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Volume 85 ◆ Number 21

Jehovah Our Exceeding Great Reward

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

Genesis 15:1

As members of the body of Christ we belong to the church that is characterized as being both militant and triumphant. We know the former to be true because we are well aware of the fact that we are still in the midst of sinners. We look at ourselves and must confess that we have many weaknesses and frailties, both in our physical and spiritual life. As we look about us we see that we are surrounded by enemies that, under Satan, seek to destroy us. In this situation the Lord calls us to fight the good fight of faith in opposition to all wickedness and every form of the lie.

There will come a time when

we will no longer be on this earth, but in the new creation in heaven above. No more problems and struggles. No more sickness, sorrow, sin, or death. All shall be made new. Peace under the Prince of Peace shall be the rule. Love and righteousness shall fill this new creation. The knowledge and the wisdom of God shall be in our hearts and minds. This, however, belongs to the future. The reality is that we are still on this earth and must fight.

However, even though we are presently members of the church militant, we are at the same time already members of the church triumphant. Indeed, we do not taste the fullness of that triumph yet, but it is ours. The very fact that Jesus Christ ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God means exactly that. We are there with Him and in Him. We have that victory because we have faith, that gift of God, whereby we are united to Christ with a spiritual bond through which we draw all the benefits of the cross. That is the victory.

We have an expression of both the church militant and the

church triumphant in our text. The Lord says, "I am thy shield." That is the battlefield. The shield suggests that the church has a battle to wage in the midst of which Jehovah is our shield. The Lord also says, "I am thy exceeding great reward." That is the victory. He does not say that He will become such. No, He says, "I AM." We do not experience it perfectly yet, but in principle it is ours now.

In our text, God comes to Abram after Abram had performed a particular work. Abram had just gone out and rescued Lot from the four kings of the north. Returning home as the representative of the church militant of that day he is met by Melchizedec. What Abram had done had met with God's approval. We find at least three evidences of that. In the first place, there is no word of rebuke for his having used the sword to deliver Lot. Secondly, Melchizedec blesses him in the name of the Lord. And finally, God says, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy exceeding great reward."

We may ask the question,

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Why did God say this to Abram? The reason is that Abram was met by not only Melchizedec, but also by the king of Sodom, who wanted to reward Abram with all the spoil. Abram declines the offer lest the king of Sodom say that he had made Abram rich. He trusted in God, who had promised him the land, and he was not going to get it in any other way than by the hand of God. God comes to Abram and in essence says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Do not concern yourself with the reward of the king. I am thy reward."

God was not obligated to give Abram anything. Whatever the Lord gives is a reward of grace. It is always a gift of God. The reward that God gives to His people is not remuneration. He is not paying them back for what they have done. No, it is always a gift. What we do and what we deserve to be paid for would bring us to hell. We deserve no less than the exceeding great reward of damnation. Even if we served Him perfectly all our lives we would not have earned a thing, for we are still nothing but unprofitable servants. Instead of God being obliged to give us something, we are obliged to thank Him for having given us the desire and ability to do that particular work.

The wonder of wonders is that God gives us a reward that consists of nothing less than Himself. Amazing! How can that possibly be? We must remember that this is Old Testament language. In the New Testament God would say, "In Jesus Christ I am thy exceeding great reward." In Christ the Almighty God came close to us, in our flesh, tabernacled among us, and performed the work whereby He realized the tabernacle of God with men. To say that Jehovah is our exceeding great reward is to say that Jesus is. He is the salvation that Jehovah prepares.

This is what happened here

typically with Abram. He was called out of the land of the Chaldees and brought to a land flowing with milk and honey, which God had promised to him and to his seed. In the unfolding of His promises, God prepared the tabernacle and the temple, where He dwelt typically with His people. Finally, He realized this promise in the day of Immanuel, who prepared the way for the perfect tabernacle.

This reward is exceeding great. It is great, first of all, because it never ends. Everything else has an end. Gold, silver, farms, houses, great honor—all end. Moth and rust corrupt these; thieves break through and steal these; and men who honor us die. But the everlasting covenant communion with God with His people knows no end. Secondly, it is rich in depth. As much as we may appreciate a birthday or Christmas gift, we soon tire of it. But the reward of our text is so rich that we never get sick of it. The more we receive, the richer it becomes.

There will be no doubt about our receiving this reward, for God is also our shield. The very fact that we receive this reward makes this shield necessary. The moment that we receive the reward, at that very moment we need the shield. This shield we receive at the time of our regeneration. Then God lives in us by the Spirit of Christ, thus making our bodies the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Now things begin to happen. We have life, and life means activity. Having received faith we also love God, love the truth, have hope, and are sanctified in principle. One who has thus been born again with this new heavenly life will show it in all his life. This is when the shield becomes necessary because the world will see this godly life and oppose it.

This was the situation with Abram. He waits patiently for

God to give him the land, the meanwhile refusing the offer of the king of Sodom. The king feels insulted and hates Abram for it. In fact, Abram was hated by the people of the land when he first came. Here was a man who believed in the Word of God and who would take their land from them. Furthermore, they did not like his cattle grazing on their land. In this situation Abram could well fear that the four kings would return later in revenge. The more Abram showed his faith, the more they hated him.

So it is in our life. As regenerated children of God we reveal our faith in our God. As the end draws nearer, the pressure of the antichrist becomes greater. Many things that we formerly enjoyed are being taken away unless we bear the sign of the beast. It becomes more and more plain that we need a shield. Since Jehovah is our shield, we know that we have perfect protection. There is no place where the devil can approach us for that fatal blow. There is no angle from which his fiery darts can reach us. Jehovah is our unchangeable covenant God, who will never change His mind and take the shield away.

This shield has a name. It is Christ. There on the cross Jehovah poured out His wrath on Christ, a wrath that we were supposed to receive. In grace God provided a shield in the person of Christ. Christ shielded us from that consuming wrath as a mother hen shields her chicks under her wings. This marvelous work of Christ continues as He now sits on the right hand of God as King over all. In all His work at the right hand of God He is our shield. God and His shield are in the church, the very church upon which the Spirit was poured out. No one can hurt the church of Christ.

That certainly has great significance and comfort for us. As Abram was told to fear not, so

we need not be afraid. God does not promise that we will not lose our goods and our honor. Abram knew that also. He knew that he would not die, for God had not yet given him seed by which Christ could be born. That is why he said, "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless." He knew that the reward came in the covenant line and presently in Christ.

The point is that we do not need to be afraid that anyone can keep us from that exceeding great reward. God says, "I AM thy shield and I AM thy exceeding great reward." Who can change that? God is changeless, and who is going to overpower Him?

Fear not, church militant, for you shall receive to the full the glory of the church triumphant. Therefore, do not compromise

when tribulations increase and when you are tempted to give in for the earthly goods and fame that are so attractive. You have a reward. You have Jehovah, our covenant God, the God of our salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Walk in faith and know that only in that way can we enjoy the comfort that He, in Christ, is our exceeding great reward.



Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters

The Making of a Minister

Christ's church needs ministers. With five or six vacancies in the churches, the PRC needs ministers. We feel that need here at the seminary. The students and professors have been busy supplying pulpits this summer, in August preaching almost sixty out of sixty possibilities. Not all of that is vacation supply. Another pastor is off his pulpit for health reasons. The churches feel the need for pastors.

