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Given All Things re Life and Godliness

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

II Peter 1: 3, 4

Peter wrote this epistle to new Christians. They were being troubled by false prophets who brought "damnable heresies," which raised questions about God's promises. Doubts had arisen in their spiritually young minds (though one does not have to be spiritually young to have such doubts and fears) whether God's promises were true and whether He would keep them. When these doubts get started, then the devil keeps pushing, in or-

der to shake their faith and to make them doubt their Christianity.

Peter began his letter to them by assuring them that they possess the very same "precious faith" that he and the other apostles have. The faith of recent converts is the same faith given to the twelve apostles. And we can add that we have the same faith today as they had 2000 years ago.

In our text the apostle describes the wonderful contents of the salvation God gives by means of the faith He works in us. As frightened and doubtful as these saints are, God uses His servant Peter to assure His young children that they are His—and just what a wonderful thing it is to be His. So Peter, with evident delight, gives a brief and powerful description of their (and our) salvation.



Peter begins by reminding these saints that they are saints precisely because and only because the Almighty Jehovah, Creator of the ends of the earth, the everlasting God, gave them salvation. Peter told them in the first verse that they "obtained" faith, i.e., it was

given to them. They did not make it, nor earn it; they did not accept an offer. It was given to them. They received faith by divine allotment.

Now Peter adds that, in addition, they were "given...all things that pertain to life and godliness." We are to remember that the Giver exercises "His divine power" to give this gift. Divine power gives to God's children all that is necessary for spiritual life. This life is spiritual life in Christ; the life of regeneration; the life of those who are adopted into God's family. It is the life of an intimate relationship with the Father. In addition, divine power gives to God's children all that is necessary for "godliness," that is, a living before God's face, a reverent attitude, and actions that flow out of this wonderful life with God. Because divine power gives initial life and godliness, we may be assured that nothing is able to undo what God did and is doing. His power gives and it continues to sustain, without interruption, for as long as we live.

Peter speaks of this great gift of God because he is presenting assurances to these attacked and

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

BUSINESS OFFICE

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

Postmaster:

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

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

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

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

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

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

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

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troubled saints. They are fearful about being able to continue in their new Christian faith, both for the present and in the future. Peter reminds them that their faith was given to them by God Himself, who never changes. And, with the gift of faith, God gave them also a life and godliness that Satan and all his forces cannot destroy. The power of Satan and of false prophets is the power of a creature. Over against the power of creatures is divine power, the Almighty! Be not afraid. Fear no evil. Trust in Him. Rest in Him. Seek Him for all you need. When our foes seem so great and strong, then compare them to the incomparable Almighty Jehovah (Is. 46:5).

How does God give us all things that pertain to life and godliness? "Through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." Knowledge of God—that is the answer to every one of our fears. When we are afraid in the present or for the future, it is the knowledge of the Almighty, the all-wise and loving Father, that brings peace and calm. In the previous verse Peter said that knowledge of God and of Jesus is the way that the experience of grace and peace became theirs. To know God is life (John 17:3). And to know God is the basis for godliness—living before the face of God. So an intimate knowledge of God assures us of His continued great care. In addition, to look up to and at God reminds us that He is the One who called us to faith. He began and will continue His excellent work of calling us by the effectual outward and inward call. The knowledge of this brings calm. These new Christians and we are secure in the faith. No one can pluck us out of the hand of our Father or out of faith and salvation.

When God efficaciously calls and saves someone, then that person is immediately given something. God floods him with the vast treasure of His own "glory and virtue." We are completely sinful and corrupt and covered with shame until God clothes us with His own glory and excellence. As great as the enemies of our faith and of the truth may seem to be, we are assured of our security when we remember that God Himself called us by His own glory and His moral excellence. Nothing less than God's own glory and moral excellence are at stake if His people should fall from faith and salvation. That is why we have no real reason to be afraid.

When the glorious God calls us, then He also gives us "great and precious promises" concerning the future. His promises are the greatest and the most precious. Further, because it is God who makes these promises, they are sure to be realized. And notice that there are no strings attached to these promises, because they "are given" as gifts.

The excellence of these promises arises from the fact that because of them ("by these") we are made to be "partakers of the divine nature." God's promises center in Jesus and in all His riches and gifts. In Jesus all of God's promises are fulfilled, for He came, suffered, and died to accomplish our salvation. Through Him we have salvation—a salvation that cannot be taken from us. And through Jesus we have life eternal,

with the hope of its being realized in the new heavens and earth (cf. 3:13). These promises are essentially fulfilled, but not completely until Jesus returns (which return is a part of God's promise, 3:4).

So, when fearful and troubled by the false prophets and Satan, consider Him who began a good work in you. Consider His divine power and His own glory and excellence by which He called you. Look up. Consider what He has already done for you.

Nothing less than God's own glory and moral excellence are at stake if His people should fall from faith and salvation. That is why we have no real reason to be afraid.

Knowledge of God—that is the answer to every one of our fears.



Then consider the present end of God's powerful work in us.

First, we are "escaped." This means that we are spiritually delivered from the morally corrupt environment that surrounds every member of the church militant. We still live in the midst of the corruption of this world. It is perishing and fit for destruction and eternal misery in hell. But we are escaped.

And we are delivered from the dominion of our depraved nature, which has its source in our own lusts. We are to reckon ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:11). God has called us into communion with Himself through His Son, and this communion enables you not to let sin "reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Rom. 6:12). We are now able to make the choice to yield ourselves "unto God, as those that are alive from the dead," and we are able to yield our "members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13). We can still be seduced by and comply with the lusts of the flesh, and we are liable even to be drawn into great sins, but we must repent and fly for refuge to


Christ crucified. We must mortify our flesh more and more, and press toward the goal of perfection.

Second, when God called us, and gave us faith and all things with regard to life and godliness, He gave us the great honor of being “partakers of the divine nature.” We certainly do not partake of the divine as Jesus did, but nothing less than God’s image is re-created in us (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). God predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His dear

Son (Rom. 8:29), so we are real children of God. We are able rightly to know Him, and to possess righteousness and to have holiness worked in us. The good news of Jesus Christ proclaims not only forgiveness of every sin, but also a sanctification through the Spirit. God’s adoption of us to be His children means that we actually partake of His life, which begins in regeneration. And soon His glory will be revealed in us.

May assurance arise out of the

knowledge that you are the object of God’s divine power and the recipient of faith and of all things needed for life and godliness. The false prophets may confuse for a while, but they are false. The new (and old) Christians can be assured, with a confidence that arises from knowing God and His mighty works for us and in us.

Let not your hearts be troubled! Know whom you have believed! Know His power and His promises! 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Seeking the Unity of the Church (3)

The heritage of the great sixteenth-century Reformation is a profound awareness of the unity of the church that compels Reformed believers to strive for a manifestation of unity in the local church and among true churches of Jesus Christ. Luther was not alone in his desire for unity among the churches that were separated from Rome; Calvin earnestly pursued the same, even though it sometimes brought him grief and reproach.

As noted earlier, one of the bitterly divisive issues of the Reformation was the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, specifically the question of the bodily presence of Christ in the Supper. Calvin recognized that this issue should not have divided the churches that together rejected the idolatry of the Romish mass. Concerning these Reformation churches he wrote in 1541:

We must be satisfied that there is brotherhood and fellowship be-

tween the churches, and that all are in agreement in so far as it is necessary in order to be united according to God’s commandment.

Calvin did more than express his opinion on unity; he worked for it. With Bullinger, he crafted a document on the Lord’s Supper that found agreement in the churches both in Zurich and Geneva. He made an attempt to do the same with Luther, but Melancthon wrote Calvin that he dared not show Calvin’s work to Luther for fear of eliciting a violent reaction. For his pains to express the truth clearly, Calvin incurred the hatred and reproach of the radical Lutherans after Luther died.

Until the Lutherans became impossible to deal with, Calvin encouraged the French not to write their own creed, but to be satisfied with the confessions of the nearby Lutherans—for the sake of unity. Calvin and the Genevan ministers counseled the believers driven out of England into the continent to worship with the Lutherans of the country where they settled. Even significant differences over wor-

ship must not be reason for division. They wrote:

But in your capacity of private individuals, not only may you lawfully, but what is more, you should support and suffer such abuses as it is not in your power to correct. We do not hold lighted candles in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper nor figured bread to be such indifferent things, that we would willingly consent to their introduction, or approve of them, though we object not to accommodate ourselves to the use of them, where they have been already established, when we have no authority to oppose them....

A significant ground for this advice is the unity of the church, as the letter demonstrates.

There is not one of us who from spite against a candle or a chalice would consent to separate himself from the body of the church, and so deprive himself of the use of the sacrament. We must take care not to scandalize those who are still held in such infirmities, which we should certainly do by rejecting them upon inadequate grounds.

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2008, p. 196.

Luther and Calvin were illustrious proponents of church unity. But hardly were they alone. Virtually every reformer pursued unity among the churches. They preached, wrote treatises and books, attended conferences, and crossed land and sea to teach in foreign seminaries and universities for the sake of spreading the truth, the basis of unity. They wrote thousands upon thousands of letters to encourage, instruct, and counsel fellow believers and ministers, and in this way promoted unity in churches all over Europe.

Two powerful expressions of this desire for unity among the churches of the Reformation come to light in an exchange between John Calvin and Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury in the Church of England. In March of 1552, Cranmer wrote to Calvin with a proposal that he was making also to Bullinger in Zurich and Melanchthon in Wittenberg—a conference. Cranmer writes:

As nothing tends more injuriously to the separation of the Churches than heresies and disputes respecting the doctrines of religion, so nothing tends more effectually to unite the Churches of God, and more powerfully to defend the fold of Christ than the pure teaching of the Gospel and harmony of doctrine. Wherefore I have often wished, and still continue to do so, that learned and godly men, who are eminent for erudition and judgment, might meet together, and, comparing their respective opinions, might handle all the heads of ecclesiastical doctrine, and hand down to posterity, under the weight of their authority some work not only upon the subjects themselves, but upon the forms of expressing them. Our adversaries are now holding their councils at Trent, for the establishment of their errors; and shall we neglect to call together a godly synod, for the refutation of error, and for restoring and propagating the truth?

