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Volume 84 ◆ Number 11

The Excellency of Jehovah's Name

O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

Psalm 8:1

Have you ever admired God's wonderful handiwork in creation? Have you ever stood in amazement at how God has worked in some way? Maybe you have seen the stars in all their brightness when you were out in the country or on a camping trip. Perhaps you have been amazed at how God knit together in the womb a perfectly formed baby. You don't have to look far at all to find something for which to praise God. It is good for us to contemplate God's greatness in creation. But even more than that, God wants us to think on Him and on His greatness and goodness towards us.

David does that in Psalm 8. He is overwhelmed with what he observes around him. He is not simply overwhelmed by amazing

things in creation. Rather, he is overwhelmed with God Himself and what great works God has performed. That's why David begins the Psalm, "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" Jehovah's name is the revelation of His goodness and perfections. David is concerned with the excellency of Jehovah's name. That's why he ends the Psalm on the very same note, "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth." Just as David's thoughts turned to consider Jehovah's excellent name, ours should do the same.

Excellent in Itself

Recall that the names of God reveal His attributes. We find that phenomenon often in Scripture, when a name that is assigned to a particular person reveals something very important about him. Adam's name indicates that he was taken from the dust. Eve's name means that she was the mother of all living. Noah's name means rest, and points to the fact that God would bring rest through Noah. Abraham's name was assigned to him to show that he would be the father of many nations. And so it

is with many other names in Scripture. Their names had meaning.

So it is also with God's names. They tell us about Him. What does David call God in this Psalm? What is the name that is so excellent? David addresses God as "LORD our Lord." Of course, whenever we find the name LORD in all capitals, that stands for Jehovah. God revealed that specific name to Moses from the burning bush in the wilderness. "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM [Jehovah, in the Hebrew] hath sent me unto you" (Ex. 3:14). When God calls Himself "I AM," He is teaching us that He does not depend on anything or anyone for His existence. He simply *is*. He always has been and ever will be. Nothing will ever change Him.

Therefore, the name "Jehovah" shows that He is faithful. When He makes a promise, He cannot forget it or change His mind about it. "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). That necessarily implies that all Jehovah's promises are sure. This is why the name "Jehovah" is associated with

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God's covenant faithfulness. The promise God made in the garden of Eden is sure: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). He is faithful to keep His covenant promise.

Confirming His covenant faithfulness, God made the promise to Abraham: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7). This promise, of course, was brought about through Isaac, through Jacob, and through David, the writer of this Psalm. And, ultimately, Jehovah's covenant promise was fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ.

When David addresses Jehovah, the faithful covenant God, he adds "our Lord." David's confession is personal. Jehovah, the almighty and self-sufficient God, is our God personally. That is, He has devoted Himself to *us*. He is "our Lord." As Lord, He is the master and ruler of all creation. And when He rules over the creation, He does it for *us*. Not only that, He also rules over His people so that He accomplishes all His purposes in them. That is the God that David is confessing in the Psalm.

Jehovah, our Lord. What a name! Excellent in all the earth! Not that David was thinking only about this particular name. David was thinking about all the ways God reveals His excellent name. He was thinking about and praising God for all His perfections. Jehovah's name is excellent. It is mighty and magnificent. Jehovah's name is excellent in itself.

Excellent in Creation

The way that David came to this conclusion concerning Jehovah's excellent name was by considering how God's perfections are reflected in creation. Before

penning this Psalm, David may have scanned the creation with his mind and considered how Jehovah's excellent name is revealed all around him. To be sure, he could have listed many different things. But of all the things that display God's excellent name, David considers that a newborn baby is one that deserves mention. He says, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger" (Ps. 8:2). God has ordained little nursing babies to give evidence of His faithfulness. Somehow, God knits them together in the womb, brings them into the world at just the right time, and then gives them all the wisdom they need to get their nourishment from the breast. God has ordained these little babes and sucklings to show forth His excellency.

The atheist denies that God's wisdom is reflected in these infants. The atheist proclaims that the little infant is the product of blind chance. In response, David calls the atheist "the enemy." God uses the tiny baby to still the enemy. God shuts the enemy's mouth so that he cannot give an answer. Oh yes, the godless theory of evolution may try to explain how a newborn is knit together so perfectly. It may try to explain how a newborn baby even knows how to get its nourishment as soon as it is born. But it cannot. The enemy is silenced by the wisdom of God shown forth in tiny babies.

Furthermore, God has always been pleased to use these weakest of means to bring praise to Himself. When Jesus cleansed the temple, and the Pharisees and Sadducees refused to praise Him, God ordained praise from the children. "And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children

crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased, And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" (Matt. 21:15-16). God stilled His enemies with babes and sucklings.

After David considered the infant in arms here below, he then turned his attention to the heavens: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained..." (Ps. 8:3). Imagine David lying on the ground and looking up at the night sky brightly spotted with countless stars. He would recognize that these too are the work of God's fingers. Like a masterpiece of art, the stars show forth God's praise. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1).

That was David's response even before the telescope had been created. Today, when the most powerful telescopes are focused on the most distant spots of light, we learn that those spots are not just individual stars, but whole galaxies, with millions of stars in them, each galaxy forming beautiful spirals that speak of order and wisdom in creation. All of them are so far away that we measure distances to them in light years. When we consider that light travels 186,000 miles every second, we can begin to appreciate that a light year is a very, very great distance indeed.

The universe is so great and beautiful; but God is greater and more beautiful. So the heavens help us understand just a little about God's beauty and greatness. They are dim reflections of His glory. This is why David describes God as the One "who has set thy glory above the heavens" (v. 1). When David considers God's glory,

*God uses
the tiny baby
to still
the enemy.*

he sees that nothing *in all the earth* even compares with God. And when David looks beyond the earth into the heavens, he comes to the same conclusion. As wonderful as the most wonderful creature may be, God is more wonderful. His excellent name is revealed in creation!

Excellent in Salvation

David's meditation upon God's excellent name in itself and in creation finally turns his mind to consider His name revealed in salvation.

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? (Ps. 8:3-4).

David sees how excellent God's name is and immediately wonders why such a great God would take notice of such lowly creatures as we are.

What is man after all? Is he not made from the dust of the earth? And is not the son of man a frail, sinful, mortal creature? Job expresses almost the same thought:

How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm? (Job 25:4-6).

Man is nothing.

Despite our lowliness and sinfulness, God is still mindful of us! He still is faithful to His covenant. He remembers His promises. He remembers us. And because He remembers us, He also visits us. He comes to see our situation in order to help us. This is not just a one-time visitation, but an ongoing care that Jehovah, our Lord and Master, gives to us.

God is so mindful of us in our misery that He sent His Only Begotten Son to visit us. God sent Him to experience our misery. He

sent Jesus to save us from that misery. God sent Jesus Christ so that we could be crowned with glory and honor.

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas (Ps. 8:5-8).

God made us a little lower than the angels so that we could ultimately be crowned with a heavenly glory and honor.

We are a little lower than the angels now, but in heaven we shall be equal to them as regards our mortality (cf. Luke 20:36). God made us subject to mortality through the curse so that, one day, we could have dominion over all things with Christ Jesus. We are not the central figures in the humiliation and exaltation mentioned in the Psalm. Rather, Jesus Christ is the central figure. This is evident from Hebrews 2:6-9:


But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Jesus Christ was made a little lower than the angels when He took on Himself a mortal human nature. In

that human nature, He suffered all the pains of hell for us. And because Jesus was obedient to death, God has highly exalted Him. Now He is crowned with honor and glory as the Lord of all.

It is evident that the most magnificent revelation of Jehovah's excellent name is in the person and work of Jesus. Jesus reveals the attributes of Jehovah more than any other creature. How fitting, then, that God named Him Jesus, that is, "Jehovah Salvation." Jesus revealed Jehovah's faithfulness through His coming and through His lifelong work. Jesus revealed Jehovah's mercy by giving Himself, in order to deliver us from our misery. Jesus revealed Jehovah's perfect justice when He suffered the very torments of hell for us on the cross. And Jesus reveals Jehovah's sovereignty as He sits enthroned at the right hand of God ruling over all things.

Though we do not yet see all things put under Him, still He reigns. But the full evidence of the dominion that David talks about in Psalm 8 must wait until the Judgment Day. Then it will be clear that all things are in subjection under His feet. Then the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 will be fully accomplished. The devil and all his hosts will be crushed under the heel of King Jesus. And we will rule with Him: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3:21).

Is it not astounding that Jehovah should visit us to bring us heavenly glory? That just adds to the wonder of His glory. Truly, the name of Jehovah, our Lord, is excellent in all the earth. Truly, His glory is above the heavens. May that thought ever be in our hearts and minds as we consider the excellency of Jehovah's name in itself, in creation, and especially in our salvation through Jesus Christ. 

Seeking the Unity of the Church (4)

Unity in the Truth

All the zealous efforts for unity in the church have one common thread that must not be overlooked. The one common element is this: unity is only in and on the basis of the truth. Unity built on smiles and pleasant talk is pseudo unity. Unity built on compromise with the truth, thus on a blurring of the truth of Scripture or on outright heresy, is a unity forged with Satan's blessing. Ultimately that is the unity of the antichristian church—all the churches around the world united on the basis of the lie, supporting the one who will claim to be God, directing the worship of all men to this impostor.

To understand why truth is the genuine unity of the church, we must come to appreciate the profound reality that the church is the body of Christ. God has set Christ to be the head of the church (Eph. 1:20-22). God has from eternity known each member of that church, chosen each in Christ, and given each one to Christ. Every member of the church is grafted into Christ by a living faith. Christ lives within every member by His Spirit. Christ rules each member from the throne erected in the heart. This union with Christ makes the innumerable host of the members of the church to be not a pile of rocks, not a faceless mob, but a living body.

Not only does Christ rule over each member, He rules in and over each congregation. Christ is especially present in the special offices. He preaches the gospel, He administers the sacraments, and He exercises Christian discipline in each faithful church.

But consider, now, that this same Christ is truth. For Jesus Himself declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). God determined to reveal Himself in His Son, in whom "dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). God speaks of Himself by the Word, and Jesus is that eternal Word (John 1). And God's "Word is truth" (John 17:17).

