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Created Unto Good Works

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

The Lord's will and work must be done. We see that every time we consider the law. The law in the Word is the revelation of His will. We must perform it in the service of love. We do not do this as co-workers with God, which requires the combined efforts of God and us to accomplish God's will. That is impossible and likewise unworthy of our God. Rather, we are co-workers of God, called by Christ to accomplish God's work through the Holy Spirit. Called to do God's work because only God's work is good, and is always good.

So He taught us to pray: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Only when we are engaged in that work can it be appraised as good. This should

deeply humble us, for there is no cause for boasting, in that the work of salvation is His to the finest detail. Salvation is always solely of grace.

The context leads us to this truth. Verse eight summarizes the first seven verses. Verse nine is added for emphasis. Our text, verse ten, is designed to prove and illustrate that great truth. This is seen by the word "for": No man who works boasts, for we are God's workmanship. All is from Him, including our very existence, the purpose of our existence, our good works, and our walking in them. All is of grace in Jesus Christ.

That means that we are God's product. Not that we are the only product that God has ever produced, but that we are of God only. No one else has anything to do with it. We take no part in it and are not worthy of it. We are solely and entirely the work of grace.

That we are God's creation does not refer to our first creation, but to our recreation. This is the work of the Holy Spirit whereby we are made new creatures in Christ. That is plain from the context, which speaks of our being quickened in Christ.

According to our first creation, we were formed in the image of God, but we apostatized, took on the image of the devil, and hence became children of wrath. But in Christ we are new creatures, in that all the old has passed away and all has become new, including the whole elect church and every individual believer.

It is unto good works that we are created. It belongs to the image of God that man is a working being. Christ said: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Therefore, we are active, working friend-servants. At one time we rebelled against God in sin, but we are now restored in the image of God consciously to do good works. Consciously and willingly we work to the praise of our Maker, servants of God in willing obedience and devotion.

In that light we see what Scripture means by good works. The Heidelberg Catechism puts it both negatively and positively. Negatively, good works are not founded on human imaginations or institutions of men. Nor is it up to man to set the criterion or standard. Nor is anything good because it carries an attractive sheen or appeals to the fancies of men.

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Positively, God alone determines what is good. Good works, then, have their source in the faith that the Holy Spirit has wrought in our hearts, they find their criterion in the law of God, and they are performed unto His honor and glory. Only such can be good works because only God is good. Of Him, and through Him, and unto Him are all things.

Unto these good works we are created. Good works are not the cause but the fruit of salvation. They are the manifestation of God's work of sanctification within us.

It must also be emphasized that we are God's workmanship. This refers, first of all, to the church as a whole. The earthly body is used in Scripture as an example of the perfect unity, multiformity, and harmony that belong to the church of God. Other figures used are that of the tree, the vine, and the temple. Secondly, it refers to the individual members. Each one of us is wondrously made. However, to a large extent this is hidden by the body of sin and death. We wait for the final glory where the saints sin no more.

It should come as no surprise to us to see here that we are created in Christ Jesus. Jesus is His personal name, designating the Son of man who came to seek His own and save that which is lost. He is Jehovah-Salvation. All that He ever does He does as Jesus, from the counsel of God, from birth to eternity.

The name Christ denotes His exalted position as chief servant in God's house, anointed of the Father, the Head of the church. We are in Him both from a legal point of view and organically.

Legally Christ is our representative Head before the Father. In Him we are engraved in the palms of God's hands. In Him we have redemption and the right to be called the sons of God. Christ

is all our righteousness before God. He is our Savior, Intercessor, Mediator, and eternal High Priest before God.

So also organically. As the branches of the tree are one organism with the root, and as all the members of the body have their unity in the head, so Christ and His church are one. As branches we live out of the root. As members of the body have their reflexes and power to act from the head, so we receive all our power to live and act out of Christ.

This has been the case already from eternity. Sovereignly God chose us. He knows His own in infinite foreknowledge. He knows them as objects of eternal good pleasure to share in His covenant forever. Election is also organic. God chose a people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. As the body cannot have an arbitrary number of heads, so all the elect from eternity form a perfect unity.

Reprobation is also organic. There are a given number of reprobate. They serve their purpose in the present time in the ingathering of the saints, but perish forever in their wickedness.

Not only is election organic, but it is also personal. God appoints each one of us his own place as member in the body of Christ. Each serves his unique place in the church in the history of the world.


Created in Christ Jesus also includes the cross. God chose unto Himself a redeemed people in Christ. We find all our righteousness in Him. By the Spirit of God in Christ we are created sons and heirs of salvation. He implants His life in us by way of regeneration. This is how He makes us able and willing to walk in all good works. As men of God we have the unction of the Holy One to be prophets, priests, and kings unto God and before His face.

The amazing truth is that God has created us unto good works that He has foreordained that we

should walk in them. Not only are *we* foreordained, but also our *works*. These good works are not our inventions, but God's. We do not bring them to God, but He brings them to us. They are the works that He has eternally specified for us. Just as an expert mechanic has special uses for certain tools, and each part of a mechanism fits intricately so that it functions well, so also the church. God uses human instruments to serve His purpose. He determined a Moses, a David, as well as a Peter, Paul, Calvin, and Luther. He determined when they should be born and where they would labor and with what talents. What applies to them also applies to us.

That is pictured for us in Revelation 14 in the 144,000. That is a figurative number indicating to us that God has chosen an exact number of people who are His peculiar possession. They are a complete unity consisting of just so many individuals. Each has his own place for a specific task and no one can take that place. All this will become more evident in heaven.

Thus we are privileged in Christ to serve His purpose. We walk in the good works that God has ordained. This is not only true occasionally, but those good works become the desire of our lives. We do this not as robots who are moved by remote control, but as living and willing members of Christ, governed by His Spirit in mind and in will.

We should be well aware of the fact that this does not mean that we sin no more. Even our best works are polluted with sin. The Word of God constantly admonishes us against sin. The new man is motivated by the love of God. Therefore, we do walk in good works, for, by the wonder of God's grace, God's strength is accomplished in us. What a blessed privilege to be counted in that glorious number who belong to Christ. To God be the glory! 

Catechism: The Old Path, the Good Way (1)

“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

Jeremiah 6:16

Profound gratitude is the proper response when Protestant Reformed members realize what they have in the practice of catechism—the church’s instruction of covenant youth.

They may be as grateful for catechism instruction and for faithful pastors who teach, as they are for air to breathe and food for their families. And more so.

This gratitude, if it is proper, resists pride over against so many that have allowed the practice to slip away, or have turned it into something other than feeding lambs. What have we that we have not *received*? And who makes us to differ? And why boast as though catechism were not a gift to the undeserving? (cf. I Cor 4:7).

But the right response of believing hearts to catechism is gratitude to God.

As the churches begin another season of catechism instruction this month, we do well to remind ourselves that the practice of the church in giving instruction to the children from early youth to late teens (and later) is an “old path.” It is also a “good way.” By it, under the blessing of a good God, the people of God “find rest for their (and their children’s!) souls” (see Jer. 6:16a).

May God preserve the Protestant Reformed Churches (and all others who have maintained this practice) from responding, “We will not walk therein” (see Jer. 6:16b).

How Old!

We might be surprised how old is this path.

Already early in the old covenant the church walked this path. The *church* taught the youth. This understanding of the church’s role in catechizing is based not only on Abraham’s role as spiritual teacher of the community. God certainly gave Abraham this place over his household and mandated him to teach them all (Gen. 18:19). But very shortly the church’s role became much more official and organized when the *Levites* were assigned the position as teachers of the children.

The inspired blessing that Moses gave the tribe of Levi before he died was God’s powerful and official appointment of them to this work. “They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law” (Deut. 33:10). Spread out as they were in the land of promise (see Josh. 21), the Levites were able to carry out the work efficiently. When Israel later began to fall away, good king Jehoshaphat carried out his spiritual reforms by restoring the Levites to their proper work. They “taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all of the cities of Judah, and taught the people” (II Chron. 17:9). And when Israel returned

from Babylon, Nehemiah understandably had the Levites assume their ancient role: they “caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Neh. 8:7, 8). Later, prophet Malachi sharply rebuked the unfaithful priests and Levites for failing in this fundamental calling (2:7, 8).

The place of Levites as teachers explains what happened in the synagogues and in the special schools for the children spread throughout the land. When sufficiently well trained in the old covenant Scripture, the children graduated to become “sons of the law” (Bar Mitzvah). The evidence of Scripture knowledge by Jesus at age twelve, when He debated the “doctors” (teachers!) in the temple, was not surprising to anyone. What was surprising was that this young man knew the Scriptures *so well*. The church’s youth were always taught.

The old path.

Thus, we would expect Jesus to tell His disciples (the representatives of the church!) to “feed my lambs” (John 21) and to make more disciples by “teaching them...” (Matt. 28). Christ was reminding them of the old paths. When the disciples took up their work after Pentecost, “they ceased not to *teach* and preach Jesus Christ” in the temple and in *every house* (Acts 5:42).

This calling of the church takes nothing away from the massive responsibility of all parents.

It only establishes the necessity also of the *church officebearers* seeing to the biblical instruction of the church's children.

The old path is marked out by Scripture.

The Early Church

The early New Testament church followed that path.

At the request of an officebearer who was feeling the weight of the responsibility to teach catechism, Augustine (354-430) wrote one of the first books on catechetics—how and what to teach. *Catechizing the Uninstructed* has insightful and surprising educational wisdom for catechism teachers today. According to historian P. Schaff, mandatory catechism for the adult convert and for the children of believers was “a regular institution of the Christian church from the beginning” (7:551). The children were taught what to believe (from the Apostles' Creed), how to pray (from the Lord's Prayer), and how to live (from the Ten Commandments). If that sounds familiar, it is. These are three of the main sections of the beloved Heidelberg Catechism. The children were also taught how and what to sing.

Although there was regression in the Middle Ages, catechism instruction did not disappear. There is good evidence that regular instruction of the youth was maintained—at least by some. Without it, God's church would not have survived.

The old path.

The Reformation

So it's certainly a mistake to suppose that the Reformation *began* the instruction of the youth through the church. At the Reformation this great and necessary practice was renewed, strengthened, even developed. But the Reformation fathers were merely clearing the overgrowth from the well-worn path, traversed by

God's church for 4,000 years or so already.