As classes at seminary begin again this fall, and God calls His people to "maintain" the schools, which includes the seminary (see Lord's Day 38), the question is important: Who will come to prepare to be preachers?

Then, when some of the vacancies are not created from ministers retiring but from troubles, who would dare prepare for the ministry? The ministry requires much and sometimes ends in sorrow. Who would aspire to the gospel ministry when, if he is watching, he sees that it involves difficulties?

Toil and Sorrow

The ministry is certainly work. Hard work. The many

New Testament passages that describe a preacher and his work point out the hardships. A minister must "endure hardness" (*hardships*), as a good soldier, Paul says to Timothy. The ministry requires time, usually all the time a man has, and then some, so that there is always work undone. Most of the pastors I know work seven days every week. If the Christian life itself is a sacrifice of everything to Jesus Christ, the ministry is so in a special way. It involves the "care" of the church and churches, as Paul puts it in II Corinthians 11, where the word *care* implies a kind of anxiety. It requires that a man "spend and be spent" (II Cor. 12:15) for the churches. It is not improper to translate that: "I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls." When a man serves faithfully, it takes everything he has, and is.

His work in the ministry, a pastor recently told me, sometimes makes studies in seminary look good again, almost leisurely. And our students in the seminary by no means carry a light load.

The work of the ministry in some pastorates may even con-

clude with less than happy farewells. The PRC is not the only denomination that uses Article 11—and laments that it is used more than one would want. The church papers of other Reformed denominations have spoken of the same. Others do not report it publicly; but it happens.

Who would want to become a pastor, when other occupations may be much more appealing?

A God-Made Man

The answer is that God makes ministers.

No man makes himself a minister. No man simply decides to become a pastor. Indeed, a man makes a decision to enter seminary. A man makes a decision to seek the pastorate. A man makes a decision to seek candidacy at the conclusion of his seminary training. A man makes a decision to accept a call to a congregation. But God has worked these decisions in a man, and in the church who calls him, because God makes ministers. Not man.

There certainly are men who make themselves ministers. The church world is full of self-made ministers. Such men may even make it into faithful denomina-

tions. Like the false apostles of early apostolic times, also today there are “deceitful workers” who, by the power of the evil one, “transform themselves” into Reformed ministers (see II Cor. 11:13).

They are very displeasing to the Lord and (grossly to understate it) will not be a blessing to the churches.

But a faithful minister is made such by God. His choices to enter seminary, continue to the end, seek candidacy, and accept a particular call, are all worked in him by the Maker of ministers, Jesus Christ Himself.

A man is *made* a minister.

Paul puts it that way in Ephesians 3. “Whereof I was *made* a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.” Although the word “made” can sometimes be translated “became,” the other translations are wrong when they put it merely, “whereof I *became* a minister” or “I *became* a servant.” The translators of the KJV understood the Greek properly. A man must be *made*, made into what he is not naturally. Actions are performed *upon* him to make him a servant of Jesus Christ.

Paul was neither self-appointed nor self-made. Paul was made a minister by another. With the power of grace, God performed a great work to make Paul a gospel-servant.

Both the natural and spiritual gifts Paul had were God-given. His keen intellect to grasp the truth and explain it so the churches understood it, the voice to project the words without sound-systems, the stamina to labor at night as tent-maker so he could work without wages, and the not-to-be-underestimated-ability to travel worldwide in every kind of discomfort and without complaint...were God’s gifts. Even the natural weaknesses in his constitution—whatever they

were—that made his appearance and preaching unattractive to some (see II Cor. 10:10 and 11:6) were God-designed.

Far in advance, God planned the parents Paul had (an unbelieving father), the home he was reared in, the schools he attended. Sovereignly, God directed his way among the proud Pharisees, but made sure he had good knowledge of the Scriptures. Jesus Christ Himself even gave Paul his three-year seminary course in the wilderness of Arabia. In an initially unwilling Saul, God created a willingness. By the powerful call of His own voice, God placed him into the apostolic office and made him a missionary to the Gentiles and writer of much of the New Testament Scriptures.

Paul was made a minister.

If a man today becomes a minister—a genuine minister of the gospel—it is because God makes him a minister. The strength to endure four rigorous years of seminary training after four years of university, God gives. God determines the upbringing of each one, perhaps different from that of all others, for his particular task. God creates the desire. God issues the call. God even ordains the weaknesses and lacks in a man’s constitution—so troubling and perhaps embarrassing that he cries out many times to be delivered from them (see II Cor. 12:7, 8).

Whether a man becomes a minister, at bottom, is God’s decision. Whether a man continues in the ministry for life is God’s decision. God makes the minister.

No Pride

We ministers may never forget this.

A man who understands the origin of his ministry to be in God Himself—whether the man cursed God for the first 20 years of his life, or whether he desired the ministry as long as he can remember—is not a proud man.

A proud minister, especially a proud *Reformed* minister, is the most conflicted creature there could be. He preaches grace—undeserved favor and blessing. But he lives as though what he has was not given, or perhaps given because he deserved it. If pride is allowed to remain, to reign in the minister’s heart (think Psalter #40: “Let pride never reign in my heart”), he will not only ruin his ministry, but do greatest damage to the church Christ loves.

God makes ministers.

The knowledge of this is crucial for the minister. And for the congregations. And for the seminary student. And for the young man considering making the first call to one of the professors or his pastor: “I think God may be calling me to the ministry; what shall I do next?”

When the work is difficult, the minister reminds himself: God made me a minister. When the congregation wishes their man had more gifts, different gifts, they remember: “God made our minister.” When the young man ponders whether to make

that first call, he will remind himself, “As I humbly submit myself to the judgments of my consistory, the seminary professors, the Theological School Committee, and the synod and classis, God will make this plain to

me, too.” When the seminary student realizes that little could be more disastrous than *becoming* a minister without being *made* a minister, he prays with all fervency, “Oh, Lord, show me Thy will. I beseech Thee, do not al-

If a man today becomes a minister—a genuine minister of the gospel—it is because God makes him a minister.

low me to do my will without it being Thy will." When the Lord reveals to that student that he cannot continue, there is not one ounce of shame. And when the Lord keeps the door open for him, there is no pride.

For the Lord makes ministers.

The churches have vacancies. More than a few.

The Lord willing, the seminary will have nine students this year preparing themselves for this high and holy calling.


Are there other young men whom the Lord will make ministers?

Do the dangers and hardships cause the young man to hesitate to prepare? The aspiring soldier does not allow the news of warfare, injuries, and deaths, to keep him from the recruiter's office. He knows soldiers are needed.

As to the elders, let them be

watchful, cautious, discerning. Encourage the capable young men to consider the ministry. Withhold the letter of recommendation from the proud man. Give frank advice to the students in

your congregation. We pray for wisdom and boldness for you.

Please pray for us, and for the students. And pray that God will make more men who say, "Here am I; send me." 

Our congratulations to Pastor-elect Cory Griess (2009 graduate of the Protestant Reformed Seminary) and to Calvary Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, who will soon, D.V., install their first pastor.