In perfect harmony with this, Scripture teaches that the church is built on the truth, for her foundation is "the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20).

Paul's inspired epistle to the Ephesians is the book of the Bible that more than any other emphasizes the truth of the church as the one body of Christ. After setting forth (in the first three chapters) the doctrine of the one church, grounded eternally in election in Christ, redeemed by Christ, and united (Jews and Gentiles) in Christ, the Spirit so beautifully caps this teaching with the admonition "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And why? "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:3-6).

Since the truth is the unity of the church, the confessions play a significant role in genuine church unity. Reformed believers rightly call confessions "the forms of unity," recognizing that the confessions unify. Reformed churches the world over, holding up the standards of the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt, have a common bond in the Reformed truth. Presbyterian churches worldwide, maintaining the Westminster Standards, have a common bond in the truth.

Such a confessional bond, however important it is, does not necessarily result in or demand institutional unity. That is to say, no one should imagine that all the churches who have the three forms of unity should get under one umbrella-organization. This call has been made, and is being made today.

Such an idea has appeal. A worldwide Reformed organization would concretely manifest unity in the Reformed community—the heartfelt desire of every believer. For each of the member churches, it would mean that every single Reformed church becomes one's ally, rather than an adversary. Besides, the stigma of being small would immediately be gone, as each of the hundreds of small congregations and denominations would be part of a conglomerate of hundreds of thousands. This would result in recognition, perhaps even grudging respect, in the world. And it might yield resources heretofore unknown for the witness to the Reformed faith. Very appealing!

But this organization of all who

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2008, p. 220.

are Reformed, or all who are Presbyterian, or both, is neither desirable nor right, for important reasons. First and foremost, all who officially subscribe to the Reformed confessions are not Reformed. Sad to say, the history of the churches of the Reformation is a history of decline and deformation. Churches once strong in the Reformed faith begin to ignore their confessions. Heresies explicitly rejected in the confessions are heard in the preaching and teaching of churches officially maintaining the Reformed confessions. But no discipline is exercised. Thus the creeds are ignored. Every Reformed church faces this battle. The confessions must live in the souls of the people and be vigorously upheld if a church is to deserve the name "Reformed."

But there is another significant reason why it is not right or feasible to have all Reformed churches unite, even if it were possible to eliminate all those churches that no longer hold to the Reformed confessions. It has to do with truth. Truth must be understood, not in some cold, static way, as a mere standard of orthodoxy. Rather, truth is organic—like a living tree. The truth of God is an organic whole. Every part of the truth is connected to every other part, and to the living principle of life in the organism, Christ Jesus.

A significant implication of that organic view of truth is that there is development in the truth. Now the whole truth that God requires us to know and believe is contained in Scripture, but the church draws that truth out and expresses the doctrines clearly. The ancient church had the whole truth, even though few of the doctrines had been clearly set forth. The truth is not like a wall of bricks, so that the truth possessed by the early church was merely the bottom layer of bricks. That would mean that the early church had only part of the truth. Rather (taking the organic view) the ancient church had

the whole truth, but in seed form. In time that seed would sprout forth, grow into a sapling, and, eventually, develop into the glorious tree that the church enjoys today. Even when the church had but the seed of the truth, everything that would ever be developed in the truth the early church had in principle. But through the ages, there would be development in the truth—the tree would grow. That development would be through the work of the Spirit of truth.

We should notice that this development in the truth is intertwined with the writing of confessions. The truth came into clearer focus oftentimes through the necessity of combating one particular heresy or another. That new clarity of expression would be set down by the church in creeds. In addition, any subsequent development of doctrine would arise out of the existing confessions as the church lived out of her confessions. Such development would not only be based on the existing creeds, it would be within their parameters.

All this has a direct bearing on the proposal that all who hold to Reformed confessions ought to join together. Implicit in this is the idea that all these churches are within the bounds of the Reformed confessions, even though all have developed differently and have different emphases. The premise is: If a confession does not specifically speak to a doctrine, then the confessions will allow any teaching on it. For example, since the confessions do not specifically address common grace, the well-meant gospel offer, or the covenant of grace, these are non-confessional matters, and one can hold varying positions on them and still be within the bounds of the Reformed confessions.

The Reformed churches have not always taken this narrow view of the teaching and authority of the confessions. For example, the Christian Reformed Church did not hesitate to condemn premillen-

nialism on the basis of the confessions, even though the Reformed confessions do not explicitly address the doctrine of the millennium. Written before the various views on the millennium arose, the creeds do not specifically condemn pre- or post-millennialism, nor affirm the a-mil position. Nonetheless, the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism do teach that Christ is the eternal king of His church, a doctrine that premillennialism denies. On that basis, the CRC condemned premillennialism as heresy and deposed Rev. Harry Bultema in 1918.

The PRC view the issue of common grace the same way. Obviously the creeds do not address common grace directly, having been written before it was an issue. However, we are convinced that the creeds leave no room for common grace, and, in fact, condemn it. If that is true, then allowance for common grace may not be an option for any church holding to the Reformed confessions.

Similarly, the three forms do not contain a doctrine of the covenant of grace. That does not mean that any view of the covenant is within the bounds of the confessions. In the 1950s, the PRC adopted a document that demonstrated that the confessions would not allow for a conditional covenant of God made with all the baptized children. The PRC are roundly criticized for adopting this document (the "Declaration of Principles"), but to my knowledge no one has ever demonstrated that the content of the document is wrong.

For upholding the position that the Reformed confessions will not allow a conditional covenant of grace, the PRC are criticized as being too narrow. She is urged to view the covenant as a non-confessional matter. But the PRC, so thankful to God for the rich treasures of God's truth entrusted to her care, are not about to enter any union that would jeopardize these precious truths. To do so would

be to spurn the blessing of the Spirit in these advances in the truth. It would be rank disobedience and ingratitude.

Unity in the truth, unity in confession, demands that only churches that hold to the truth that is consistent with the confessions bind together.

The alternative is compromise. John Calvin, in his sermon on Ephesians 4:1-5, expressed the Reformed abhorrence of unity based on compromise:

It was very necessary that this should be added, to show that peace will never be good or allowed by God, yea, rather it would be an evil, unless it has a good basis. For what sort of a peace would it be if nowadays we

were to join the papists? We should have to forsake the pure doctrine of the gospel and to set up ourselves against God and defile ourselves with all kinds of filthiness and abominations. But it would be better if the whole world were sunk, and we with it, than to seek such a peace.

Jehovah's rhetorical question recorded by Amos (3:3) sets the demanding standard: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Churches must agree in the truth if they are to walk together. They must discuss, debate, and define carefully, probe, explore, and expound until they are convinced that they agree in the truth.

What is left for the Protestant Reformed Churches?

Is it so, for the PRC, that seeking unity with other churches in this world is limited to establishing church relationships with churches that are the fruit of PR missions?

Has the PRC made her "distinctive positions" high walls that preclude *any* relationships with existing churches?

Is the work of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches to be simply the task of looking for churches that are exactly like the PRC? Or of finding those who are close and remaking them into Protestant Reformed Churches?

The answer to all these questions is no.

... to be continued. 

Special Article

Prof. David Engelsma

The Covenant Doctrine of the "Fathers of the Secession" (5)

Upheld and Confessed Today

"[I] expect that my view [of the covenant of grace] will remain standing firm in God's church," wrote *Christelijke Afscheidene Gereformeerde Kerk* minister H. Joffers in his defense of the doctrine of the covenant of the "fathers of the Secession" in 1865.¹

Christ has not put the hope of the fiery defender of sovereign grace to shame.

Upheld by the PRC

The doctrine of the covenant of the "fathers of the Secession," particularly Hendrik de Cock and Simon

VanVelzen, is confessed today by the Protestant Reformed Churches.

God's eternal, gracious decree of election, accompanied by the just decree of reprobation, governs the covenant of grace with believers and their children, as it governed (and still governs) the covenant with Abraham and his seed, being one and the same covenant. Election is the source of the covenant of grace, of the gracious covenant promise, of the bestowal of all the blessings of the covenant, of covenant salvation, and of the preservation of covenant saints.

Accordingly, the covenant grace of God in Jesus Christ is particular and irresistible, or efficacious. God's grace in the covenant is not universal, that is, wider than election, which is the source of covenant grace, and more extensive than the cross of Christ, which is the judicial

ground of the covenant. The grace of the covenant is not resistible and losable, as it must be if it is universal in the sphere of the covenant.

Because the covenant has its source in election, and is governed by election, the covenant is unconditional. For its establishment, maintenance, and perfection, it depends upon the almighty grace of God in Jesus Christ. The covenant does not depend upon the will, work, or worth of the baptized child, whether the will, work, or worth of the child is aided by grace

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1. H. Joffers, *De Kinderdoop met zijn Grond en Vrucht* (Kampen: S. VanVelzen Jr., 1865), 4. This and all other quotations from Dutch writings in this article are my translations. Joffers' book has not been translated. The English title would be, *Infant Baptism with its Ground and Fruit*.

or is the child's own unaided contribution.

The faith of the covenant child is certainly the necessary means by which the child receives and enjoys the covenant and its blessings, as it is the power of the demanded covenant life of obedience. But faith is the gift of God in the covenant, with regard both to the power of faith and to the activity of faith (Canons, III, IV/14). This gift of faith to the child is determined by predestination (Acts 13:48; Canons, I/6).

The faith of a baptized child does not make covenant grace, supposedly offered to all alike and even bestowed on all alike, effectual in some. The faith of a child is not the cause of the *fulfillment* in a few of a promise supposedly *made* to all the children alike. The faith of a child is not the reason why some children remain in the covenant in distinction from others, who once were in the covenant as truly as those who abide, but eventually fall out of the covenant.

On such a view, faith is a human work upon which the covenant, indeed the covenant God Himself, depends. And the inheritance and salvation of the covenant are, in fact, of him that runs and wills, rather than solely of God who shows mercy (Rom. 9:16).

Official Condemnation of the Doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen

Publicly, officially, decisively, and at huge cost of reproach, scorn, and exclusion in the Reformed community (not unlike the reproach borne by the Secession in its early days), the Protestant Reformed Churches have rejected the doctrine of a conditional covenant made in grace with all the children of believing parents alike. Thus, the Churches have maintained the covenant doctrine of the "fathers of the Secession."