Calvin gives his wholehearted endorsement to the concept, writing:

Your opinion, most distinguished sir, is indeed just and wise, that in the present disordered condition of the Church, no remedy can be devised more suitable than if a general meeting were held of the devout and the prudent, of those properly exercised in the school of God, and of those who are confessedly at one on the doctrine of holiness.

He expresses dismay at the attacks of Satan against the truth. He also decries the disunity of the church, ascribing much of it to the sinfulness of the leaders. He writes:

This other thing also is to be ranked among the chief evils of our time, viz., that the Churches are so divided, that human fellowship is scarcely now in any repute amongst us, far less that Christian intercourse which all make a profession of, but few sincerely practice. If men of learning conduct themselves with more reserve than is seemly, the very heaviest blame attaches to the leaders themselves, who, either engrossed in their own sinful pursuits, are indifferent to the safety and entire piety of the Church, or who, individually satisfied with their own private peace, have no regard for others.

And the result, writes Calvin, “is that the members of the Church being severed, the body lies bleeding.” Calvin expresses his deep, personal desire for unity. “So much does this concern me, that, could I be of any service, I would not grudge to cross even ten seas, if need were, on account of it.”

This is the heritage of every Reformed and Presbyterian church. Every believer who will be faithful to the Reformation will seek the unity of the one church of Jesus Christ.

And yet disunity prevails among the churches of the Reformation.

In spite of all the prayers for unity, in spite of the devoted activity of such giants as Luther, Calvin, and the host of notable theologians of the Reformation era, in spite of untold effort in the last 400 years, the church remains divided. If Calvin saw the church as a bleeding body with members “being severed,” today one can scarcely see a body, so scattered and divided is the church. There is no need to document this obvious reality.

But, why this division?

From the viewpoint of the creature, the cause is sin. Sins of men, plots of Satan, pride, heresy, party spirit, rejection of the Bible, all contribute to this resulting disharmony.

And yet there is another reason, one that every Reformed believer will confess, namely, God has so willed it. Acknowledging that God is omnipotent and knowing that His counsel is both complete and sovereign, we can only conclude that God planned that the church on earth be divided.

History demonstrates God’s determinative will. God determined division in the church in the Old Testament—the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of the ten tribes. God determined that the Western (Europe) and the Eastern (Greek Orthodox) branches would divide in 1054. God planned the Reformation, and the expulsion of Luther. God determined that the Anabaptists would leave the Reformation churches, and that the Lutherans and Swiss Reformed would go their separate ways. The fact that the followers of Calvin would further divide into Reformed and Presbyterian was not outside of God’s plan. And the host of divisions in the last 400 years that resulted in hundreds of different Reformed and Presbyterian churches—all of it is in God’s sovereign counsel.

And may we again ask why? May we reverently inquire into the counsel of God and be so bold as

to ask what purposes God has in these divisions? To a degree, that is, to the degree that Scripture guides us, we may.

First, let us be careful to note that while God sovereignly wills divisions, and is in full control of the factors that cause them, God does not approve of the sin of dividing His church. God determined that Israel would divide into two kingdoms, to be sure. But clearly God disapproved of Jeroboam's rebellion. He disapproved of the ten tribes forsaking the temple and the house of David, which desertion ultimately resulted in the ten tribes being scattered among the nations.

From this history of Israel, we learn some lessons. We learn that God may bring division as a judgment on a church that is not zealous for the truth. When a church no longer loves the truth, she may begin to dally with the lie. God eventually visits that folly upon a careless church, so that she officially adopts heresy. That grievous sin guarantees that such a church will continue to apostatize—she has, in principle, forsaken Christ, the truth of God. She will soon put out of her midst the faithful who call her to repent and return to the truth.

This brings out another purpose of God in church reformation, namely, to preserve His truth in a faithful remnant. Those expelled continue by God's grace to proclaim the truth. Such church reformation has occurred time and again.

History demonstrates that God uses not only reformation, but division to preserve His truth. Luther and Calvin agreed on the doctrines of grace. If the Lutheran churches had continued in the doctrines of Luther, concord should have prevailed between the Reformed churches and the Lutherans. But the Lutheran churches became infected with the disease of synergism—that man can contribute something to his salvation, and God and man cooperate in this work.

God determined that the Lutherans would repudiate Calvin and his doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and that the two churches would go their separate ways—in order to preserve the truth of sovereign grace in the Reformed branch!

Other church divisions are due not to adoption of false doctrine, but to geography and history—also as controlled by God. The divide between Reformed and Presbyterian was not caused by schism. Nor was it true that a church adopted false doctrine, so that faithful believers, repudiating the heresy, left to form a new church. No, both (Presbyterian and Reformed) desired the doctrine developed by John Calvin. Yet their geographic separation (Presbyterians in the British Isles and Reformed on the European continent) and historical circumstances resulted in diverse development—in church government and liturgy, as well as in doctrinal perspective and emphases reflected in different confessions.

Let us appreciate the fact that God wills the very historical and geographical circumstances that bring about the diversity that we see in the church today. This may be illustrated by the differences that exist in and among Christians. Each believer lives out the Christian life in the calling and circumstances in which God places him or her. For example, a mother in the home seeks to fulfill her calling as a Christian, as does a carpenter, and as a Christian schoolteacher. All will develop, in the course of their respective lives, in how best to serve God. They will see implications of their faith and ways to live out their faith in harmony with their calling. In the way of faithfulness, each will become more adept in

living the Christian life in his respective sphere and calling.

That is but one aspect of the differences among believers. Compare those three Christians to three others with the same respective callings, but in a communist land, and consider the implications for their Christian life and development. And then add race to the differences—Chinese, African, or British. Obviously, each Christian will develop, grow, and live out his or her faith differently—each seeking to live in harmony with the Bible.

So also the church. God has determined that the church live in many different lands and cultures. God has determined that His church be composed of Chinese, Russian, Brazilian, Australian, indeed, of every tribe and race. God has determined that the church of the Reformation be


God has determined division for the sake of development, for varied emphasis, and to bring out different aspects of His one, glorious truth.

Reformed and Presbyterian. God has determined division for the sake of development, for varied emphasis, and to bring out different aspects of His one, glorious truth. Such development would not occur if the church were one body

—one race, one denomination—in one land.

The discerning reader will see immediately one of the rich benefits of seeking unity across the lines of race, culture, and church tradition. But that must wait. The point here is: God has determined division for the sake of His truth.

And yet, God delights in His one church, His unified church.

Thus we must return to the Divine demand to seek unity in this diversity. And to do that, we must have firmly in view what is the only basis for unity, namely, the truth of God. Next time. 

Not Anabaptist but Reformed*

By Rev. H. Danhof and Rev. H. Hoeksema

Chapter II. Superficial Judgment and Rash Accusation (2)

[Introduction: In the first half of this chapter, Rev. Danhof and Hoeksema point out that Rev. Van Baalen in his pamphlet (The Denial of Common Grace: Reformed or Anabaptistic?) accuses them of not maintaining both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. They reject the charge and quote from their own writings to substantiate their claim that his charges are incorrect. They now go on to address more of Van Baalen's accusations against them.]

Then on pages 40-42 follows a discussion about the attributes of God, which seeks to prove that we eliminate some of God's attributes that cannot be brought into agreement with others. Thus we supposedly deny the love of God because in God there is also punishing righteousness! Rev. Van Baalen could easily have kept this entire argument in the pen. Nowhere have we ever written what Rev. Van Baalen presents as our view. However, if Rev. Van Baalen wants to show a "double track" here too, and thinks that before our consciousness God's love cannot be in harmony with His punishing righteousness, then we differ with him. Certainly,

God is love. But since He greatly cherishes Himself as the Most High, as the absolute Good, it is necessary to understand that that same love reveals itself as punishing righteousness on all those who turn themselves against Him. There is certainly no conflict or contradiction here. And when, in connection with this, Rev. Van Baalen attributes to us an exegesis of Luke 6:35 that basically says that the goodness of the Lord is no goodness at all, then we ask him where he ever read such an explanation by us? The brother really thinks that we would explain the text like that, but that is simply because he has never taken pains to think through our view.

Concerning our explanation of Hebrews 6:4-8, Rev. Van Baalen remarks that this passage does not apply to our subject. That text speaks about spiritual blessings, about men who have lived very close to grace, about very specific gifts that are given to some men. The writer explains this by using the figure of a field on which rain frequently falls and that produces thorns and thistles under the influence of the rain. According to Rev. Van Baalen, that is not to be applied to the general gifts of nature, but only to those specific blessings that are named there. But Rev. Van Baalen does not tell us why this should not apply to all gifts. The point of agreement is that the natural man in himself does not have access to the blessings of God. In himself he is unclean. And because he is unclean, all gifts then become unclean to him as well.

This applies to those who live the closest to grace and who receive the most generous rain, but also to those who live further from the center. It is a good Reformed notion, already expressed repeatedly by Calvin, and also implied in our confessions, that all things are unclean to the unclean. The natural man certainly receives gifts, many gifts, gifts that in themselves are even good, for they come from God. But for the wicked sinner these never become blessings in the proper sense of the word. God is good. Certainly. He is gracious and merciful and kind. And everything that comes from God is always good. There is absolutely no darkness in Him. But that good God with His good gifts is wrath and punishment to the wicked sinner.

And, therefore, Van Baalen's next argument, which is simply borrowed from Dr. Kuyper, does not hold good either. In short, it comes down to this, that whoever denies general grace denies one of two things: Either he must deny the total depravity of man, or he must deny that man is by nature still capable of "some civic righteousness." Thus says Dr. Kuyper, and thus says Van Baalen after him. Now neither of these is true, and Rev. Van Baalen cannot think of any other possibility either. That is perfectly clear. But this does not prove that there is not a third possibility, which is truly in harmony with Scripture and the confessions. And we present that possibility.

