

THE *August 2007* STANDARD BEARER

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In This Issue:

- ◆ *Glory in This!* **434**
- ◆ *Supervising Preaching...*
Edifying Congregations (2) **437**
- ◆ *Letters* **439**
- ◆ *All Around Us* **441**
- ◆ *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (2)* **444**
- ◆ *Royal Children: Children of the Word (2)* **446**
- ◆ *Deacons' Relationship to the Consistory (1)* **449**
- ◆ *Cup* **452**
- ◆ *Worship in His Fear (8)* **453**
- ◆ *News From Our Churches* **454**

Volume 83 ◆ Number 19

Glory in This!

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 9:23, 24

God created man with a heart, and a mind, and with the wonderful ability to tell what things lay upon his heart and mind. Man was created with a tongue to glory, to speak long and loud, about what he should see and remember. Man was made with lips to boast of the affections and desires of his heart. By that creation, established in perfection, man saw the world around him. In all its creatures he saw the hand of his Maker. As he saw, so he rejoiced. His joy was to employ his tongue in the glory of his Maker. He gloried in the Lord.

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With the fall into sin, the gift of glorying was not taken from man. Taken from him was his ability to use it rightly, in the service of his Creator. No longer did he glory in the Lord. Now his glorying is contrary to his Creator. Instead of speaking of his Maker, he speaks of himself. He will speak of his possessions. He will declare his attainments and accomplishments.

There are times when men will boast of their wisdom. Ancient civilizations prided themselves in their learned men. Wise men sought to discover the mysteries of the universe around them. They learned of the physical elements. They learned how to use those elements to their advantage. Others sought to discover the mysteries of man, the workings of men's bodies. Still others sought to discover the mysteries of men's minds. Some sought the right way for men to live in harmony with fellow men.

The wisdom of the present day is rather different, but men still glory in their wisdom. Today's wisdom is of technology and science. Men glory not only of knowing the secrets of the universe, but of using that knowledge to improve their condition. Men glory

in the study of the economy and business and in the fruit of that study: wealth unimaginable. They glory in the art of diplomacy and boast that they can end all wars. Men boast in the science of medicine and imagine that they shall one day be able to cure every illness affecting the human race.

How far men have come! How much they have improved themselves! Are they not wise?

That wisdom of men fails. Wars come upon the earth. Businesses and economies tumble and collapse. Diseases still ravage mankind. The wisdom of men is utter folly before the wisdom of God. Before the manifestation of that wisdom of God, the wisdom of men is exposed in all its vanity. It cannot stand the light of God's judgment.

The word of God comes to man: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom."



In times of war men boast of their strength. Heroic deeds are performed on the battlefield. One man sacrifices his life for the sake of his fellow soldiers. Bravery is seen in the actions of one who enters the line of fire to help the

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wounded. Courage is displayed in one who charges toward the enemy against all hope and destroys that enemy. Men of might storm a beach held by an enemy. A multitude dies upon that beach in order that a few might survive to carry out a great assault.

Stories of such feats warm the hearts of a nation that reads and hears of them. Such heroes are widely celebrated and hailed throughout that nation. Their stories are told and retold. What strength, not only of body but also of heart! What dedication to the cause of a nation's survival and triumph!

Yet this might of men ceases. These men become old and weak. Their bodies, once filled with power to do great things, become weak and frail. Their hearts, before filled with courage, tremble before ordinary tasks. A generation soon arises that cannot remember or appreciate those deeds of valor. Nations raised upon the might of such great deeds surely fall as time marches onward. The might of the mighty is forgotten. Such deeds as were celebrated among grandparents are barely remembered, and they are surely forgotten by children and grandchildren.

"Let not the mighty man glory in his might!"



If not the mighty men in their might, then the rich will glory in their riches. The present day is a day of glorying in riches.

What riches there are in which men glory! Men have the riches of their income. They own businesses, stand in management positions, and have six-figure salaries. They have the riches of their possessions. They own large houses, vacation homes, and vast acreage. They have a number of toys, large and powerful. Large vehicles carry status with them. Their RV's are more spacious than the homes of their grandparents. Their vacations are luxurious, exotic, and long.

All these things they love to

talk about: what they shall purchase and what they have. They talk about these things among themselves. Continually they rate themselves by the things they possess. They easily become jealous of those who have more than they, and they strive to catch up and surpass, either in truth or in appearance. They look longingly and lovingly at those whose wealth makes their poverty in comparison. They consider the great estates they see in their towns or neighborhoods and boast of what meets their eye. Set before their eyes are the riches of billionaires, their great estates and the lavishness of their enjoyments. As they boast, it becomes difficult to distinguish whether they are moved more by envy or jealousy or pride. At the same time, they glory in those riches.

The rich man glories in his riches!

Yet, how much trouble comes with those riches! Those possessions fade in the eyes of men as they become greedy for more and better. Their "pride and joy" becomes old and broken-down. The more they accumulate, the more security they need to protect the things they own. Rich men glory in their riches one day, and then weep and howl over their misery the next, their lives broken and ruined. Their riches have not guarded them against their calamities.

"Let not the rich man glory in his riches!"



Wisdom, might, riches. From wisdom, to might, then to riches. Yet, the more things change, the more they stay the same. In whatever men boast, they boast in themselves, their wisdom, their might, their riches. Men boast in their pride. In their hearts they possess themselves, love themselves, seek themselves.

But let them not glory! "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches." Let them

all fall silent. Let the word of pride die upon their lips.



Let another come forward. On his tongue is a different word. He has a tongue to speak. He has something in which to glory. He will speak from his heart of the object of his delight and affection.

This man alone has permission to glory: "Let him that glorieth, glory in this." His glorying has the approval of God. His glorying is righteous and holy. His glorying is in obedience to the Word of God.

He will glory in the Lord! The Lord of glory, who is worthy of all praise and honor. The Lord, who has created all things for the glory of His name. The Lord, who works all things for the glory of His name.

To glory in the Lord is most proper and right. For the Lord has made all things according to His good pleasure, not the pleasure of man. According to His good pleasure He has created all things for His glory. He has created man for His glory. He has created the tongue of man for His glory. Therefore, let man glory in this! Let him glory in the Lord.



What cause is given for glorying in the Lord! The true and living God, worthy of all glory, is a very particular God. He exercises lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.

He exercises lovingkindness. In lovingkindness He looks upon His people. He sees them as they truly are: not wise but foolish, not mighty but weak, not rich but poor. Seeing them in such misery, He does not turn away. Upon them He has tender compassion. But that compassion is more than a mere feeling. He exercises lovingkindness. That lovingkindness of the Lord is mighty to deliver from foolishness, weakness, and poverty.

The Lord also exercises judgment. In great compassion He comes near to His people in judg-

ment. The mighty, just Judge over all delivers them. He takes them to Himself and keeps them safe in His almighty hand. In His care they prosper and flourish. They enjoy the riches of being His people.

The Lord also exercises righteousness. He is the righteous, just Judge. As He sees, so He judges. In perfect justice He condemns and destroys the wicked. In perfect justice He delivers and protects the innocent and righteous.

He delivers us! He protects us! How can this be? How can this just Judge deliver us sinners?

He exercises righteousness. He exercises righteousness, not only to see and know who is righteous, who is worthy of deliverance. He exercises righteousness, not only to deliver and protect the innocent and righteous. But He exercises righteousness also in making them righteous. In His just judgment He declares them righteous, imputing to them a righteousness that is not their own. The righteousness He imputes to them is His very own. He made that righteousness theirs by promise in the Old Testament, the promise of the seed of the woman. He made that righteousness theirs by fulfillment in the gift of His only begotten Son in the fullness of time. He made that righteousness theirs by that Son's fulfillment of all the law and by His mighty death on the cross, a perfect offering for sin. That righteousness He imputes to them, making them righteous.

Lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness the Lord exercises in the earth. This is the Lord we understand. This is the Lord we know.

"Let him that glorieth, glory in this!"



A right and proper glorying is this glorying in the Lord. An obedient glorying is this glorying in the Lord's lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness. For these are the things in which the Lord delights.



But the glorying of this word of holy Scripture is not yet complete. This glorying is richer and deeper! It is not found only in the Lord, to glory in Him and His exercise of lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness. This glorying is also found in us, what is given to us.

"Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me."

Here is the glorying of the covenant. This glorying is never to stand at some distance from God. It is not to behold the exercise of God's lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth from afar. Such glorying is impossible. Rightly to glory is to know that lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the heart and soul. To glory is to possess them as God's gracious gifts, given to the ignorant, helpless, and destitute. To glory is to possess through these wonderful gifts fellowship and friendship with the living God Himself.

"That he understandeth and knoweth me!"

That he understands the Lord is cause for glorying. He looks all around him. He looks around at all the creation, from the stars in the heavens above to the creatures in the earth beneath. There he sees the hand of God. He looks throughout the wonder of redemption and salvation, from regeneration to glorification. He beholds in every aspect of that work of redemption the hand of God. He understands the presence of God. He understands the almighty power of God.

That he also knows the Lord is cause for glorying. Through this understanding of God in all His works of lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, he knows the Lord. He knows his sovereign Lord in fellowship and friendship. His heart grows stronger in seeking the Lord. He is more and more richly blessed in finding the Lord. He delights in the Lord, and knows the delight of the Lord in him.

How can he that glorieth glory in this? How can he glory that he understands and knows the Lord?

Only because that very understanding and knowledge of God is God's gracious gift to him. Not that he first knew God or these works of God. But that God first knew him. God first opened his understanding and illuminated his mind. God exercised His lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth upon this foolish, weak, and poor man. In that exercise, the Lord gave Himself to be understood and known.

Therefore, "Let him that glorieth, glory in this!"



This glorying is our blessing! Our delight is to have this glorying on our tongues, these works of the Lord in our hearts. Upon us He has exercised His lovingkindness, His judgment, and His righteousness. To us He has delighted to show His lovingkindness, delivering us from our foolishness. For us, helpless and lost, He has delighted to work salvation through His mighty judgment. From our sin and death He has delighted to redeem us by the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. These works He is delighted to exercise.

Our delight is to know these works of the Lord in ourselves. Out of that delight we speak, using our tongues aright. We glory in the Lord. We glory that we understand and know the Lord.

"For in these things I delight, saith the Lord." The very works in which He delights are the works in which we delight. His delight is our glorying. What He delights to exercise in the earth we delight to declare in the earth. We show forth with our tongues these wonders of God and we speak of them following after Him.

"Let him that glorieth, glory in this!"

"That he understandeth and knoweth me!" 

Supervising Preaching... Edifying Congregations (2)

In the June 1 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, the editorial held out the admittedly sensitive proposal that minister and elders work together for the improvement of the preaching. In the summer meetings, when consistory agendas may be shorter, the men may take time to discuss calmly the preaching and how the preacher can bring the gospel to the congregation in the most edifying manner.

The goal of these meetings is not to make the preacher popular, but to make his preaching edifying. More edifying. The goal is a well-fed and healthy flock who love their pastor. They love him deeply because, even though he may not mesmerize with his eloquence, he edifies them with his good sermons. Through him they hear Christ, whose Word blesses them.

The editorial showed that the Church Order, the Questions for Church Visitation, and Reformed history call the elders to take an active (not *reactive*) role in the supervision of preaching. Then it presented a procedure for the discussion to take place, and laid out some benefits for the preacher and the congregation—especially the member who may be critical of the preaching.

The editorial concluded by promising to examine what, specifically, the elders should look for in the sermons.

Admittedly sensitive is how I put it earlier. One shrinks from mak-

ing such suggestions. An elder winced a little when I discussed this with him today in the morning shade of my front porch over a cup of coffee. But the Lord will bless the effort when we ministers humbly receive the elders as God-appointed servants, and the elders labor with bold and patient love. Those last four words are essential.



Two of the most fundamental questions the elders ask themselves are: Do the sermons glorify God? And do they edify the saints?

God-glorifying

God's people will be edified when God is glorified. First is God's glory.

A mark of a good sermon is that, by it, the hearts of the people of God are lifted up to praise God. The people of God respond, "How good is our God! He's great and greatly to be praised!" The people of God respond to a good sermon the way they respond to the Lord's Supper: "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.... Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the LORD, all his works

in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul."

Sometimes this mark of a good sermon is brought out with this question: Is the sermon God-centered rather than man-centered?

God-glorifying sermons will make the people of God respond like the church in Revelation 4: "The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Praise to God will proceed from the whole of the believer's being: "All my bones shall say, LORD, who is like unto thee...?" (Ps. 35:10).

Glorifying to *God*, good sermons will not bring glory to the man. This is the preacher's great temptation. He wants the people to like him, speak well of him, praise him. He resists this, by the grace of God. He reminds himself that he is the *friend* of the Bridegroom, and not the Bridegroom Himself. Thus, to call the Bride (the church) to praise him instead of the Bridegroom is great folly and gross wickedness. He knows this. Yet it is a devilish temptation.

"Did the sermon call attention to God and His Christ, or to the pastor?"

Soli Deo Gloria.

Congregational Edification

When God is honored, the saints will be edified.

Do the sermons edify the saints? This is the question put to the elders annually by the church visitors: "Is the congregation *built up* through his preaching?"

But edification is so much broader and deeper than one might first imagine. One appropriate way to ask about edification is to inquire regarding the trio of Christian graces: faith, hope, and love. Is the congregation built up in *faith*? Do the sermons quicken in them *hope*? Is *love* worked in the hearts of the people of God?

First, *faith*.

Faith is *knowledge* of all God revealed in His Word (see Heb. 11:3 and Lord's Day 7). Good sermons are faithful explanations of the Word of God so that the people grow in the knowledge of God, for faith is knowledge. From good sermons the people of God learn. Out of God's treasury the minister brings out things new and old (see Matt. 13:52), so that they always are learning more. If a minister is anything, a minister is a teacher.

Under this heading—of faith as knowledge—a few key questions may be asked: Is the sermon faithful to the text and its context? Since the source of faith's knowledge is the Holy Scriptures alone, is the sermon based on and does it flow out of the Scriptures? Second, since "every heretic has his text," is the sermon preached in the light of the whole of Scripture, and is it in harmony with the Reformed confessions? Third, is the sermon antithetical, that is, does it "refute and contradict errors" (see Formula of Subscription), so that the people of God are protected from the wolves who bring in false teachings? In the sermon, does the minister hold "fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Tit. 1:9)? All of the people of God are warriors in the king-

dom. Are they trained and equipped to do battle? And, not to be forgotten are the questions whether the antithetical note in the preaching is reasonable, balanced, appropriate. After a practice preaching session in seminary many years ago, Herman Hoeksema is said to have commented, "Well, I know what the text *doesn't* mean. But what *does* it teach?" And, because every congregation is different, is the antithetical note appropriate for this particular congregation in this specific place and time?

Often elders are tempted to limit their analysis of sermons to that—faith as knowledge, sermons as truth. That would be a mistake.

Knowledge, all by itself, puffeth up, makes proud (I Cor. 8:1). Is the understanding the understanding of love? For "charity edifieth."