They rejected the doctrine of conditional, resistible covenant grace to all the baptized children alike, first, in their repudiation of

the "well-meant offer of the gospel" in 1924. The "well-meant offer" of Christ as adopted by the Christian Reformed Church was the doctrine of preaching that arose out of Christian Reformed theologian Prof. William Heyns' teaching of a covenant grace of God towards and in all baptized children without exception. Repudiating the "well-meant offer"—the doctrine that God is gracious in the preaching to all hearers without exception, that is, the doctrine that election does not govern the preaching of the gospel—the Protestant Reformed Churches also, in fact, rejected the doctrine of universal, conditional, resistible grace in the sphere of the covenant. As the history of the Secession of 1834 illustrates, the doctrine of a "well-meant offer" and the doctrine of conditional grace to all baptized children go hand-in-hand.

The Protestant Reformed Churches rejected the doctrine of a conditional covenant a second time in 1951. This rejection was explicit. It had to be explicit for, just as in the churches of the Secession in the early 1860s, ministers within the churches themselves introduced the new and different doctrine of a covenant cut loose from election. Unlike the churches of the Secession at their synods of Franeker (1863) and Amsterdam (1866), the Protestant Reformed Churches responded to the erroneous teaching as a Reformed denomination confessing the Canons of Dordt is bound to do. By synodical decision, they condemned the doctrine of a divine covenant dependent on human conditions as contrary to the Reformed creeds, including the Reformed "Form for the Administration of Baptism." They affirmed the covenant gospel of sovereign, particular grace.

The Protestant Reformed Synod of 1951 adopted a statement that simply applied the teaching of the "Three Forms of Unity" and the Baptism form to the controverted issue of the covenant. The statement is titled, "Declaration of Principles

of the Protestant Reformed Churches." The "Declaration" affirms that "all the covenant blessings are for the elect alone" and that "God's promise is unconditionally for them only: for God cannot promise what was not objectively merited by Christ."² The "Declaration" denies that "the promise of the covenant is conditional and for all that are baptized."³

The covenant doctrine that the Protestant Reformed Churches repudiated in 1951 was that of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"). Ministers in the Protestant Reformed Churches had become enamored of the doctrine of the covenant taught by K. Schilder, B. Holwerda, and C. Veenhof. But the covenant doctrine of the "liberated" Reformed was, and is, that of the Secession ministers Pieters and Kreulen. This is the case, not only because all forms of covenant doctrine that cut the covenant loose from election are essentially one and the same. But the "liberated" Reformed theologians deliberately patterned their doctrine of the covenant after that put forward by Pieters and Kreulen in their book on the covenant and infant baptism in 1861. C. Veenhof, leading architect of the doctrine of the covenant of the "liberated" Reformed, tells us this: "[The 'liberated' doctrine of the covenant] was drawn up in conscious connection with that which was taught by men such as Pieters and Kreulen..."⁴

Indeed, "drawn up in...connection with" fails to do justice to the dependency of the "liberated" doctrine of the covenant upon Pieters and Kreulen. One who has read Pieters and Kreulen's *De Kinderdoop* (English translation: *Infant Baptism*) concludes that the "liberated" Reformed theologians simply made Pieters and Kreulen's doctrine their own.

The dominant feature of the "liberated" doctrine, like that of the doctrine of the two Secession ministers, is its cutting loose of the covenant from election. It was the

avowed purpose of the “liberated” Reformed theologians that election not govern the covenant of grace. “With regard to what was taught [by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”)] concerning covenant, covenant promise, and Baptism, very consciously this was *not* placed under the control of election.”⁵

All of the other elements of the doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen make up the doctrine of the covenant of the “liberated” Reformed: a gracious promise to all the children alike, dependent for its realization upon the condition of faith; the failure of the promising God to keep His promise in many instances, because of the failure of the children to perform their condition; a covenant grace to every baptized child without exception, which grace can be resisted and lost; the bestowal of covenant blessings upon all the children at Baptism, which blessings can be lost; the very real possibility of apostasy from the covenant in which one was once included as truly as were those who persevere unto eternal life; and even the characteristic attack on the teaching that God establishes His covenant with Christ as head of the covenant and the elect in Him consisting of the charge that this doctrine robs Baptism of its meaning in the case of reprobate children.

By the Protestant Reformed condemnation of the conditional covenant doctrine of the “liberated” Reformed Churches, therefore, Reformed churches carrying on the tradition of the Secession of 1834 condemned the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen as contrary to the Reformed confessions. What the Secession churches failed to do at their synods of 1863 and 1866, the Protestant Reformed Churches did in 1951.

Election and Covenant in Light of the Federal Vision

The fundamental issue between the two contending covenant doc-

trines in the Dutch Reformed tradition, indeed in the history of Reformed Christianity from Calvin and Bullinger to the present day, is not, as Veenhof thought, the conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant promise: “the central question, namely, the nature of the covenant promise [whether conditional or unconditional – DJE].”⁶

The nature of the covenant promise, whether a gracious, conditional, resistible promise to all the children alike or a gracious, unconditional promise to the elect children only, that effectually realizes itself in all to whom God makes it, is indeed important. The promise of the covenant is a chief concern of the “Declaration of Principles,” just as it is a great concern of the apostle in Romans 9:6ff. that the word of God’s covenant promise to Abraham and his seed not be ineffectual in any to whom it referred: “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect.”

Nevertheless, the fundamental issue in the controversy between the two contending doctrines of the covenant is not the nature of the covenant promise.

Rather, the fundamental issue is the relation of election and covenant: Does election govern the covenant?

If election governs the covenant, as the “fathers of the Secession” taught in the nineteenth century and as the Protestant Reformed Churches confess today, the covenant, the covenant promise, covenant union with Christ, the gift and possession of covenant blessings, perseverance in the covenant, and covenant salvation are unconditional. They depend, not upon the believing and obeying

child, but upon the free, sovereign, electing grace of the covenanting God in Jesus Christ.

The issue is the gospel of (covenant) salvation by (covenant) grace alone.

That this, and nothing less, is indeed the issue in the longstanding controversy over the covenant, the heresy of the federal vision now makes plain in the community of Reformed churches. The men of the federal, that is, covenant, vision are, by their own testimony,

developing the covenant theology of Schilder, Holwerda, and Veenhof and, therefore, the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen. This development of the covenant doctrine of

the “liberated” Reformed Churches brazenly denies justification by faith alone and every one of the five, grand truths of the gospel of grace confessed, explained, defended, and adopted by the Reformed churches in the Canons of Dordt. I have demonstrated all of this in a full-length book, and need not argue, or prove, these incontrovertible statements here.⁷

It is not enough, therefore, not nearly enough, that Reformed churches affirm non-binding

What the Secession churches failed to do at their synods of 1863 and 1866, the Protestant Reformed Churches did in 1951.

2. The “Declaration of Principles,” in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 418.

3. Ibid., 424.

4. C. Veenhof, *Prediking en Uitverkiezing* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1959), 299.

5. Ibid. The emphasis is Veenhof’s.

6. Ibid.

7. See my *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers: Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2005).

propositions gainsaying some of the more egregiously heretical teachings of the men of the federal vision.

It is certainly not enough that Reformed seminaries and theologians, under pressure, distance themselves from the men of the federal vision.

The God of Reformed church history, whose mills of judgment upon error grind slowly but exceedingly fine and whose advancing of the truth of the gospel to victory moves similarly slowly but surely, now puts all of Reformed Christianity to the test by means of the theology of the federal vision, His unwilling servant.

A conflict over the covenant

that has continued, and repeatedly raged, over hundreds of years now must and will be resolved.


From the full, bitter fruits of the doctrine of a covenant cut loose from election, the Reformed churches must now recognize that this doctrine is the denial of the gospel of grace as confessed in the Canons of Dordt.

In light of the dreadful judgment of God on the doctrine of a conditional covenant in the form of the theology of the federal vision, Reformed churches are called to renounce the doctrine of a conditional covenant and to confess that God's gracious, sovereign, eternal decree of election in Christ governs the covenant of grace.

They are called to return to the

covenant doctrine of the "fathers of the Secession."

Thus, in the great matter of covenant salvation they will return to the Canons of Dordt, which was the "*credo*" of the Secession of 1834.⁸

So that to God alone may be the glory of salvation—in the covenant! 

8. "One of the first publications that Hendrik de Cock provided for was the re-publication of the Canons of Dordt. With this the *Credo* of the Secession as a reformation movement had been expressed" (W. van't Spijker, "*De Synode en de Remonstranten*," in W. van't Spijker and others, *De Synode van Dordrecht in 1618 en 1619*, Houten: DenHertog, 1987, 120).

Understanding the Times

Mr. Cal Kalsbeek

Standing in the Shadow of Dawkins

"And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment."

I Chronicles 12:31

Richard Dawkins might consider it an honor to be mentioned in the title of a prestigious religious periodical like the *Standard Bearer*...and then again, maybe he wouldn't. Whatever the case may be, the "honor" is his because of his blatant atheism, and the challenge it poses for modern-day Issachar and her covenant seed.

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Maybe a taste of Dawkins will help us understand that challenge. In his recent book, *The God Delusion*, Dawkins writes: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully." Atheists have written books against God and Christianity before, but of late Dawkins and others of his ilk (e.g., Sam Harris in his book: *The End of Faith*, and Christopher Hitchens in: *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*) appear to have stepped it up a notch. In defense of his tirade against God and those who worship Him,

Dawkins writes:

...We all need our consciousness raised. Atheists as well as theists unconsciously observe society's convention that we must be especially polite and respectful regarding faith. And I never tire of drawing attention to society's tacit acceptance of the labeling of small children with the religious opinions of their parents. Atheists need to raise their own consciousness of the anomaly: religious opinion is the one kind of parental opinion that—by almost universal consent—can be fastened upon children who are, in truth, too young to know what their opinion really is. There is no such thing as a Christian child, only a child of Christian parents. Seize every opportunity to ram it home.¹

So, it's all about the kids!