Cory and Lael
and their children, John Owen and Simeon

Letters

Remembering H.J. Kuiper


Prof. Engelsma's review of *Henry J. Kuiper: Shaping the Christian Reformed Church*, by James A. DeJong (July 2009 *Standard Bearer*) took me back to my earlier days of ministry. Soon after I joined the faculty of Unity Christian High School (1956) in Hudsonville, Michigan as teacher of Bible and Reformed Doctrine, I came to know Henry J. Kuiper personally. We were members

of what was then called The Reformed Fellowship, a circle of scholars whose serious discussion of theological and social issues—particularly hot-button issues within the Christian Reformed Church—helped strengthen my commitment to the essential tenets of the Reformed faith.

Whatever Kuiper's views of common grace may have been, he certainly impressed me as a stalwart warrior in the cause of

Christ. The book review's mention of *Torch and Trumpet* magazine also recalled the articles I was privileged to contribute to *T & T*, in which I refuted certain views of Henry Stob, then a professor at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Henry Kuiper—and his brother R.B. Kuiper—were among the church's worthies.

Joseph Hill
Beaver, Pennsylvania 

All Around Us

Belhar Confession

The synods of the Reformed Church of America (RCA) and the Christian Reformed

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Church (CRC) moved towards adopting the Belhar Confession to serve as a fourth form of unity along with the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt. The RCA's website (www.rca.org/

[Page.aspx?pid=4073](#)) contains the following explanation of the Belhar's status:

Delegates at the 2009 General Synod discussed the Belhar Confession in advisory committees and on the plenary floor. They

Rev. Clayton Spronk

voted to adopt the confession as a fourth standard, a decision that needs to be ratified by a two-thirds majority of the RCA's 46 classes, which will report their votes to General Synod in 2010.

According to the CRC's Acts of Synod 2009 (p. 604; available at www.crcna.org/site/uploads/uploads/resources/synodical/2009acts.pdf) the following motion was adopted: "That synod propose to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth Confession)...."

In the next three years the two denominations that have the closest historical ties to the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will likely officially adopt the Belhar Confession as a church standard. How far apart we are! How sad!

The Belhar Confession was adopted first by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) in South Africa in 1986. The DRMC was established by the exclusively white Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) to be a church for black people. Apartheid was still in place as the system of government in South Africa in 1986. This was the system of government that enforced racial segregation and the rule of the minority (whites) over the majority (blacks). Sadly, the Dutch Reformed Church also practiced racial segregation by forming separate churches for blacks instead of allowing them to join the white churches. The DRC was guilty of horrible sin and it is understandable that the DRMC would be greatly offended by this situation. Indeed it is understandable that in such intolerable circumstances the DRMC would feel compelled to take bold action—even the bold action of adopting a new confession that addresses the issue of racial segregation in the church, which it did in adopting the Belhar Confession.

However, the Belhar Confession is not a *Reformed* Confession and is not worthy of being adopted by Reformed Churches alongside of the three forms of unity. The Belhar Confession is seriously flawed.

A preliminary objection to the Belhar is that it is unnecessary. Yes, one can understand why a denomination that is forced to accept racial segregation would think about writing a new confession, but a new one is not necessary because the old ones already address this issue. Especially the Heidelberg Catechism in LD 21 Q/A 54 and 55 addresses the issue of the unity of the church very clearly. The answer to Q 54 explains the catholicity of the church by stating that the church is gathered "out of the whole human race," meaning from every nation, tribe, and tongue. The answer to Q 55 explains the communion of the saints, stating

that all and everyone who believes, being members of Christ, are, in common, partakers of Him and of all His riches and gifts; secondly, that everyone must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members.

This Lord's Day clearly condemns the segregation of members of the church along racial lines as a sin against the catholicity of the church and disobedience to the command to seek the communion of the saints.

Perhaps some feel that a confession is necessary to address the issue of segregation because the other three forms of unity do not extensively treat the issue. The problem with that thinking is that there are other serious issues that are not addressed extensively in the Three Forms of Unity, and the number of confessions would multiply exceedingly if a new one would be written to address each issue.

Another objection to the Belhar Confession is that it is more of a statement on social issues than on ecclesiastical issues. Along with promoting justice and unity in the church, the Belhar calls for seeking justice and unity in the world. The confession states that

the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice.

Perhaps we can concede that there is nothing wrong with witnessing against injustice. But we must take issue with the calling to stand by "people in any form of suffering and need." The church simply is not mandated by Scripture to seek to put an end to all human suffering. Putting an end to human suffering is the agenda of political parties, not the church.

Which political party does the Belhar line up with? Brian Polet answers that question, writing in the *Banner*, the official magazine of the CRC, an article entitled "Marxism Comes to the CRC?" Polet writes,

Masking the language of biblical profundities, the Belhar promulgates socialism by demanding obedience to the Marxist ideology of class struggle.

By adopting the Belhar Confession the RCA and CRC would commit themselves to the political ideals of socialism. The adoption of a political agenda by the synods of these two denominations is unsurprising to those who have monitored their meetings over the past several years. When one reads the headlines of the reports on synodical activities such as "Synod Hears Suggestions on Diversity," "Executive Director Addresses Minority Concerns,"

"Synod Seeks to Diversify Leadership," "Synod Repents the Sin of Racism," "RCA to Encourage Broader Diversity among Future Synod Delegates," "Homosexuality Dialogue," well, one gets the feeling that he is reading updates on the proceedings of the Democratic Party's national convention rather than the proceedings of an ecclesiastical assembly.

I am reminded of an admonition given by a professor in seminary not to include politics in sermons, not only because the minister has no business pushing a political agenda but also because he will inevitably offend those in the church who have different political ideals. The RCA and CRC claim to be seeking "reconciliation," but by moving to adopt the Belhar Confession and its "liberal" political agenda, they are inevitably causing division by offending those members who are "conservative" in their political thinking (and being from "conservative" Northwest Iowa, I know there are many of them). As a political document the Belhar is inherently not a form of unity but of division.

Another objection to adopting the Belhar is that it was written by Allan Boesak, a man known to be a heretic. I can almost hear people asking, "What difference does it make who wrote the confession, as long as it is faithful to the Word of God?" True faithfulness to the Word of God is more important than the author of the confession, and we shall address that issue presently; however, the author is also important. Confessions serve as doctrinal standards for the church and her members and as the basis for the unity of the church. When the church believes it is time to write a confession that will be such a standard of truth and basis for unity she has vested interest in knowing that the one who will be writing the confession knows and loves the truth. We have

that confidence with the TFU. When the Reformed people in the Lowlands determined it was necessary to write a confession to distinguish the Reformed faith from the detestable teachings of the Anabaptists, they looked to the thoroughly orthodox minister Guido de Brès. When Frederick III determined a confession was needed as a tool for teaching children and for promoting unity in the church, he did not think who wrote the confession was a minor matter but enlisted two staunchly orthodox and well trained men, Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, for the work. And when it was time to defend the great biblical and Reformed doctrines of grace from the insidious attack of Arminianism, the Canons of Dordt were written by the Great Synod of Dordrecht, that is, by men who are renowned to this day for their orthodoxy and committed to the truth of God's Word.