Besides, faith is not only a "certain knowledge." Faith is also an "assured confidence...that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God..." This assurance the Holy Spirit works in our hearts by the gospel (Lord's Day 7). Good sermons lead the people of God to trust in Jesus Christ, to embrace Him, to have confidence that Christ with all His benefits are his own! Good sermons *call* the people to believe. They also warn against unbelief and address unbelievers. (Do they? Read carefully Lord's Day 31:84.) There are places for "exhortations and threatenings" (Canons of Dordt V:14). But especially the sermons lead people to believe in Jesus Christ, by whom sin and sinners are forgiven—freely, and fully. They comfort the saints. The elder should ask: Did we hear Jesus Christ and Him crucified?

Thus, good sermons will not make people doubt. A curse upon the preacher who seeks to instill doubts in the people of God. Of course, careless presumption must

be addressed. The minister must "distress the comfortable." But he also comforts the distressed.

It took too long for me to "get his drift," but a good elder early in my ministry proposed that the window above the pulpit in the new sanctuary have engraved in it the words: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people...." That elder's call remains as Christ's mandate to us pastors.

Edify in faith. Then, *hope*.

Saints must be built up in hope. With regard to what must "hereafter befall us" (cf. Lord's Day 10). With regard to the "things to come" (Rom. 8:38; I Cor. 3:22). The people of God need "bright hope for tomorrow." They may have it. Good sermons will quicken this hope in them. Why, God's people are "saved by hope" (Rom 8:24), were "begotten again unto a lively hope" (I Pet. 1:3-5). According to Paul's conclusion in Romans, Scripture was designed for this: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

Hope for the near future—tomorrow and next month. Hope also for the more distant future—a generation, when Christ returns, and eternity.

Do the sermons speak also of the future? Often? When they do, are the people of God led to fear, or to a calm assurance that Christ sits on the throne, ruling in power and love? Let the people see Jesus, so that they are "anxious for nothing" (Phil. 4:6; Matt. 6:25, 31), and so that the peace of God which passeth all understanding may keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Hope releases the people of God from the ulcer-inducing anxieties of life. It is also the antidote to the soul-deadening materialism of this age.

Do the sermons lead the people of God to "set their hope in God" (Ps. 78:7)?

Faith. Hope. And *love*. Love, the greatest of the abiding trio of Christian graces.

First, good sermons preach the love of God for His people. What great love is this that sent His Son into the world for us! How He loves us! The cross is the love of God. Bounties to His own are the love of God. Frowning providences are God's love. Nothing shall separate us from that love. Not now, not in the future.

Are the sermons saturated with God's love for His people? Is the Bridegroom's voice of love heard clearly by the bride?

Second, good sermons call the people of God to love *God*, and to love their neighbor. This is obedience to the ten commandments (see Matt. 22:37-39). The life of those loved by God is a life of love, of loving obedience. Of having God as their God, worshiping Him, confessing His name, observing His day. Of obeying authority, of sexual purity, of giving, speaking

truth in love, forgiving the neighbor, and everything else that the commandments require. The life of the Christian is a life of "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22). And when they preach these positive virtues, faithful sermons warn against "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like" (Gal. 5:19-21). With these warnings, the sermons make clear that "they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."



Faith, hope, and love. The saints will be built up to be complete Christians. For the work of the ministry is "for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the

knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12,13).

Wise elders take the broadest perspective. Although one sermon may have faults, no one sermon is basis for judgment whether the man's ministry is properly edifying. The elders should be patient, watching for the big picture. A mother's competence to nourish her family properly is not to be judged on the basis of one meal. Every sermon does not include the *whole* counsel of God. To expect that is to expect the impossible. But: 1) Every sermon will be preached *in light of* the whole counsel of God. And, 2) all the sermons taken together, in a period of time, will include the whole counsel of God. No minister may "fail" to accomplish this (see Acts 20:27).

Elders will see to it. Faithful pastors pray for it. May our good God grant it.

... to be continued. 

Letters

Sabbath Observance

Thank you so much for your special Sabbath issue of May 2007! It was very informative and declared even the position of Calvin, of which I was unaware. But why consider Calvin to be weak and faltering in his position on the fourth commandment? Does not it grace this Reformed teacher that he did not want to go beyond what Scripture has to say on this matter, for it is possible to bind heavier burdens than warranted (Matt. 23:4)? Apparently the scholar concluded that the fourth commandment is mainly ceremonial and felt compelled to bring his opinion in harmony with this finding.

But this is then cause for a host of questions, for by what criterion would a commandment be moral, civil (judicial), or ceremonial, see-

ing that the Westminster divines considered the fourth commandment to be moral instead?

I thought that only the sacrificial laws were ceremonial because they foreshadowed Christ's atonement. And, although the Sabbath foreshadows the eternal rest, it does not foreshadow Christ's passion. Moreover, the ceremonial laws have ceased their enforcement, since the atonement of Jesus Christ once for all is the fulfillment, the substance, the body that was foreshadowed. But the Sabbath, foreshadowing the eternal Sabbath, still awaits its fulfillment after Judgment Day. Thus it comes as a surprise that Calvin considered the fourth commandment to be mainly ceremonial. However, he based that opinion on Colossians 2:16-17, which makes one wonder how to understand this Scripture passage correctly.

Furthermore, Calvin is wary of a ceremonial way of keeping the Sabbath. What would then the difference be between a ceremonial manner and the proper manner? According to Isaiah 58:13 the proper manner of keeping the Sabbath is by calling it a delight. Thus it should be a festive rest, and not an unwelcome interruption of our daily activities (Neh. 13:15-22, Amos 8:5). This, however, differentiates between keeping the Sabbath and not keeping it, but it does not differentiate between a ceremonial and a proper manner.

Another surprise is that recreation is mentioned with daily activities in one breath. I suspect that is so because Isaiah 58:13 forbids doing your own pleasure on the Sabbath. However, I think that this is a wrong interpretation. Because Isaiah 58 mainly deals with a

proper way of fasting, I surmise that there must be a connection between the Sabbath and fasting. Notice then that verse 3 also speaks of finding pleasure. Thus verses 4 and 5 describe wherein people found pleasure, and verses 6 and 7 the opposite of the kind of pleasure that the Lord chooses. This description does not fit the normal perception of recreation.

Concerning the term recreation, it should be kept in mind that it does not mean only leisure but also, more literally and archaically, invigoration and creating anew. Thus recreation does not always mean the pursuit of secular activities such as organized sports, but also denotes a re-energizing by the means that God provides, which suggests that there is a lawful form of recreation. Does not Jesus confirm: "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27)?

Is Jesus even defying the notion of cessation of labor when He says: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17), and when He says that He ought to heal on the Sabbath (Luke 13:11-16)?

The *Standard Bearer* is for me a most welcome spiritual food for which I want to express my deep gratitude.

Yours in Christ,
Jan Reckman
Aylmer, Ontario

Response:

Your thoughtful letter is a welcome addition to the ongoing discussion and debate concerning the fourth commandment and keeping the Lord's Day.

First, it gives me opportunity to correct something that we were intending to correct anyway, namely, mistakenly identifying Ursinus as the writer of the German version of the Heidelberg Catechism (cf. my article—"The Fourth Commandment: Our Catechism, Calvin, and Ursinus"). Actually, further reading indicated it was Olevianus who translated into the German Ursinus'

Latin original, not Ursinus himself. So Dathenus did not follow *Olevianus'* lead in this matter.

But second, there is the issue of Calvin and the fourth commandment. You are to be commended for wanting to be as deferential to Calvin as possible. One differs with him only with reluctance. But where necessary, one must still differ and state it is so—for instance, Calvin's liberal position on divorce and remarriage. As you point out, the 10 commandments (every one of them engraved in stone) are to be distinguished from the ceremonial laws, which had their substance fulfilled in Christ's atonement. The Sabbath of the fourth commandment has not yet attained its complete fulfillment, heavenly glory.