Had the reformers not restored catechism throughout the church, the Reformation would have been a flash in the pan. But because the children were learning and believing the truth, standing on Scripture and its principles, the Reformation was an enduring gift of God to the churches.

The old path.

Hear Calvin refuse to return to Geneva unless a program of catechism were instituted. See him and his pastors requiring parents to bring their children to catechism, and declaring that “those who contravene this order shall be called before the company of elders.” Watch Luther, some years earlier, manifest his love for the church's children by writing a catechism. Luther always had his eye on the children of the flock. Find Pastor Knox in Scotland writing in his book of discipline that the minister must take care of the children and youth, instructing them in the basic doctrines and especially in the catechism. Go to Dordt, a generation later, and see them devoting some early and lengthy sessions of the Great Synod to catechism instruction. And listen to President Bogerman thunder how indispensable the labor was. To which some of the delegates from Germany responded by recommending that elders prepare lists of all the youth age eight and older to ensure faithful attendance. Others from Germany reported that children of 8 and 10 knew the entire catechism!

Too soon again, reform was needed in the Netherlands because catechism instruction was neglected. But God raised up the men and women of the *Afscheiding* and the *Doleantie* to restore the practice, so that the church of Christ would continue in the land of our forefathers.

See the path? The way is plain. The path is old.

This is the way a Reformed church and denomination must walk.

The PRC

The official documents of the PRC require this.

The questions asked at the annual Church Visitation have four references to catechism. The church visitors ask the full consistory whether it “sees to” the conducting of the classes, the material used, and the attendance. In the absence of the minister they ask the elders and deacons whether the minister teaches the classes. In the absence of the elders, the minister and deacons are queried whether the elders supervise catechism. And when the full consistory assembles again, investigation is made whether there is fruit on the catechetical instruction: “Do the young people seek admission to the Lord's Table?” This great emphasis on catechism by the church visitors makes sense when one reads the Church Order article itself that requires church visitation. Article 44 requires that the officebearers be examined about how they build up the congregation, *in particular the youth*.

Nor is this requirement surprising to the minister, because when he was called to the pastorate, the call letter read plainly: “The labors that we expect of you... are: preaching twice on the Lord's Day, *attending to catechetical instruction....*”



I pray that we are impressed by those who have walked this way. Be more impressed than if you saw a literal path in Palestine trod by Paul himself...or Jesus. Those are mere footpaths. No profit in walking on them. But the ancient path of catechizing children is a “good way,” on

which we find rest for our (and our children's!) souls.

The Blessings!

Profound gratitude to God for the blessings found on this path will keep us on it.

The blessing of mature children, who seek the Lord's Table with knowledge and discernment of the Lord's body. Stable children, not tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Lovely children, sanctified as they have been by the word of God all these years. Strong children, able to wield the sword of the Spirit against the church's (and the Lord's) foes. Thankful children who love the church, their mother, at whose breasts they have been nursed all the years of their youth, so that they are now strong. Obedient children


who have learned what it means to love God and their neighbor. Children united with their brothers and sisters because they have all been taught the church's one confession. Discerning children who understand the times and know what the church ought to do. Children well protected by the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation. Children ready to give an answer to those who ask them of their hope. Hopeful children whose eyes ascend to the clouds, waiting as they do for the coming again of Jesus Christ.

On a Sabbath afternoon, or some time of family worship, tell your children about this old path. Show them that it is indeed the good way, where they will find rest for their souls. Warn them of the temptation to say, "we will not walk therein." And make

clear to them the judgments of God upon those who say so.

But make especially clear to them the blessings. Oh, the blessings. The great blessings. The rich blessings. The undeserved blessings.

Lord God, open the storehouses of heaven. Shower down upon Thy church the rich blessings from the Word taught our covenant youth. Establish them in the faith. Teach them godliness. Form their hearts. Comfort their souls. Knit them to Thyself in Christ. Love them. By the Word taught, work repentance, create faith, and declare to them forgiveness. May Thy blessings be so abundant that there is hardly room enough in our souls to receive them.

And then give us men, able men, faithful men, who love to teach, love the children, and devote themselves to this great work. 

Letters

KJV


Praise God for the excellent article in "All Around Us" (Rev. M. DeVries) of the July 2008 issue of the *SB*.

Rev. DeVries makes a perfect statement of truth when he says, "make no mistake, the doctrine of Scripture lies at the very heart of the faith of the church of Jesus Christ.... All our faith stands or falls with the answer to the question: Is Scripture the infallibly inspired and therefore authoritative Word of God?"

Ever since the Reformation, and again in the 1880s and today, this has been exactly what has turned the church to Satan's "Yea, hath God said?" liberalism and lies to deny Scripture and make up gods after their own imagination.

The "proper reverence" for God's Word is nearly dead. Except for the PRC of course, and other faithful denominations. The old Authorized Version is still the best translation available in our age of "comic-book Christianity"!

One way even good churches foster this lie is with the "Children's Church" nonsense. The idea that children can't learn the truth from the KJV or by listening to the faithful preaching of that Word—the very thing that will "make (them) wise unto salvation"! God's continued blessing upon you all in the PRC. Remain faithful. Know that you are appreciated and that you are still a "light on a hill."

*Al Salmon,
Moorestown, NJ* 

All Around Us

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

■ FACEBOOK:

Not for kids

Take this important article from *Reformed Perspective*, a magazine written by young Reformed

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

people for young Reformed people and, in the case of this article, also for their parents.

There is out there the great unknown world of the Internet. Part of its draw is that there is so much that is undiscovered—an old friend, a new friend, a good bargain, some information you

needed for research, a stimulant for a pet sin. The problem with the Internet and our kids is that they aren't telling their parents the whole story—where they've been, what they've seen, how they ended up there, what their friends at school told them to look up, who they've been com-

municating with, etc. And parents need to know. They need to be on the alert. They need to protect their children, not just physically from the lurking molesters, but especially from the spiritual temptations that rot the soul and heart.

And now there's this apparently innocent but very powerful social networking site called Facebook. What is Facebook? It is a very popular, easy to use, social networking site where people can leave messages for their friends and find messages about their friends all day long. But is it as innocent as it sounds?

Well, parents probably don't know, so, here is an article, written by one who is in the know. Maybe not written to his parents, but to parents in general and a good warning, not just for parents, but also for the young people (Jon Dykstra, *Reformed Perspective*, June 2008).

There's a lot to like about Facebook. Status updates for example. Through them I've learned when a friend was excited about an upcoming trip to New York, or in need of prayer because of their medical situation, or stressed because both their children had the flu, or happy because they were expecting another little one.

One friend's update even helped me save valuable minutes every laundry day: "Jan has a laundry confession—she doesn't fold underwear. It's true. Try it! C'mon—free yourself from folded underwear tyranny!" This website is often derided as a timewaster, but if it weren't for Facebook I would have been forever condemned to worrying about wrinkles in items of clothing that no one even sees!

A starting spot

So there's a lot to like about Facebook, but the site does have an unpleasant side. Like the Internet itself, it is not a place teens should be allowed to go unmonitored. And younger children

should not be allowed on the site at all.

How young is too young? You have to be at least 13 to get a Facebook account (though many children get around this restriction by simply pretending to be older). If 13 is the standard this secular group sets, that seems a good indicator that Christian parents should consider an older age limit.

Problematic applications

Some of the parents I've talked to have signed up to Facebook specifically to keep track of what their children are up to. But even some of these parents are oblivious to the dark side of Facebook. This is a site that encourages curiosity—the more you explore the more cool applications, pictures and games you can find. But if children do start exploring they are sure to come across Facebook's sleazy side. A quick perusal of the 20 most popular applications revealed that at least 11 of them had material that was not appropriate for children...or adults for that matter.

- 1) Funwall: Lots of cute posters, but about 10% of the material is pornographic
- 3) Superwall: Users can share videos, half of which seem to be pornographic
- 4) Bumperstickers: Contains a category called "F-you"
- 5) Owned: Allows users to buy and sell friends
- 6) Texas Hold 'Em Poker: A great place to practice gambling
- 7) Friends For Sale: The name says it all
- 13) Super Poke: Loads of street slang sexual references
- 16) My Sexy Friends: Encourages the objectifying and rating of friends
- 17) Mob Wars: For anyone who wants to be the head of a murderous gang
- 19) Zoosk: A dating service
- 20) Likeness: How similar are you to the movie stars you idolize?

Other problems

Pornography is a big problem but applications like Fun Wall, SuperWall and Bumpersticker

are also problematic in that they contain clever insults, cutting put-downs and vulgar jokes. This is just the sort of source material that teenage boys use to impress their friends in the schoolyard, and Facebook is an endless source.

The site has also been used by students in our Reformed schools to pass comments to each other about their favorite and least favorite teachers. We all know that students have always said nasty things about teachers, but doing it on Facebook brings it to a whole new level. The mean words spoken between students in a school hallway are soon forgotten, but the same words posted on a Facebook page encourage friends to add to and expand on these insulting words.

The same thing can also happen between friends—silly insults spoken between friends aren't that significant. But they become far more hurtful when they are posted on Facebook for dozens and even hundreds of others to read.

I've seen some rather horrid material being said by Christian youth. I can only assume that their parents don't know what these children are up to.

Conclusion

And that's the real problem; many parents aren't monitoring their children's use of Facebook. A responsible parent always knows where their children are and it shouldn't be any different with the Internet and with this website.

Like the Internet itself Facebook has some amazing content that makes it very attractive. Facebook allows friends to share photos and news, keep track of birthdays and email addresses, organize events, play games like Scrabble and Boggle together, and even monitor the cheapest plane fares to Europe. Mature users can decide to make use of the good material and ignore the rest.

But younger users may not make the right choices so parents must take steps to know what their offspring are up to. To do that, you'll have to sign up as your child's Facebook friend and

check their page regularly. If you don't know how, ask your child or someone in their early twenties and they'll almost certainly be able to help. And if your child is under 13 get him off the website. If the world admits the site is inappropriate for children this young why would we think different?

Well, anyone who is the slightest bit familiar with Facebook, or any other of the social networking pages (myspace.com, xanga.com, etc.), knows not only that they can be time wasters, that they are harmful to personal communication skills, that they are places for gossip, slander, name-calling, church schism, and promotion of every sort of sin, and so on, but also that they are very, very popular among the young—75% of youth aged 18-24 years have Facebook accounts in the USA. And this demands that parents take the strictest oversight of their teenagers' and children's use of the Internet.