Dawkins would protect the children from the propaganda of their parents and replace it with his own; and it is his task and that of other fellow travelers to “ram that home.” Something like what Charles Francis Potter had in mind when he wrote in his book, *Humanism, A New Religion*: “Education is thus a most powerful ally of Humanism. What can the theistic Sunday Schools, meeting for an hour once a week, and teaching only a fraction of the children, do to stem the tide of a five-day program of humanistic teaching?”

The Problem

And therein is a significant part of the problem. While it is true that many of Issachar’s children are instructed in Christian grade schools, and many even in Christian high schools, once they reach college they are often confronted with the likes of Dawkins, professors who are on a mission to “ram home” their godless philosophy. That their numbers are legion is not difficult to demonstrate.

Numerous studies “...indicate that our institutions of higher learning, both private and public, are thoroughly dominated by political and cultural liberals.” One such study reveals that “...72% of professors describe themselves as ‘left/liberal.’” That’s about four times as liberal as the general public. Another indicator of their tendency toward liberalism is their political party affiliation, which is largely Democratic. One study that was done over a ten-year period revealed that “...80% of professors voted for Democratic candidates compared to only 8% who voted for Republicans.” Further, here’s how they stand on some of the issues of today: 67% believe the homosexual lifestyle is acceptable. 84% say a woman has the right to have an abortion. 75% are accepting of extramarital cohabitation. 66% say the government should guarantee employment. 72% say the government should reduce the income gap.²

These figures should not be surprising and would not be so troubling except that many of these professors do attempt to “ram home” these beliefs. That they are doing exactly that is suggested by the results of a study by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni:

...49% of students said their professors often made political comments in the classroom even when it had nothing to do with the subject they were teaching. ...almost half the students said there were no alternative views offered to counterbalance their professors’ political presentation, leading 29% to think that agreeing with their professors’ politics was necessary for good grades.

In short, according to those with first-hand knowledge, in the college classroom today, many professors are preaching rather than teaching.³

Furthermore, methods of indoctrination on the college campuses go beyond the classroom. At most—if not all—colleges, methods of indoctrination are promoted in a number of ways, including “...freshman orientation, speech codes, mandatory diversity training, dormitory policies, guidelines for registered student organizations and mental health counseling.”⁴ It’s all about tolerance—tolerance of everything except biblical, Christian beliefs. The case of Missouri State University junior Emily Brooker illustrates this:

(Emily) objected to an assignment in which students were asked to write their state legislators and urge support for adoptions by same-sex couples. The evangelical social-work major was promptly hauled before a faculty panel and charged with maintaining an insignificant commitment to diversity. The panel grilled Brooker on her religious views without her parents present, convicted her of discrimination against gays, and informed her that to graduate she needed to

lessen the gap between her own values and the values of the social-work profession.⁵ (See pages 109-110 of the Dec. 1, 2007 issue of the *Standard Bearer* for more of this article.)

The Brooker case had both a happy and sad ending. Happily, the Alliance Defense Fund sued Missouri State on Brooker’s behalf and won. An independent investigation into the case “found such widespread intellectual bullying throughout the university’s school of social work that investigators recommended shutting the program down and replacing the entire faculty.”⁶ Sadly, it was not shut down.

The Results

More sad still are some of the results of this “bullying.” (A note of caution must be expressed here. The examples in this article are not to be construed as typical for *all* college campuses, at least to the degree shown in the examples. Nevertheless, college students will face similar challenges to one degree or another, and these challenges have contributed to some very sad outcomes.) For example:

A mother describes what happened when her daughter went off to college: “our daughter was raised in Christian schools and in a Christian home. Two years out of high school at 20, she enrolled at the University. Unfortunately, she was overwhelmed by the professors and began to believe their

1. Richard Dawkins, “The God Delusion: Introducing the Paperback,” *Free Inquiry* Aug./Sept. 2007: 14.

2. Rusty Benson, “Power politics at postmodern U,” *AFA Journal* June, 2005: 20.

3. Benson: 21.

4. Rebecca Grace, “Colleges Turn Left; Students Think That’s Right,” *The West Michigan Christian* September, 2006: 1 & 8.

5. Mark Bergin, “Tenured bigots,” *World* August 18, 2007: 28.

6. Bergin: 28.

philosophies. She graduated two years ago...and has turned her back on all that she believed in. We are trusting God to bring our girl back."⁷

While this is but one example, national surveys indicate that this trend is growing. These "...surveys indicate that up to 51% of Christian students no longer claim to be 'born again' by their senior year."⁸ That is a startling statistic! One might wonder, how can this be?

A George Barna poll suggests that student ignorance due to lack of preparation in the home, church, and school is the main problem. According to that poll, "Just 9 percent of evangelical students believe in anything called absolute truth."⁹ One might be inclined to question the accuracy of this poll; however, it appears to be corroborated by the results of the PEERS test. The PEERS test is designed to determine the worldview of the test-takers by examining their beliefs in five key areas: politics, economics, education, religion, and social issues. Test results indicate that,

From 1988-2000 average scores of Christian school students dropped by 30.3%. Results of evangelical family students in public schools dropped 36.8%.

Christian students attending public schools now regularly score in the lower half of secular humanism, headed toward a socialistic worldview. Students in typical Christian schools score as secular humanist.¹⁰

Preparation for Standing in the Days of Dawkins

Those statistics require a sense of urgency such that Issachar's children not be numbered among them. For them to stand in these days of Dawkins they need to be equipped, not only to know the vain philosophies of Dawkins, but also how to respond to them. Helpful might be some suppertime discussions using the sword of the Word to combat the following (and


other) common statements that the likes of Dawkins present as truth:

1. The Bible is a myth.
2. The male gender is responsible for the world's problems.
3. Current translations of the Bible are not accurate.
4. The Bible is full of inaccuracies and/or inconsistencies.
5. Tolerance means accepting all lifestyles as valid.
6. Human beings are the product of evolution, not creation.
7. There are no absolute truths.
8. Christians are responsible for the earth's pollution.
9. Homosexuality is okay with God.
10. Christians are hateful.
11. Christians are bigots.
12. All religions say the same thing.
13. If God created all things, He must have created evil; therefore God is evil.
14. According to the rules of empirical, testable science, God does not exist.

To further prepare Issachar's young people for the challenges of the likes of Dawkins, a Reformed, biblical, Christian high school liberal arts education is of utmost importance. This needs to be an education in which the students are taught antithetically in all the areas of study. Not only do they need to know the truth of each discipline, they need to know the enemy's lies with respect to each and be equipped to combat them. Too often high school students begin to focus on a particular area of study too early. At this time in their educational journey, more important is a broad exposure to all areas of learning. It may even be advisable to offer a course of study that exposes the students to the specific worldviews of the day and equips them to combat their false teachings. Also, Issachar's seed should have opportunity to articulate a Reformed, biblical, Christian worldview of their own.

In this regard one cannot emphasize enough the importance of systematic, sound catechetical instruction provided by the church, which will firmly ground Issachar's covenant seed in the Scriptures and the Reformed creeds.

Furthermore, they will need spiritual support when they go off to college. While it may be a challenge to be able to provide this support if they are far from home or stay on campus, provide it we must.

Clearly, modern-day Issachar must not simply assume that just because her children are raised in Christian homes, taught in Christian schools, and regularly attend church, they are not at risk when they fall under the shadow of Dawkin's post-modern culture. The warning of Colossians 2:8 rings as true today as it did in the days of the apostle Paul: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." However, the apostle's warning is more than just a warning, it is also a call to action: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Col. 2:6). Furthermore, in Ephesians 6 the apostle supplies marching orders for this battle "...against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). The marching orders for this battle of ideas require that Issachar put on "the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13). 

7. Chuck Edwards, "Surviving a college education," *AFA Journal* July, 2004: 17.

8. Edwards: 17.

9. Charles Colson, "Worldview Boot Camp," *Christianity Today* December, 2004: 80.

10. Brannon S. Howse, "Test reveals Christian students lack biblical worldview," *Christian Renewal* February 11, 2002: 16.

Wilderness


How easy it is to forget we live in the wilderness! With solid homes, comfortable clothes, fine food, and every convenience readily available—beds queen size and king, cell phones and Internet, refrigerators and microwaves, RVs and SUVs, doctors and hospitals—the wilderness seems quite far away. But in the wilderness we live, and there we shall die.

God did not create the world as such. The blame lies with Lucifer, who, beginning with Eden, transforms all he touches—from lush lands to golden cities—into wilderness (Is. 14:17). Spiritually, it is all wilderness, a waste-howling place (Deut. 32:10), great and terrible (Deut. 1:19), a solitary way where the soul faints (Ps. 107:4), men are entangled, shut in (Ex. 14:3), and die, their carcasses wasted and then consumed (Num. 14:35). To travel there is to pass through the shadow of death (Jer. 2:6). It is a perilous place (II Cor. 11:26), a land of darkness (Jer. 2:31), great winds (Job 1:19), thorns and briars (Judges 8:7), hunger and thirst (Num. 21:5), fierce enemies (Jer. 3:2; Ezek. 23:42), ambush (Lam. 4:19), and wild dragons, fiery serpents, and scorpions (Is. 43:20; Deut. 8:15). And in the wilderness expect to encounter the seven-headed scarlet beast and its mysterious bejeweled rider, drunk with saint-blood and blasphemous—Babylon the Great, Mother of harlots, Abomination of the earth (Rev. 17:3-6).

Israel spent a long season in the wilderness (Num. 14:33), passing from one to another—Etham, Shur, Sinai, Paran, Zin, Kedemoth, even Sin. And from the moment they entered the wilderness they lusted exceedingly (Ps. 106:14), murmured (Ex. 16:2), disobeyed and tempted God (Num. 14:22). They provoked Him to wrath and grieved Him (Deut. 9:7; Ps. 78:40). Even after they entered Canaan—an imperfect picture—they were never very far from more wilderness—Beersheba, Bethaven, Judah, Gibeon, Ziph, Maon, Engedi, Moab, Jeruel, and Tekoa. In one of them, young David would keep sheep from bears and lions (I Sam. 17:28). In another, John the

Baptist would be a voice crying, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord” (Mark 1:3).