The key to Colossians 2:15, 16 is to understand that the word Paul used was not "the Sabbath" (singular, as the King James may lead one to read), but the word "of sabbaths" (plural, and with no definite article). He is referring, then, not to the *seventh day* of the week, set by creation ordinance and later for remembrance of God's *great redemptive event, His deliverance of Old Testament Israel from bondage and death* (cf. Deut. 5:15), but to the host of special ceremonial days added by the law of Moses, each of which required cessation from work. There is reason why the "sabbaths" Paul refers to here are listed with new moons and feast days (the literal meaning of the word translated "an holyday" in the KJV). These are days added by Moses (for a time), not what was in place from creation itself.

With all due respect, we say again, Calvin did the Reformed churches and saints no favor when he lost sight of the binding character of the fourth commandment, with its call to lay certain activities aside on one day of the week, namely, the first day, and then tried to argue for a strong Lord's Day keeping anyway based on precedent and common sense, of all things. What this would mean

practically is that officebearers are to leave the question about what a man may busy himself with on the Lord's Day to each member's judgment and pleasure. And if a few members can buy, sell, and play on the Lord's Day, you may be sure the spiritually immature will be right behind, beginning with the youth. In the New Testament, officebearers are still dealing with sheep, prone to follow others. Calvin, normally the shrewdest of men, seemed to lose sight not only of the reality of believers' human nature in this instance, but also of the fact that in the New Testament there are many carnal that also remain in the church. One does not have to *imagine* what such will justify and busy themselves with on the Lord's Day if all an officebearer can appeal to is their judgment and 'spiritual' wisdom. That is painfully evident from what secular activities members of Reformed churches are engaging in on Sunday these days. And then, in this one instance, they appeal to Calvin besides. The other 99.9% of his biblical teachings and positions they ignore and cannot apologize enough for. But in their sabbath laxity and abuses they are 'Calvinistic'! For shame.

Calvin, however, did give them a crack in the door.

But our particular concern is that this absence of authoritative prohibition crept into the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of the fourth commandment. It must be explained how this came about. Ursinus' reliance upon Calvin is the explanation. Thank the Risen Lord that He saw to it that the fathers of Dordt and of Westminster corrected this matter and did not rely on the exegesis and biblical perspective of any one man, no matter how gifted and generally correct he might have been.

Ceremonial remembrance would be doing such things Moses' law required on such days, namely, offering certain kinds of sacrifices, and on occasion performing certain

washings as well. *Proper* keeping means being occupied precisely with those activities of which the Heidelberg Catechism speaks. Frequenting worship services, feeding one's soul, and visiting the needy and lonely in their distress loom large. This is exactly what the Isaiah 58 passage to which you refer has in mind (cf. vv. 6, 7). One can do this every day of the week, but special time and opportunity are afforded on the Lord's Day certainly. And should this not be a delight, rather than some burdensome law that simply stifles and forbids? We cease from doing any number of things, in order to free ourselves for those things most needful for our souls and the souls of others. And the spiritual find it a delight. If one does not, it is time to check one's spiritual pulse.

As for forbidding "recreation," it depends on what comes under the label "recreation." In common PRC parlance it refers to things connected with games and sports. Already in early Protestantism the

church was warning against bowling and golf and such secular activities intruding into the Lord's Day. With every activity engaged in on the Lord's Day the question should be asked, am I by this activity trying to stimulate my physical heart or my spiritual heart. That is, is one doing what one is doing primarily with one's spiritual heart and vigor in mind? And then give an honest answer to your Lord. As selling at the marketplace would fall under Isaiah's condemnation of "doing one's own pleasure" on the Lord's appointed sabbath, so would pursuit of sports and games. Spiritual fasting requires more than refraining from eating certain foods. It has reference to all kinds of things that delight my fleshly appetites, but which must be put aside.

The two passages you cite, quoting words of Christ (John 5:17 and Luke 13:11-16), are powerful passages for proper Sabbath keeping. When Jesus told the Pharisees

that both He and His Father work on the Sabbath day, He was not referring to manual labor, or to doing things for an income or material gain, but He was reminding us that the *forbidding of labor* is not the same as *forbidding being active* on the Lord's Day. There are things we are called to do, things we are to be busy with on the Lord's Day—and those things have to do with the Father's business. What the Father's business is on the Sabbath is made plain by Christ's healing the sick on the Sabbath—works of mercy in the physical realm, and having to do with the gospel in the spiritual. When Christ said "Walk!" or "See!" He was preaching the gospel. Activities having to do with the gospel are not only permitted, but required on our Sabbaths. And manual labor for material gain is not to interfere.

We are grateful for your high regard for the *Standard Bearer*. May the Lord bless you Lord's Day by Lord's Day.

K.K. 

All Around Us

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

■ The CRC Synod and Women in Office

Two days after the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) celebrated its 150th anniversary, its synod voted to strike the word "male" from the church order requirement for officebearers. Church Order revisions require the majority vote of two synod meetings, and this decision ratifies the proposed change to the Church Order, adopted in 2006.

This decision comes as no surprise. For more than 30 years the CRC synod has wrestled back and forth over the issue of women in

office. Already in 1973 the synod of the CRC received a report finding no biblical prohibition on women holding any and all church offices. Over the following two decades study committee after study committee brought reports to the annual synod, till finally in 1995 the synod gave classes and congregations permission to ordain women into all the offices under a system of local option. Before this year's synod, 26 of the 47 classes—a majority—exercised this option.

Subsequent to this decision, the synod also made a decision opening the way for women to serve as delegates to its synod meetings.

Many in the CRC think this decision comes not a moment too soon. Carol Rottman, a founder of the Committee for Women formed in the 1970s, said, "This is the be-

ginning of an opening I think is going to be monumental for the church." Claudia Beversluis, provost of Calvin College, said, "I think next year's Synod is going to look remarkably different. There will be women sitting at these tables and the synod will find out what they've been missing all these years." Rev. George Vander Weit of Fuller Ave. CRC called it a "tremendous moment." He said, "I've worked and prayed for this moment for years." Karen Norris, a female candidate for the ministry in the CRC who has been searching for a position for more than a year said, "The next step now is for churches to own up to what was decided tonight and say 'We're willing to consider calling a female pastor.'"

Of course, not everyone was happy with this decision. Rev. Joel

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Nederhood, former director of the Back to God Hour, said "There will be many of us who will continue to believe those biblical requirements involve a gender component, and it is impossible for us to surrender that idea."

The synod anticipated this too, and so, in an effort to keep the denomination together functionally, gave permission to those congregations and classes that are still opposed to women in office to register on their credentials to classis or synod their protest against seating women at the broader assemblies. This means that synod will be able to seat female delegates, but that some classes may still, because of a majority opposition in the classis, refuse to seat female delegates from particular congregations. Of course, this is simply a cushion and a temporary measure. Rev. Vander Weit says, "Let's model the inclusion of men and women at synod and let's have the classes look at us and say, 'That's the kind of unity we want.'" But, apparently, Nederhood and others are satisfied with this provision. Rev. Nederhood said, "The issue is the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. I think that decision goes far in enabling us to work in classes and the local churches together. What we have here is the kind of protection we must have."