We certainly deny that the unregenerate does any good before God. "Incapable of doing any

* Not Anabaptist, but Reformed was a pamphlet written by Danhof and Hoeksema in 1923 as a "Provisional Response to Rev. Jan Karel Van Baalen Concerning the Denial of Common Grace." Translated here from the Dutch by seminarian Daniel Holstege.

Previous article in this series: January 1, 2008, p. 155.

good, and inclined to all wickedness" is the description that our confession gives concerning the natural man. You certainly cannot say it stronger than our Heidelberg:

Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness? Indeed we are, except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.

I know Rev. Van Baalen thinks ill of us that we maintain this position. He says that we must come to one of two evils. The one evil is that we "maintain the position that natural man can perform absolutely no good whatever." He thinks that Pharaoh's daughter performed a good deed (good in the sense that she did something good before God, so that her deed could be reckoned to her as good) when she drew a beautiful child out of the water, even though she surely did not care about the many other children who perished in the Nile. Well then, Rev. Van Baalen, we indeed maintain with our Catechism the position that natural man can do absolutely no good whatever unless he is regenerated by the Spirit of God. You are accountable for your departure from this.

And our Catechism is not alone in expressing it like that. The rest of our confessions are in complete agreement on this point. Thus we read in Article 24 of the Belgic Confession:

Therefore it is so far from being true that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that, on the contrary, without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation.

Now if you want to say that this self-love, which is also in Pharaoh's daughter, is good, you are accountable for that. We call it sin. In Article 14 of the Belgic Confession, we read:

And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he hath lost all his excellent gifts which he had received from God, and retained only a few remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient to leave man without excuse; for all the light which is in us is changed into darkness.

That is according to Scripture. It does not say that the few remains are sufficient to attain unto the good that is also good before God. Rather, the few remains leave him without excuse, as he consciously and willingly and at all times performs sin and wickedness with those remains. Likewise is it in the Canons or Five Articles against the Remonstrants. Notice Head IV.4:

There remain, however, in man since the fall the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion, *that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.*

You see, brother, that is Reformed language. And God's Word has the same language.

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:5-8).

And again:

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one (Rom. 3:10-12). For whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23).

Now it is quite clear, Rev. Van Baalen, that you do not do justice to this view of Scripture and the confessions. You might want to change that a bit. It is your view that by nature man is so corrupt that he is wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all wickedness, but that the corrupt nature by God's common grace once again becomes capable of doing positive good. And we profess with all boldness that exactly this last part is neither according to the confessions nor according to Scripture. It is exactly this view that closes its eyes to Scripture; that first looks around in the world and then allows itself to be tempted, by the apparent good of the world, to say that natural man still indeed does good. You did not draw this out of God's Word, since Scripture and the confessions do not speak about man in the abstract, that is, about man who would be corrupt if God's general grace did not make him somewhat capable of doing good; but rather, they describe man as he really is, as he lives and functions in this world. And, therefore, our view is not opposed to Scripture and the confessions, but yours is.

Do we say, then, that natural man has not retained any of his gifts? Absolutely not. We want to emphasize that. Without those natural gifts man would not be able to sin or even continue as a creature that is accountable before God. But we insist that with those gifts he can never will anything other than wickedness before God and that in various ways he completely pollutes them and holds them under in unrighteousness, even in

natural things. That is the language of our confessions.

Is it perhaps our view that sin already reveals itself in all its entirety in the world? That is not true either. We understand perfectly well that sin has not yet come to its full maturity. But we do not explain this by a certain restrain-

ing work of God, of which there is never any mention either in Scripture or in the confessions; but simply from the organic development of things. And that is our good right. Rev. Van Baalen may differ from us here and attempt to show that our view does not hold good, but he has no right to accuse us of being un-Reformed in any respect.

Therefore let this chapter be concluded with the assertion that, as it seems to us, we have in the foregoing supported with all necessary proofs the fact that Rev. Van Baalen has wrongly judged and has rashly accused us. He will surely want to acknowledge this himself.



When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

Keep the Body Under

High Standard of Life

You are mistaken, when you seek the seat of indwelling sin in your *body*, and when you brand your *flesh* as the malefactor upon whose head comes down all guilt.

He who says this, directly contradicts Jesus' saying that, not from the *flesh*, but from the *heart*, proceed all sorts of evil things, because from the heart are the issues of life.

Laying all guilt upon the flesh is an invention of Satan, who himself is nothing but a *spirit*, who does not have a body, and therefore, in case sin dwells *merely* in the flesh, goes out free. Such also is the cherished opinion of those who suffer from all sorts of pride and those who have been hit by the arrow of envy and hatred, because their sin hides within the *spiritual* domain, and when the *flesh* is made the scapegoat, there is no fault in them.

But let not the more sensually

disposed natures deem that therefore sin lies in the spirit only, and that, in the weighing of sin, our *flesh*, i.e., our *body*, really has no count. For this would be an equally strong denial of another word of Jesus, when He said: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). Or also against what Paul says: "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom. 7:25).

As Paul writes (Gal. 5:17): "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these two are contrary the one to the other."

And so also: "They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the *flesh*; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5).

For this reason it is your Christian duty to recognize your flesh, your body, to be an enemy, whom you must fight. A power that struggles with you, to see which is the stronger. But a power which, as child of God, you can, must, and shall overcome.

So the holy apostle presents the case.

He compares life here on earth with the sport-life of his time, or, more accurately, he thinks of the Isthmian games, which used to be

played in close proximity to Corinth.

At these games Paul had seen how a bad wrestler struck out with the fist toward his opponent but did not hit him, and thus beat the air. But also how a good wrestler hit his opponent, overcame him, and got him under the knee, and now dragged him along as his prey.

And so, says Paul, I wrestle with my body.

I wrestle with my body, not by way of a game-fight. When I attack my body, I strike not amiss, not as beating the air, but with effect. And the outcome is that I have my body under me, that I am master over my flesh, and as conqueror freely dispose of my body.

I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me.



How is this to be understood?

As man you exist after soul and body; but these two are not equal. For, when soul and body are torn apart in death, the soul continues to exist apart from the body and to live and to enjoy, but the body without the soul is a corpse.

So your *ego*, your person, does not throne in your body, but in your soul. Thus your body is nothing but an instrument which God gave to your soul, through which

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to reveal itself and to have fellowship with the visible world and with your fellowmen.

No sooner is the working of your soul upon your body broken, than life about you falls away from you.

You see this in part already in sleep. Stronger still when one is chloroformed, and his leg can be amputated without his knowing it. Also when one faints, and has no knowledge of himself.

Thus to this extent your soul is bound to your body and is dependent on it.

Suppose one wants to commit sin, what sin is there that he can carry out and perfect without the help of his body?

Surely, in his spiritual thought he can sin before God, without anyone knowing anything of it, and the dreadful struggle between our *ego* and our God, which must end in the total denial of our most deeply hidden *self*, takes place altogether in the soul.

But apart from this one principle sin, what sin is there that does not touch the body?

When unholy passions rise in you, thirst after money and pleasure, anger against the brother, and what not else, even all these hidden sins are unthinkable apart from the body. Or is it not through the body that impure desires come into your mind? Through the body that you learn to know money and pleasure? And also through the body that you know what another does to work you harm?

Also of sin that does not express itself in outward act it must be confessed that, the one sin of our *ego* against God excepted, it were unthinkable in us if the body were not there.



But far greater still becomes the significance of the body as soon as it comes to *outgoing* sin, which refuses to remain hidden in the heart, but wants to go out, wills to reveal itself and to carry out and perfect the premeditated wrong.

Then it must be confessed in the severest and most literal sense that there is no one single sin which can express itself in action outwardly otherwise than through the gate of your body from your heart.

When one is chloroformed, while the effect lasts, no one sin can be committed by him. And when one is in a faint, it is equally impossible.

But when the body is awake and active, so that the senses perceive, and the soul through our nerves has our body at its disposal, the gate is open, and sin rides out.

You are mistaken, when with sin you think merely of voluptuousness, drunkenness, and debauchery.

He who is angry exhibits his sin equally by means of the flesh. He shows it by the look of his *eye*, by the features of his *face*, by the language that passes his *lips*, by the serpent-hiss that goes out from his *throat*, sometimes also by scornful or menacing gesticulations with *finger* or *hand*.

Passion equally shows itself through the body. You see the *veins* swell, the color become *red*, the *whole body* come into action, evil words go out of the *mouth*, and sometimes the *hand* or *fist* is lifted.

Backbiting and slander, written or told, are unthinkable apart from the body.

Heaviness, laziness, dilatoriness, wasting of time—it all depends upon the question whether you govern your body or your body you.

Self-conceit, vanity, desire to shine, pride, self-exaltation cannot exhibit themselves except by the carriage of the body, by the way in which you dress, show yourself, and treat others by words or motions.

And so along, you can literally name no single sin, but, for outward action, always needs the body.

Without the flesh, sin can be active in your bosom, but cannot reveal itself.



But as it is with sin, it is also with your holier sense.

Whatever good and holy tendencies may waken in you, whatever lowly sense of humility may fill your heart, whatever urge of love may speak in you, of this also there is no revelation possible save *through your body*.

Without your body there is no fellowship of saints in the earth. Without your body no single utterance or exhibition of love in look, in word, or in deed. Without your body no single revelation of the life that grace poured out in you. Though there be light in you, it cannot shine out but through the windows of your body. What does not shine out through them remains hidden.

For consider well, without your body you can hear nothing, read nothing, say nothing, show nothing by look or face, and can absolutely do nothing outwardly.

When in the future day of the Lord you will have your *glorified* body, all this will present no difficulty, because your body, as it shall then be, will altogether be disposed to this outshining of spiritual light.