So we have three confessions written by men that we are confident were qualified by the Spirit of God for the work. Shall we then adopt a fourth confession by a man who openly denies the truth that Scripture condemns homosexuality (see *Banner*, Jan. 2009 "Allan Boesak Quits Church Posts over Homosexuality Policy, Belhar" p. 16)? Arguments have erupted over whether or not the Belhar promotes homosexuality (Boesak being one of those who argues it does). While that is a matter worthy of consideration, it still seems to me that Boesak's status as a heretic is the more important issue. It may be that in the future the Reformed churches will determine that it is time to write another Reformed confession. If she does, let her look to men who love and defend the Reformed faith to write it.

Now we come to the most serious problem with the Belhar Confession, and that is that it promotes false doctrine. This,

of course, is denied by the RCA and the CRC. The CRC's synod adopted the Belhar partially on the ground that "previous synods have expressed no difficulty with the Belhar Confession on biblical grounds." This is a rather negative statement and does not express the kind of confidence one would like to see expressed by an ecclesiastical assembly that is moving to adopt a fourth confession. For some reason the 2009 synod of the CRC did not go on record stating that the Belhar is thoroughly biblical. I did not find an official statement of the RCA concerning the Belhar's faithfulness to Scripture. Nevertheless, the actions of the synods of both the RCA and CRC must mean that both synods believe the Belhar is thoroughly biblical. It is not.

The Belhar Confession is often simply unclear and should be rejected on the grounds that, although some statements may not be heretical in themselves, they can easily be interpreted to support false doctrine. One such statement is "God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and peace among people." This statement is simply not clear enough to be helpful for the church to make a meaningful confession. Some could interpret this statement as declaring God's purpose to establish peace amongst the elect members of the church—a truth revealed in Scripture. Others could interpret this statement as referring to a desire of God to establish peace amongst all men, elect and reprobate alike—an idea that is definitely unbiblical.

That the authors of the Belhar probably leaned towards the second interpretation (a desire of God for peace amongst all men) is indicated by the next statement, which is patently unbiblical: "God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor


and the wronged.” Again, this statement is unclear. What did the authors of the confession mean by “God of”? This is not made any clearer when the Belhar later states that God “stands... with the wronged.” So apparently God “stands with” the destitute, the poor, and the wronged. Though the Belhar does not spell out what it means that God is the “God of” and “stands with” those who are suffering one form or another of injustice in the world, these statements clearly mean that God loves and wills to help *all* such people. Thus the point to be made here is not only that the Belhar is once again guilty of setting forth political (clearly Marxist) ideology but that the Belhar teaches a universal love of God for the down and out.

The Bible and the Reformed confessions (the TFU) do not teach that God loves all those who suffer some form of earthly injustice. They teach that God loves all the elect (both rich and poor). This doctrine of election taught by the Bible and the Reformed confessions is fundamen-

tal for condemning the horrible sin of segregation in the church that the Belhar Confession was written to condemn. The proper Reformed response to this sin is that in election God has chosen (elected) men and women from every nation, tribe, and tongue to be a part of the *one* body or church of Jesus Christ. Since in God’s eternal counsel the members of the church are one, they must join together in the church institute and form one body. To deny people membership in the church on the basis of skin color, or for any other reason that does not have to do with doctrine, is sin against God’s decree of election.

The Belhar does not mention election, and therefore it cannot be adopted as the Reformed response to segregation in the church. But even worse, the Belhar contradicts the truth of election, God’s love for some, and teaches a love of God for all. Not only, then, is the Belhar not biblical, but it is not confessional! It contradicts the other three creeds to which it is supposedly going to be added as a form for unity. It

contradicts especially the Canons of Dordrecht. The Canons were written to reject the Arminian error that, among other things, taught a universal love of God for all men. The Canons reject that teaching, which means that the Canons also reject the Belhar Confession.

That the Belhar must be rejected is clear to one who knows and loves the teachings of the Reformed confessions and who knows and loves the doctrine of election. By moving toward adopting the Belhar, the RCA and the CRC show that they have gone a long way towards forgetting about the Reformed confessions that already exist and the doctrine of election. (In the August 2009 issue of the *Banner*, Rev. Hoksbergen states “election remains a topic rarely addressed from the pulpits of our churches” (cf. “The New Calvinism” p. 86). What this means is that they are moving away from the Reformed faith. Those who remain committed to the Reformed faith weep as they see once faithful denominations fall further away. 

Church and State

Mr. Brian VanEngen

Another State Allows Homosexual Marriage

Several past articles under this Church and State rubric have addressed the subject of homosexuality and the trend in the law to protect the practice of the sin of homosexuality. This author’s home state of Iowa recently made national news when

the Iowa Supreme Court ruled that homosexual “couples” could not be denied marriage licenses.¹ Believers would do well to pay close attention to the progression of the law in this regard. The trends that are being established today may very well have serious implications for our churches in the future.

This article will address some of these developments, using the trends in Iowa as an example. We will look at the impact that court decisions or legislation on this issue may have on our churches and schools. Finally, we will look at how these same trends are progressing on the federal level.

The decision of the Iowa Supreme Court in *Varnum v. Brien* stunned many. Several courts and legislative bodies have made

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¹ *Varnum v. Brien*, 763 N.W.2d 862 (Iowa 2009).

decisions that allow homosexual marriage, but these have tended to be in the more “liberal” jurisdictions. Only two other states allow homosexual marriage, and this was the first such action in a state in the heartland of the country.¹ The decision was also noteworthy in that it was unanimous.

The case involved a lawsuit by six gay or lesbian couples who were denied marriage licenses. While heterosexual couples were permitted to marry, the county recorder’s office denied marriage licenses for the homosexual couples, in part because the Iowa Legislature had passed a law providing that only marriage between a male and a female is valid.² The six couples brought suit against the recorder claiming they were denied Equal Protection of the law in violation of the Iowa Constitution. They also claimed they were denied the fundamental right to marry, as well as rights of privacy and familial association. Twenty-five different groups filed amicus, or “friend of the court,” briefs on either side of the issue. These amicus briefs were from local and national organizations that were not parties to the action, but that sought to help sway the court’s decision one way or the other.

The county argued that there were five basic reasons for limiting marriage to heterosexual partners: promoting procreation, promoting child rearing by a father and a mother within a marriage, promoting stability in an opposite sex relationship to raise and nurture children, conservation of state resources, and promoting the concept and integrity of traditional notion of marriage.

¹ Jeff Eckhoff and Grant Schulte, “Unanimous Ruling: Iowa marriage no longer limited to one man, one woman,” *Des Moines Register*, April 3, 2009.

² Iowa Code section 595.2(1) (2009).

The court reasoned that limiting marriage licenses to those of opposite sex created classifications of couples who were treated differently. This raises questions of constitutionality. It would be impossible in the limited space of this article adequately to explain the law in this regard, but a very rough summary is as follows. When laws or government actions creating classifications are examined under Constitutional analysis, there are three standards that can apply. Under the usual standard, great deference is given to the legislature, and a law will stand as long as there is a plausible policy reason for the classification. On the other extreme, certain types of “suspect” classifications, such as those based on race, are subject to strict scrutiny, and are presumed invalid unless it is shown the law is narrowly tailored and serves a compelling government interest. An intermediate standard also applies to certain “quasi-suspect” classifications. Under this standard, a law or action will be upheld if the government can show it furthers an important government interest and is substantially related to that interest.