These decisions, very obviously, go against the will of God for the church in the Scriptures. The Scriptures state very plainly that women are not to hold the special offices of pastor, elder, or deacon in the church. The book of I Timothy was written by the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, to prescribe how things are to be done in the life of the church (I Tim. 3:15), and an important part of this is the place and behavior of women in the church. From I Timothy 2:11-12, "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in

silence," the Scripture's prohibition of women in office is plain. This position is corroborated countless times in other parts of Scripture. Throughout Scripture the leadership roles in the life of God's covenant people were consistently assigned to men (Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, etc.) In the Old Testament God assigned the special offices of the priesthood and kingship to the male members of the families of Aaron and David. In the New Testament Jesus called twelve men to be His first disciples and later the apostles. In Acts 6, seven men are chosen as the first deacons. The New Testament qualifications for all three offices can apply only to men—"husband of one wife" (I Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6).

Allowing women to serve in the church offices is against the will and wisdom of God.

In evaluating the current decisions of the CRC, it is good that we look at the history of the CRC, the history that they also remember this year. From this we see two things.

First, this began much earlier than 30 years ago when the first report concerning women in office came to the synod of the CRC. For the 40 years prior to the 70s the CRC wrestled over the question of the authority and inspiration of Scripture, and in 1972 adopted "Report 44," which declared, basically, that Scripture is true in its message of redemption through Christ but is not necessarily accurate in its statements regarding science and history. This added a human element to the Scriptures, and opened them up at every point to higher criticism—"Is this God's word, or is it just something the author is saying from the limited viewpoint of his culture and place in history?"

Second, the struggle over the authority of Scripture began even earlier, in the controversies in the CRC of the 1910-20s over the doctrines of grace. Most of this

stemmed from a desire to engage and identify with the American culture, and to make the preaching of the gospel more appealing to those without.

This year's decision concerning women in office comes as no surprise. It reflects the direction of the CRC over the past 100 years, a sad history of departure, resisting first the doctrines of grace, and later the authority of Scripture, and capitulating at every point to the norms accepted in our American culture.

We can only wonder how much further the CRC will go. In our culture the push is for the tolerance and acceptance of homosexuals in every area of life. Will the next main item on the synodical agendas of the CRC be the opening of church offices to homosexuals?

These developments highlight the need among us for continued antithetical living and teaching which is faithful to God's Word.

(Information for this article was drawn from the *Grand Rapids Press*, June 13, 2007, and the Synod 2007 news reports on the website of the CRC, www.crcna.org.)

■ CRC Synod Appoints Mary Hulst to Calvin Seminary

As if to ratify its decision concerning women in church office, the CRC synod also, this year, appointed Mary Hulst, former pastor of Eastern Ave. CRC, to the full-time position of assistant professor of preaching at Calvin Seminary. After her interview and confirmation, the synodical delegates rose to give her a standing ovation, and synodical president, Joel Boot, said "Tonight you taught us some things about preaching ... and you taught us that you ought to teach that to others. Congratulations."

The CRC web page reports (June 14, 2007),

During the interview she was asked if sermons have become a relic of the past. "There is nothing else that works the way preaching works," she said. "Good preaching is changing the world.... That's why I'm taking this job." Asked where she gets the authority to preach, Hulst answered, "What right do I have to preach? Only the call God has given me and the gifting of the Word.... Our authority given comes from first submitting to the Word."

These would be good and true statements if they came from the mouth of a male minister. Nothing does work as good preaching works. And no one has authority to preach, but from God and by submitting to His Word.

But, sadly, neither she, nor the CRC, is submitting to God's Word in these decisions.

■ The PCA General Assembly and Justification by Works

While the synod of the CRC, as well as the synod of the PRC, were meeting, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was also meeting, in Memphis, Tennessee.

The PCA is one of several more conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denominations wrestling with the controversial and heretical teachings of the Federal Vision and the New Perspective on Paul. Previously, the General Assembly of the PCA appointed a study committee to analyze and bring back recommendations concerning the Federal Vision. The full 36-page report of the study committee can be found online at www.byfaithonline.com.

From the online magazine of the PCA, "By Faith Alone" (June 14, 2007), we learn that the General Assembly adopted the following nine statements as "a faithful exposition of the Westminster Standards":

1. The view that rejects the bi-

covenantal structure of Scripture as represented in the Westminster Standards (i.e., views which do not merely take issue with the terminology, but the essence of the first/second covenant framework) is contrary to those Standards.

2. The view that an individual is "elect" by virtue of his membership in the visible church; and that this "election" includes justification, adoption and sanctification; but that this individual could lose his "election" if he forsakes the visible church, is contrary to the Westminster Standards.

3. The view that Christ does not stand as a representative head whose perfect obedience and satisfaction is imputed to individuals who believe in him is contrary to the Westminster Standards.

4. The view that strikes the language of "merit" from our theological vocabulary so that the claim is made that Christ's merits are not imputed to his people is contrary to the Westminster Standards.

5. The view that "union with Christ" renders imputation redundant because it subsumes all of Christ's benefits (including justification) under this doctrinal heading is contrary to the Westminster Standards.

6. The view that water baptism effects a "covenantal union" with Christ through which each baptized person receives the saving benefits of Christ's mediation, including regeneration, justification, and sanctification, thus creating a parallel soteriological system to the decretal system of the Westminster Standards, is contrary to the Westminster Standards.

7. The view that one can be "united to Christ" and not receive all the benefits of Christ's mediation, including perseverance, in that effectual union is

contrary to the Westminster Standards.

8. The view that some can receive saving benefits of Christ's mediation, such as regeneration and justification, and yet not persevere in those benefits is contrary to the Westminster Standards.

9. The view that justification is in any way based on our works, or that the so-called "final verdict of justification" is based on anything other than the perfect obedience and satisfaction of Christ received through faith alone, is contrary to the Westminster Standards.


This decision indicates a positive direction in the battle against these popular heretical teachings on justification. Strong and clear statements are made here against the Federal Vision and the New Perspective on Paul and, at the same time, the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith is stated and affirmed. Apart from the difference that we have with the PCA and the Westminster standards on the covenant of works, there is a sense in which these decisions, at least as to their purpose and weight, are something like the "Declaration of Principles" adopted by the PRC in the early 1950s. They should give direction and support to the churches in dealing with the heretical doctrines and their proponents.

There remains, however, one important question: Is there the necessary will in the PCA to exercise discipline over those who teach the heresy of justification by faith and works?

The General Assembly did "re-mind those ruling and teaching elders whose views are out of accord with our Standards of their obligation to make known to their courts any differences in their views," and also reminded the Sessions and Presbyteries of the PCA that, following the Church Order "it is their duty 'to exercise care over

those subject to their authority' and 'to condemn erroneous opinions which injure the purity or peace of the Church.'"

Our hope and prayer is that they have the will to do this, for the sake of truth. If they do, they

will be doing something that, as yet, none of the other conservative Reformed denominations dealing with Federal Vision have done. 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (2)

Its Rich Symbolism

The elements of the Lord's Supper are very familiar to us. We understand that the bread and the wine symbolize Christ's broken body and shed blood. He told us the same in the institution of the Lord's Supper recorded in Matthew 26:26-27, the parallel accounts of Mark 14:22-24 and Luke 22:19-20, as well as I Corinthians 11:23-25.

But how often have we considered the rich symbolism of the sacrament?

We sometimes speak of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as "coming to the Lord's table."

At the Lord's table we enter into fellowship with Jehovah our Redeemer.

In a broader sense, that is true of all the church's worship. Whenever we enter God's house truly to worship in spirit and truth, we enter into fellowship with God. Worship is fellowship with the Holy One. Especially in the preaching of the Word we enjoy God's fellowship with us as He speaks, conversing with us and taking us into His own life of fellowship and love and telling to us His secrets (Ps. 25:14).

In the communion of saints we worship, expressing our oneness in the faith with the members of the congregation of which we are a

part. In communion one with another, in the bond of love, as sinners alike redeemed by Christ, we are taken into the fellowship of God.