When in Paradise God created Adam, this cost Adam no trouble, because then too the balance was perfect.

But now this is not so.

Now your body is no more in this pure condition that with equal readiness it gives sin and holiness a passage through and out.

On the contrary, now your body gives sin an easy passage through, while all too frequently you must do violence to your body to effect a through passage to an utterance of higher life.



The struggle born from this is very bitter and long.

For, of course, by nature your body is still corrupt and thus subject to all sorts of weakness. Thereby the body acquired certain habits of its own. From the body a certain action begins to go out

upon the soul. And you meet with resistance every time you attempt to use your body for something holy and of God.

The question is whether you oppose this, or whether you give in to the flesh.

In either case, there is always a struggle, and the question is, who overcomes in the same, whether you yield to your body, or your body to you.


Paul truly complains: "O wretched man that I am, who shall

deliver me from the body of this death"? (Rom. 7:24). But this same Paul glories nevertheless: "I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection" (I Cor. 9:27).

This does not mean, of course, that Paul *always*, and always *altogether*, overcame. Wounds he too incurred with it. Marks of his struggle the apostle of the Lord also bore.

But it does mean that he did not give up the battle. That in the struggle he gradually gained

ground. And that by grace it was given him that his body did not always run away with him, but that he ruled his body as a rider his unwilling horse, which then indeed offers resistance and opposition, and sometimes makes a false motion, sometimes even throws him from his back, but without the rider giving in.

In the end it is always the child of God that is master, and, because he continues such, triumphs. 

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

The Unknown Day

We know many things concerning the final day of world history. We know that such a day is certainly coming. We know from the precursory signs that that day is getting nearer and approaching rapidly. We know that great events will take place on that day—such as the final destruction of all things, the return of the Son of Man, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment when every man, woman, and child will stand before God the righteous Judge and then be sent either to heaven or hell. But there is one thing we do not know, and that is when exactly that last day will be.

Sometimes we ask questions of each other concerning the timing of that day. "How far off do you think Christ's return is? Do you think it is just a matter of a few decades, or even a few years? Is it likely to come during our lifetime? Will Christ perhaps return in 2008?"

The Word of God has an answer to these questions. The answer is, There is no answer! The day is unknown! No one on earth knows or can know or ever will know! Jesus said, "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32).

God Himself knows, of course. There is no uncertainty in His mind concerning it. He is not sitting around waiting to decide when to bring all things to an end. He is not watching this world to see how bad things get so that one day He will say, "That's it! I've had enough! Now I'll destroy it all!" Rather, He has set the day in His counsel. He has determined the specific time, down to the exact second, when the Lord Jesus will return in great power and glory. And nothing can change that. Nothing will make it happen sooner, and nothing will delay it.

But God is the only one who knows. He has not told anyone else. He has kept it a secret. For all mankind, that day is and will always be, until it arrives, an unknown day.



It is striking to learn from Scripture that not only men on earth do not know when this day will be, but also the angels of heaven are ignorant of it.

This is surprising, for the angels are God's ministering spirits. They are His servants who do His will. And in doing His will, they play a vital role with regard to the end. All of their work is done with a view to the return of Christ. They are busy in that one great work of the Son of God of gathering, defending, and preserving His church. They are directly involved in the work that, when it is finished, will mean the end has arrived.

In light of this we might be inclined to say, "The angels would be the most likely of all creatures to know. It would even seem necessary for them to know. So, surely they do. Surely God has told them!"

But He has not. Not even the angels of heaven know when Christ is coming again.

Even more striking is that the Son of Man did not know the day

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.

when He would come again. This is puzzling, for the Son of Man was also the Son of God.

What we must understand is that when He said this, Jesus spoke regarding His humanity. He was stating that as a man, in His present earthly position as a human, He did not know the day or hour of the end. And the reason for this was that He knew and spoke only the things that the Father had revealed to Him (John 8:26). This was something His Father had not told Him.

Jesus knows now when that day will be. He now sits at God's right hand. He executes the counsel of God and brings about all things with a view to the coming of that final day. But He did not know as a man, in His state of humiliation, when He would return.

All of this shows how foolish man is to imagine that he can know when the end will be. There are many who claim to know (e.g., Harold Camping). They make complex calculations. They boast of divine revelations. They come with specific predictions (October 20, 2011 according to Camping). But if the angels of God do not know, and if even the Son of Man while on earth did not know, it ought to be abundantly clear that no one else can know.

How proud man is to think that he can know something that not even the angels know. How proud man is to think that God would reveal to him something that He did not even reveal to the Son of Man. And how foolish. One thing is certain regarding all man's calculations and predictions—they are wrong! The unknown day will remain an unknown day until the end of time.



Because God has not told anyone, the return of the Lord Jesus is going to be unexpected. It will take people by surprise.

After making His statement concerning the unknown day,

Christ pointed out (in Matthew 24:37-39) that His second coming will be similar to the coming of the flood. The flood took some (namely, the ungodly) by total surprise. The reason was not ignorance, for Noah had preached to and warned them for 120 years. The reason was that they despised and rejected the gospel he preached. They did not want it to interfere with their pleasure and sin-filled lives. Therefore the day came suddenly upon them, while they were busy eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. It was too late for them to repent. The judgment of God swept them all away to an untimely death, and ultimately to the fires of hell.

That is how it will be when God's clock of world history ticks over to its last second.

When Christ returns, the world will be busy eating and drinking and making merry. The ungodly will be satisfying their flesh through gluttony and drunkenness. The world will also be busy marrying and giving in marriage. That is, the ungodly will be busy satisfying their sexual lusts and appetites (and doing so, as they do already, without bothering anymore with marriage).

This will be man's approach because he has the idea that this is what life is all about. Those who are without Christ live for a utopia of pleasure on earth. "Let us eat and drink and be merry while we have the chance! Let us enjoy every possible earthly pleasure as much as we can before we die!" And so they party without restraint. They indulge themselves in promiscuity. They seek pleasure without any thought to the fact that their judgment is coming.

The ungodly will pursue every earthly lust and pleasure right up to the day of the end. For them the unknown day will come unexpectedly and as a total surprise.



There is always the danger that the people of God are taken by surprise as well. Because of our sinful flesh, we too like to live our lives as though this life is all there is—eating and drinking and making merry. When that happens, we are not ready for the end. Then it could come upon us when we least expect it.

This is the very reason why God has not told us the day or hour when Christ will return. This may seem strange. We might think we would be more prepared if we knew the day. But the fact is, it is better for us that we not know.

If we knew the exact day and hour we would put off being ready. Because of our spiritual laziness we would say, "I can afford to wait with my spiritual life. It doesn't matter if I put that on the back burner for a while. It's good enough for now that I devote just a little time to spiritual things. When the end gets nearer, then I'll give some serious attention to the welfare of my soul. But there's no need to do that yet!"

God, in His wisdom, has kept the day a secret. Because it is unknown to us, we seek (by the grace of God) to be always ready. And when we do, we will be ready, not only for the end of the world, but also, as we must be, for the moment of our death.

To be ready means first of all that we watch for the end to come. We study the Word of God and are familiar with the precursory signs. We then observe carefully what is taking place in this world. These signs are all around us. We hear them clearly and loudly proclaim, "The end is getting near! The final day is certainly coming—and soon!"


To be ready also means that we live in the present in light of the fact that the end is coming. We do not give up living our lives here below and simply wait for the end to come. But we live those lives in a certain way. That is the way of obedience and holiness. We keep

ourselves unspotted from the world. We are busy in the service of our Lord. We faithfully do the work He calls us to in our homes and families, in His church, and in everyday life. If we are busy in all these things, then when Christ returns He will not find us doing what we ought not be doing. He will not find us sinfully fighting with family, or hating other saints, or loving the world, or complaining concerning our lot in life, or stubbornly refusing to repent of a certain sin. He will not have to

ask, "Why, as one of My children, do I find you here? Why have I found you doing this?"

The most important part of readiness, however, is to cling to our Lord Jesus Christ. In reality, there is no other way to be ready. How can we possibly be ready to meet Him if we are without Him? How can we possibly be ready to face Him as Judge if we do not have Him as our Savior? How can we possibly be ready to face eternity apart from Jesus to whom we belong both in life and death, both now and forever?

If we have and belong to Jesus, then we are ready for the end to come. Belonging to Him, we can be fearless with regard to the final judgment. Having Him, the unknown day will not come unexpectedly upon us. Because of Him, the coming of the final day will be most delightful and comforting as the day of our great salvation.

"Now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (I John 2:28). 

Decency and Order

Prof. Ronald Cammenga

Suspension and Deposition of Officebearers (2)

"When ministers of the divine Word, elders, or deacons have committed any public, gross sin which is a disgrace to the church or worthy of punishment by the authorities, the elders and deacons shall immediately, by preceding sentence of the consistory thereof and of the nearest Church, be suspended or expelled from their office, but the ministers shall only be suspended. Whether these shall be entirely deposed from office shall be subject to the judgment of the classis, with the advice of the delegates of the synod mentioned in Article 11."

Church Order, Article 79.

Introduction

In our last article, we began our treatment of Article 79 of the Church Order. It is this article that treats suspension and deposition of officebearers. We considered the kinds of sins that warrant suspension and deposition, as well as the fundamental biblical principles that undergird the responsibility of the congregation to remove from office men who have

committed public, gross sin. The sanctity of the special offices, the welfare of the congregation, and the glory of the name of God require the removal of those who have shown themselves to be unfit representatives of Christ in the church.