The Court then needed to decide whether homosexuals were a classification entitled to heightened scrutiny. The court looked at a number of factors to be considered in determining whether greater protection was warranted, including: whether there was a history of discrimination against homosexuals, whether homosexuality was a characteristic beyond their control, and whether they were relatively politically powerless. The court found that homosexuals were a class entitled to heightened scrutiny, but did not decide whether homosexuals were entitled to protection under the higher strict scrutiny standard. In the court’s analysis this was unnecessary because the restriction on homosexual mar-

riage could not even meet the intermediate standard. However, even the designation as at least a “quasi-suspect” class is important because it lays the groundwork for special protection against discrimination, as in other civil rights laws such as those protecting minority races.

The court in *Varnum* ruled that the reasons the county had articulated for denying marriage to homosexuals were not substantially related to important government interests, as required by the intermediate standard. The Court ruled that the state statute limiting marriage to male and female, and therefore the refusal to issue a marriage license to homosexual couples, was invalid as a violation of the Equal Protection clause of the Iowa Constitution, which is similar to the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution. The Court also addressed one reason for denial of marriage to homosexuals that the county did not raise – religious beliefs. The court opined, and correctly so, that religious convictions lay behind the desire to prohibit homosexual marriage. However, as the court stated, the establishment of one religion’s tenets over another’s also violates the Constitution.

This case is instructive with regard to the direction of the law on this and similar moral issues. This is true not only for the state of Iowa, but other jurisdictions as well. It is well worth noting several characteristics. First, the court repeatedly cited the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*,³ in which the Court ruled that homosexuality was a privacy issue and could not be treated as a crime. The *Lawrence* case has been analyzed in more detail in the *Standard Bearer* in the past.⁴ The *Lawrence* case built on

³ *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003).

⁴ Brian K. Van Engen, “Recent Legal Developments in the Battle over

the foundation established in *Roe v. Wade*, so that the status of the law is now basically that everyone is "able to do what is right in his own eyes," under the banner of privacy rights, as long as he does not "harm" another person. Because of the Iowa court's reliance on the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Lawrence*, we can expect that jurisdictions throughout the country will follow this line of reasoning.

The next item of note is the court's reasoning that the true reason for denying homosexual marriage is based on religious principles. The county in the *Varnum* case could not argue its opposition based on religion, because, as the court stated, that would violate Constitutional prohibitions on the establishment of religion. However, our opposition to homosexuality is based squarely on our belief that this sin is forbidden by God's law as revealed in Scripture. The court drew a distinction between marriage for the purposes of civil law and marriage under religious views. The court noted its constitutional mandate to protect the free exercise of religion, "which includes the freedom of a religious organization to define marriages it solemnizes as unions between a man and a woman."¹ However, while the court exempted churches themselves from recognizing a homosexual "marriage," the ruling leaves open the question of the individual who cannot in good conscience treat a homosexual couple as "married."

The declining morality of the culture in which we live also played into this case, and will continue to play into similar cases in whatever jurisdiction they are presented. The court in *Varnum* compared homosexuals to other minority groups who were previously disadvantaged under the

law, such as racial minorities. The court noted the progression of society to the point that now, as with the *Lawrence v. Texas* decision, behavior may be disfavored but not be considered an absolute moral wrong. In the court's analysis, this was similar to the laws upholding slavery eventually being reversed.

The second way in which the declining moral culture played into this case is in the weakness of the reasons put forward by the county for denying homosexual marriage. The county basically argued that marriages between a man and woman were needed for stability, for tradition, and for good homes for children. In an age where multiple remarriages and divorces are allowed and where divorced, single-parent homes are common, it is difficult to argue seriously that marriage provides stability. Children are often tossed back and forth and confused, and families are broken up and rearranged. Our society has denigrated marriage to a civil status of convenience, to be broken on a whim. Even many of the same "evangelicals" who oppose homosexual marriage turn a blind eye to the rampant practice of divorce and remarriage. Under these circumstances, it is virtually impossible to reason that heterosexual marriages are the foundation for stable families.

The *Varnum* case received much attention in the press, with many of the usual cries against judicial activism. While pronouncements from a state supreme court do tend to garner attention, believers will do well to pay close attention also to the more subtle legislative efforts to advance the same agenda. These provisions may pass as amendments to other bills, or seemingly innocuous bills that are little noticed. Let us look at an example of such a bill that recently passed in Iowa.

In 2007, the Iowa legislature

passed an "anti-bullying bill," which required all accredited, nonpublic schools to adopt a policy that declared harassment and bullying to be against school policy.² This sounds like an admirable goal that we could support, since we certainly do not believe bullying is a permissible activity for the child of God. However, just prior to its passage, an amendment was added to the bill that included sexual orientation and gender identity as specific traits for which bullying was prohibited. This inclusion caused some public reaction, but not enough public outcry to defeat the bill. After all, even if homosexuality is wrong, isn't it still wrong to "bully" someone on that basis?

The problem with the legislation is the way it interprets bullying or harassment. The definition of bullying and harassment as stated in the law includes:

Any electronic, written, verbal, or physical act or conduct toward a student which is based on any actual or perceived trait or characteristic of the student and which creates an objectively hostile school environment that meets one or more of the following conditions:

- (1) Places the student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or property.
- (2) Has a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health.
- (3) Has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's academic performance.
- (4) Has the effect of substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.

With this definition, one can imagine a scenario under which a teacher in a covenant school teaches against the sin of homosexuality. The claim could be made that such teaching is det-

Homosexuality," *Standard Bearer*, Jan. 1, 2005.

¹ *Varnum v. Brien*, 763 N.W.2d 862, 905 (Iowa 2009).

² Iowa Code section 280.28 (2007).

rimental to the mental health of a student who feels he has a different sexual orientation, or that it interferes with his academic performance. The student could further claim that he does not feel welcome to participate in the school. Or perhaps the school board expels the student or suspends him from extracurricular activities because of his sexual orientation. This would certainly interfere with his ability to participate in the services, activities, or privileges provided by the school. Under either scenario, the school would be in violation of its own policy.

Our schools may be able to avoid this result, at least for the present, by relying on the free exercise clause of the Constitution. However, at some point, the courts will have to decide where the lines will be drawn when the freedom of religion clashes with the "privacy rights" of those who practice homosexuality or other

sins we condemn. The court in *Varnum* noted this statute in finding that homosexuals are a class entitled to some measure of protection.¹

Finally, the struggle over the protection afforded to homosexuals is not limited to the state level. For instance, Congress is currently considering legislation to add crimes based on the victim's sexual orientation and gender identification to the classifications of "hate crimes."² Some have expressed fear that if this bill is passed, it could be used to restrain religious groups from voicing opposition to homosexuality.³ However, even if the law is not directly used to protect

homosexuality, it is again another step towards recognizing those who engage in this sin as a protected class. The establishment of this protected classification in this and other laws could be used, just as in the Iowa case, as a springboard to limiting discrimination of any kind against homosexuals as a group.

In conclusion, as the views of the world around us regarding what is morally acceptable change, so do the laws that affect our daily lives. Behaviors once considered morally reprehensible are accepted, and the foundations for God-ordained institutions such as marriage crumble. One can easily see the day fast approaching when our condemnation of sin will subject us to prosecution as "intolerant bigots."