God always brings His church through the wilderness. By grace, He transforms that perilous place into a refuge (Ps. 55:7). So in the wilderness, Moses found safety from Pharaoh (Ex. 3:1), David hid from Saul and Absalom, and Elijah from Jezebel (I Kings 19:4). And how God has cared for His people there! In its darkness, He appeared in blazing glory (Ex. 16:10). To the wandering He gave a law, a reason to worship and give thanks (Lev. 7:38). He forsook them not, but by cloud and fire led in the way they should go, gave His good Spirit to instruct them, and sustained them so they lacked nothing (Neh. 9:19-21). He made them to go forth as sheep, guided them like a flock (Ps. 78:52), and delivered them in their distress (Ps. 107:4). For the hungry and thirsty He furnished a table, rained bread from heaven (Ps. 78:24), and brought geysers from the rock (Ps. 78:19). He numbered them (Num. 1:19), humbled them, and proved them (Deut. 8:16). He carried them as a man bears his son (Deut. 1:31) and kept them as the apple of his eye (Deut. 32:10).

How comforting that the ministry of Jesus began in the wilderness. Among wild creatures, hungry, thirsty, and sorely tempted, Christ overcomes the Beast (Mark 1:13). In the wilderness Jesus feeds the multitude (Matt. 15:33), seeks that which is lost (Luke 15:4), and is lifted up that whosoever believes on Him should not perish (John 3:15-16). Because of His covenant of peace, they dwell safely there (Ezek. 34:25; Hos. 2:6). He gives His church eagle’s wings to fly to her prepared wilderness place, nourishes and keeps her safe from the Serpent (Rev. 12:6-14). And He transforms that waste-howling wilderness into a new thing (Is. 43:19). He pours out His Spirit from on High so that the barren place becomes fruitful (Is. 32:15), the solitary place becomes glad, the desert place blossoms as the rose, and waters break out into streams (Is. 35:1-6). Even the animals shall honor Him (Is. 43:20). He shall comfort all the waste places and make them again like Eden, the garden of the Lord, where joy and gladness are found, thanksgiving and the voice of melody (Is. 51:3). Out of the wilderness He comes forth, like pillars of smoke, and the church also, leaning upon her beloved (Song of Sol. 3:6; 8:5). 

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News from Seminary Hill

The second semester of the school-year is well underway.

Prof. R. Cammenga taught an interim course, between the semesters, on "Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology."

Senior seminarian Heath Bleyenbergh has rejoined us, having successfully completed his six-month internship in the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, MI under the supervision of Hudsonville's council, particularly the Rev. G. Eriks. In addition to his regular courses, Mr. Bleyenbergh is preparing for his synodical examinations before the synod in June.

Third-year seminarian Cory Griess will do his internship in the Hull Protestant Reformed congregation in Hull, IA, beginning in July 2008 under the tutelage of the Rev. S. Key.

Bleyenbergh and Griess are the two seminarians presently licensed to speak a word of edification in the churches.


In the good providence of God and with the help of a friend outside the Protestant Reformed Churches, the seminary was able to buy a five thousand volume theological library for a reasonable sum. The library contains several very old and rare books, including a work by Theodore Beza dating from the sixteenth century. Of special interest and value to the seminary are the many books on the Greek New Testament text of Scripture, specifically the New Testament text used by the translators of the Authorized Version. The faculty would like to see these books become the core of a special section of the library featuring the Traditional Text of the New Testament. Not only our own professors and students, but also other scholars might find this part of the library useful. Presently, the new acquisition is being sorted and catalogued.

Worthwhile conferences and special lectures enhance the learning and life of a seminary. In January, in the time between the interim course and the beginning of the second semester, all of the seminarians and Prof. B. Gritters attended a conference on Reformed missions at Westminster Seminary California in Escondido. In February, Mr. Hugo Bos, a Reformed layman from the Netherlands, spoke to the seminary, area ministers, and some interested laity on current developments in various Reformed churches in the Netherlands. In April, the Rev. E. Case, pastor of PCA congregations in Mississippi, will give three lectures on southern Presbyterianism under the auspices of the seminary. These lectures will be open to the public.

With the approval of the Theological School Committee, the faculty are planning a three-day conference on John Calvin in commemoration of the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Reformer in 1509. The conference will be held in Western Michigan on September 3-5, 2009, God willing. The conference purposes the spiritual benefit of the interested public, not of ministers only. It is the hope of the faculty and the Theological School Committee that many from North America and abroad, as well as from the Grand Rapids area, will attend.

In the two, special issues in 2007, the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* treated the Reformed doctrine of the covenant, setting forth the understanding of the various aspects of the covenant by the Protestant Reformed Churches. Copies of these issues are available from the seminary.

May the Lord Christ prosper the work of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the seminary for the defense of the faith and, especially, for the training of men who will be good preachers and diligent pastors.

For the Faculty,
Prof. David J. Engelsma 

Laboring in the Consciousness of God's Sovereignty in Missions (4) Jesus' Proclamation of His Hardening of the Reprobate

As election is the saving purpose of God, reprobation may be called the sovereign righteous and judicial purpose of God. God wills to save His elect from eternity. He has ordained others to be vessels of His wrath from eternity, to serve the magnifying of His grace in election and to reveal His righteous judgment in the way of their sin and hardening (Rom. 9:15-24). As election is known by its fruit in the elect, one may also say that reprobation becomes manifest in the hardening of the wicked in sin, unbelief, and iniquity. The pattern of our Savior is also instructive in considering this truth.

Jesus not only labored in the consciousness that all were not His sheep, but also in the consciousness that He worked condemnation and hardening unto judgment. In the context of Jesus' explanation to Nicodemus concerning the necessity of regeneration, the text speaks of the world of believers, organically, in the elect that was to be saved in John 3:16. The text identifies the elect as regenerated believers who are saved and not condemned. But it also speaks of the unbelieving who, be-

ing condemned already, will not come to the light.

We read:

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (John 3:18-21).

In like manner, speaking of false prophets, He warns us:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. 7:15-20).

That fruit of sin was rooted in the fact that God did not give unto

them the gift of faith, for they were not His sheep. Jesus unashamedly says so in His preaching, "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you" (John 10:26). He also thanks the Father that this is His will (Matt. 11:25-27). That fruit of sin is rooted also in the hardening in sin wrought by the gospel that exposes the hypocrisy of sin. Our Savior, by His coming into the world and by His death and resurrection, works the judgment that comes upon the world of sin and unbelief. He is realizing God's counsel concerning reprobation in the reprobate wicked. Jesus says, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin" (John 15:22). This belongs both to God's purpose in Christ and to the purpose of the preaching of the gospel. Jesus says concerning the work of the Spirit, the Comforter:

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged (John 16:8-11).

In what Jesus says concerning these things, there are several elements. The first is that He is accomplishing the will of His Father; God's counsel is being realized. Reprobation stands in the sover-

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eign will of God. Moreover, reprobation has respect to certain persons ordained unto judgment. Secondly, that counsel of God is realized in the way of justice and judgment, which leaves the unrepentant wicked without excuse, hardened in sin unto judgment. Thirdly, Jesus makes it clear also that this truth does not mitigate the seriousness of the call to repentance. Jesus repeatedly warns them, "I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come" (John 8:21). He says in the same context, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:23, 24). By His warning, Jesus leaves them without excuse, and by it they are hardened. That man, being a fallen sinner, cannot come to Christ apart from the gift of saving faith (John 6:44, 65) does not absolve him. That man, being from below and unregenerated from above, is bound in unbelief does not change the fact that he is responsible before God.

There is also a fourth element here that is noteworthy. Reprobation, upon which this hardening rests, the hardening under judgment itself, and the warning that works it, are all taken up in the missionary preaching of Christ. Preaching the truth of reprobation; judgment for unbelief, the fruit of hardening; and warnings concerning unrepentant unbelief are not only the effect of mission work and preaching, they are part of the contents of the preaching itself. Jesus did not simply teach His disciples these things in private. He proclaimed them to those of whom and to whom He said, "ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep" (John 10:26). He speaks the warning, "ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24), in the temple.

In like manner Paul, in his missionary preaching, not only

calls men to repentance and faith in Christ to be saved but says to the multitude in the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia, "Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; 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 13:40, 41). Such a declaration from the prophets, "ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you," is a clear declaration of God's counsel, of judicial hardening resting upon sovereign reprobation. The positive element of that call of the gospel is there, to be sure. Paul had just said, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38, 39). But Paul does not stop with that exhortation. He comes also with a warning, one that rests upon God's eternal counsel of election and reprobation. This too is evangelism! This is apostolic mission preaching!

In a similar manner, though to a Gentile audience on Mars' Hill, Paul, after showing them to be inexcusable for their image worship, and already self-condemned because of it, warns them:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30, 31).

Paul is aware that judgment according to the counsel of God has now come, by his preaching, to these Gentiles. It is a judgment that separates among men, between

faith and unbelief, between elect and reprobate.

There are several observations we may make in the light of this truth. While we may say of others to whom we preach or bear witness as Paul did concerning Israel, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1), yet we know also that it is not God's purpose to save all. We must in all such labor say first, "Thy will be done." While we labor, preach, and witness to all who will hear, for that is our calling, we must not shun to declare the whole counsel of God in that witness. A half-truth is a falsehood. If election is considered something to be hidden in the closet by many who call themselves Reformed, reprobation has been virtually, if not actually, moved to the garbage dump. Yet it underlies the mission preaching and witness of Christ and the apostles and is expressly indicated therein, not simply as a doctrine in Scripture, but in its reality and fruit. We may not be wiser than Christ. Reprobation is to be faithfully confessed and preached: the truth of judgment and warning must be proclaimed.

This runs counter to all the mission advice that is current today in the church world about us. Nor may we water the truth down. Jesus did not come to save a vague "unconverted" or amorphous blob of sinners. He came to save His people from their sins. The gospel must be preached to the nations for a witness, and then the end shall come (Matt. 24:14). That witness has always a twofold effect, along the lines of election and reprobation. It saves the elect and gathers them. It hardens the reprobate wicked unto judgment, and by it the world itself becomes ripe for final judgment. This truth and the consciousness of it guides our mission work. It is also to be unashamedly preached!