■ Punishment for Speaking Against Homosexuality in Canada

Tolerance for everything is tightening its noose on the intolerant. This article by Tim Waggoner comes from Lifesite-news.com, June 9. It tells the story of an Alberta pastor who was recently fined \$7000 and ordered to apologize publicly and remain silent on homosexuality.

OTTAWA, June 9, 2008 (LifeSiteNews.com)—On Friday, the Alberta Human Rights Commission ordered Alberta pastor Stephen Boissoin to desist from expressing his views on homosexuality in any sort of public forum. He was also commanded to pay damages equivalent to \$7,000 as a result of the tribunal's November decision to side with complainant and homosexual activist Dr. Darren Lund. The tribunal has also called for Boissoin to personally apologize to

Lund via a public statement in the local newspaper.

Boissoin was first hauled before the Human Rights Commission to answer to a complaint filed by Lund, an assistant professor at the University of Calgary. Lund made his complaint after Boissoin published a letter to the editor in the Red Deer Advocate, in which he denounced homosexuality as immoral and dangerous, and called into question new gay-rights curricula permeating the province's educational system.

"Children as young as five and six years of age are being subjected to psychologically and physiologically damaging pro-homosexual literature and guidance in the public school system; all under the fraudulent guise of equal rights," wrote Boissoin in the letter. In an interview, Boissoin told LifeSiteNews.com that he's under attack not only for his letter, but more significantly for his beliefs. "The point I am trying to make here is what's being attacked at the core is what I believe, according to my personal beliefs and my religious beliefs." Most disturbingly, says Boissoin, is that the ruling calls for him to "cease publishing in newspapers, by email, on the radio, in public speeches, or on the internet, in future, disparaging remarks about gays and homosexuals." Boissoin wondered to what extent the right to freedom of expression in Canada will be deteriorated, stating, "I am not allowed to hold on to my views."

The pastor also maintained that his beliefs are founded not on hate or malice, but derive from a personal concern for the family and society rooted not only in faith, but also in science. "I am not allowed to hold my views, but the Lunds of the world are allowed to bring gay ministers into schools, they are allowed to present scientifically baseless teachings to kids that people are born gay." "I am all for tolerance, I don't want to see anyone who calls themselves homosexual be discriminated against," added Boissoin. "At the same time I believe it is a behaviour, there is no scientific proof that anyone

is born gay, but these teens are taught in our school systems that that is the way it is, that people are born homosexual."

Boissoin then addressed the potential implications of what he called a scientifically baseless pro-homosexual curriculum being taught in schools. "When you deem something acceptable, you increase the likelihood that they will participate in that, and that's a great concern to me," he said.

"Absurd—beyond absurd. I will never make a public apology; I stand by what I said. My context has never been taken into consideration. Lund's context has always been taken into consideration."

Boissoin's is the latest in the string of actions by human rights commissions at both the national and provincial levels which have the nation in an uproar over the threat to freedom of speech and freedom of religion posed by the human rights commission. The Alberta government, which created the human rights commission, has ultimate authority over the commission and its mandate, rules and who is appointed to the commission.

The question can be asked, Why is this happening? Why this attack on Christians?

In this case against Boissoin, some circumstantial evidence has apparently been produced that links the influence of his teaching to the beating of a homosexual young man. Some kids who were involved in the beating had apparently read about the Boissoin case, and suddenly he became guilty of a hate crime for this. Meanwhile, it is a fact that of all the hate crimes and terrorist acts committed in recent history, none of them can be attributed to Christianity, and yet, as this case demonstrates, Christianity is being targeted for its speech against homosexuality. So, why is Christianity being targeted?

The answer is, because we have the Word of God, the Scriptures, which condemn homosexuality. These people want to at-

tack God and His will and Word, and so they attack Christians. And, fearful as this may be, this is what believers can expect in this world. But then, we should count it joy to suffer for the name of Christ, we should continue to demonstrate true Christian behaviors toward our persecutors, and we should trust the Lord who has promised never to forsake us in such troubles. He said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

■ From Justification to Women in Office


Over the past several years the Presbyterian Church in

America, PCA, has been involved in ongoing debate and decisions regarding justification by faith alone and Federal Vision. This year, the synod dealt with another important and difficult issue that, it seems, will extend over years to come. On Reformation21.org, Ligon Duncan posted the following:

The Assembly was called upon to debate a controversial matter, the overtures of a number of presbyteries asking for the creation of a Study Committee to consider women's roles in the church, or the possibility of female deacons in the PCA. Eventually, the Overtures committee recommended against a Study Committee, and a Minority Report advocated the establishment of a Study Com-

mittee with narrowly defined parameters (e.g. a focus on women in diaconal service).

The minority report was adopted and a study committee was appointed to look at these issues.

It's important for us to note that when a church begins to waffle on the question of ordained women, in any of the offices, it is only a matter of time and the churches will not only allow this, but be overrun by it. Evidence of this is in the Christian Reformed Church synod of 2008, which seated women delegates, and it was not long ago that the same disputes and questions existed in the CRC. 

Graduation Address

Prof. David Engelsma

The Courage of the Minister of the Word

"And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak they word" (Acts 4:29).

Introduction¹

It is a strange and dangerous fact that so little is made, and even said, about the qualification of courage in the

¹ This is the text of the address—the final rectoral address of the speaker—on the occasion of the graduation of Mr. Heath James Bleyenberg from the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary on June 12, 2008 at Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI.

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minister of the word of God. One may scour the standard works on preaching and preachers without coming across even the mention of courage, much less a chapter devoted to this virtue, as the virtue deserves and demands. There is much about earnestness, humility, self-discipline, love, holiness, diligent study, aptitude to speak, devotion to the congregation, and more, but never a word about courage.

This neglect is dangerous.

It is dangerous because the neglect may, in fact, indicate that the emphasis on humility and love desires a ministry devoid of courage, or intends to excuse cowardice in the ministry.

It is dangerous because neglect of courage as a requirement for the ministry tends to leave the

young minister unprepared for the conflicts he will surely face—conflicts that demand courage on his part.

Overlooking courage as an attribute of the minister is dangerous simply because courage is necessary for a faithful ministry. Without courage, the other virtues—earnestness, humility, diligent study, devotion to the congregation, and all the rest—important as they are, go for nothing. They are unavailing.

This minimizing, if not ignoring, of courage is also strange.

How prominent, how vitally important, was courage in the ministry of the prophets in the Old Testament! Courageously, Hanani the seer rebuked godly King Asa for his league with the pagan king of Syria, although the

outcome for the prophet was that Asa was enraged with him and put him in prison (II Chron. 16).

With courage, Hanani's son, Jehu, confronted King Jehoshaphat: "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD" (II Chron. 19:2).

To instance no other, at His call of the prophet Jeremiah, Jehovah made the prophet "a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land" (Jer. 1:18), describing the prophet's courage in the face of opposition to the word he would bring—opposition, not from the heathen, but from the people of God and their office-bearers.

How we rightly celebrate courage in the outstanding champions of the truth, defenders of the faith, and reformers of the church! Athanasius, Gottshalk, Luther, Calvin, de Cock, Kuyper! We honor their knowledge and confession of the truth, to be sure, but especially their courage, without which the truth they knew and confessed would not have prevailed, nor benefited the church.

It would certainly be strange were we Protestant Reformed professors, ministers, elders, and people to slight courage in a minister, inasmuch as Herman Hoeksema, to whom under Christ we are so much indebted, exemplified courage in the minister.¹ Already in his seminary days, he deliberately called the state schools "the gates of hell" in a Christian Reformed congrega-

tion known to oppose Christian schools, with the result that that congregation promptly closed its pulpit to Hoeksema. In his first charge, another Christian Reformed congregation in which there was strong opposition to the Christian schools, Hoeksema preached sharp sermons on the necessity of good Christian schools. The result was that members left the congregation—and him—as he knew they would. Regardless that it cost him his promising place in the Christian Reformed Church, hatred, and deposition, as well as lifelong isolation in the community of Reformed churches, Hoeksema confessed sovereign, particular grace, not only in election, atonement, and conversion, but also in the preaching of the gospel of election, the cross, and conversion. He also confessed the antithesis regarding the Christian life. As the necessary implication of these two truths—sovereign, particular grace and the antithesis—he strongly condemned the popular doctrine of common grace, already then a sacred cow in the Reformed churches. In his own congregation, First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI, he began teaching marriage as a lifelong bond in the face of members who had remarried after divorce. Still more, he was courageous to testify sovereign, particular grace in the covenant, with regard to the children of believers, against fierce opposition in his own congregation and denomination, at a cost to himself that only a minister can fully appreciate.

Above all, the omission of courage from the list of qualifications for the ministry is strange because of the insistence on courage in a minister in Scripture. I have already reminded us of the importance of courage in the prophets in the Old Testament. No less insistent on courage in a minister is the New Testament.

That the word "courage" seldom appears in the New Testament with reference to preachers is of no consequence. The characteristic itself plainly marks all the New Testament preachers of the gospel. Think of Paul and Barnabas on the mission field in Antioch in Pisidia, preaching Jesus Christ and justification by faith alone and warning an obviously hostile crowd, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you" (Acts 13:41).

Think of Paul again, now addressing the church—the church he himself had gathered and organized, but falling away from the gospel and Christ: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" (Gal. 3:1).

Think of the courage of the apostles Peter and John in Acts 4. Boldly, they confessed Jesus as the Christ of God to the Sanhedrin, which had recently murdered Jesus, in the face of severe threatening.

The courage of the minister is expressed in the New Testament Scripture by the repeated statement that the minister spoke the word "with boldness," and by the prayer, which is also repeated, that God would give His ministers boldness to speak the word.

We have such a prayer in Acts 4:29: "Grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word." This was a prayer by the church at the very beginning of the history of the church of the new covenant, not alone for the apostles and their co-workers at that time, but also for the church's preachers down the ages.

It was a prayer for Heath Bleyenbergh. It was a prayer for all our seminarians. It was a prayer for all us ministers.

It was a prayer that I hope my address puts in the hearts and on the lips of us all, if it is not already there.