¹ *Varnum v. Brien*, 763 N.W.2d 862, 889 (Iowa 2009).

² Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, H.R. 1913, 111th Cong., 1st Sess. (2009).

³ David Stout, "House Votes to Expand Hate Crime Protection," *New York Times*, May 4, 2007.

A Refutation of Dispensationalism (3) "The Kingdom Is at Hand": A Fact, Not a Conditional Offer

When Christ started His public preaching, He began by proclaiming boldly that the kingdom of heaven was "at hand." Dispensationalists say that Christ, by this statement, was giving to the Jews a well-meant offer of the Davidic kingdom. But, they go on to say,

since the majority of the Jews rejected Christ, He responded by withdrawing the offer for the time being, with the intention of offering it to the Jews again at His second coming.

In an effort to prove that Christ made such an offer, they frequently cite Mark 1:14, 15, which describes the content of Christ's early preaching:

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the king-

dom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel (Mark 1:14, 15).

Christ said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." Dispensationalists say that this meant that Christ was offering to the Jews an earthly kingdom, a kingdom like the one that David ruled some one thousand years before Christ came.

As was pointed out in the pre-

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vious article, some have objected to this dispensational well-meant offer, arguing that it teaches that the Messianic kingdom could have been realized without the cross ever having to take place. If the Jews would have accepted such an offer—so the argument goes—the result would have been that the Messianic kingdom would have been realized on this earth without the sins of its citizens having ever been atoned for on the cross.

Dispensationalist Charles C. Ryrie responded to this line of reasoning by saying that the same argument could be used against the amillennial interpretation of the phrase “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”:

Let us suppose for sake of discussion that the dispensational interpretation of Jesus’ offer of the Davidic kingdom in the Gospels is not correct. If He was not preaching about the millennial kingdom when He said, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17), then He must have been talking about a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men (for there are no other choices).... If the Jews had received this spiritual kingdom and had been saved, then does this not mean that the cross might have been unnecessary? If the Jews had immediately accepted the spiritual kingdom Jesus offered, then what would have happened to the cross?¹

In this way Ryrie attempts to turn the tables on the amillennialists, in hopes that this will silence their objections.

Before considering how the Reformed amillennial could respond to such an argument, let us begin by considering what Christ meant when He said that the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

What the kingdom was that Christ said was near

There are a number of places in which Christ not only made known that the kingdom was near, but also explained what the kingdom was to which He was referring. Consider, for example, the following passages:

But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you (Matt. 12:28).

...behold, the kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17:21b).

In these passages, Christ explains that the kingdom of God refers to Christ’s gracious reign inside a person. God’s kingdom, Christ says, is present wherever the Spirit is working graciously in the hearts of His people, delivering them from the power of their spiritual foes.

Dispensationists teach that the kingdom Christ preached is a kingdom that will not come until some future millennium. But Christ Himself said that those who were enjoying deliverance from sin and Satan were already at that time beginning to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom He was preaching.

Commenting on the Matthew 12 passage quoted above, dispensationalists have taught that the casting out of demons and other miracles served to demonstrate the power that Christ will one day exert when He establishes His millennial kingdom in the future. Christ, they say, was giving a demonstration of His power. But since the Jews rejected Christ’s offer, the Jews will not experience this power until sometime in the future.

This, however, is not what Christ said here. Our Lord pointed out that the casting out of demons served to manifest that the kingdom He was preaching had already come. The testimony of the miracles was not “Look what

I can do for you, if you accept my offer,” but rather, “Look at what is already now taking place right before your eyes.” The miracles were proof, Christ said, that the kingdom of God “is come unto you.” It was already present. The people were called to repent and believe this good news.

What is meant by the nearness of God’s kingdom?

Christ proclaimed that the kingdom of God was a present reality. He said, “The time is fulfilled” (Mark 1:15). The prophets had proclaimed that the promised King would one day come to save God’s people. That glorious day had now arrived.

But what, then, did Christ mean when in other places He spoke of the kingdom being *near*? The phrase “the kingdom of God is at hand” means literally “the kingdom of God is near.” So why did Christ say that the kingdom was *near*, if in fact it was already present?

One of the things we must consider, to understand this statement, is the spiritual nature of the kingdom Christ was preaching. If one considers Christ’s kingdom to be a carnal, earthly kingdom, then he will likely take the word “near” to mean “about to be established on this earth.” But if one understands the spiritual, heavenly nature of Christ’s kingdom, then he will have no difficulty understanding that Christ’s kingdom is near to all those who are in the vicinity where Christ is proclaiming the gospel of our salvation.

The kingdom that is present in the hearts of all believers is near to all those who hear the gospel preached. Christ spoke of the kingdom being near even to those who did not themselves believe and enjoy the blessings of that kingdom. Our Lord spoke of this when sending out His disciples to preach about the kingdom, and to perform mira-

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 166-167.

cles that illustrated the blessings of that kingdom:

And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you (Luke 10:9-11).

The word translated “come nigh” is the same as that translated “at hand” in Mark 1:14-15. When the gospel was being preached and the signs that illustrated the gospel promise were being performed, all those in the vicinity of these wonders were told that the kingdom of God had come nigh unto them. Even the unbelievers who refused to believe the gospel were told to be assured that the kingdom had come nigh to them, and that they were going to be more without excuse on the day of judgment for rejecting the wonderful words that were proclaimed in their hearing.

A proclaimed gospel, not a conditional offer

Now let us return to consider Ryrie’s challenge to the amillennialists. He asks how we would explain what would have happened if the Jews had accepted Christ’s offer of a spiritual kingdom. If they had accepted such an offer, would that not have meant that the blessings of the kingdom could have been enjoyed without the Messiah dying on the cross?

This question would present a problem only to those amillennialists who teach the well-meant offer of the gospel. As soon as we recognize that the gospel is good news that is proclaimed as an accomplished fact, and that it is not an offer that depends on man for

its fulfillment, then the problem immediately goes away.

Let us go back to the statement that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” When Christ preached those words, He was not making an offer to the Jews. He was proclaiming something that was absolutely true, regardless of whether those who heard Him believed or not. God had promised that the King from the line of David would one day come to save God’s people. That promise had now been fulfilled. The King was in their midst. The fulfillment of the promise had not depended upon man. God had brought it to pass, and now the people were called to repent and believe this good news.

Yet one still might ask, what if everyone had repented and believed the good news? What if the Jews had not crucified their Messiah. How could we have enjoyed the blessings of Christ’s kingdom without the atoning sacrifice of our High Priest on the cross?

The answer is that there is no way that this ever would have happened. Repentance and faith are entirely gifts of God, and God gave these gifts only to a small remnant of the Jews. In His good pleasure, He chose not to give these blessings to all the Jews, or even to the majority of the Jews. He gave them only to a small remnant, and the rest He gave over to their sins. God would have been perfectly just if He had given no one these gracious gifts. That anyone receives them is a wonder of grace.

Furthermore, it was God’s plan all along that the Messiah would come at a time of great apostasy, and that the majority of the Jews would hate and crucify Him. The death of Christ was decreed by God before the foundation of the world, and it is foolish to speak of even the slightest possibility that something contrary to God’s decree would ever have taken place.