It remains for us to consider the proper procedure by which suspension and deposition is to take place. This procedure is spelled out in Article 79. What is this procedure? And how is the procedure different in the case of elders and deacons, on the one hand, and ministers, on the other hand? What is this difference and what accounts for the difference? In this article, we will consider the proper procedure that a consistory is to follow

in the case of the suspension and deposition of elders or deacons. Next time, the Lord willing, we will treat the procedure to be followed by a consistory that is faced with the sad calling to suspend and depose its minister. Then we hope to conclude our study of Article 79 by considering whether the broader assemblies may depose officebearers, a controversial issue in the history of the Reformed churches, as well as in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The Decision of the Consistory

Article 79 specifies that in the case of elders and deacons who have committed public, gross sin, they "...shall immediately, by pre-

Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

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ceding sentence of the consistory thereof and of the nearest Church, be suspended or expelled from their office." Suspension and deposition of elders and deacons takes place by a decision of the local consistory, along with the concurrence of the consistory of the neighboring congregation.

Article 79 calls for suspension and deposition to begin "by preceding sentence of the consistory" of the congregation in which the elder or deacon holds his office. Discipline of every sort belongs to the calling of the local congregation. It has called and ordained the man into his office. His office resides in the local congregation. He is under the supervision of that consistory. Any discipline, including the discipline of officebearers, must begin at the local level. The keys of the kingdom have been entrusted to the local congregation.

Article 79 speaks of the "sentence of the consistory." Throughout the Church Order, "consistory" refers to the elders of the local congregation. Article 79, therefore, calls for suspension and deposition to begin by a decision of the elders. It is noteworthy, however, that in all the other articles in the Church Order that deal with officebearers, not only the elders, but also the deacons are involved. The nomination and election of candidates for the ministry, according to Article 4, includes "the consistory and the deacons." Article 5 regulates the calling of ministers already in office. They are to be called "by the consistory and the deacons." For this reason, both the elders and the deacons sign the call letter that is issued to a minister. A minister may accept a call to another congregation, according to Article 10, only after he has received the approval "of the consistory, together with the deacons." Articles 22 and 24 of the Church Order regulate the nomination and election of elders and deacons. Elder and deacons are to be chosen "by the judgment of the

consistory and the deacons." All the articles in the Church Order that deal with the offices in the local congregation, with the exception of Article 79, specify the involvement of both the elders and deacons. This is a significant aspect of the parity of the offices in the church, and an important part of the mutual supervision exercised by the officebearers. Consistency with the other articles of the Church Order would indicate that the deacons should be included in any decision to suspend and depose one of their fellow officebearers. Just as they were involved in the man's being put into office, so they should be involved in his removal from office.

This inconsistency has been addressed by the Canadian Reformed Churches, who have added the deacons to the consistory in the article in their Church Order that deals with suspension and deposition.

When ministers, elders or deacons have committed a public or otherwise grievous sin, or refuse to heed the admonitions by the consistory with the deacons, they shall be suspended from office by the judgment of their own consistory *with the deacons* and of the consistory *with the deacons* of the neighbouring Church. (Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Article 71. Italics added, R.L.C.)

Our churches ought to consider adding the deacons to the stipulations of Article 79, thus bringing the article in line with the other articles relating to the offices in our Church Order.

Concurrence of the Neighboring Consistory

Article 79 requires that a neighboring consistory concur in a consistory's decision to suspend and depose one of its elders or deacons: "...by preceding sentence of the consistory thereof and of the nearest Church...." So serious is deposition from office that the Reformed churches have deemed it

wise to do this only in consultation with another consistory. "In the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14b). It is wise that a third party consider the facts of the case and render an objective judgment. But this involvement of the neighboring consistory also honors the federative union. The congregation that is faced with the responsibility of deposing an officebearer does not stand alone. There is not only mutual oversight of the officebearers within the congregation, but there is also mutual oversight of the officebearers within the denomination. This is an important aspect of the unity of the church. If the broader assemblies must give their concurrence in the discipline of the ordinary members of the church, how much more ought they to be involved in the discipline of officebearers, at the very least the concurrence of the neighboring consistory. As we will see in the case of ministers, the Church Order requires not only the concurrence of the neighboring consistory, but also the concurrence of the classis and the delegates *ad examina* of the synod.

The neighboring consistory that is consulted should be a neighboring consistory *within the same classis*. Because classical boundaries are at times a bit arbitrarily drawn, it is possible that a congregation's nearest neighbor resides in a different classis. The neighboring consistory that is consulted in compliance with Article 79, ought to be in the same classis. The main reason for this is that any disagreement between the two consistories must be brought to the classis for adjudication. If they reside in different classes, this might unnecessarily complicate matters. Also, all protests and appeals that might arise out of the suspension and deposition would be considered first by the classis to which the congregation of the suspended and deposed officebearer belongs. The consistories involved in the suspension and deposition ought,

therefore, to be members of the same classis.

Article 79 specifies the “sentence” or judgment of the neighboring consistory. The neighboring consistory, in other words, must concur with the decision of a consistory to proceed to suspension and deposition of an elder or deacon. The consistory of the congregation within which the elder or deacon holds office must first make a definite decision with grounds to suspend and depose. It must not ask the neighboring consistory whether or not it should proceed with suspension and deposition. The neighboring consistory must be asked to concur with the decision that has already been taken to suspend and depose. That decision, with its grounds, must then be considered by the neighboring consistory. That decision, the neighboring consistory must either concur with or disapprove.

Article 79 requires a joint meeting of the two consistories. At this meeting, all the facts of the case must be laid out before the neighboring consistory. Answers must be given to any questions that they may have. After having all the facts of the case laid out before them, the neighboring consistory ought to meet on its own in order to vote on concurrence with the decision to suspend and depose. Such a decision ought to be preceded by a good discussion of the grounds for suspension and deposition laid down in Articles 79 and 80? Is the sin the kind of sin that calls for suspension and deposition, and is the man guilty of the sin with which he is charged? If the neighboring consistory does not concur, so that there is disagreement between the two consistories, the matter must be brought to the classis for disposition. In the event that the neighboring consistory does not concur, a consistory may not consult another neighboring consistory in an effort to obtain concurrence with its decision. One neighboring consistory is to be consulted, and any

disagreement between the two consistories ought to be resolved by the classis, if need be at a special meeting of the classis.


Varia

What if the officebearer indicates that he intends to protest his suspension from office? In that case, the consistory ought ordinarily to wait to implement his final deposition from office. During the process of protest and appeal, he must continue to be suspended from office, that is, he must be deprived of the right to exercise the functions of the office. But only after the broader assemblies have adjudicated the whole matter should the local consistory finally depose the man from office, stripping him of the office itself. This would ordinarily be the best procedure. Nevertheless, the particular circumstances of the case do enter in. It may be that the sins of which the officebearer has made himself guilty are so grievous that the consistory judges that it cannot wait, but for the spiritual welfare of the congregation and the glory of God’s name must proceed to the officebearer’s deposition. Each consistory must consider the wisest course of action, given the exigencies of the particular case.

Once an officebearer has been deposed, his deposition must be announced to the congregation. This ought not to be an announcement placed in the bulletin, but read to the congregation from the pulpit. The announcement should be made and approved by the consistory. The announcement should be brief, but should inform the congregation both of the fact of the officebearer’s deposition, as well as the grounds for his deposition. The officebearer whose deposition is to be announced to the congregation should be made aware of the announcement that the consistory has approved to be made to the congregation. Although the consistory does not need his approval of the announcement, it is wise that he be

made aware of the announcement and the consistory be assured that he has no valid objection to the specific wording of the announcement.

What if a man attempts to resign from office? May a man be permitted to resign from office once a consistory has begun deposition proceedings, or even before the consistory has formally begun such proceedings because it has not yet had the opportunity to act? Ought the consistory to receive an officebearer’s resignation and thus halt deposition proceedings? A man may not be permitted to resign from office in order to avoid deposition proceedings. If he requests resignation, it must be denied on the very grounds that he has made himself worthy of suspension and deposition. Resignation from office may be granted in circumstances in which one is unable to carry out the duties of the office, not when he has made himself unfit for office.

What if the man withdraws his membership from the church? Ought the consistory nevertheless to proceed with his deposition? In this case, the deposition proceedings ought to be halted. Only those who are members of the congregation can be the objects of discipline. A man who renounces his membership in the church in order to avoid deposition aggravates his sin. But in this case, a consistory has no choice but to suspend such proceedings. Even then, the man must be warned against the aggravation of his sin, and if he persists, although granted his membership papers, an appropriate announcement ought to be made to the congregation informing them that at the time that he made request for his membership papers the consistory had begun deposition proceedings against him. And, of course, such ought also to be noted on the man’s membership papers, so that any consistory to which he might apply for membership would be apprised of the situation when he withdrew his membership. 

Purity

Satan has targeted you to lead you away from a life of purity. Through the wicked world, Satan entices you to write your own rules for how you will live your life. His lie to you is, "Follow the lusts of your heart. Eat the forbidden fruit. Do what you want to do whenever, wherever, however, and with whomever you want. If you do this, you will find happiness. God is not interested in your happiness. Do what makes you happy." Satan deceitfully leaves out the devastation and spiritual scars that result from such choices.

God assures you of His powerful grace to overcome these attacks of Satan: "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). God's grace is a power that transforms the lives of His people. My prayer is that God's grace is a power in your life, giving strength to live in purity. To live in purity, we must understand what purity is. In future articles we will examine other aspects of living in purity.

By the work of the Holy Spirit in us, the Holy Scriptures search out the inner recesses of our hearts to show us if we are clinging in any way to sin. This is done in the way of meditating on the Word of God. Scripture calls the child of God to this activity. In Psalm 77:12, Asaph confesses, "I will meditate also of all thy work...." Psalm 1:2 says that the man who delights in the law of the Lord meditates on it "day and night." On a Sunday afternoon and dur-

ing the course of a week, young people, meditate on this Word of God concerning purity. Take some time to write out answers to the thought questions. May God use this to encourage you in the pursuit of purity.



Passage to read and consider:

Matthew 5:8—"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

In this passage, purity is listed as one of the spiritual characteristics that make the citizens of the kingdom beautiful. This characteristic is found in the citizens of the kingdom who are born again by the Spirit of Christ, are renewed in the image of Christ, have received the gift of faith, are washed in the blood of Christ, and are sanctified by the Spirit of Christ. The pure in heart are saved by the grace of God and given the new life of Christ. They are new creatures in Christ. To citizens of the kingdom, Jesus Christ has given the new hearts that are described in Matthew 5:8 as pure.