¹ The speech was given to an audience consisting of the faculty of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, the seminary graduate and other students at the seminary, the members of the Theological School Committee of the seminary, the members of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and visitors from other churches.

What Courage is

The courage that must characterize the minister is the spiritual strength of a regenerated heart that enables, and *impels*, him to preach the word of God in the face of some threat to himself if he does so. The courage that Scripture calls for in the minister expresses itself in a bold preaching of the word, so that courage is virtually identical with bold preaching. If it were not for the fact that the topic could leave the wrong impression, I might have titled the speech, “The *Boldness* of the Minister.”

In response to severe threatening of the apostles by the leaders of the Jews, with the purpose that the apostles “not...speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:17, 18), the church prayed that God the Lord would “grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they many speak thy word” (v. 29). This was a prayer for courage, but courage in the form of the strength of heart to preach the word of God.

Similarly, in Ephesians 6:19, Paul asks the church to pray “for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.”

In I Thessalonians 2:2, the apostle reminds the Thessalonians that “we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God in much conflict,” even though the apostle and his companions had just suffered and were shamefully treated at Philippi. According to verse one, it was this courage to speak the word boldly that explained that “our entrance in unto you...was not in vain.”

The courage of the minister, then, must not be confused with a merely natural forwardness of action and speech that amounts to nothing more than self-promotion, rooted in pride, and that is not only unbecoming a minister, but also harmful to his ministry.

Such a minister is the proverbial bull in a china shop.

Nor is this courage, so highly recommended by Scripture, merely a minister’s stubborn, unyielding holding to his opinion, insisting on his way, and standing for his cause, even though this stubbornness proves to be costly to himself. There is a wise saying in the church that it is not the suffering that makes a martyr, but the cause for which he suffers. There are many who are ready to suffer and even to give their life for false religion and idols. One thinks today of the Muslim suicide bombers. But they are not martyrs. They do not lose their life for Christ’s sake. They are merely foolish, evil self-destroyers. Only the man or woman who gives his or her life for Christ and the gospel is a martyr.

Likewise, a minister who resolutely maintains an error, or persists in advancing his own personal cause, often to the injury of the church, is not courageous, but merely obstinate.

The grace of courage is boldness on behalf of the word of God; boldness to speak that word; boldness to speak it where it is not welcome and where speaking it will bring opposition and therefore suffering to the preacher; boldness to speak just that aspect of the word of God that is needed because just that aspect is presently denied or opposed or questioned; boldness to speak that particular aspect of the word that is being opposed to just that audience that is opposing it.

The opposite of this courage is cowardice in a minister. Either he is silent, or he deliberately avoids preaching those doctrines and precepts that might anger his audience, or he is careful to avoid speaking certain truths to that audience that needs the message he withholds.

Courage will boldly proclaim the word of God to the ungodly and unbelieving world. As the

minister has opportunity, he will testify of the one true God, of His wrath upon the wicked world, for example, in the storms and floods now devastating the United States, and of Jesus Christ as the only Savior from sin and the only escape from this wrath and as the Lord over all by His resurrection from the dead. The courageous minister will expose and condemn the world’s idolatry and unrighteousness—its lawlessness.

Increasingly in Western society, this proclamation of the gospel of God meets with threatenings. Like the Jewish Sanhedrin in the apostles’ day, the civil authorities today in Europe, Great Britain, and North America “strictly threaten” the true church and her ministers “that they speak henceforth to no man in this name” (Acts 4:17). Overt persecution is impending, and even now breaking out.

When the state decrees that all religions are one and must be tolerated, courage will be required to proclaim that the God and Father of Jesus is the one true God and that all other gods are idols.

When the state legislates that condemnation of homosexuals is a hate crime, courage will be required publicly to preach that homosexuality is a vile passion and that homosexual sex is an abomination, and to call such sinners to repentance.

Courage will boldly proclaim the word of God to the apostatizing churches, particularly the apostatizing Reformed churches. As he has opportunity, the courageous minister speaks to them the word of God concerning sovereign grace—the grand doctrines of Dordt—including sovereign grace in the preaching of the gospel. In view of the heresy—the plain, gross heresy—of the Federal (Covenant) Vision in the deepest bowels of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, he

will speak the truth of sovereign grace in the covenant of grace. This is the truth that also in the covenant, with regard to the salvation of the children of believers, the salvation of God in Jesus Christ has its source in election—election accompanied and served by reprobation—and that the covenant and its salvation, therefore, are unconditional.

With boldness, the courageous minister will also proclaim to the departing Reformed churches the life of sanctification according to the law of God: Sabbath observance as obedience to the fourth commandment; chastity in single life; fidelity—lifelong fidelity—in marriage; and the calling of Christians to have no fellowship with unbelievers, with their works of darkness, and in their ungodly organizations.

This courage will cost the minister. He will be maligned, scorned, and—what is harder to bear—ignored.

Courage will boldly proclaim the word of God to the minister's own congregation and denomination. Especially is courage necessary for the bold proclamation of the word to one's own church.

Boldly, the minister must speak the whole counsel of God, and not only certain parts that the congregation might prefer.

Boldly, he must proclaim the grand, but offensive, doctrines of grace set forth in the Canons of Dordt. He must not only mention them once in awhile, but preach them, including their particularly offensive aspects: total depravity; reprobation; limited atonement; particular grace, that is, grace that is not for all, but for some only.

Boldly, he must proclaim the truth of salvation by grace alone as this truth is rightly defended, maintained, and developed in the Protestant Reformed Churches regarding the covenant of grace.

Boldly, he must proclaim a God of holiness, as well as a God

of love; a God who is terrible, as well as lovely; a God of anger and chastisement upon His sinning child, as well as a God of grace.

Boldly, the minister must address the particular sins that disgrace the congregation and expose it to the judgments of God. It does not take courage to condemn sin in general. No minister will incur the wrath of members for lambasting sin. Billy Graham has won fame and fortune by haranguing sin. But let the minister warn against a noticeable distaste for distinctively Reformed doctrine, or against the use of the Sabbath for pleasure, or against feuding among the members, or against mothers working outside the home to the detriment of marriage, home, and family, or against men and women drinking too much, indulging in unseemly parties, and hanging out in bars, and then there will be angry opposition.

Boldly, he must exhort love among the members of the church. But the exhortations must be specific and pointed. No courage is required to preach a vague, general, and undefined love. But it takes courage to admonish husbands to treat their wife with kindness and gentleness; to command fathers to give up some of their recreational activities, and even unnecessary working, in order to spend time raising their children; to exhort wives and mothers to sacrifice their gifts, careers, and personal interests for their husband and children; to "beseech Euodias... and Syntyche" that, once and for all, "they be of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4:2); and to give pointed warning, without mentioning her name, to Mrs. Busybody in the congregation, that she is not permitted to gossip, and to those who greedily listen to her, that they have a devil in their ear, as much as she has one on her tongue.

Boldly, the minister must be

negative in his proclamation of the word to his own congregation, not only positive. He must be bold to be negative in the face of strong pressure from some in his congregation that he not be negative, but only positive. He must be negative in preaching sound doctrine: salvation by efficacious, irresistible grace is the gospel; the teaching of universal, resistible grace is a false gospel. He must be negative in preaching holiness of life: the unbreakable marriage bond is the narrow way to the face of God; remarriage after divorce is adultery, and adulterers and adulteresses will be forever outside the celestial city.

With boldness, the minister must preach precisely the doctrines regarding which there is weakness in his congregation. He must preach justification by faith alone in the meaning of the doctrine in Romans and Galatians, when there is proud self-righteousness and legalism. He must preach justification by faith and works in the meaning of the doctrine in James, when there is a lax antinomianism and carelessness of life.

Boldness of preaching in the Protestant Reformed Churches is by no means limited to addressing the error of a lack of zeal for the grand doctrines and the narrow way of life of the Reformed faith, which I might call "the error on the left." Boldness is also required for addressing the error of a zeal for these doctrines and this way of life that is not according to knowledge, which I might call "the error on the right."

In my own ministry, the pressure from the right was as threatening as that from the left, and I had to contend with an overwrought and misguided zeal for the great doctrines of the faith, as much as with apathy towards them. I refer to opposition to preaching the "must" of the law, as well as the "may," the

“can,” and the “will,” as though preaching the “must” (“We *must* obey the law of God!”) were self-righteousness and Pelagianism. I refer to the insistence that every sermon must *explicitly* and even *mainly* be a repudiation of common grace and the conditional covenant, as though only such sermons were the gospel of grace. I refer to the objection—the *strenuous* and *threatening* objection—to urgent exhortations, for example, a sermon on James 4:8, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you,” as though this were blatant Arminianism. I refer to the contention that all the congregation must observe certain rules which a member himself has invented as essential to an antithetical life, even though these rules are nowhere to be found in Scripture, in the creeds, or in the church order, for example, that auction sales on behalf of the Christian schools are “worldly,” and that the preacher must thunder forth these commandments of men.

Boldly, the minister must rebuke his own church when this is necessary. Paul rebuked the Galatian churches, as also the congregation of Corinth. Christ commanded the angels of various churches in Asia Minor to warn the congregations that He was about to remove their candlestick from its place and to vomit them out of His mouth (Rev. 2:5; 3:16). “Ye adulterers and adulteresses,”

James said, to Christians and Christian churches (James 4:4).

Courage will boldly proclaim the word of God to the objects of mission on the mission field and to churches recently formed by missions. Surely the missionary must know the people and their culture; surely as a wise man who desires the salvation of the people he takes them by guile; and surely he knows and practices the methods of missions, as well as the principles. But just as surely this does not rule out boldness in speaking the word in missions.

How boldly Paul and Barnabas preached and warned at Antioch in Pisidia! (Acts 13) They did not coddle those who rejected and opposed the truth, but “waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (v. 46).

How boldly Paul proclaimed the one true God, condemning the idols, in Lystra (Acts 14).

To the Thessalonians, the apostle could write concerning his missionary labor among them, “we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God in much conflict” (I Thess. 2:2).

How bold was the early Christian missionary in response to the question of the Frisian king stepping into the water in order to be baptized with his entire tribe! When the king asked,

hesitating, “What was the destiny of my ancestors?” the missionary replied, “Your pagan ancestors are in hell.”