That fellowship with God and one another is richly expressed when we partake in faith of this Supper of our Lord.

But in the Lord's Supper we confess emphatically that the only way we have such a blessed place in the covenant and church of God is by the broken body and shed blood of our Savior Jesus Christ.

So Christ has given us the elements of bread and wine as the essential elements of the Lord's Supper.

What a beautiful sermon to our sight and taste is the proclamation of the broken bread and the poured out wine! Together they are heralds of God's great love to us in Christ Jesus. They proclaim loudly "that, whereas you should otherwise have suffered eternal death, I have given My body to the death of the cross, and shed My blood for you."¹

The bread signifies Christ as the Bread of life. Immediately after setting forth that truth in John 6:48, Jesus explains, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and

drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:53-56).

Bear in mind, it was a long road before that bread became bread.

First, the grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die. After that, the ears of grain must die when the fields of grain are cut. Then the grain must be pulverized in the mill, and the flour baked into bread in a hot oven. And finally that bread is once again broken before our eyes.

Think of the horrible sufferings that Christ suffered for us!

Then there is the element of wine.

The wine signifies the blood of Christ first of all. It signifies, therefore, the blood of Him who said (John 7:37), "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

But in addition wine, according to Scripture, is a symbol of communion, prosperity, and joy, that which is extra. Notice, I don't say that wine is the symbol of that which is *excess*. To consume excess wine is to abuse the very symbol given by God in that drink. It is to sin against God. But wine is the symbol of that which is extra.

For that reason, in the Lord's Supper wine signifies the translation of our earthly life into the joy of God's heavenly tabernacle. When Jesus delivers us from sin, He doesn't simply lead us back to

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what we had in Adam. He leads us into the everlasting life of heavenly perfection and joy, covenant fellowship with God in Jesus Christ, where there are bounties forevermore.

Again, that wine did not come to be set before us without the berries having been crushed. Only afterwards is the wine poured out, even as the blood of Christ dripped to the ground from the wounds that He bore for our sakes. That brings us to an additional element of symbolism in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Also belonging to the symbolism of the sacrament is the *breaking* of the bread, and the *pouring out* of the wine. These symbolize the crucified body and shed blood of Christ. The minister, in the presence of the congregation during the administration of the sacrament, breaks the bread and pours the wine into the chalice.

This symbolism should be preserved, in harmony with the testimony of the Heidelberg Catechism in Question and Answer 75: "...that His body was offered and broken on the cross for me, and His blood shed for me, as certainly as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup communicated to me; and further, that He feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life with His crucified body and shed blood, as assuredly as I receive from the hands of the minister, and taste with my mouth, the bread and cup of the Lord, as certain signs of the body and blood of Christ."

So the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, in conjunction with the Word, proclaim the gospel of the cross! The Lord's Supper is the visible gospel. Not that it stands alone. The Lord's Supper as the visible gospel is dependent upon the Word preached, and only supports that Word preached. But what a beautiful sermon to our sight and taste is the proclamation of the broken bread and poured out wine!

But there are other elements of

symbolism in the sacrament that ought not be overlooked.

There is also the matter of eating and drinking. The signs of bread and wine are not merely to be observed, but appropriated by partaking of them. We don't simply look on. Jesus said, "Take, eat; drink ye all of it. This do in remembrance of me." We eat and we drink. By faith we eat and drink in the fellowship of believers and of God Himself. This eating and drinking symbolizes the appropriation of Christ and all His benefits by the spiritual activity of saving faith. By faith we appropriate Him and all His benefits by the spiritual activity of a true faith.

Also belonging to the administration of the sacrament are the words of institution spoken by the minister. These also belong to the symbolism of the Lord's Supper.

Those words that we hear, the words of Scripture, are not simply the words of a command that we must obey. It is that, to be sure. "This do in remembrance of me." That is a command to the church. And failure to obey is a grievous act of disobedience to God! But it is more than a command.

The words of institution given by our Lord also signify that Christ speaks His powerful, efficacious Word through the minister to His people when they celebrate the Lord's Supper. Else we would not have a sacrament. Without the presence of Christ by His Spirit, the Lord's Supper cannot be a means of grace for the strengthening of our faith. Without the presence of Christ and the power of His Word, we would have nothing but empty form. But as Christ Himself speaks through His Word and by His Spirit, the Lord's Supper becomes to the church a means of grace, nourishing and strengthening all who partake in faith.

Finally, there is one more element of symbolism that we should consider. That is the communion table. The communion table symbolizes the table of God's everlast-

ing covenant, a sign of His fellowship and love, the fellowship of God through Christ with His people. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we do so as an expression of love. We have been taken into the very covenant fellowship of God. We have been taken into that fellowship together with all His people in the congregation where the sacrament is administered.

Lord's Day 28 of the Heidelberg Catechism expresses that in several ways.

It does so, in the first place, by pointing out that "Christ has commanded me *and all believers* (my emphasis) to eat...and to drink."

It emphasizes this communion of saints, secondly, by its repeated reference to "we." We become one with Christ, "flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone," so that together "we live, and are governed forever by one spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul."

And in Question and Answer 77 we are pointed to the very institution of the Lord's Supper, where the conclusion recorded in I Corinthians 10:17 is this: "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

And so when we partake of His Supper at the table of His covenant fellowship, we express our love—our love for our Redeemer. But as Scripture makes clear, we can't love Him except we also love one another. So that must be our confession, lest we eat and drink damnation to ourselves, not discerning the Lord's body.

Participation Not Optional

One final consideration in this article. Christ has commanded all believers to partake of His holy Supper.

We shall have opportunity, the Lord willing, in a later article to discuss the question of who are

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1. *The Psalter*, Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper.

proper partakers of this Supper. But immediately the emphasis falls upon the fact that all who confess faith in Christ are commanded to partake of this sacrament that is to be administered in the church.

Christ says, "*This do.*" There is no option. We must partake properly. We must partake in faith. But partake we must.

The law of the Old Testament with respect to the observance of the Passover holds true now with reference to the table of the covenant. God said to Israel in Numbers 9:12-13 that all were obligated to keep the Passover. "But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey"—in other words, this man is healthy; he is not away on a journey—"and forbearth to keep the passover," that is, he doesn't observe that ordinance of God, "even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin."

What applied to Israel in connection with the observance of the Passover is just as applicable today to our partaking of the Lord's Supper. So we read in John 6:53, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ex-

cept ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."

To claim to be members of Christ's church, and not to partake of the Lord's Supper, is a monstrosity, a deformity in the church. It is a misrepresentation of all truth concerning what it is to belong to Christ.

One cannot belong to Christ and ignore His fellowship at the table of the covenant.

There is a rather constant danger that we fall into the sin of a self-willed religion. We like to do things "when we feel like it" or "the way we feel like it." That is to put self before God.


The celebration of the Lord's Supper is not a matter of our pleasure or our feelings; but it is the command of the Lord of lords to His church.

Our young people must understand their obligation in this connection. I don't mean that our young people must make confession of faith just for the sake of taking communion at a certain age. That must never be the case. To say in that confession that you love Christ in the truth as taught in this Christian church, when you don't, is to speak a lie of profound pro-

portions. Confession of faith must be made *spiritually*, as a matter of one's knowledge, experience, and spiritual desire. But we must understand that to belong to Christ compels us to make that confession.

Under normal circumstances a man or woman *in his or her youth* will confess faith and partake freely of the fellowship of Christ's body. We must. A young person ought to be able to take that stand before making such significant life decisions as further education, employment, or marriage. Nothing is of greater significance or priority than taking the stand of confession of faith and thus becoming a spiritual partaker of the Lord's Supper. To neglect that, or to postpone it unnecessarily, is to walk in disobedience against the Lord Christ.