The word "pure" means "freedom from stain, pollution, or contamination." Purity is cleanness and clearness, to which nothing is added. A bucket of white paint with one drop of black in it is no longer a bucket of pure white paint. A pan of brownies with just a little dog doo-doo baked into it may smell fantastic and look edible, but they are still contaminated. Purity means not contaminated, mixed, or blended with anything else. This fits with how we use the word—we speak of pure gold, pure air, and pure water.

This does not mean that the child of God is sinless on this earth.

In fact, as citizens of the kingdom we are conscious of and burdened by the reality of sin in our own hearts and lives. Purity cannot be a life completely free from sin. It is a single-minded devotion to God. A pure heart is devoted to God in the way of holiness. Purity is a devotion to live the way God calls us to live. It is to live the way God has saved us to live—a life of service and devotion to Him.

Purity involves the whole person. You cannot be half-pure. To be pure is not to be prim and proper outwardly while, within, our desires, motives, and thoughts are full of iniquity. Purity is living our lives in holiness. Such a life requires single-eyed devotion both inwardly and outwardly. We like to put on and take off our devotion like clothes. We want to be devoted to God, but we also want to be devoted to ourselves and to the things of this earth. Outwardly, our devotion can appear so genuine and pious, but inwardly our thoughts and desires are filled with the ways we want to please our flesh. The young person who is pure is living consistently no matter who is around. Our conduct does not change because parents, elders, or pastor is present or might find out what we have done. Purity is a life lived to the glory of God.

Understanding what purity is points us to who defines purity for us. Who is the authority and standard of all purity? Who has decided what purity is? Who can really show us what purity is? God is the authority and standard of purity. This purity is revealed to us through Jesus Christ, who is the pure, totally perfect Son of God.

Rev. Eriks is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Jesus Christ lived a life of purity, revealing the purity and righteousness of God Himself.

This is important to understand for two reasons. First, God in Jesus Christ, not this present sinful world, is the standard of purity. Do not look to the world to define purity. The world under the leadership of Satan cannot be trusted, because Satan is the father of the lie. His lie is that good is evil and evil is good. To learn about purity, don't listen to Satan or the world, but go to the Word of God! Second, knowing the purity of Jesus Christ is important because the only possibility for living this life of purity is found in Jesus Christ. The life of purity is not out of reach for you. It is not hopeless for you. Do not despair and think that such a life is impossible. It is possible by the grace of God. The possibility is not found in you, but in Jesus Christ, who gives to you the living water of the blessings of salvation. He is the One who changes hearts and lives by His sovereign work. Even where you are walking in sin, Jesus Christ is able to change you so that you begin to live this life of purity.

Thought questions:

- 1) What is purity?
- 2) What does it mean that you cannot be "half-pure"?
- 3) Who is the standard for purity?
- 4) What does Psalm 86:11-13 teach about purity?



The life of purity is a holy life free from what taints and contaminates. This life is a consistent life of striving to live to the glory of God in obedience to His Word. A pure life involves every area of life. The word "purity" is often used, especially for young people, in regard to sex. But purity goes far beyond sex. Here are a few areas of the Christian life in which to consider purity.

First, God calls you to purity

in your *relationships*—with your parents, siblings, friends, and co-workers. Purity in these relationships means freedom from lying and deception. Those who are striving for purity do not selfishly use others to benefit themselves. Especially in relationship to authority, purity is freedom from disobedience and rebellion. A life of devotion to God is shown, then, by speaking the truth, loving others by giving yourself selflessly for their good, and obeying those in authority over you.

Second, God calls you to purity in your *schoolwork*. This means no cheating. Do your work to the best of your ability in devotion to God.

Third, when you are involved in *sports and entertainment*, God calls you to purity. If you are involved in athletics, the life of purity means no cheating, no selfishness, and no lying. When you seek entertainment, this means you must be careful what you see and what you hear. What you do must be free from what would contaminate your heart and your mind. Do not think that tasting the filth of the world will not have an effect on you. Would you eat the brownies just out of the oven knowing that just a little dog doo-doo was baked in them? Then why would you contaminate your hearts and minds with the music and movies and filth on the Internet?

Fourth, God demands purity at *work*. This means that at work there should be no gossip, laziness, deception, or disobedience. Instead, the life of purity at work is a life of obeying your employer, being kind to your fellow workers no matter what they do to you, and working hard for the glory of God.

Finally, God calls young people to *sexual purity*. Off limits to you are pre-marital sex, impure thoughts and actions, and pornography. The child of God should not wear suggestive clothing or use suggestive language. God demands that you use your bodies in

a way that is consistent with God's design for your bodies.

Thought questions:

- 1) What are some other areas of purity to consider in your lives?
- 2) Where are you struggling to maintain purity in your life? Why?
- 3) Are you committed to purity in all areas of life, but especially to sexual purity?

If you are struggling to maintain purity in any of these areas, be assured of the grace and mercy of God. Take time to pray, asking God to forgive your sins. Know that there is forgiveness for you in the blood of Jesus Christ. The God who forgives your sins is able to give grace to overcome such impurity in your lives (read Philippians 2:12, 13). Pray daily for grace to overcome impurity in your lives.



Living a life of purity is extremely difficult because Satan through the world entices us to impurity and we are drawn to this because of our sinful natures. Satan is the father of the lie (John 8:44). Satan presents to us in the world the illusion that sin won't harm us, that God does not care about our happiness, or that God is not in control of the circumstances of our lives. Satan bombards you through music, TV, video games, and the Internet with the idea that you will find true and lasting happiness in doing what you want. He wants you to believe that in this media you will find truth and happiness. It looks good! If you dabble in these things, it feels good. Slowly, Satan strives to lead away from the purity of God to the "purity" of the world (which is no purity). What happens is that more and more you do what feels good instead of considering what God calls you to do. Maybe you think for a moment about what dad and mom will say

if they find out, but soon your lust overrules that concern.

Living in purity is difficult because the world says purity is weird. If you are going to live in purity, you are a strange. Sometimes this characterization even comes from others in the church. Living the life of purity means swimming against the sinful currents of this world, which is not pleasing to your flesh. Standing against these currents is hard work. You will be branded as some religious wacko. It is so much easier to go with the flow. But when you go with the flow, you are allowing people rather than God to determine what purity is.

When Satan attacks with the lie, God provides the truth, which is found in His Word. The reality is that God has created and saved you for a purpose. He loves you. He has demonstrated that love by giving His Son to die for your sins. The way to true happiness is know-

ing Him and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Let us look to God for the reality about a life of purity.

Thought questions:

- 1) What makes a life of purity so difficult for you?
- 2) What are some of the fears, questions, or hesitations you face when you consider living this life of purity?




The motivation for living this life of purity is found in Matthew 5:8, which says, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." God blesses the pure in heart. God blesses not because we are pure in heart. His blessing is always a gift of grace that is completely undeserved. This blessing is undeserved because even this purity is a gift of God to His people.

Yet this motivates us. The

great blessing for the pure in heart is that they shall see God. This means that one day you will be in heaven to see the glory and beauty of God revealed in Jesus Christ. You will enjoy covenant fellowship with God forever. In the new heavens and new earth there will be everlasting spiritual joy. Why will this be true? There will be no more sin. You will be perfectly pure. You will serve God in perfection forever.

What this means for you now is that true joy and happiness is found only in the way of purity. In the consciousness that you will see God one day, strive, by the power of God's grace, to live in purity.

Thought questions:

- 1) What will be so wonderful about heaven (read Revelation 21:3-7)?
- 2) Are there other motivations for living in purity? 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. James Laning

Dispensational Eschatology (1)

A Summary of Dispensational Predictions Concerning Future World Events

With this article we move on to the subject of eschatology—the study of the last things. Lord willing, Rev. Key will be going through the subjects that are normally covered in this locus of theology, while I plan to do a more in-depth study

of a few erroneous eschatological systems.

This article marks the beginning of a series of articles on dispensational eschatology. Dispensationalism is an erroneous theological system that promotes the idea that Israel is the earthly people of God and the church is the heavenly people of God, and that God in the immediate future is going to separate these two peoples. Re-

peatedly they stress the imminency of this separation, claiming that current events indicate it could happen at any moment, and that many are going to be left behind and will have to go through the horrible events leading up to Armageddon.

Dispensationalism is extremely popular. A number of movies and many books have been very effective at promoting the movement.

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

So much so that *the* nonfiction bestseller of the 1970s was a popularization of the movement—Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970). Since the mid-1990s, Tim LaHaye's novels in his *Left Behind* series have been read by tens of millions of people, and have been referred to as "the most effective disseminator of dispensationalist ideas ever."¹

What makes these books fascinating to many is that the authors take current world events and claim that these specific events were prophesied in Scripture. Then they proceed to give details about what they say Scripture indicates is going to happen next. Thus many people are attracted to the books the way sinful man has always been attracted to fortune-tellers. And when one adds to this an action-packed plot, as is often found in the novels and movies used to promote the dispensational movement, it is not surprising that they have become a raging success.

A prime example of dispensational prophesying is found in the *New York Times* best seller with the catchy title, *Armageddon, Oil and Terror: What the Bible Says About the Future of America, the Middle East, and the End of Western Civilization*. Written for the most part by Dr. John F. Walvoord, president of Dallas Theological Seminary from 1952 to 1986 and one of the primary architects of contemporary dispensationalism, this work is said to bring to life what the prophets saw so many years ago. War in the Middle East, nuclear technology in the hands of "rogue" states, instability in oil markets, terrorist attacks on United States' soil, new alliances between Russia and the Middle East, and attempts to wipe Israel "off the map," are all said to signal the rapid approach of Armageddon.