And the missionary apostle was bold to write of the sovereignty of God in predestination to the newly-formed church at Rome (Rom. 8-11), as he was bold to require of the very young congregation at Corinth chastity and lifelong faithfulness in marriage (I Cor. 6, 7).

In all this bold preaching, the minister is, and must be, motivated by love for the people, desirous that they be saved. Therefore, boldness does not, and may not, produce recklessness of speech, disregard of time and place, brutality of attitude and action, or even carelessness how the message of the gospel is phrased.

We desire that the members of our own congregation go to heaven with us; we desire that men and women on the mission field be gathered unto Christ; we want the Reformed churches to forsake their erroneous teachings and worldly walk and to stand with us in and for the truth; we hope that even our witness to the world may be God’s means to rescue some from His wrath.

But this desire of love does not, and may not, cut the nerve of boldness in preaching.

For boldness, born of courage, is necessary.

(to be concluded) 

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Arie denHartog

Singapore and Then to Redlands

Rev. denHartog is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

This has been a very exciting summer for us. We spent two weeks in Singapore. Our hearts greatly rejoiced when we were invited to come to

Singapore to speak at the “Family Camp” of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. At first I was going to write only about our experiences in Singapore, but then

we enjoyed an equally exciting time in our church in Redlands, California, where we were asked to speak at the youth retreat sponsored by Hope Protestant Reformed Church.

Being part of the two events mentioned above gave us the opportunity to experience two 'worlds,' different in so many ways. Singapore is an Asian culture, in many ways so different from America, though in both places the culture is worldly and ungodly. Singapore is an ultra-modern city, bustling with business, phenomenally successful and prosperous by worldly standards. It is an amazing experience coming into Singapore's grand Changi airport. Outside the airport one is immediately impressed by the modern-day freeways, lined with beautiful plantings, the many expensive, gleaming, brand-new cars traveling on them, the impressive housing estates, the signs of ever growing prosperity, massive building projects going on everywhere you look. New sky-scraping office buildings and hotels are continually being built. Singapore has a population of over four and a half million people. The plans of the country are to increase this population in the next decade to over six million. And all these people live on an island covering about 250 square miles.

It is overwhelming to stand for a short time in the city hall subway station where trains from all over the island come together. The massive subway system is as grand as any in the world. During the busy times of the day, trains run as often as one every minute! As you are standing there, thousands and thousands of people rush by you. Very strikingly, the crowds that pass by are made up predominantly of young people, well-dressed and with the look of being business-orientated. They are all rushing off to their jobs, many related to

the high-tech, fast-moving industry that drives the prosperity of Singapore. Being in Singapore for just a few days one can experience modern inventions that are more advanced even than those in many parts of America.

A very unusual dimension of the world in Singapore is the presence of few children. Though there are children of course, many Singaporeans postpone marriage in order first to succeed in the business world. Many in the modern society of Singapore consider bringing forth children far too bothersome and limiting. Raising children is considered by many a degrading, menial task that can be performed by uneducated domestic servants imported from other countries. Many of the young women of this society consider successful careers in which they are constantly advancing to greater heights of worldly achievement and glory to be far more desirable than staying home and taking care of children. The few children that are born to young successful Singaporeans are driven to attain even greater heights than their parents.

Standing in the midst of this society, seeing it all rush by and seeking earthly prosperity and success, as Christians we are impressed by the utter vanity of it all. Because of the pressures of Singapore society, many are burned out already in their early fifties or even sooner. No matter how successful they have been, after just a few short years of a very high-pressure lifestyle, men and women are left with nothing of any lasting personal value and significance.

Evident in Singaporean society, where the culture is predominantly pagan in philosophy, is a rapid development of worldliness. There is an openness in the display of immorality and an acceptance of this as a legitimate part of the culture and excitement of the world. Private clubs

provide expensive entertainment and an unbelievable variety of cuisine for long, drawn-out dinners. Soon Singapore will have its own casino gambling.

Singapore society does not have the restraint that for years somewhat slowed down the ungodliness in our own nominally Judeo-Christian culture. Young people everywhere make use of computer technology and high-tech inventions that promote a worldly philosophy and a lifestyle that leave the present older generation far behind. All of this has its great influence on those seeking to live a serious Christian life in this worldly city.

Just two weeks after being in Singapore we found ourselves in Los Angeles Airport. Also here one sees thousands and thousands of people rushing by. The culture is obviously very different. There is much more evidence of a multi-racial and multi-cultural society. There is a far greater presence of pregnant young mothers and families than in modern-day Singapore. Especially in public places there is much more evidence of the poor and rich, though not so much of the extremely poor as in other countries in the world that we have visited. Though our society is generally nominally Christian in character it is becoming less and less so. There is evidence of gangs and crime and the drug culture on every hand, much more than in Singapore. American beaches display shocking forms of immorality not seen in Asian society. The in-your-face brazen display of the wickedness of immorality, takes on a somewhat different character than in Singapore. There is greater danger of crime and violence. There is the toleration of open blasphemy against Christianity that few other societies would permit against the prevailing religion, all in the name of religious freedom and individual rights. The Word

of God prophecies that nominally-Christian society will exceed in wickedness and ungodliness the culture of the pagan world.

America has the modern-day phenomenon of mega-churches. Many people in America still go to church. But the church for the most part has become so superficial, apostate, and ungodly that its members in their lifestyle are hardly distinguishable from the world where they live. The truth of God's Word has been largely forgotten, the law of God is despised and trampled underfoot, and sound doctrine is imagined to be totally irrelevant. Worship services that should be directed to exalting the glory of God and of the Savior and promoting His truth and holiness have been changed largely into forums of worldly, popular entertainment, exciting mass audiences and giving them the imagination of being active and zealous 'for the Lord.' One is utterly amazed at what such churches do to attract people. Across the street from Southwest is a mega-church that uses the Lord's Day for such events as car shows and the circus.

In both of the cultures described above, God has His church, a very small remnant of society, elected by His grace, redeemed through the precious blood of His dear Son Jesus Christ, sanctified by His Spirit, called to a life of holiness and godliness. True Christian living in both of these societies is extremely challenging. Also in the sphere of the church that we lived in for a short time, there are amazing contrasts between Singapore and America. In our Protestant Reformed Churches we have a strong tradition of the Reformed faith and the heritage of God's covenant that God in His mercy has preserved among us for several generations. In Singapore we worked among a church made up largely of converts from pagan religions. Most are first-

generation Christians, but there is now also the presence of the second generation of covenant young people. In the church where in the past we have served, there has not yet been a marriage between two young people born and raised in the sphere of the covenant.

In the providence of God we had a wonderful experience among the saints of God in Singapore. We spent ten years of our life in Singapore, during which time we saw the wonderful works of the Lord in saving His people and forming them as His church. There was the evidence of the beautiful zeal of first love for the Lord. We served in a church that began largely with young people. Christian marriages were taking place with unparalleled frequency during those days. Children were being born and receiving the covenant sign of baptism.

At the camp that was held at a resort in Malaysia, I gave five speeches on the subject, "The Pursuit Towards Godliness." I was truly impressed, as I often have been during the times we lived in Singapore, at the amazing ability of the saints in Singapore to listen to the Word of God. Five speeches in just four days! There was interest in things spiritual. Most of the activities at the camp were very directly spiritually orientated. There was wonderful blessed fellowship with dear saints of God. We experienced again the beautiful reality of how God saves and gathers His church in all nations and among all peoples. By God's grace, by His truth, and through faith in Him, we are one in the faith and knowledge of our God and Savior. We feel a bond of Christian love that is profound. We are one also in the great struggles and challenges we face in Christian living. We are one in the struggles against sin and temptation in the world. We confess our own great weakness and that our only hope is in God

alone. We are one also in facing the great challenges and serious calling for the future.

One of the greatest of these challenges in any church is that of raising a new covenant generation to continue in the truth of God. It is God's purpose that the church grow through the work of evangelism. This is beautiful and exciting. Through this work new converts and their families are brought into the church. This will continue until the day of the glorious return of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. But it is also clear from the Word of God that the church continues according to God's own covenant purposes in the line of generations. The strength of the church in the midst of this ungodly world, whether in Singapore or in America, will by the grace of God be seen in the new covenant generations that arise in the midst of the church. "For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

Often on the mission field personal piety and godliness are stressed. This is of course good and very important. At the same time, there must be a consciousness of corporate Christianity in the church of Jesus Christ where Christians understand the great significance of their membership in the church and their calling to maintain the truth of God by instructing the generation to come. In maintaining this calling it is of greatest importance for the church and her members to be in the world but at the same time spiritually separate from it. She must condemn this ungodly world and flee from it. She must have a radically different and antithetical lifestyle.

In America, as in all the world, there is always the great danger of apostasy. We see in our land dreadful apostasy in the church. We see young people who were born of believing

parents and were more or less instructed in Christian religion from their childhood days later in life living in gross wickedness and ungodliness, forgetting their glorious heritage and despising the covenant of God.

At the Redlands Retreat I was heartened to see a group of our covenant young people, most of whom had been raised from childhood in the sphere of the covenant among us. Many of them seemed to be serious and spiritually minded, well grounded in the truth of the Word of God, and deeply concerned about their own walk with the Lord as well as the future of our Protestant Reformed Churches. Many were deeply concerned about Christian marriage. The retreat gave opportunity for young men and women to find each other in the sphere of the covenant and of the church. It was a joy to see interests beginning between young men and women, some of which have in the past continued to develop and have resulted in Christian marriages in churches of God among us.

The general subject of the Redlands Retreat was "Maintaining a Spiritual Life." For my speech I chose the sub-topic "Spiritual Growth." The theme passage from Scripture for the Retreat was II Peter 3:18: "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen."

The important question for the church in Singapore and for her members is, will the church continue in the new generation that is arising? Will the first love for the Lord that often characterizes a church raised up on the mission field continue in a pagan culture in the next generation. Is there in the church a steadfast willingness to be different from the world and to oppose its wickedness, and not to go along with its life of vanity? Will there be a new

generation that is strong in the knowledge of the truth and committed to maintaining and living by that truth, or will the powerful influences of a pagan culture lead many away to join the world again? There is a strong drive in Singapore for worldly success and glory. Sadly, we also saw some young people very committed to success and prosperity, drifting and troubled in a pagan culture, and timid about taking serious stands and commitments to the truth. This could only bode great spiritual dangers for the future of the church.