The notion that these things are to be kept hidden is rooted in the

humanist notion that salvation depends on man and that if only we package things correctly, men will believe. That the truth is to be wisely and timely preached in due proportion is scriptural. But watering down the truth, or being deliberately unclear about it, is not preaching that is wise or timely or in due proportion. It is dishonesty. Preaching the truth of election and reprobation unashamedly will bring division, separation, reproach, and conflict. This is the reality of the gospel. When Jesus proclaimed Himself the Good Shepherd, many said of Him, "he hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?" (John 10:20). When He told them that His sheep hear His voice and that they believed not because they were not of His sheep, and that He was the Son of God, they took up stones to stone Him (John 10:31).


The fact is that hiding the truth of election and reprobation robs the

sheep of their true comfort. Reprobation serves election. The truth of it also underscores, to the re-deemed, the wonder of grace that God has wrought in his life to the comfort of his soul. Thus Peter explains it in the figure of Christ, the Cornerstone. We read:

Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy,

but now have obtained mercy (I Pet. 2:7-10).

Hiding the truth of reprobation or election saves none of the reprobate. It only robs the elect of their true comfort.

The knowledge of this truth is also important for the work of missions and the saints on the mission field. It is an answer to discouragement when those we desire to come do not. It makes it clear also that while we would labor faithfully, the power to save, gather, and build the church is not in our hand. If men do not come, the reason is not the failure of some technique. When men do come, it is not the success of our methodology, though God uses means and faithful labor. It is because some stumble at the word, being disobedient, while others are given of God to hear the voice of Christ and come unto Him by faith. 

All Around Us

Rev. Jason Kortering

■ Stem Cells without Embryos

Scientists have discovered over ten years ago that embryonic stem cells can develop into any organ of the body, and can thus be useful in treating diseases. To refresh your memory, stem cells are those that are taken from newly fertilized eggs, eggs that are in their earliest stages of development, containing no more than 64-cells. Many of these embryos are "extras," having been produced in laboratories for in-vitro fertilization. The sperm are from the father or donor and are joined, in a petri dish, to the egg taken from the female. Usually only one such fertilized egg is needed for implantation, thus leaving perhaps four

or five extra embryos. These extra embryos are either frozen for possible future use or discarded. Because these cells are stem cells, they are pluripotent, which means that, unlike more mature cells (the mature baby has billions of cells), they hold the possibility of developing into any organ of the body. The stem cells do not actually develop into organs, but they do begin to resemble the organ cells. The use of them has the potential of curing many dread diseases. An example of this is that when they are introduced into a diseased kidney, the other cells "educate" and integrate the new cells until the organ is effectively regenerated.

This ability to grow human tissue of all kinds may make it possible to cure numerous cell-based diseases such as juvenile diabetes and Parkinson's disease, and they could make organ transplants unnecessary.

This information is a summary of an article, "Ethical Concerns Surround Stem-cell Research," by Hacsí Horvath posted on CNN research page.

We can be thankful to God that this effort has raised the consciousness of America concerning the ethical propriety of such activity. These stem cells taken from young embryos raised the question of the nature of fertilized eggs. Many in the medical field expressed caution that if we believe that life begins at conception, these embryos are actually conceived persons, though lacking a developed body. If a medical technician would use them for experimental purposes (e.g., to grow specific cells of the body for later implantation), this would have a direct effect upon the life of the embryo. In the above mentioned article, David R. Cox, professor of genetics and pediatrics and co-director of the Stanford Human Genome

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Center at Stanford University, is quoted as stating, "A significant fraction of people in our country believe that developing human stem cells from early pre-implantation human embryos is destroying human life."

The solution Cox proposed was an "intermediate position." He suggests that the way forward is to address the concerns of people who believe that this type of research should not be conducted under any circumstances, by emphasizing that the human embryos would have been destroyed or thrown away anyway and that the purpose is to alleviate human suffering.

By now we are quite familiar with such reasoning in our post-modern world. There is no standard of right or wrong. Quite simply, the end justifies the means.

This issue of stem-cell use has become a national debate. It became that through the efforts of our president, George W. Bush. From an article published in *Time* magazine, August 12, 2001, entitled, "How Bush Got There," we learn that, after Bush consulted many medical ethicists and religious leaders, he came to the compromise solution that *Time* called "wonderfully adroit." "By allowing funds for research on the small number of already existing stem-cell lines (more than 60 as later indicated), but denying money for any work with stem cells derived from newly formed embryos, he positioned himself in the narrow political space that allowed him to claim he had not stood in the way of promising medical investigations. At the same time, he could insist that he had kept his promises to the Republican right, which abandoned his father after the elder Bush broke his no-new-taxes pledge. To placate scientists who argue that Bush did not go far enough, he promised 'aggressive federal funding of research on umbilical-cord, placenta, adult and animal stem cells, which do not involve the same moral dilemma.'"

President Bush announced to the American people in August 2001 that the government would limit its funding for research to embryos already in existence and destined for destruction. No funding would be given for research upon newly formed embryos. This did not mean that private laboratories, both commercial and educational, were forbidden to make use of other embryos; the restriction applied only to government-financed projects. This aroused a national debate and a storm of protest. Scientists and people who suffered debilitating diseases raised a cry of obstructionism and lack of sympathy. On the other hand, from the pro-life people came accusations of compromise and of lack of respect for the unborn.

We can easily see how the public policy of the government on this issue never solved the moral issue at stake. The reasoning was utilitarian. These embryos were the result of fertilization in a petri dish and were preserved by cryonics. They were of no interest to the donors. In fact, the donors were willing to sign consent forms that authorized their release for scientific use. The embryos were destined to be destroyed anyway, so why not make good use of them for the next generation? The government did not want any responsibility for the creating of more of these embryos. They restricted use to those already created. In the end, however, they never faced the issue whether these embryos were actually conceived persons, which was what the abortion debate is all about. Was the discarding of them a form of murder? Was this similar to the natural selection of the fertilization process? Every fertilized egg, of course, does not implant in the womb. Some of them are discarded in the natural process of fertilization. But, no matter the rationale, the fact is that we Christians view the fertilized egg as the beginning of life. Respect for human life begins with our treatment of the em-

bryo. The moral dilemma was not resolved by government policy, it was aggravated.

Then, November 21, 2007, the *New York Times* announced to the nation that scientists had bypassed the need for embryos to get stem cells.

Two teams of scientists reported yesterday that they had turned human skin cells into what appear to be embryonic stem cells without having to make or destroy an embryo—a feat that could quell the ethical debate troubling the field.

All they had to do, the scientists said, was add four genes. The genes reprogrammed the chromosomes of the skin cells, making the cells into blank slates that should be able to turn into any of the 220 cell types of the human body, be it heart, brain, blood, or bone. Until now, the only way to get such human universal cells was to pluck them from a human embryo several days after fertilization, destroying the embryo in the process.

The need to destroy embryos has made stem cell research one of the most divisive issues in American politics. Pitting President Bush against prominent Republicans like Nancy Reagan, and patient advocates who hoped that stem cells could cure diseases like Alzheimer's. The new studies could defuse the issue as a presidential election nears.

The reprogrammed skin cells may yet prove to have subtle differences from embryonic stem cells that come directly from human embryos, and the new method includes potentially risky steps, like introducing a cancer gene, but stem cell researchers say they are confident that it will not take long to perfect the method and that today's drawbacks will prove to be temporary.

Researchers and ethicists not involved in the findings say the work, conducted by independent teams from Japan and Wisconsin, should reshape the stem cell field. At some time in the near future, they said, today's debate over whether it is morally acceptable to create and destroy human em-

bryos to obtain stem cells should be moot.

The reaction is interesting.

"Everyone was waiting for this day to come," said the Rev. Tadeusz Padholczyk, director of education at the National Catholic bioethics Center. "You should have a solution here that will address the moral objections that have been percolating for years," he added.

The White House said that Mr. Bush was "very pleased" about the new findings, adding that, "By avoiding techniques that destroy life, while vigorously supporting alternative approaches, president Bush is encouraging scientific advancement within ethical boundaries."

■ Little but Alive

World magazine, in its February 2, 2008 issue, has an article by the above title. It includes an interview with two men, Robert George and Chris Tollefsen, who wrote a book *Embryo: A Defense of Human Life*. Their response to the announcement in the *New York Times* of obtaining stem cells without touching the embryo is helpful.

Unfortunately, the debate does not look like it is over. Almost immediately after the announcement, some scientists, journalists, and lobbyists started to declare the need to "keep all options open" — including the option of killing human embryos. This has become a mantra for those who seem committed to research on embryonic humans regardless of the moral or scientific merit of such inquiry.

Later in the same article, they mention how this might be done.

Here is the worst case scenario: the creation of millions of human embryos—human beings in the early stages of development—in order to perform scientific experiments on them, and in order to harvest their body parts for medical therapies for others. We have sadly seen the destruction of millions of human beings before in a litany of tragedies of the 20th century. But we

have never seen the creation of human beings *precisely* for the purpose of destruction and use.

In the subsequent details of the interview, they set forth the contents of their book, which is an attempt to demonstrate the Christian perspective of human life at conception and why the critical issue in our on-going debate over abortion must be the biblical teaching of God's involvement in conception and the value we place upon the human embryo.

Even with President Bush's position, which is now the practice in our country as far as spending public funds is concerned, scientists must limit themselves to use embryos that are already in existence and destined to be destroyed and experiment with them—even though it means the death of these human beings.

In the middle of such confusion, responsible Christians, on the basis of the Bible, insist that abortion is wrong. Many cold-hearted scientists are convinced that embryos are only tissue formed in the mother, over which she has the right to have final say and has the right to determine whether it remains or is removed. In between, we have a political position that says, kill a few but don't add to their number.


Even the above-mentioned discovery of "other ways" will not solve the abortion debate. It helps Christian scientists who may be involved in this field of research to be able to participate without compromising their conscience. It may give hope to Christians who desire to benefit from such research for the treatment of frustrating diseases. All this is a helpful and

hopeful advance for us as Christians. But when it comes to ethics, Christians in all walks of life, including pastors in the pulpit and in every public forum, must continue to decry abortion and cry out to our faltering nation, "Thou shalt not kill." Whether our neighbors like it or not, the Bible is the source of our ethics and we are not ashamed to tell them.

And when it comes to action, we may well appreciate those who refuse to sit on their hands and allow abortions to be performed.