Since it was absolutely certain that the Messiah would one day come and atone for the sins of God’s people, even the saints who lived before Christ’s death were able to enjoy the kingdom blessings that Christ would one day purchase for them. When Christ said, “Repent, and believe the gospel,” all those who responded in repentance and faith certainly began to enjoy the blessings of Christ’s kingdom, even though Christ had not yet died on the cross.


A sense in which the kingdom of God is still future

Christ speaks of the kingdom of God as a present reality, while also promising that the full realization of that kingdom is still future. He spoke of the nearness of God’s kingdom when referring to the signs of His coming:

So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand (Luke 21:31).

As we begin to see more clearly the signs of our Lord’s coming, we look upward, knowing that our full redemption is nigh.

While earnestly longing for the coming of our beloved Husband, we preach the good news that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Still today we preach, “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel.” And when Christ preaches this gospel through the church today, He is not making a well-meant offer to all the people who hear it. He is proclaiming an accomplished fact. He is setting forth God’s wonderful promise, the full realization of which is absolutely certain and sure.

Such is the gospel we proclaim today. Such is the gospel our Lord proclaimed when He began His public preaching some two thousand years ago. 

Teaching Piety and Practical Godliness in the Covenant Home (1)

In this article we again consider what Deuteronomy 6 has to say about instruction in the covenant home. Let me quote this passage again so that it is before us.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou riseth up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the post of thy house and on thy gates (Deut. 6:6-9).

Every word and every figurative expression used in this passage are about practical religion in the covenant home. The law of God must be well known in this home. It must be referred to again and again. It must be the real standard and guide of our covenant home in day-to-day concerns that arise and the issues we face. It must govern every part of our behavior. The law of God must, by the grace and Spirit of God, establish the order and stability of the home. It must be

the glory and beauty of the covenant home that makes it so very different from the homes of the world.

Knowledge of the truth, and doctrinal instruction, are important in our covenant home. Truth and doctrine are foundational to Christian living. This we must certainly teach also in our homes. Religion is not just about vague mystical experience, or temporary, superficial feeling of excitement and emotion. The covenant home must be built on the solid foundation of the infallible and unchangeable truth of the Word of God. But knowledge of the truth alone, without sincere godliness and piety, leads to dead orthodoxy. If our godliness and piety are not real, spiritual, and living, our religion will lead to hypocrisy. Our children will grow up with this form of religion and learn it for themselves.

There is always a lurking danger of this because of the deceitfulness of our own hearts. It is easy to imagine in our own hearts that it is sufficient to maintain sound doctrine without putting this doctrine into daily practice. Mere outward formal religion is an abomination to the Lord. The Lord complained against Israel concerning such religion in the days of Isaiah the prophet:

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, these people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they

do worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men (Matt. 15: 7-9).

True religion is not easy to maintain from day to day in our homes. It takes much earnest prayer and spiritual effort on the part of parents. We cannot hide from our children in the home who we really are, whether or not we are spiritually minded, genuine and sincere.

The covenant home is the God-ordained sphere where our children must be taught true godliness and piety in their lives. By the Spirit of God we must live in our homes in living fellowship with God and in true godly fellowship with one another. We gain a good understanding of our children as they grow up in our home from childhood to being mature adults. Our children also know us as their parents. We must have deep personal spiritual concern for our children. If the religion in our home is not real and genuine, catechism instruction and the instruction of the Christian day school will do little to reverse the damage that has been done to our children.

Godliness begins with a living knowledge of God and a humble knowledge of ourselves, who and what we are before Him. Our God is a great and majestic and holy God. He is the Sovereign One who does whatsoever He pleases. He has made us for Himself, and all things in the world in which we live for His own glory. He is the absolutely Holy One

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who hates sin and loves purity, goodness, and holiness. He is the righteous Judge who condemns and punishes all sin and evil in perfect truth and justice. He is the God who has saved us by sovereign grace. We have no worthiness in ourselves. With fear and trembling we realize that it is only His mercy that has saved us from the just judgment our sins deserve, from death and hell. We are His people because of His sovereign love towards us and not because of who we are in ourselves and what we have done to merit His favor. These are the truths that are the basis of true godliness and humility before God. If God is truly our God, we must also serve Him.

We nurture our children in godliness when we teach them to have a serious attitude about God Himself, His greatness, holiness, and fear. In our covenant homes we must teach our children about the seriousness of keeping the law of God. The whole book of Deuteronomy teaches us this. The book of Deuteronomy teaches us about the very serious consequences of disobedience to God's law. Such disobedience will surely bring upon a people the judgment of God. This judgment will lead to their final destruction. When God's people fall into sin, they must by the grace of God repent from that sin and turn again to Him. They must not continue in sin. Sin is a fearful reality. It becomes more and more complicated and destructive when men continue in it. True godliness is daily repentance.

This we must teach our children in our covenant home. When we sin and when our children sin we must go with them to the cross of Jesus Christ, the only place of forgiveness and restoration. Then, too, we must

teach our children the wonder and blessedness of God's forgiving mercy and love. This is foundational to true godliness. The blessing and favor of God is experienced by the people of God in the way of keeping His commandments and doing His will in their daily lives. The proper motive for keeping the law of God is gratitude to God for His great salvation. God's commandments are not grievous but joyous.

The first commandment teaches us that we must have the Lord alone as our God. We must love Him with all our hearts and souls and mind and strength. This must be evident not only in our

The covenant home is the God-ordained sphere where our children must be taught true godliness and piety in their lives.

words but in deed and in truth. In the Lord must be all our hope, our

trust and confidence, the joy of our salvation, and all our glorying. We marvel that Israel in the Old Testament in her history so often turned to idolatry. But we ought to be on our guard that idols do not arise in our own covenant homes when the things of this world, its pleasures, its covetousness, and its godless philosophy of life so influence our families that we are drawn away from the sincere service of the Lord. We are guilty of the same idolatry that Israel was if we allow this to happen in our covenant homes.

Our prayer life and daily family devotions, reading and explaining the Word of God to our children, will do much by the grace of God to instill godliness in our children. The reverence we show for God, the sincerity and earnestness of our prayers, the interest in the regular study of God's Word in the daily life

of our covenant families, understanding the application of the Word of God—all these things teach our children the meaning of true godliness.

The fourth commandment teaches us to love the Lord's Day. The proper spiritual keeping of the Lord's Day is a very important part of true godliness, contrary to the imagination of many professing Christians today. Godliness in our covenant homes means that we teach our children to love the Lord's Day. This day must be a special day for our families when we go up together as a covenant family to God's house with joy and thanksgiving to worship the great God of our salvation. The fourth commandment is not about a whole list of things we may and may not do. The fourth commandment is about repentance, about returning to the Lord, and about spiritual restoration and revival in our lives. It is about our life and fellowship with God as the glorious and blessed God of our salvation. In Him we have the hope of heaven and of glory. The sabbath day is the sign of the spiritual rest we have in God and of our glorying in Him. Sabbath observance is a sign that distinguishes us from the world as God's people. A very important part of proper sabbath observance is the blessed reality of the communion of the saints. In our home we must teach our children the importance of concern and love for their fellow saints. The covenant home ought to be the place where there are often gatherings of the communion of the saints. The love we have for our fellow saints must according to the Word of God be fervent and unfeigned love of the brethren. Our children must learn this too in our homes.