In America, and particularly in our Protestant Reformed Churches, we have many generations of the glorious heritage of the truth, the truth that we should love to call the Reformed faith. Sadly, there are in our midst also some young people whose lives are characterized by vulgar conversations and shamefully immoral, ungodly behavior. We have to be seriously concerned about the new generation that is arising among us. Have we taught our covenant children to be truly spiritually minded? Have we taught them to be strong and uncompromising in the knowledge of the truth?

America has a dreadfully apostate culture. Once nominally Christian, it is now without a doubt exceedingly pagan in its culture of gross wickedness and ungodliness. This culture is promoted in our day by the powerful instruments of the mass media. Sadly, America is perhaps today known the world over more for this popular culture than for anything else. Hollywood and Broadway and Vegas are of great influence in our land. There is today the influence of the world of the Internet, having an even greater potential to destroy young people with the most shocking wicked philosophy and lifestyles ever in the history of the world.

Who would deny that our

covenant young people are affected by this culture? Some of our young people seem to be more knowledgeable about and ready to talk with each other about this culture than they are about the glorious truth and great salvation of the Lord. We face the extremely important questions, are we truly growing in the knowledge of the truth, in the grace and knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ? Are we in our generations manifesting sincere, distinctive, antithetical lifestyles, in true holiness and godliness, living in obedience and fear before the Lord in an increasingly wicked and apostate world? Do we realize, not less and less but rather more and more, that we must condemn the wicked world in which we live and be separate from it?

Having experienced life again in two different cultures and two church settings, we can say that our earnest prayer to God is that we can as churches in two parts of the world help each other to grow in and continue in true distinctively Reformed religion, both in doctrine and in life. I believe that, because of the generations of the heritage of the Reformed faith that God in His mercy has preserved in our midst, we have much to communicate to the church in Singapore, and she and her members can still learn much from the heritage that God has given and preserved among us.

We are thankful for the exciting years of work we have enjoyed among the saints in Singapore in the work of missions. May the Lord continue to give us such blessed opportunities in His worldwide church and kingdom.

There is an urgent need for us to be always examining and judging ourselves, our own churches, homes, and families, and to be earnestly concerned about the future of the cause of God's covenant and kingdom in our own midst.



September 1, 2008

The new school year was scheduled to begin on Monday, August 25, with an opening "orientation" and chapel speech by the rector. This is normal for the day before regular classes. The students receive assignments and reading lists, purchase the required books at the seminary bookstore, and receive their "practice preaching" text assignments. The rector makes important announcements, reminds the students what to expect, and opens with a devotional exposition of Scripture and prayer. The new students feel their way around. The older students take a deep breath. Ten students will grace our halls in the year 2008-2009. As I write (August 6), we're already gearing up to begin. Summers are short.

During the first semester our only fourth-year student—Cory Griess, from Loveland, CO—is serving in an internship under Rev. Steven Key in Hull, Iowa. Mr. Griess and his wife (expecting twins in December!) will work there until January, when he returns for his last semester. Our third-year students include one from the PRC—Mr. Dan Holstege, member of Southeast PRC, Grand Rapids, MI; one from the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland—Mr. Martyn McGeown (attending Hudsonville, MI, PRC); and one from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia—Dr. David Torlach (attending Byron Center, MI, PRC). Mr. Holstege and Mr. McGeown have been licensed to preach in the churches and have been busy this summer filling pulpits, not only in Michigan but in Northern Ireland and across our country. The second-year students are Mr. Nathan Decker (Faith PRC, Jenison, MI); Mr. Brian Huizinga (Grandville PRC, Grandville, MI); Mr. Vernon Ibe (Berean PRC, Manila, the Philippines); and Mr. Jonathan Mahtani (Georgetown PRC, Hudsonville, MI).

The two new students are Mr. Stephen Griess, from Loveland, CO PRC, and recently married to Jaimy (nee VanDonselaar); and Mr. David Mahtani, from Bethel PRC, NW Chicago, and married last year to Madri (nee VanderWalt). Both of these men graduated from Grove City College in Pennsylvania.

All but one of the students are enrolled in a full, four-year curriculum. The rigorous schedule includes courses in Theology, Exegesis, Old Testament, New Testament, History, Languages, and all the courses that give instruction in making sermons, teaching catechism, church government, and much more. Each student takes at least 16-18 credit hours per semester.

The students in years 2-4 are required to make two sermons each semester to be preached on a Monday morning before the student body and faculty. They submit their written sermon on the previous Friday, so that students and faculty alike can examine them carefully for discussion and critique on Monday. Delivery, organization, and content are discussed. The first-year students make one or two sermons, and deliver them just to the homiletics professor and their fellow students. This is a difficult but very important part of a student's training.

Classes take place on Tuesdays through Fridays. Each day, mid-morning, one of the students leads the seminary in devotions, and all break for 15 minutes of coffee and fellowship. Each Wednesday, one of the faculty or area ministers speaks in a special chapel exercise. Afternoons are devoted to study; most of the students retire to their carrels in our library.

But the seminary training includes much more. This year, classes will be cancelled for a day so that all can attend a special conference on Herman Bavinck at Calvin Seminary. Last year between semesters all the students travelled to Escondido, CA, to attend a conference on missions at Westminster Seminary. The seminary also invites guest lecturers to speak, and has usually opened up these lectures to any interested visitors.

Other activities of the seminary, official and unofficial, include: Student Club meetings once per month at the professors' homes; a picnic at the beginning and end of each school year; and fellowship among the wives with the professors' wives to have discussion on the special calling of the minister's wife.

The life of the seminary is busy and very interesting.

The faculty—Profs. Ronald Cammenga, Russell Dykstra, and Barrett Gritters—ask for your prayers. Pray that we may be faithful in our work so that God blesses it with able and faithful ministers. Pray for the students, that they may take up their very heavy load with zeal and joy. Pray for their wives or wives-to-be, that they may be fit helpers and qualified for the unique and demanding calling of a pastor's wife. The rewards God promises the faithful are rich.

Last Sunday evening before the council and I left the consistory room in the church where I was to preach, I said to them what now we say you: "Pray that sons in your congregation may aspire to the high and glorious calling of the gospel ministry. Send us your sons!"

What I did not say, but could have, was, "Come visit us some time." Sometimes teachers bring whole classes for a morning. Other times individuals sit in on classes. Those in the area are welcome! Call ahead if you come with more than a few.

Prof. B. Gritters, Rector 

Historical Introduction to Dispensationalism (6)

Dispensationalism and Independentism

The articles so far in this series have been intended to provide a historical introduction to dispensationalism. The first few articles provided an overview of some of the current teachings of the movement, showing how dispensationalists capitalized on current events to promote their system, and pointing out some of the foolish ideas that man comes to when he takes dispensational theology to its logical conclusion. Now I have been turning the focus more toward the origin of dispensationalism, in an effort to understand what dispensational theology was designed to accomplish.

Last time we considered how nineteenth-century dispensationalists developed their views partly in an effort to counter the then popular teaching that promises to Israel were going to be fulfilled in the history of America.¹ This time we consider how the original dispensationalists used their eschatology to persuade people to leave their churches and join a group known as the Brethren. Then, Lord willing, there will be one more introductory article on how dispensationalists used their so-called “literal interpretation of Scripture” to present themselves as leaders in the battle against the

¹ Some would have substituted Great Britain for America.

Rev. Laning is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: August 2008, p. 447.

new forms of liberal theology that were on the rise.

But now we consider how the independent Brethren developed dispensationalism in an effort to persuade people to leave their churches and join them. Even though it is true that many dispensationalists today are members of some church, the churches where these people are found do not normally have biblical, Reformed church government. Rather, they are often characterized by independentism and congregationalism.² This is because independentism and dispensationalism go together, and the latter was used to promote the former.³

Dispensationalists started

² Independentism is a system of church government in which each church is independent of all other churches. Such churches refuse to enter a federation of churches in which all the churches agree to submit to the decisions of the broader assemblies. Congregationalism is a system of church government in which the authority to rule in the church is ascribed to all the members of a congregation collectively. If a church has a group of elders, those elders usually do not function as a ruling body in the church. For example, in many congregational churches, to remove a person from the membership rolls, all the members have to meet together and vote on the matter. Because these two ideas often go together, the whole system could be referred to as congregational independentism.

³ James Patrick Callahan, *Primitive Piety: The Ecclesiology of the Early Plymouth Brethren* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1996), 137-39.

by rightly emphasizing the importance of separating from the established churches. But they went beyond this to insist upon “freedom” from sound ecclesiastical confessions and proper church government. By stressing that God’s judgment upon both the world and the church was imminent, dispensationalists were effective in persuading people to separate from the existing instituted churches and join their interdenominational network. In view of the fact that dispensationalism was designed in part to bring about such a separation, a consideration of this subject is important for obtaining a better understanding of the movement.

John Darby, the Brethren, and the Rejection of the Established Church

Although premillennialism is an ancient error that goes all the way back to the first few centuries after Christ, the dispensational form of this teaching is of relatively recent origin. The beginnings of dispensationalism are rightly associated with a man named John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). Though some argue that a number of Darby’s central positions were taught by Edward Irving before him, Darby was certainly a chief founder of the movement and contributed greatly to the rise of dispensationalism both in the British Isles and in America.

For a brief period John Darby was an ordained minister in the established Church of Ireland. An

established church—sometimes referred to as a national church or state church—is one that is recognized and supported by the civil government as the official church of the nation. The name “Church of Ireland,” for example, indicates that it is the one church that is Ireland’s official church. Such a church has an unholy alliance with this world, which inevitably results in the corruption of the world entering the church.

From this church Darby withdrew himself at a relatively young age. He viewed many of the officebearers within it to be worldly, unconverted men who were willing to compromise with Roman Catholicism. This he blamed largely on the fact that ministers in the established church were ordained by bishops, and that these bishops were often themselves corrupt. Pointing to this corruption within the Church of Ireland, and despising state involvement in church affairs, Darby left the established church and encouraged others to do the same.

The Call to Leave All the Churches

But when people left the corrupt established church, where were they supposed to go? Darby himself had decided to join a relatively new sect known as the Brethren,¹ and he desired others to join him. According to the Brethren, the people should not join any of the dissenting denominations that were already in existence.² Denominationalism, they maintained, was always a cause of corruption in the church. The confessions of a denomination, the Brethren ar-

¹ When the Brethren later split in the 1840s, Darby became a leader of the stricter faction, which became known as the Plymouth Brethren.