Although there may be some differences among dispensationalists on the precise order of events, this book is extremely popular and provides a good summary of cur-

rent dispensational teaching concerning world events. An overview of the predictions of Dr. Walvoord, who is credited with teaching prophecy in a way that everyone can understand, is helpful to get the big picture of what dispensationalism is, and of why it is so popular. The following are some of the main predictions he makes, along with some of the proof texts he uses to support his position. The events are listed roughly in chronological order.

Global terrorism and strife over oil indicate that Western civilization is about to crumble.

The worldwide need for oil leads to a global struggle, centering in the Middle East, which has the largest volume of known oil reserves. The Middle East gradually becomes the political and economic center of what will soon become a world government.

Islamic terrorism rises in response to this, fueled by a hatred for Israel and the West, who are striving to dominate the region. This rapid rise in terrorism indicates that an invasion of Israel is soon going to take place. The imminent danger of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons leads many people to seek a strong, central, worldwide government to preserve peace.

All true believers suddenly disappear when God raptures them into heaven.

Suddenly all the New Testament Christians who have died will be resurrected, and the believers who are still living will be taken up into heaven (I Thess. 4). When this Rapture takes place, the Holy Spirit's influence through the church will be removed from the earth (II Thess. 2:6-7), with the result that evil will progress in the world like never before.

The disappearance of all believers will have a profound effect on the nations of the world, but especially on the United States, which

is said to have a greater percentage of Christians. This sudden large decline in population is expected to be one factor that will lead to the decline of the United States. This decline will be significant, for it will make way for the rise of a new superpower consisting of an alliance of European and Mediterranean nations.

The Roman Empire revives.

Ten leaders, predominantly from Europe, and the nations they represent will form an alliance that will constitute a revival of the Roman Empire (Dan. 7:7, 24). These ten leaders are said to be symbolized by the ten toes in Daniel 2 and the ten horns in Daniel 7. The present European Union is thought to be the forerunner of this future ten-leader group. This "Group of Ten" will control the nations and geographical regions that used to be under the dominion of ancient Rome.

This alliance will be viewed as necessary for the very survival of Western civilization. Disruption of the West's oil supply and the rapid increase in terrorism will so threaten the Western nations, that such an empire will be viewed as necessary to put down the violence, guarantee peace in the Middle East, and secure the flow of oil to the West.

Power is centralized in one leader, who makes a seven-year covenant of peace with Israel.

One of these ten leaders will subdue three of the others, and rise to become the head of the Group of Ten (Dan. 7:8; 9:26). This man is the Antichrist, who will make a seven-year covenant of peace with Israel (Dan. 9:27), in an attempt to settle the Arab-Israeli controversy, bring terrorism under control, and stabilize the world economy. Some

1. Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 15.

speculate that this covenant may involve Israel's returning some conquered territory in exchange for international guarantees that Israel will not be attacked. In any case, this covenant will mark the beginning of a seven-year period that will end with the battle of Armageddon and the bodily return of Christ.

During the first three and a half years of this leader's administration, there will be worldwide peace, while the new leader consolidates his power. During this period of peace the Jewish temple will be reconstructed (Matt. 24:15) and sacrifices will once again be offered (Dan. 9:27; 12:11).

The armies of Russia and her Islamic allies invade Israel and are annihilated by God.

The armies of Gog and Magog mentioned in Ezekiel 38:1-7 are said to refer to an alliance of Russia and a group of Islamic nations, including Libya, Sudan, Turkey, Iran, and the Islamic nations of the former Soviet Union. These nations, which are not part of the Group of Ten, will attack Israel from various directions. Refusing to submit to the Antichrist, and having an extreme hatred for Israel and the West, these nations will invade Israel at a time when she will be at rest, having been lulled into a false sense of security by the peace agreement the Antichrist has made with her (Ezek. 38:11).

These nations will endeavor to take control of Palestine, striving for more land, more wealth, and the destruction of Israel. But by attempting to destroy Israel, they will be cursing God's chosen people. And God, who has promised to curse all those who curse His people, will directly intervene to annihilate the armies of Russia and her Islamic allies. As a result of this divine intervention, God will be sanctified in the eyes of the nations (Ezek. 38:14-16), and many—both Jews and Gentiles—will turn to the Lord (Ezek. 39:22).

More and more Israelites are converted and come to Christ.

During this period multitudes of Jews will be killed, but there will also be many Jews who will be converted to Christ. These Jews, recognizing that prophecy is clearly being fulfilled before their eyes, will come to the startling realization that the Messiah has already come, and that His second coming is near. Thus Christ's words will be fulfilled in which He promised that He would not return until Israel would say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt. 23:39).

The recent return of Israel to Palestine is said to be a precursor of this. Ezekiel's vision of the resurrection of the dry bones is said to have been fulfilled when unbelieving Israel was restored to their ancient homeland. Although Israel remains in unbelief, this return to the promised land is said to have been a physical restoration. The spiritual restoration and conversion to Christ is expected to follow, but not until after this attack by the forces of Gog and Magog (Ezek. 39:22).

The Antichrist breaks his covenant, deifies himself, and declares himself world ruler.

Once the armies of Russia and her allies are defeated, the Antichrist will have no check on his power. Recognizing this, he will break his seven-year covenant with Israel at the halfway point (i.e., after three and a half years), and will declare himself world ruler (Dan. 7:8).

Making use of satanic wonders to prove his deity, he will demand to be worshiped as god (II Thess. 2:4). He will insist on maintaining absolute control over the economy, and will not allow anyone to buy or sell without his permission (Rev. 13:17). The duration of his absolute rule will be three and a half years (Dan. 12:11; Rev. 13:5), which amounts to the second half of the seven-year period mentioned above.

Israel is fiercely attacked by all nations for three and a half years.

No longer protected by the Antichrist's world government, Israel will be fiercely persecuted for this three and a half year period—a period known as the Great Tribulation, or the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7; Matt. 24:21, 22). During this time the Antichrist will invade Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and attempt to exterminate the Jewish people (Dan. 7:25; 8:24; 9:25-26; 11:44; Matt. 24:15; Rev. 13:7). Although he will not reach his goal, he will succeed in killing two thirds of the Israelite population (Zech. 13:8).

Many Jews will flee for safety into the wilderness (Rev. 12:13-17), as they will be hated and persecuted by all nations (Zech. 12:2,3). This will be the culmination of Satan's attempt to destroy Israel, God's earthly people (Rev. 13:4), with the Antichrist attempting to finish what Hitler started.

The Antichrist makes Iraq the new economic center of his world rule.

References to Babylon in Scripture are said to refer to modern Iraq, since Iraq is situated where Babylon once was. Iraq (Babylon) will be rebuilt in the end times (Zech. 5:5-11), and will become a headquarters for the Antichrist (Rev. 17-18).

It will first become the center of a new world religion. The world church, void of true believers after the Rapture, will unite with adherents of other religions to form a powerful religious and political institution that will be centered in Iraq, and will put to death all those who refuse to join with it (Rev. 17:6).

This "superchurch" will align itself with the Antichristian empire. The whore riding the beast, mentioned in Revelation 17, is said to be a symbolic portrayal of this unholy alliance. The Antichrist will make use of this whore during the first half of his reign—the period

in which he will be at peace with Israel. But once he declares himself to be the world ruler, he will destroy this false religious system and replace it with the worship of himself (Rev. 17:16-17).

At that time the Antichrist will set his eastern capital in Iraq (Babylon), where he will be able to control the world's oil reserves. He will remain in control there for a short period, until the sudden, cataclysmic destruction of the city takes place, right before the final coming of Christ (Is. 14:1-7; Rev. 18:9-19; 19:11-21).

China, probably out of a desire for oil, challenges the Antichrist and destroys Iraq.

China will lead a group of eastern nations to invade the Middle East—a movement that will constitute part of the gathering of the nations for the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16). The prophecy of Daniel speaks of a king who battles against forces from the north, south, and east (Dan. 11:35). This king is said to be the Antichrist, and these forces are said to be Russia (north), the Islamic nations (south), and China and his allies (east). These eastern forces will be enormous, consisting of two hundred million troops (Rev. 9:13-16)—an army larger than there has ever been. The massive size of this army, which is referred to in Revelation 9, is said to provide further support for the idea that it is referring to China, and perhaps India, seeing as these are the great population centers of the world.

One third of the world's population will be slaughtered by this massive army (Rev. 9:15, 18), which will invade the Middle East after God miraculously dries up the Euphrates River. When these forces from the Orient succeed in destroying Iraq (Babylon), the Antichrist will retreat to Israel. These eastern armies will then quickly follow, leading to the final great battle between east and west.

Disaster after disaster greatly reduces the world population.

During this last three and a half year period, the seven seal judgments (Rev. 6-8), the seven trumpet judgments (Rev. 8-9), and seven bowl judgments (Rev. 15-16) will be poured out. Through the haze of the destruction, the sun will become black and the moon will become as blood. There will be stars falling from heaven, and drastic changes to the earth's climate. Floods and other weather disasters will wipe out much of the world's food supply. Great famines and epidemics will cause millions to perish (Matt. 24:7; Luke 21:11). As the period draws to a close, there will be great earthquakes and geological upheavals that will cause mountains and islands to fall into the sea. These disasters, along with extreme violence, will result in the earth's population being reduced to only a fraction of what it was before.

The nations come together against Israel at Armageddon for the greatest and final world war.

Russia, although defeated earlier, will be able to put together another army to attack Israel from the north. A great army from Africa, including Egypt, will attack Israel from the south. And China and its allies will attack Israel from the east. These armies, it is maintained, will meet at Mount Megiddo in northern Israel, since the Scriptures say they will meet at Armageddon, and the term Armageddon means Mountain of Megiddo (Rev. 16:16). This location, although too small to contain all these forces, will be the geographic focal point for this last battle.

Although the people will be motivated by a desire for world power, the devil will be working through his demons to assemble the people to attack Christ when He returns (Rev. 16:13-14). Although millions will perish in what will be the greatest war of all his-

tory (Dan. 11), there will also be many Israelites who will be converted to Christ.