Still more, if I contemplate skipping the sacrament because things are not right in my own life, or because things are not in order with a fellow church member, the Lord's command stands. In such a case He tells me that I had better take care to put my house in order and to make things right so that I can partake properly of His holy Supper.

"This do in remembrance of me." 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Jan Miersma

Royal Children: Children of the Word (2)

Last time we began to look at developing in ourselves and our children the ability to read the written word and

listen to the spoken word with understanding. We saw how important this ability is, for we are children of the Word: reading and listening to the Word of God with understanding is the means by which God works our growth in the knowledge of Him and our salvation. From the Word of God in II Timothy 3:15, we know that God uses this means for the salvation

of us and our children: "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." To that end we began looking at ways in which these abilities grow and develop in our children, focusing first on our conversation with them.

In this article I hope to encour-

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age you to read with your children, especially to read aloud with them and to them. It goes without saying that we will certainly read aloud the Scriptures with our children as part of our daily walk with God. Even if we read nothing else, this stands above all, as an absolute necessity, and may include reading from a Bible story book as a supplement to the Scriptures themselves. Especially when our children are young we will help them to grow in understanding if we stop from time to time and explain the sense of what is being read. In this article, however, I would like to focus on reading in general, especially reading aloud with our children, as a means to develop in them a love of the written and spoken word.

When I was a young wife, my mother gave me the book *Hidden Art*, by Edith Schaeffer. In this book she advocates using our artistic talents in our everyday lives, whether they be talents of musical expression, writing, drawing, or gardening, to name a few. She includes a chapter on using "dramatic ability," in which she encourages families to read aloud together as a way of using this ability in everyday life. She says, "This is a far more uniting experience than being entertained by radio, TV, or any sort of entertainment you go to, or sit and watch.... Whether it is with small children, adults, or a group of varied ages, there are questions or thoughts that simply burst out at times as the book is shared together, and which open up opportunities for knowing each other and each other's responses and attitudes in ways which no other 'entertainment' could ever do.... It gives the family a background for thinking and growing in their concepts and understanding, together, rather than always separately."¹

This idea seemed so good to me. Although my mother had read to me as a child up until the age of eight or so, this idea of continuing

to read aloud together had never occurred to me. Though we had no children at that time, nor until many years had passed, we began reading aloud together as a couple. This became something we enjoyed far more than the vapid entertainment to be found on the television set, so that when our set broke for the second time in a month, we decided to live without it. We grew together as a couple in this way, and when we were finally blessed by the Lord with children, I couldn't wait to start reading to them. At the time, I saw it merely as something enjoyable to do together as family, but over the years I have seen other great benefits flow from this practice.

Listening to stories read aloud was found, in a study conducted in Great Britain, to be the most powerful predictor of children's school achievement. Why? In addition to other factors, the authors of the study emphasized the importance of learning to understand words alone "as the main source of meaning. Because the words do not come with pictures attached, the child must come to grips with 'the symbolic potential of language'-its power to represent experience independent of the context of the here and now."² A child can thereby begin to understand that there is a reality beyond what he can see. He or she learns that he can use language to reflect on his or her own experience in relation to someone else's or to put himself into another's experience in such a way that he can learn and benefit from it without having actually to have the experience. Obviously we need this ability when we read and study God's Word and reflect on His dealings with His people and us. Although when children are very young we will use mostly books with pictures, we should try gradually to wean them away from dependence on illustrations.

Further, listening to books and stories read aloud develops vo-

cabulary and an ability to understand the patterns of speech. Not only will your children be able to benefit from books that would otherwise be on too difficult a level to read on their own, but they will absorb by osmosis the way in which language works, how it is structured, and how to express ideas effectively, thereby not only raising their own reading level, but also improving their ability to express themselves in spoken and eventually written language. While this also occurs in silent reading, oral reading and listening seem to be a more effective means. Some excellent books, especially what we call "the classics," can be a little daunting at first, hard to "get into." By reading them aloud we can help our children to read books they might otherwise give up on too easily. They will learn by this to persist in their own reading, not to cast a book aside simply because they find it a bit difficult at first. This is something that will aid them someday in reading meatier doctrinal books.

There will also be times when we may stop reading a book because the content is not edifying. The whole book breathes a spirit of rebellion against authority, for example, or the book is simply poorly written. Our children will learn that you can stop reading, stop listening, or stop viewing, that there is a place for rejecting that which does not serve to edify. When we stop and talk about the reasons for the rejection, we will help them to become critical (in the good sense) listeners, viewers, or readers.

Hoping you have been convinced of some of the benefits of reading aloud with your children, I'd like also to answer possible questions or objections. What

1. Schaeffer, Edith, *Hidden Art*, Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971, 149.

2. Healy, Jane, *Endangered Minds*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990, 192.

should we read? When do we find time to read? What if I'm not a good reader? How do I get my children to listen? What about sinful behavior and thought in books?

What should we read? Edith Schaeffer in her book *Hidden Art* suggests a formula of reading from three different areas: something from good children's literature, a story with a Christian message, and the Bible, or Bible storybook. This could be modified somewhat, as most of us already read the Bible with our children. We could include reading biographies or history. There are many books from Inheritance Publications, both biographies and historical fiction, that we can read with profit. *Portraits of Faithful Saints* by Prof. Hanko is a wonderful resource to introduce our children to God's work in the history of the church. Because our children study history in school with a textbook, they might be inclined to regard it as medicine, but when well written, history is as fascinating, or even more so, than fiction. I have found historical works by Genevieve Foster, Isaac Asimov, and Albert Marrin to be particularly interesting and well written. Their content and perspective must, like everything we read, be tested in the light of God's Word, because these are secular historians, but we can use books like these to help our children grow in appreciation of God's sovereign government of all things.

In children's literature, emphasize the classic works of children's literature, but also include some lighter fare from time to time. Don't approach the classics with the idea that we *have* to read these because they're good for us. Read them because they are interesting, funny, well written books. Book lists like *Books Children Love* or *Honey for a Child's Heart* may assist in finding books to read. While there are some worthwhile modern works, there is much in recent children's literature that we will probably want to avoid. Not only

do themes like alienation from parents, peer values, and "me, me, me" books abound, but much of the writing is not on the same level as the older works.

Finding time for reading should be a priority; however, it does become more difficult as children get older and have demands of homework, catechism, music lessons, or sports. When my children were growing up, I think they regarded reading time as a kind of intrinsic right, so that even when we had been out later than usual for some reason, they would ask, "Can we still read?" It was a time together we didn't want to miss. First, time reading together does not necessarily have to be long. It can be fifteen or twenty minutes. Secondly, it doesn't have to be every day; perhaps we will find time only on weekends or during school vacations. Sunday afternoons are a good time to read some of the books I mentioned earlier about the history of the church, historical fiction for younger children, and biographies and actual history for older children. Read together from books like *Unfolding Covenant History*. It is helpful to have regularity to keep the line of the book, but don't give up because it seems difficult to find the time. Like good habits of any kind, it can take time to establish, but, especially if your children are young, start now.

"But I'm not a good reader," you say? Like any other skill, oral reading improves with practice. Listening to some books on tape or CD can be helpful to model good reading skills and ways to bring out the voices of the different characters, but the sound of *your* voice reading to your children will mean more to them. "My children are poor listeners; they don't want to sit and listen." While it is impossible to read aloud during wrestling matches and vigorous exercise, sitting still isn't necessary unless we are reading Scripture. My children have played with legos, colored, folded origami designs,

worked puzzles, and even juggled while listening. It can be a great time to work on crafts or sewing projects or to do repetitive mindless jobs like sorting things, preparing food for canning or freezing, or inserting flyers, if you have a paper route. It certainly makes the work go faster.