² In countries that have an established church, the denominations that are opposed to it are called “dissenting” denominations.

gued, frequently served to divide Christians, and were often only externally confessed. Furthermore, the democratic process that was often used when voting for officebearers in these denominations frequently resulted in the same problem that plagued the established church—namely, that ministers were chosen who were not really converted believers. So Darby urged people to reject the various instituted churches and to join the independent Brethren instead.

But why should people join the Brethren? According to Darby, the preachers among the Brethren received authority directly from God, rather than through bishops or the church institute. Although Darby rightly rejected ordination by a bishop, he actually fell into the error of supporting lay-preaching. He rejected the biblical principle that to be called by God to be a minister of the gospel one must be called by a true instituted church. Instead he insisted that anyone who was called directly by God had the authority to preach.

So how, then, does it become evident that one has been called directly by God to preach the gospel? According to Darby and the Brethren, God showed this by demonstrating to all that a certain person had the “gifts” needed to perform the task. The thinking was that if God gives a person the gifts needed to preach, that is sufficient proof that God has called him to preach.

Thus it is evident that even though Darby and the Brethren rightly rejected the idea of an established church, they fell into another error when they rejected the God-given authority of the church institute. Claiming to be separating from the world, they were actually keeping themselves separate from true churches of Jesus Christ.

This made it possible for Darby and the Brethren to start an

interdenominational network that would gather together discontented people not only from the established church, but also from the various dissenting denominations. Many joined the Brethren to be “free” not only from the corruption in the churches, but also from the binding authority of ecclesiastical confessions and decisions of broader ecclesiastical assemblies.

By doing so the Brethren were effectively denying that the instituted church is a manifestation of the kingdom of God on this earth. This is what they wanted to do. And with this on their mind, they developed a view of eschatology that would help them accomplish this goal.

Dispensationalism Developed to Promote the Brethren

A number of works on Darby and the Brethren have noted the relationship between their views on eschatology and their rejection of the established church.

Darby’s study of unfulfilled prophecy played an important part in bringing about his full withdrawal from the established church. The growing conviction that the kingdom of God would be established on earth as a result, not of the exertions of men on its behalf, but of the direct intervention of Christ Himself—and that in judgment—combined with the belief that the Jewish nation rather than the Christian Church was the instrument which God would use for the establishing of His kingdom on earth, to discredit the concept of an established church.³

The doctrine of the established church has often been based on the idea that the church and the state in a given country are the New Testament counterparts to the priesthood and the kingship in Old Testament Israel.

³ Harold H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren: 1825-1850* (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1967), 53.

According to this view, just as the priests and the king worked together in the days of David and Solomon to promote the worship of the true God, so the church and civil government today should be united in an effort to do the same thing.

Such a view amounts to teaching that a certain country today—whether one wants it to be the United States, England, Ireland, Scotland, the Netherlands, or whatever—is the counterpart to Old Testament Israel. Then the civil government and established church are two united witnesses, and to depart from the established church is to depart from the church of Christ. Over against this, Darby argued that God promised earthly dominion not to any of the Gentile nations, but only to the earthly nation of Israel.

Darby was undoubtedly correct when he rejected the notion that the Old Testament promises concerning dominion were going to be fulfilled in the history of some Gentile nation in this age. But by developing dispensationalism, with its central teaching that these Old Testament promises were going to be fulfilled in the earthly nation of Israel, he was denying that these promises are already now beginning to be

fulfilled in the church of Jesus Christ.


Dispensationalism and the Popular Spirit of Independentism

It may take a moment to realize why someone would want to deny that the Old Testament promises concerning dominion on this earth are already now beginning to be fulfilled in federations of true instituted churches. The sinful nature of man does not want the instituted church to have authority on this earth. He does not want to have to submit to the binding authority of sound ecclesiastical confessions and the decisions of proper church assemblies. And if he has a desire to be a leader, he does not want to have to wait until he receives a call from an instituted church. Independentism is appealing to the carnal nature of man. Man by nature desires to do that which is right in his own eyes. Thus it is not surprising that many found Darby's ideas to be appealing.

This rejection of institutional authority was a very important element of dispensationalism, and one that is easy to overlook. Yet it is one of the reasons why dispensationalism was well received when Darby and others brought it from the British Isles to America in the mid to late 1800s, and why it has remained popular in this

country, and in many others, to this day.

Independentism has been and continues to be popular, not only because it appeals to man's sinful nature, but also because it can appear at first glance to be a good alternative in days of religious apostasy. Dispensationalism became popular in days when the theory of evolution was becoming accepted and the denial of the inspiration of Scripture was becoming more common in the churches. And as dispensationalists pointed to prophecies that spoke of how corrupt the church would be in the last days, many agreed that independentism was the best way to remain free from all the corruption during the short period of time that is left before Christ returns.

Yet the dispensational call was not only a call to separation. As time went on, it became a call to militant action as well. Dispensationalists went after the liberal trends in theology, insisting that the dispensational method of a "consistently literal" interpretation of Scripture was the only one that could combat these mighty foes. Since this argument of the dispensationalists is one of the key ones that many have found appealing, we will turn to it, Lord willing, next time. 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

Labor Not for the Meat That Perisheth

Not Live by Bread Alone

To labor, to be busy, to work is our high human calling. For though it is true that God the Lord, after the fall, has said: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen. 3:19), yet in this saying the emphasis and stress fall on "the sweat of

the face" and upon the "eating bread." With wonderful accuracy of expression the word *labor*, or *work*, does not occur in this punitive judgment.

To have to work in such a way that it exhausts our strength and forces sweat from the body, and to have to do this to keep the

Reprinted from When Thou Sittest In Thine House, by Abraham Kuyper, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1929. Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.

mouth open, has come upon us by reason of sin.

But by itself work is so little an outflow of sin that Christ rather glories in the fact: My Father *works hitherto and I work*.

To be able, to be permitted, and thus to be obliged to work is the privilege that comes to man because he is created after the image of God. What Jesus said was spoken far less after His divine than after His *human* nature. He worked as our Mediator, i.e., as the *man* Jesus Christ.

One speaks sometimes of a *right* that comes to man by reason of work; and surely in the sense here given, there is such a right.

Because the Lord your God is a God who always works, and you are created after His likeness, the right, the high privilege of being permitted to work, is your due as a man.

This is what every Sabbath declares unto you anew in God's name.

In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, with all that in them is, and because the Lord your God so *worked*, therefore you must *labor* six days and do all your work, and only in connection with this does the Sabbath have a meaning as a day of rest, so that there be no other rest in your life, than in the life of your God.

They who picture blessedness to themselves before the throne of God as consisting in the fact that all labor shall then be ended and all work be fallen away, that in a *dolce far niente*, i.e., in a blessed doing nothing, one might taste heavenly joy, neither know their God, nor His angels, nor life as it shall be in heaven.

For your God works *always*.

And the angels are *ministering* spirits.

With a view to blessedness Christ says to His elect: "Over a few things hast thou been faithful, I will make thee ruler over many things" (Matt. 25:23).



But this beautiful ordinance of creation has also been broken up by sin.

Not to work has now obtained a charm. And sinner after sinner dies, of whom it must be confessed with sorrow, that really, all his life long, he accomplished as good as nothing.

Such as these, God's Word points to the small, insignificant ants, and asks: "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man" (Prov. 6:9-11).

The sinner indeed knows well that he receives his day from God to labor, but in his heart he says, "I shall be wicked anyway, why then should I labor in vain" (Job 9:6, Dutch version). Or when he has labored, in his selfishness he says, "He that laboreth laboreth for himself, for his mouth craveth it of him" (Prov. 16:26).

When there is no bread in the cupboard, and no money in hand, one cries and longs for work. But when hunger does not sting, and our portion is secure, idleness seems preferable, laziness to be human wealth, and even in the early Christian churches you see such do-nothings corrupt the life of believers in such wise that the holy apostle is forced to make threat: "He who will not work, shall not eat" (II Thess. 3:10-12). And again: "Even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."

Not in Paradise, neither before nor after the fall, but by Christ Himself it is said: "Are there not twelve hours in the day,

so then let us work while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

So the entire Scripture is opposed to being busy doing nothing, in which so many among us spend their days rising and dressing themselves, walking hither and thither and chatting somewhat, eating something and drinking something, looking into the fire or through the window, and then lying down again, to return to their friend, a long loved sleep.

God in His Word knows that work is a blessing, that idleness is the root of all evil, and therefore that Word always warns against idleness and indolence and urges one to work.

Even of the wealthy housewife in Proverbs 31 is it said: "She riseth also while it is yet night, and eateth not the bread of idleness."



Converted or unconverted therefore makes here no difference, here or hereafter. Always to work is our glorious human calling, because we have been created after the divine likeness of Him who *always* works.

We must rest from our *sinful* works. On the Sabbath we may rest from our slavish labor, to be spiritually more richly engaged. After death we shall rest from our earthly labor; but always to work is and *remains* the calling which in our patent of nobility as man we received from our God.

And the outcome shows that a people, a family, a person, that works is happy. But that indolence works ruin to a people, breaks up the family, and unnerves your personal life.

Yet there is a considerable difference between him who is converted to Christ, and the other who still wanders about without his Savior.

First, of course, in that a converted man who plays the sluggard and spends his days in

idleness is far more guilty before God.

But this is so self-evident that it scarcely bears mention, even though many confessors of the Lord will do well to pay heed to this.

But there is still another difference, which is more significant, namely, that the unconverted works for the meat which *perisheth*, and that the converted man at least *can* work for the meat which abideth unto *eternal* life.

The sinner as such works, and must work, to have bread wherewith to sustain life.

He stands in the humiliation.

He knows that, as to worth, his body is subordinate to his soul; and yet, almost all his life is spent in the care to feed and maintain *the body*.

This is now done in terms of money, but that makes no difference. In almost every family almost all the money that comes in is spent on the body. To give the body shelter, to clothe and to maintain it.

So one works for wages, one works for money wherewith to buy bread and clothing, and with millions and millions of our race it is still the rule of life: "In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread."

This ordinance is God's ordinance over the sinner, and mankind does not escape it.