Christ returns in the body and destroys the armies attacking Israel.

While this world war is still going on, Christ will descend from heaven, accompanied by His angels and the raptured Christians. Many Israelites will now have been converted to Christ, and will welcome the Messiah whom they have pierced (Zech. 12:10). The rebellious armies that have met at Mount Megiddo will see Christ descending, and will unite together in a vain attempt to fight Him and His heavenly host.

Christ's feet will come to rest on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem, at which moment the mountain will be divided, resulting in a great valley that will stretch into the Jordan Valley. This is one of the ways in which Christ's second coming will drastically change the geography of the earth.

All nations and the Jews are judged by Christ.

Christ will annihilate the multitudes gathered at Mount Megiddo, and then proceed to judge the surviving people one by one. All living Jews will be gathered together. Those who have trusted in Christ will be the first citizens of Christ's new kingdom on earth, and those who have remained in unbelief will be put to death.

The surviving individuals of all nations will be judged in Jerusalem, and those judged will fall into two classes—the sheep and the goats. The sheep, which are the ones who helped Israel when she was persecuted, will be invited to enter Christ's kingdom. To befriend and help a Jew during this time will be irrefutable proof that one has genuine faith in Christ and a correct understanding of the Scriptures. The goats, who showed cruelty to the Jews, will be thrown into everlasting fire.


Israel rules over the nations of the world for a thousand years.

All the believers who have survived will now enter the millennial kingdom of Christ, yet will remain in their mortal bodies. Those believers who died either prior to Pentecost or after the Rapture will now be raised from the dead, and will receive their new, resurrected bodies. These saints in their resurrected bodies will also be present, and will help to administer this new kingdom of Christ on earth.

Thus the earth will be free from unbelievers when the millennial

age begins. But this will not last forever. As the children mature and as new babies are born, each individual will have the opportunity either to rebel or to believe. Thus, as time goes on, the number of unbelievers will grow. Nevertheless, it will still be a thousand-year utopia, in which Israel will reign over all the nations of the world.

This summarizes some of the common dispensational predictions concerning future world events, and is provided as an overview of

current dispensational teaching on eschatology, before proceeding to investigate some of these teachings in more detail. It will also be necessary to consider some of the central ideas that underlie the movement, and some of the main reasons why it has become so popular. While doing this, we will attempt not only to refute the error, but also to set forth the truth over against it, providing explanations of some key passages of Scripture. But enough for this article. We will continue with this study, Lord willing, next time. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

Members of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI were asked to reserve the evening of January 19 for their congregation's Talent Night. Trinity members were encouraged to sign up themselves, or volunteer someone else in the church, to take part in the program. The evening provided an opportunity for good Christian fellowship and for discovering God's gifts and talents in each member who participated.

The Choir of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada spent the evening of January 6 singing for the residents of Emmanuel Home in Edmonton. In addition to providing an hour of spiritual refreshment in song, the choir was also accompanied by their pastor, Rev. John Marcus, who provided a short meditation from God's Word for the residents as well.

As noted in our last "News," Seminarian Heath Bleyenbergh completed his Internship at the Hudsonville, MI PRC on December 31. As a way of saying thanks and

farewell to Mr. Bleyenbergh for his diligent work during his internship, as he brought God's Word from the pulpit, in catechism classes, at Bible Study, and in some homes for the past six months, Hudsonville held a farewell coffee for him after their worship service on New Year's Day.

There was also a note in a recent bulletin of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI from Mr. Bleyenbergh, where he is a member, thanking the congregation for a grocery shower and gift certificates collected on his behalf during the just-completed holiday season.

In keeping with the subject of Seminary Internships, we can also add that the Council of the Hull, IA PRC approved a request from our Seminary to oversee the Internship of Seminarian Cory Griess from July 1 - December 31, 2008. Coincidentally, Seminarian Griess was scheduled to come to Hull for pulpit supply on January 27, when their pastor, Rev. Steven Key, served a classical appointment to Calvary. So the congregation will have an opportunity to meet Mr. Griess at that time, God willing.

The Council of the South Holland, IL PRC approved their Building Committee's recommendation to hire Craig Architects to design

their new church building. The Council also scheduled a special congregational meeting for January 24 to gain congregation approval of this action and expense.

For those of us living in the northern half of North America, it is not unusual to experience weather-related cancellations. This time of year you can almost expect that a Sunday worship service or a midweek catechism class or Bible Study will not meet because of snow or ice. This was the case again on a Monday evening in January in west Michigan when several of our churches cancelled their scheduled meetings—not because of snow or ice, but because of a tornado watch. A tornado, in January, in Michigan? A reminder to us again that God controls everything, weather included (Job 37).

We are also reminded that the warmth of summer is now only a few short months away, when we read in several of our church bulletins that plans are already well under way for church camping at various locations for July and August.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI reported to their congregation

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

that the book entitled *Evangelism in the Established Church* has been completed and published. This book is a compilation of *Standard Bearer* articles written by Rev. Jason Kortering to encourage and assist each of us in our personal witness. So convinced was the Evangelism Committee that this book would be a blessing to each of their congregation's members that they reserved a free copy for each household to read and add to their library.

Sister-Church Activities

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, with his wife, Sharon, and Elder Jim Holstege, left Friday, January 11, for Northern Ireland to visit our sister church, the Covenant PRC of NI on behalf of our denomination's Contact Committee. While there the men were able to meet with Covenant's Consistory for their annual visit.

Rev. Kleyn also preached for Covenant the two Lord's Days they were there, led a midweek Bible Study on Jonah, and gave a lecture in Limerick on "Living Antithetically in a Technological Age." May this trip serve to strengthen our sister-church relationship and encourage Rev. Stewart, the Consistory, and the congregation in all their work.

Young People's/ Young Adult Activities

Members of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC were asked to reserve January 11 for a soup supper hosted by their Young People's Society. After the supper Rev. A. Spriensma, pastor at Kalamazoo, gave a presentation on the work in the Philippine Mission.

The Young Adult Society of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada met at the home of Rev. R.

Smit for Bible Study on January 13. Their after-recess discussion that evening centered in the interesting and no doubt thought-provoking question of attending other denominational services.

Mission Activities

Rev. Rodney Kleyn and Elders Vern Haveman and Harlow Kuiper, from our churches' Domestic Mission Committee, visited our mission field and the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship in Spokane, WA on January 19, 20. Also included in that visit to the west coast was a planned stop in Loveland, CO for a meeting with the Council of the Loveland, CO PRC, the calling church for Spokane, and attending a mission conference at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, CA with our missionaries and seminary students on January 18 and 19.

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude and thanksgiving to God we announce the 45th wedding anniversary on January 24, 2008 of our parents,

GERALD and BONNIE KUIPER.

Their example of a loving marriage and of service to others has been a wonderful blessing and encouragement to us. "O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together" (Psalm 34:3).

- * Jerry and Beth Kuiper –
Jordan, Travis, Kelsey, Levi
- * Doug and Pam Dykstra –
Josh and Justin
- * Jim and Karen Daling –
Nathan, Brandon, Leanna, Jeremy
- * Matt and Tami Kuiper –
Alyssa, Nicole, Ryan
- * Tim Kuiper
- * Andy and Kim Kuiper
- * David and Nichole Kuiper

Hudsonville, Michigan

New Bulletin Clerk:

Hull PRC:
Sue Uittenbogaard
1410 Birch St., Hull IA 51239
(712) 439-2258
csuitten@mtcnet.net

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.com). Please mail resumé directly to the school, at 4900 40th Ave., Hudsonville, MI 49426.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Hudsonville Ladies' society expresses its sympathy to fellow member Barb Dykstra in the death of her mother,

LORRAINE STONER.

May God comfort her with these words from II Corinthians 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Heath Bleyenbergh, Pres.
Donna Boven, Sec'y

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to our heavenly Father, we rejoiced with our parents and grandparents,

GARY and JUDY KAPTEIN,

as they celebrated 40 years of marriage on February 1, 2008. We are thankful for the many covenant blessings that God has given them and pray for His continued faithfulness in the years to come. We have been blessed through the godly example they have given to us. We take joy and are humbled by the words of Psalm 105:8: "He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generation."

- * Mike and Kristy Kaptein
Jordan, Nicole, Alexis, Haley
- * Matt and Cindy Stoel
Luke, Megan, Tyce, Chad
- * Jon and Cheri Rutgers
Rachel, Caleb, Emily, Joel
- * Carl and Cristy Kalsbeek
Mackenzie, Jayden, Troy, William, Jacoba
- * Justin and Cathie Koole

Jenison, Michigan

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Jenison, MI 49428-7137

THE STANDARD BEARER

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CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2008-2009 academic year should make application at the March 20, 2008 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and

a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school (or www.prca.org).

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 20 meeting, notifica-

tion of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

* * * * *

The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 5, 2008, our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents,

**MR. and MRS. MINARD
VAN DEN TOP,**

celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to God for them, and for the blessing God has given them these 60 years. We sincerely appreciate the Christ-centered home and the instruction they gave us. It is to God that we give all the glory. "And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them" (Jeremiah 32:39).

* Jerry and Karen VanDenTop

Terry and Lisa VanDenTop
Mike and Tricia VanDenTop
Brent and Amy VanDenTop
Kevin and Michelle VanDenTop
Dustin and Kara Westra

* John and Judy Bouma

Joel and Sheila Zylstra
Brent and Shari Dommissie
Brent and Shelli Klammer
Jason and Michelle VanderMeulen
Amy

* Duane and Beverly Netten

Les and Gwen VanRoekel
Keith and Nicholas

* Henry and Marlene VanDenTop

Derek and Anna VanDenTop
Abby, Katie, and Chad
27 great grandchildren
1 great grandchild in glory

Doon, Iowa

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

Many on-site activities.
All of Share's facilities
are suitable for guests
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).