The fifth commandment is especially for covenant children. This commandment requires them to honor and respect their

covenant parents. This is another fundamental principle of true godliness in the covenant home. The basis of this commandment is the God-given authority of father in the home. Godliness in the covenant home means that the father himself must have a proper understanding of the nature and character of this authority. It is an authority that he has from God and that he must exercise in godly humility and with the fear of God in his own heart. This authority must not be exercised in cruel tyranny and by making heartless and unreasonable demands of his wife and children. Rather, this authority must be exercised in love for God and in

knowledge and sympathy for covenant children that God has given us. It must be guidance for children that reflects godly wisdom and real spiritual concern for them. Children must learn from their earthly father what it means to obey their heavenly Father. They must also learn the blessed reality of the compassions, mercy, love, and tender care of God their heavenly Father. Through learning respect for authority and obedience to their God-given covenant fathers, children must learn the seriousness of authority and obedience in all the various spheres of authority in which they will live.

The sixth commandment re-

quires that we love the neighbor. Love for the neighbor must begin in our homes. The first neighbors with whom children come in contact as soon as they are born into this world are their own parents and their own brothers and sisters. Love and true godliness begins with honor and respect for parents. They must show this respect in spite of the fact that their parents are imperfect and have many weaknesses and sins themselves. But it also means that parents must live in their daily lives in such a way that they are worthy of the honor and respect of their children.

... to be continued.



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Mission Activities

Members of the Heritage PR Fellowship in Sioux Falls, SD sponsored a booth in the Sioux Empire Fair from August 11-16. Rev. Allen Brummel, our denomination's missionary in Sioux Falls, planned to be at the booth as much as possible, with volunteers from the Fellowship sitting with him and also filling in during the times when he could not be there. Plans included distributing literature, and having a TV showing recent ads that have appeared on local television promoting the Fellowship, and the PRCA DVD introducing our churches. Rev. Brummel writes that the week at the fair was very rewarding, giving the Fellowship the opportunity to hand out over 900 pieces of literature. We echo his sentiments when he adds, "We now pray that God will give the increase and that His name will be glorified by the reading and study of that literature."

A recent bulletin from the Hope PRC in Walker, MI contained a brief Myanmar update. The Council of Hope PRC continues to labor with Rev. Titus and the saints in Myanmar. Hope's pastor, Rev. James Laning, is mentoring Rev. Titus in the catechetical instruction he is giving to the members of his congregation. Hope is also happy to report that some of the men in the congregation have found part-time work. As a result, Hope has been able to reduce the amount of cyclone relief given, but collections and gifts for this cause are still greatly needed and appreciated. If you

are interested in keeping current on the developments of Hope's work in Myanmar, you are encouraged to check out Hope's blog at prca.org. Click on News and Views of the PRC.

In mid July the members of the PR Fellowship in Pittsburgh, PA met together on a Saturday for a work bee at their church. There were a number of projects that needed to be accomplished on the outside of the church, and the inside of the building needed some "spring" cleaning as well.

Sister-Church Activities

Rev. Angus Stewart, pastor of the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, along with his wife, Mary, made their biennial trip to the United States this summer. They were here August 10 through September 7. Looking at the Stewarts' itinerary, we would have to call the visit a working vacation. In addition to camping in Rocky Mountain National Park and visiting family and friends, Rev. Stewart had plans to meet with our denomination's Contact Committee, give two lectures, attend the Young People's Convention, give three slide presentations on the CPRC and its ministry to the United Kingdom, and preach eight times in seven of our congregations. While the Stewarts were in America, Rev. G. Van Baren was scheduled to preach for the Covenant congregation.

Evangelism Activities

The Council of First PRC in Holland, MI approved a proposal from their Evangelism Committee to have their church listed in a directory of area churches. This listing is put together by the Holland Sentinel newspaper and is placed in area hotels for visi-

tors to the area.

The Evangelism Committee of the Grandville, MI PRC hosted a lecture on August 12 at the Grandville Public High School. Rev. Angus Stewart spoke on the topic, "Calvin versus Darwin: Anniversaries, Origins, and Worldviews." This timely topic dealt with the clashing views of God as Sovereign Creator versus evolution, according to which man elevates himself as the "highest form of good."

The Reformed Witness Committee of the Doon, Edgerton, and Hull PRCs in Iowa and Minnesota will again be conducting a Bible study at Dordt College during the coming school year. This group is scheduled to meet every Wednesday evening at 7:00 P.M. in the classroom building on Dordt's campus. The Lord willing, they will finish the book of Genesis and begin another book of the Bible to be determined by the students. The RWC hoped to see all the PR Dordt College students there and also encouraged them to invite others to attend.

Christianity on Campus, a Reformed Bible study at Grand Valley State University, and sponsored in part by the Grace PRC in Standale, MI, will once again be meeting this coming school year. Incoming freshmen and current students attending Grand Valley were encouraged to stop by Grace PRC on August 8 for an informational meeting about the Bible study. A lunch of pizza and pop was also provided.

Young People's Activities

The young people of the Calvary PRC in Hull, IA gave out a big thank-you to their congregation for helping them with a recent pop-can drive. Nearly \$800 was raised for Calvary's

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

Young People's Society. We do not know how much of a deposit one receives for the return of a can in Iowa, but here in Michigan it is \$.10. If Iowa is close to that number, that is a lot of cans!!!

The Young People and congregation of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI hosted this summer's 68th annual Young People's Convention held this year at Lake Williamson Christian Center in Southern Illinois. The topic this year was "A Church Gathered From All Nations." 364 young people were scheduled to attend,

as well as 60-70 adult chaperones. Revs. Rodney Kleyn, Angus Stewart, and Dennis Lee were the speakers.

Congregation Activities

The New Church Building Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC was happy to report that a building permit has been issued for their new church and that site work on their property has just begun.

At a recent congregational meeting, the members of the Lyn-

den, WA PRC approved two proposals. One to change the time of their evening worship service from 6:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M., and second, to resurface their church parking lot.

Members of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to a Family Bowling Night on August 14 at Hudsonville Lanes for a night of inexpensive fun and fellowship. \$2/person or \$10/family entitled Southeast members to unlimited bowling, along with free pizza and pop!



Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express Christian sympathies to those in her midst who grieve the recent loss of loved ones. Duke and Jan VanDenBerg, in the death of Duke's mother,

HILDA VANDENBERG.

Dennis Gleason, in the death of his brother,

GREG GLEASON.

Don Hauck Sr., with his children, Don Jr. and Betty Hauck, and Brad and Sharon Potter, in the death of a dear wife and mother,

EILEEN HAUCK.

Rev. and Mrs. Peter Breen (Pauline), in the death of Rev. Breen's brother,

PAUL BREEN.

May they be comforted by the words of Job from long ago: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me" (Job 19:25-27).

Rev. William Langerak, President
Jim Holstege, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and the congregation of Edgerton PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Allen Brummel and family following the passing of their sister-in-law,

MRS. NANCY KUIPER.

May they find comfort in God's word in Psalm 116: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Rev. Dennis Lee, President
James VerHey, Clerk

NOTICE:

Between September 21 and October 9, the RFPA office will have irregular hours due to staff vacations. No mail orders will be processed during this time period. However, you will be able to place an order and pick it up, but please call 457-5970 to make sure the office is open.