For what is said, that many people in the higher walks of life do not labor for their living is untrue in part. Labor with the mind

is also labor. Far heavier labor even. When at sea the storm arises, and amid the howlings of the wind the sailor must go in the rigging to take in sails, while the mate stands quietly on the bridge, no one will say that the sailor works but not the mate.

And as regards that small group of rich people who live on their income and have bread and to spare, even though they do not work, God's judgment awaits them also, in case they have not understood their calling of being, even in the enjoyment of wealth, the more zealously engaged in the interests of people and in the things of the kingdom of God.



But for the converted man God the Lord removes this humiliation from labor.

He is become God's *child* again.

And as in the family the child renders assistance and co-labors, without thinking: "by doing this I earn my bread," but works simply because mother tells him to work and because assisting mother is a pleasure, so it has become for the Christian.

Care for his living he has none. What should he need to be troubled about, saying: What shall I eat, or wherewithal shall I be clothed? Do not the heathen the same? And when he sees the birds of the heavens, that they sow not, neither spin, and yet are fed of his God, can he lose

confidence in his Father who is in heaven?

We do not say that such is the case with every Christian, but that such it ought to be.

As a child does not care for himself, but lets his father care for him, and now works for father with spirit and love and in obedience *because* he is his father, so also does a child of God leave the care for his living to God, and meanwhile works all the hours of the day in the service of his God.


Hence, what he works for is not wages, not money, not bread, but the *good pleasure of his God*.

He is at home with God. He is in God's service. And in his divine calling he is all day long at work, because God has placed him in it, that therein he might please God.

So he works not to make his living, i.e., not for the meat which perisheth, but to enjoy the good pleasure and the favor of God, i.e., for the meat which endureth unto eternal life.

Thus is the humiliation overcome.

It is no more all of life spent in the care for the body. For even the most slavish and material labor is included in the service of God and therefore sanctified in Him.

Every morning, as a new day begins, his inquiry and prayer is: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" And every evening, when the day's work is done, he brings the same as an offering to God, giving God the glory. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Minister Activities

Since our last "News," several of our churches have been busy extending calls. Rev. R. VanOverloop received the call

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

from the Doon, IA PRC to serve as missionary pastor to the Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines. The newly organized Providence PRC, presently meeting in Hudsonville, MI, extended their first call for a pastor to Rev. R. Kleyn. Both Rev. Kleyn and Rev. VanOverloop recently

declined those calls. Rev. J. Slopsema is considering a call from Grace PRC in Standale, MI to become their next pastor. And Calvary PRC in Hull, Iowa continues to wait on the Lord for their first pastor, since Rev. K. Koole declined their latest call to come over and help them.

Young Adults Activities

The Young Adult Society of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA served as host society for a Young Adult Retreat from June 30 - July 3, under the theme, "Maintaining a Spiritual Life," based on a text taken from II Peter 3: 17, 18. In addition to the two speeches, one by Rev. M. VanderWal, pastor at Hope, and the other by Rev. A. denHartog, pastor of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, the 67 attendees were able to participate in discussion groups throughout the week-long retreat on topics of Know the Enemy, Be Prepared for Battle, and How to Grow in Faith. Most of the activities that are usually associated with retreats, such as swimming, softball, and tennis, centered at the University of Redlands campus, with one trip to Big Bear Lake, and another to Six Flags Magic Mountain Amusement Park immediately after the retreat came to a close on Thursday.

Mission Activities

Prof. B. Gritters and Seminarian Vernon Ibe and his wife, Melody, traveled to the Philippines to labor there on behalf of the Doon, IA PRC and our denomination's Foreign Mission Committee, over the Sundays of July 6, 13, and 20. During their stay they were also able to visit many of the families of the Berean PRC in Manila. On Saturday, July 12, they visited the saints in Gabaldon, bringing them the Word. One highlight of the trip was the public confession of faith of one of Melody Ibe's sisters. A family conference was also held during the visit, with Prof. Gritters delivering three speeches each day on the topic of the Reformed family. Prof. Gritters returned home on July 22, while the Ibes stayed behind for about two more weeks to visit family, travel again to Gabaldon, and worship with the Bereans.

With the approval of Edger-

ton, MN PRC and the Domestic Mission Committee, the Heritage PR Fellowship of Sioux Falls, SD is proceeding with plans to begin a yearlong campaign of television advertisements on KSFY/ABC/channel 13. The package Heritage is committed to includes 42 thirty-second commercials per month. All 42 commercials will run in one week of each month for greater exposure. 180,000 people from a 150-mile radius are estimated to view each commercial.

The general manager of KSFY is committed to working with Heritage to produce the most effective, creative commercials that convey Heritage's message. We add our prayer to that of Heritage when we thank God for this exciting opportunity and pray that it might prove to be a good witness to the Sioux Falls community.

Evangelism Activities

Members of the congregations in West Michigan and beyond were invited to the annual Summer Class Series hosted by the Reformed Witness Committee of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. This year's classes were led by Prof. H. Hanko and considered "The Sanctifying Power of Suffering." They were held at Hope Church the first four Tuesdays of July.

The Consistory of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL approved their Evangelism Committee's plan to sponsor four Bible studies at the home of a couple who live in Aurora, IL over the summer. This plan grew out of a hands-on discipleship training class at Bethel when a suggestion was made that Rev. J. Mahtani travel to Aurora with interested members of Bethel for this Bible study.


Congregation Activities

Over the summer months we have been following exciting details from the Wingham, Ontario PRC and their attempts to purchase the Salvation Army

property in Wingham. Well, we are happy to report that their offer to purchase has been accepted, with a closing date set for September 30, D.V. This is a brick church building in good condition built in the 1900s. It is located in Wingham one block off the main street. It has a nice sanctuary with a full basement and a large fellowship room and kitchen. With several other rooms on both floors, there is a total of approximately 6300 square feet. So Wingham's present building will soon be put up for sale. The Salvation Army property also contains sufficient room to serve in the future as facilities for a PR school in Wingham. The goal of the School Society is for the school to begin operation in September 2009, D.V. So this is a very exciting time for the congregation there. It is their prayer that these new facilities will be used unto God's glory and unto their blessing as a congregation.

The Future Building Committee of the Randolph, WI PRC invited all church members to an informational meeting on July 24. The final building plans were reviewed as well as the proposed schedule and selected contractors. Volunteer opportunities were also extended to the congregation.

Young People's Activities

The Annual Young People's Convention held this past July was an enjoyable and profitable time for the young people of our denomination to grow in faith and to form new friendships. A special thanks to the chaperones, the three speakers, Mr. Dan Van Dyke, Rev. C. Spronk, and Rev. R. VanOverloop, and especially to the Byron Center, MI PRC for all the excellent planning and work that went into the convention. May the week the young people spent together be used of God to strengthen them for their place of service in Christ's kingdom. 

Announcements

NOTICE!!!

The Loveland Protestant Reformed Church will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary on September 19, 2008. If you plan to attend, please call Ray Ezinga at 970-667-5702 or email tammyjvan@aol.com.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Faith PRC expresses its sympathy with Mrs. Ann Griffioen, Mr. and Mrs. Doug Griffioen and family, and Mr. and Mrs. David Griffioen and family in the death of their husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, and our beloved fellow office-bearer,

ELDER ARIE GRIFFIOEN.

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11).

Rev. Andy Lanning, President
Peter VanDerSchaaf, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hudsonville PRC extends its Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer Sam Reitsma in the death of his father-in-law,

ADRIAN VELTEMA.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (I Thessalonians 4:14).

Rev. G. Eriks, President
Peter Hoekstra, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hudsonville PRC extends its Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer David Kraker in the death of his mother,

HARLENE KRAKER.

"I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die (John 11: 25, 26).

Rev G. Eriks, President
Peter Hoekstra, Clerk

ANNUAL RFPA MEETING

7:30 P.M. September 25
Southwest PRC

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to God we rejoiced with our parents,

JOE and MARY BRUMMEL,

as they celebrated their 35th anniversary on August 10, 2008. We, as their children and grandchildren, realize that God blesses us with many blessings. Let us not forget the gift of parents and grandparents. May we continually be thankful to God for faithful parents who have instructed us in His Word. Psalm 89:1, "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations."

✿ Ryan and Marijo VanOverloop
Trevor, Ryanne, Caleb, Renae,
Lauryn

✿ Joel and Belinda Brummel

Noah, Brynn, Jonah

✿ Ted and Shannon Brummel

Raeanna, Simon

✿ Lori Brummel

✿ Sarah Brummel

✿ Andrew Brummel

✿ Katie Brummel (in glory)

Grandville, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory of Grandville PRC wishes to express their Christian sympathy to Joel and Laura Bodbyl in the recent death of their infant son,

CALVIN ALAN.

May they be comforted and strengthened in the assurance that God gives His people in Scripture passages such as Psalm 149:4, 5, where we read, "the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory."

Rev. K. Koole, President
H. De Vries, Asst. Clerk

MISSIONS CONFERENCE

Sponsored by DMC
September 8, 9

Southwest PRC 7:30 P.M.

MONDAY:

Rev. Arie denHartog:
Inspirational message

Prof. Gritters:

"Critique and Evaluation of the History of PRC Mission Work"

TUESDAY:

Rev. Bruinsma:

What We Can Learn from the History of Reformed Missions"

Rev. Kortering:

"The Need for Special Training for the Work of Missions"

All interested persons are invited to attend.

SEMINARY CONVOCATION

Wednesday, September 3, 2008

7:30 P.M.

Trinity PRC

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Young Adult Society of Grandville PRC extends Christian sympathy to our fellow members Joel and Laura Bodbyl, Mark and Maria VanDyke, and Doug and Larissa Mingerink in the death of their son and nephew,

CALVIN ALAN BODBYL,

whom the Lord, in His infinite wisdom, took to glory on July 24, 2008. May they receive comfort in the words of Psalm 9:9, 10: "The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee."

Mitchell Kamps, President
Carrie Huizinga, Secretary

Reformed Witness Hour September 2008

Date	Topic	Text
Sept. 7	"Wall of Separation Broken Down"	Ephesians 2:11-15
Sept. 14	"The Folly of Worrying"	Matthew 6:25, 26
Sept. 21	"God's Gift of the Family"	Psalm 68:6
Sept. 28	"Baptized Walk in Newness of Life"	Romans 6:4