Many Christians are willing to risk everything, though they refuse to break the law, trying to persuade women who come to have abortions to consider some alternative. There are pro-life pregnancy centers, the Care Nets, the Heartbeat organizations, which act on their convictions.

It's easy to criticize such activity, but what are you doing as a Christian? There is a place for evaluating the moral quality of movements. Just as important, it is time to stand up and address our responsibilities.

The scientists will not solve the problem of abortion, though they may try to help find some solutions. Rather, it is a matter of our heartfelt relationship with God and our love for our neighbor. Only God is able to save us from hatred and murder. He does this through His Son, Jesus Christ. God gave His Son as a payment for sin, which benefit becomes ours as we embrace Him by faith. Only God's love accomplishes such reconciliation. This is the gospel we are called upon to bring to our neighbors by word and deed. May God help us do this in these difficult times. 

...when it comes to ethics, Christians in all walks of life, including pastors in the pulpit and in every public forum, must continue to decry abortion and cry out to our faltering nation, "Thou shalt not kill."

Sober and Hopeful

Reformed Witness Hour
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proclaiming the truth of the
sovereignty of God.

The Word of God in I Peter 1:13 exhorts us: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The Scriptures here use a figure of speech in which the Christian mind is compared to the dress of an easterner, to his long robe, which was very relaxing and comfortable in moments of ease, but which had to be girded up when there was work to be done. The wearer would take up that robe and with a belt secure it around his waist in order that he might go on his journey with speed and dispatch, without any hindrances or encumbrances.

The Word of God here is calling us as children of God, saved by grace, to have a resolute determination to perform our Christian calling wherever that calling is given to us. We are not to go about our Christian life with a half-interested heart, with a lackadaisical attitude, with a ho-hum-ness about us. But we are to cast away sloth and indifference as a plague in our heart. We are, further, to cast away hindrances that could trip us up—just like that robe of the easterner if it were allowed to dangle around his ankles so that he would stumble in the midst of his work. So the Lord says that we must be careful that there be no hindrances in our life that would cause us to stumble in the holy work that He has given

us to do. Those hindrances can be greed, anxiety and worry, a besetting sin, or friends (so-called) who attach themselves to us and keep us back from a resolute and holy determination to serve the Lord our God. So we are exhorted, knowing the doctrines of God's grace and knowing that our salvation is of the Lord's mighty grace, to go about our calling with resolute determination, with zeal, with focus, and with purpose of heart. Gird up the loins of your mind, says the Word of God to us.

Now if we look at that verse once more, we find that the Word of God immediately goes on to show us how that is to be done. We read, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Those phrases we want to look at now—the idea of being sober and hoping to the end for grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Word of God here is saying, "You go about your Christian life with a holy resolve this way: by exercising godly sobriety and by living with an enduring hope."

Let us look first at godly sobriety. Peter says to us, "Be sober." Frequently we find this word "sober" in the New Testament as a word that expresses the antithesis between the believer and the unbeliever. Let me explain that word "antithesis." Antithesis simply means that God has set a spiritual difference between the believer and the world, between light and darkness, between holiness and sin. For instance, in I Thessalonians 5:6-8, the apostle Paul contrasts the life of the believer and the life of an unbeliever: "Therefore let us not

sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation." The Word of God says that the world of unbelief is drunk, intoxicated, not just with liquor but with this present life. The child of God is sober. When one is sober, one has the right estimation and judgment of life. When one is drunk he is under the intoxicating power of liquor and cannot discern reality. Drunkenness is a shameful and horrible thing. It is not something funny. It is a great sin against God. By contrast, when one is sober he has his wits about him. He has a proper judgment, a proper estimation of everything around him.

How are we to live our life with a holy determination to gird up the loins of our mind? First of all, be sober. Do not be intoxicated with the world. Do not be intoxicated with money, possessions, with your figure and how you look, with pleasures. But be sober. Take the Word of God to you so that you are constantly forming a right estimation of this life.

For instance, the Word of God says in Titus 2, "Young men, be soberminded." In the world, young men are intoxicated. They are intoxicated with themselves, with lust, with arrogance. They do not have the right estimate of a woman. They are drunk with themselves and their own lust. They do not have a right understanding of what a father is in the home, or a right understanding of children as the gift of God. Even when they become married, they

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think that life is for themselves. They are intoxicated. You, in Christ, young men, be sober.

Young women, you be sober. That means that you have your spiritual head on straight. You see that the world and all that is in the world, in the words of Scripture, is the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Now, by the grace of God, you are sober. That is, you do not consider the wealth, honor, immorality, pleasures of this world to be valuable. You see them as delusions, vanity. You know that none of these things can make you happy. They cannot obtain for you the pardon of your sin. They cannot pacify your conscience. They cannot give you life at the moment of death. You see the world and its lust and lifestyle for what it is—the pollution of sin, the echoes of the insane asylum. But you, now, are sober. You have an understanding of the things of God and of the value of salvation. Be sober.

That is how we go about our life with determination. Constantly have godly sobriety. Put the bottle away. Put away that which would intoxicate you, make you drunk, get you to begin to lust. Immerse yourself in the Word of God. Get the right estimation of the magnificence and splendor of the things of God. Do not be content with a general, foggy notion of the doctrines of God's Word. Do not slide into a complacent mode concerning God's church, but attend to the things that are spiritual.

Are you sober? Do you know what life is about? Life is not about fashion. Life is not about how your hair looks. Life is about Christ. Are you sober-minded? Do you know what things are important? Go to Scripture. Pray. Attend church. Take up your place in Bible study. Prepare for the church services.

But still more. Not only must we be sober, but Peter goes on to say, "and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The grace that is to be brought

to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ refers to the full and complete salvation that will be ours in the day when Jesus returns at the end of the world. On that day Christ will be revealed. Then all that conceals Him will be pulled down and He will appear in all of His glory. Peter tells us that on that day, which is very dreadful for the wicked, grace shall be brought to us. That is, in the day when Jesus Christ returns at the end of the world, at the end of time, we will enjoy, as His children, the fullest expressions of God's loving favor. Grace, after all, is something that we experience. The graciousness of our God is His love for the unworthy, His compassion for the unlovely, His pity for the wretched. When Christ comes, that grace will be given to us, that is, it will envelop us. It will so overpower us that every sigh and every tear will be utterly forgotten.

Hope to the end for the grace that will be brought to you. To hope to the end means to endure, to hold on. We must remember that when Peter refers to hope, he is not referring to a fond wish. When we say that we hope for the revelation of Christ, that we hope for the coming of Christ, that we hope for glory, we are not saying, "Well, I hope so." When we use the word in the human sense, we mean, "There is something uncertain here. I hope, but I'm not sure. I would like to think so." No, no. Hope in the Bible is not that. Hope is confidence. The biblical hope is the confident expectation of all that God has promised. In fact, that becomes the theme of this epistle of I Peter. As pilgrim-strangers on the earth, strangers in the Lord Jesus Christ who live in hope, in the certainty of all the promises that God has given, we know by faith that those promises are sure. But we do not have them in all of their fullness yet. So we hope to the end for the grace that shall be brought to us.

You see, right now we cannot see Jesus. We cannot see heaven.

We cannot see God's throne. Not because they are make-believe, but because our eyes cannot see them now. We cannot see or hear them now. But our eyes and ears do not determine what is real. You certainly would not want to say that if your eye cannot see it and your ear cannot hear it, then it is not real. That would be a totally proud idea, would it not? No, we hope for what we cannot see or hear now. But we know that it is there because by the Christian hope those things are pulling on our souls.

Now hope to the end. Do not quit. Be determined. Be resolute. Be unwavering in your hope. That is a hope that does not die under disappointments and trials and weariness. You see, it is only enduring hope that will cause us to gird up the loins of our mind. Nothing is more likely to cause us to give up in the Christian life and to let everything drop around us than discouragement. Then we meet difficulties and failure in our Christian work. Perhaps we go forth in the vigor of the morning's zeal but after a few hard knocks we return at night and say, "What's the use?" Discouragement and depression are great foes to the Christian calling. They are not little foes. They are big ones. It was discouragement that brought two of the best (if we may put it in those words), two of the best, most durable servants of God to their knees. Moses, who was patient and meek, was discouraged and said, "The people are too much for me." And Elijah, under the juniper tree, said to God, "I'm the only one left." Discouraged.

We need to have hope, hope in Christ and hope for the glory that shall be brought to us. That is not a luxury. That is not a special necklace to wear for special occasions. But Christ's hope is our belt. It is what girds us up. It is what holds everything together. If we do not have hope, everything falls down around us. Hope is what holds everything together. It holds our

Christian life and calling together. Otherwise it would fall down to the ground. Hope to the end.

That certainly means that words of encouragement spoken at the proper moment are going to do more good to a discouraged Christian than commiserating with him and saying, "Yes, we've got it pretty bad." No, no. Words of hope, words of encouragement. Saying to each other, "Our hope is true. Look ahead. God is on His throne. Christ is faithful. Jesus is coming. Eternal glory is ours. Hope to the end." Then we will gird ourselves for the work. We will go forward with renewed determination.


Jesus is coming. We must therefore be diligent in our calling. Jesus often spoke to us of how we must be living and acting when He comes again. He also spoke to us of how we ought to be dressed when He arrives—not physically, but spiritually. Think with me of a young bride in 1945 who truly loves her husband in a good and precious and exclusive love of God. Her husband has been gone in the

service of his country, in World War II. She receives a telegram from her husband that says, "I will arrive at our apartment on Monday morning, around 10:00." Will she greet him with sleepy eyes, with hair all messed up, with bad breath, with the apartment in a state of confusion? Oh, no! She will be at her very best, because she loves him.

Now, how is your heart? I am not asking now about your physical appearance, because when Christ comes He will look where our eyes cannot look, into our hearts. Are the things of God in good order in your life? Does the fire of the love of Christ and for the truth burn brightly within you? Do you lay hold of the Word of God and of prayer and of church attendance as that which is the center and the heartbeat of your life? Are you ready for Him? Are you girding up the loins of your mind?

We are pilgrims, spiritual pilgrims. That is the way Peter addresses us in this epistle. He says that we are strangers and pilgrims

on this earth. We are on a journey. We are passing through this world to a better one. The time to sit down and wear long, flowing, graceful, and finely embroidered robes is not right now. We will be given those robes in the final victory. Right now God has given to us a pilgrim's robe. It covers us. But you need to gird it up because you have to travel, and sometimes travel fast. Sometimes we must flee our sins. Gird up the loins of your mind, get going. Sometimes you must be quick to come to the aid of a fellow pilgrim. And sometimes the angel will come to you as he came to Lot and he will say, "Up, get you out. For God will destroy this place."

Gird up the loins of your mind. There are obstacles on the road. There are many temptations. Are you ready? Are you pressing toward the kingdom? Are you seeking that kingdom? Gird up the loins of your mind. Be sober and hope to the end for the grace that shall be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

From a recent bulletin of our Doon, IA PRC, the calling church for a missionary to the Philippines, we find a reminder for Doon, and for us as well, to remember the saints in the Philippines. Doon's Council has been actively seeking ways to help the Berean PRC in the Philippines while they await the man of God's choosing. They have asked numerous pastors in our denomination to go to the Philippines on a temporary basis, for a month or so, in order that the saints there may have another taste of the lively preaching for which they long. To date, Doon has been

unsuccessful in that quest. Meanwhile, the elders of the Berean PRC have been very competently providing reading services. They stay in regular contact with Doon for advice and encouragement. We add our prayer to Doon's when we ask our heavenly Father to continue to uphold this congregation. "...I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

The Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Fayetteville, NC has officially disbanded. As churches we thank God that He gave us the privilege and blessing to have had contact with them over the years, and to minister to this group of like-minded believers. May the Lord be with these two families and two individuals as they seek to discern now the Lord's will for

them regarding a church home.

On Sunday morning, January 26, Rev. W. Bruinsma, our denomination's missionary to Pittsburgh, PA, preached for the members of the Franklin, PA OPC.

Sister-Church Activities

Rev. A. Stewart, pastor of the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI, was able to present a lecture on "Lessons from the Reformation for Today" at the Rest Convalescent Home in Porthcawl, South Wales.

Evangelism Activities

Members of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI were reminded to pray that God may grant His indispensable blessing as several men from their congregation visited the Kent County Jail to witness to the

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

inmates on a recent Sunday afternoon, and that God would use these efforts to glorify His worthy name.

Highlights of the January meeting of the Evangelism Committee of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI included a note that they sent out pamphlets to contacts in New Jersey, Indiana, Nebraska, and Turkey. They also heard updates on the addition of the audio *Standard Bearer* to their web site and the live-streaming of their weekly worship services.

The Evangelism Committee of the Randolph, WI PRC was recently informed that, due to the sale of radio station WRRD, Sunday, February 3, was the last day that the Reformed Witness Hour would be broadcast on that station.

Congregation Activities

Members of the Jr. Mr. and Mrs. Society of Hope PRC in Walker, MI made plans to sing at the Christian Rest Home on Wednesday evening, January 30. The couples were reminded to bring two things, their Psalters and their children. Always a joy at any rest home.

The Junior Adult Fellowship of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI enjoyed a ski outing at Pando Ski Area on February 1, with pizza following at church.

The Consistory of Faith PRC in Jenison approved the organization of a Men's Society for all confessing male members. All interested men were invited to meet Sunday, February 3, following their evening service, to provide input on steps toward organizing.

The final drawings and elevations of the new building project of the Randolph, WI PR church were made available to the congregation on Sunday, February 3. A comment sheet also accompanied the set of plans for specific comments that any member would like considered.

Seminary Activities

Prof. R. Cammenga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament

at our Seminary, taught an interim course at the Seminary entitled "Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology." This course ran from January 7 through January 16. In connection with this course, Rev. W. Bruinsma traveled to Grand Rapids from Pittsburgh on Wednesday morning, January 16, to give a lecture at the Seminary on the subject, "Mission Work Among and Witnessing to Roman Catholics."

Young People's Activities

Young people, are you making plans to attend the 2008 Young People's Convention? This year's convention is sponsored by the Byron Center, MI PRC and will be held, the Lord willing, July 14-18 at Covenant Hills Camp near Flint, Michigan. The theme of this year's convention is "Safe from the Snare," from Proverbs 29:25.

Speeches will be presented by Mr. Dan VanDyke, 9th grade teacher at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI, on "The Snare"; by Rev. C. Spronk, pastor of Peace PRC in Lansing, IL, on "The Safety"; and by Rev. R. Van Overloop, pastor at Byron Center PRC, on "The Freedom to Serve." If you would like more information, go to www.prconvention.com.

Minister Activities

We pass along our congratulations to Rev. Nathan and Carrie Langerak, of the South Holland, IL PRC, in the birth of a son, Ethan Harry, born on January 24.

Rev. C. Haak declined the call from Calvary PRC in Hull, IA to serve as their first pastor.

Rev. J. Laning declined the call to serve as foreign missionary in the Philippines.

Announcements

NOTICE!

Covenant Christian High School is accepting applications from members of the Protestant Reformed Churches for two teaching positions for the 2008-2009 school year. One open position is for a Spanish teacher. The other position could involve teaching in Social Studies (Government, Economics), Business law, Accounting, and/or Religion (Bible and Cults). Secondary Teaching Certification is desirable. For more information or to request an application, please contact Mr. Rick Noorman, (616) 453-5048 or rnoorman@altelco.net or Mr. Dave Bouwkamp, (616) 457-6419.

NOTICE!

Faith Christian School in Randolph, Wisconsin is seeking applicants for a combined first and second grade classroom starting in the 2008/2009 school year. Interested applicants are encouraged to contact Mr. John Huizenga, administrator, at (920) 326-6186 or principal@randolphfcs.org. Résumés may also be e-mailed or sent to Mr. Huizenga at Faith Christian School, 611 N Columbus St., Randolph, WI 53956.

NOTICE!

The Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee is offering scholarship awards to prospective Protestant Reformed teachers and ministers. If you are interested in receiving a packet, please contact Melinda Bleyenbergh at (616) 453-8898 or e-mail daryl@altelco.net by April 1, 2008.

NOTICE!

The Protestant Reformed Seminary is sponsoring a series of three public lectures on Southern Presbyterianism in April 2008. The schedule is as follows: Tuesday, April 15, at 1:30 P.M., "Development of the Reformed Faith in the South"; Wednesday, April 16, at 1:30 P.M., "Distinctives of Southern Presbyterian Theology and Ecclesiology"; Thursday, April 17, at 7:30 P.M., "Notable Southern Presbyterian Theologians and Preachers." The speaker will be the Rev. Eugene Case, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Woodville, MS (PCA). All meetings will be held at the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, 4875 Ivanrest Ave. SW, Wyoming, MI. The public is invited. For more information, call the Seminary at (616) 531-1490.

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WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

AL and SHARON BRUMMEL,
as they celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary on March 12, 2008, Lord willing. We express our gratitude to God for the many blessings that He has given to them and to us through them. We are grateful for the religious training that they gave us, which was backed by a godly example. They are a continual inspiration to us by their service on behalf of Christ's church, their prayers on our behalf, and their seeking the spiritual good of their children and grandchildren. "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1a).

All that I am I owe to Thee,
Thy wisdom, Lord, hath fashioned me;
I give my Maker thankful praise,
Whose wondrous works my soul
amaze. Psalter 383:1

- * **Rev. Allen and Crysta Brummel**
Dean, Allyn, Ethan, Brandyn,
Steven, Crystal, Darren, Alyce, Joanna
- * **Rev. Nathan and Paula Brummel**
Alex, Melitta, Anna, Alan,
Augustine, Peter
- * **Jeff and Jodi Baker**
Daniel, Jeremy, Joel, Hannah,
Lydia, Samuel
- * **Randy and Shari Vaalburg**
Seth, Paul, Sarena, Lilyia,
Andrew, Joseph
- * **Eric and Tiffany VanBaren**
Luke, Jared, Kayla, Derek
Edgerton, Minnesota

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Edgerton PRC extends its Christian sympathy to the VerHey family on the passing into glory of

MR. ARTHUR JAMES VER HEY.

We pray that they may receive comfort in the words of Psalm 103:17, 18: "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them."

Rev. Dennis Lee, President
Harold Brands, Vice-All

TEACHER NEEDED

Heritage Christian School is accepting applications for a 1st grade teacher for the 2008/2009 school year. Questions should be directed to Mr. Brian Kuiper (616-669-1773 or bkuiper@hchr.org) or Education Committee Chairman Mr. Bernie Kamps (616-453-9773 or BernieK@Kamps-pallets.com). Please mail résumés directly to the school.

British Reformed Fellowship Family Conference 2008

Venue: The Share Centre, Co. Fermanagh, N. Ireland

Date: Friday, 25 July - Friday, 1 August, 2008

Subject: The Work of the Holy Spirit

1. *The Person of the Holy Spirit*
2. *The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*
3. *The Holy Spirit and the Covenant of Grace*
4. *The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth*
5. *The Holy Spirit and Assurance*
6. *The Holy Spirit and the Church*

Special Lecture on Charismaticism

Main Speakers: Profs. David Engelsma & Herman Hanko

Special Lecture: Rev. Angus Stewart

FOR BOOKING FORMS OR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

BRF Booking Secretary
Julie Rainey
4 The Olde Close
Cullybackey, N. Ireland BT43 5AR
jhrainey31@yahoo.com
44 (0)28 25 881955

North American Booking Office
Mr. and Mrs. Bill Oomkes
1710 Westminster Court SW
Byron Center, MI 49315 USA
oomkes@iserv.net
1 616 878 1309

Booking forms are also available on-line at

www.britishreformedfellowship.org.uk

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with disabilities.

More information,
including color pictures,

is available at www.sharevillage.org

Full payment

must be made by 25 May, 2008.

For information on Philip Rainey's
after-conference bus tour of
N. Ireland's north coast (4 & 5 August),
contact Julie Rainey (details above).

Reformed Witness Hour

March 2008

Date	Topic	Text
March 2	"Wait on the Lord"	Psalm 27:14
March 9	"The Sufferings of the Cross"	Isaiah 53
March 16	"The Power of the Cross"	Romans 8:2
March 23	"The Power of Christ's Resurrection"	I Corinthians 15:3, 4
March 30	"The Resurrection of the Body"	I Corinthians 15:35-38