What about books that portray sinful behavior, language, and attitudes? We certainly will want to use discretion here, but the reality of human life is our depravity by nature and how it works death and corruption. The determining factor in choosing the books will not be first of all what is treated, but the attitude or point of view concerning sinful thinking and actions. Is sin glorified and promoted? Or, almost equally dangerous, is man without God glorified as good in himself? Does sin appear to be without any consequence? As our children grow in maturity, we can also deal with some of these issues of sin in the books we read. They will certainly have to deal with temptation and sin in their lives and with what may appear to be moral dilemmas, but leading them to mature reflection on these types of issues by means of the books we read may also help them to recognize the false allurements of sin and the various guises it will use to deceive us. Helping them recognize where an author is "coming from," what excuses he is making for sin, or what he sees as the solution can be a means for them to grow spiritually. Even in books with Christian characters, we may need to say, "Are they walking in the principles of God's Word in this or that area?"

What about books that contain occasional cursing or oaths, including minced oaths, like "Gosh" or "darn," or "O my goodness"? When I read books containing these expressions aloud, I omit these words, which is usually easy to do, since many times they are not essential to the meaning. But sometimes, it is part of the nature of the

character, in which case, instead of reading the actual words of the character, you might say, "He cursed in God's name," or "He uttered an oath." This takes a little practice in looking ahead. Finally, there are times when the dialogue will not make sense without the expression, in which case, I might stop and explain what the character said. This is one of the advan-

tages of reading aloud, rather than listening to tapes of books. It also allows you to stop and discuss the book more easily. For some reason, once the tape, or videotape, or TV program is "rolling," we seem almost powerless to stop it, whereas in reading, this is more easily accomplished.

I hope you are reading aloud

with your children. If you are, continue, even after they can read for themselves. If you are not, I hope you will consider trying to introduce this into your family life. I believe it will not only enrich your family life, but also help your children as they grow in their understanding of the written and spoken word, and ultimately in the Word of God. 

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

The Deacons' Relationship to the Consistory (1)

The Confessional and Scriptural Indication of Such a Relationship

Collecting the alms...distributing them to the poor according to their needs...visiting and comforting the distressed...keeping in touch with other civil or social organizations who also care for the poor...showing mercy to Christians who, although not poor, still have physical infirmities or needs...teaching the people of God regarding stewardship—all of this is the work that pertains specifically to the office of deacon. For the last three years the articles that have appeared in this rubric have emphasized that the fundamental work of deacons in the church of Jesus Christ is the bodily and spiritual care of the poor and needy.

Collecting money for the general fund and other special collections...setting up the collection schedule...meeting with the elders and pastor as a council to oversee the financial affairs of the

congregation and the matter of the church's building and property...being involved with the elders and pastor in nominating men for the special offices...occasionally being delegated to a broader assembly such as Classis—in such activities we also see our deacons being busy. Is it proper for them to be involved in such activities?

Such is proper. True, these activities are not the fundamental work of their office. Deacons and congregation alike must never forget this. The reason why it is proper for deacons to be involved in such activities is not to be found in the fundamental character of their office as an office of mercy.

The propriety is due to the fact that the deacons hold office. They have been appointed by God through the church to a position of authority. Of necessity, then, they will have to attend to duties and carry out responsibilities that are not specific to any particular office, but that must be done by those whom the church has invested with authority. The key point is that they attend to such duties, not just

as deacons, but in conjunction with the other officebearers of the church.

To understand this better, we will devote several articles to an examination of the relationship between the deacons and the consistory. By definition, the consistory is comprised of the pastors and elders in any given congregation: "In all churches there shall be a consistory composed of the ministers of the Word and the elders..." (Church Order, Article 37).¹ So we are examining the relationship of the deacons to the other offices.

Note at the outset that this is a *working* relationship between the offices. By speaking of a relationship between the deacons and the consistory we mean that some of

1. In this article I make numerous references to the Church Order. I will not footnote each. The interested reader can find this document in the green booklet, *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 2002 edition, pp. 1-32.

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the work of the church requires the deacons to meet with the consistory in a body in which each pastor, elder, and deacon has one vote.



That there is such a relationship is clear from our Reformed confessions.

Reformed believers confess in Article 30 of the Belgic Confession:

We believe that this true church must be governed by the spiritual policy which our Lord has taught us in His Word, namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments; also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the church....²

The key point of this quote is the statement that pastors, elders, and deacons together comprise the church's council.

We consider our Church Order to be a confession—albeit a *minor* confession, rather than a *major* confession. It is *minor*, not in significance or importance, but because it treats a specific point of the church's doctrine and life rather than giving a comprehensive statement of our faith.

In several places our Church Order indicates that the office of deacon is related to, and must work closely with, that of pastor and elder.

The Church Order requires deacons to work with the elders in the calling and releasing of pastors. Articles four and five require ministers to be chosen, or called, "by the consistory and the deacons." The phrase just quoted is repeated in both articles; in article four, with reference to calling one who has not previously served in office (a "candidate"), and in article five with reference to calling one who is already in the ministry in another congregation. Article 10 stipulates that when a minister leaves a congregation to accept a call elsewhere, he may not do so

"without the consent of the consistory, together with the deacons."

Not only in the selecting of pastors, but also in the selecting of elders, the deacons play a role. Article 22 prescribes: "The elders shall be chosen by the judgment of the consistory and the deacons...." And both pastors and elders work with the deacons in choosing deacons: "The deacons shall be chosen, approved, and installed in the same manner as was stated concerning the elders" (Art. 24).

These articles manifest the principle that the election of officebearers in the church is the work of all three offices. Applying this principle further, we argue that the approval of a minister's dismissal or retirement is also the work of the deacons with the elders and pastors, even though Articles 11-13 do not specifically mention the deacons.

In other places the Church Order requires all three offices to take mutual oversight of each other. Article 16 requires the minister, among other things, "to watch over his brethren, the elders and deacons," whereas Article 23 requires the elders, among other things, "to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow-elders and the deacons, faithfully discharge their office." Regarding their collection and distribution of alms, deacons are to "render an account in consistory" (Art. 25). Article 40, requiring the deacons to meet regularly to transact the business of their office, concludes: "whereunto the ministers shall take good heed, and if necessary they shall be present." And Article 81 prescribes that "the ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons shall before the celebration of the Lord's Supper exercise Christian censure among themselves and in a friendly spirit admonish one another with regard to the discharge of their office."

Article 37 of the Church Order requires the deacons in some instances to participate in the work

of the elders: "Whenever the number of the elders is small, the deacons may be added to the consistory by local regulation; this shall invariably be the rule where the number is less than three." Not all agree that this article requires deacons actually to *participate* in the work of the consistory. This point we will develop at length in a future article, God willing. Clearly, however, it does speak of a working relationship between the office of elder and deacon.

We conclude that the existence of such a relationship among the offices, manifest in doing some aspects of the work of the church in common, is not a minor point in our Church Order. Eleven of the 86 articles make explicit reference to such a relationship, and other articles imply it.



Even before the Synod of Dordt in 1618-1619, when the Church Order of Dordt was drawn up and when the Belgic Confession was officially adopted as a Reformed Creed, one finds evidence that Reformed churches understood the need for a working relationship among the three offices. Article six of the "Acts or Proceeding" of the Synod of Emden (October 1571) says: "In each church there shall be meetings or consistories of ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons, which shall be held at least once every week at a place and time that each congregation shall deem most suitable and convenient."³

Not all understood the intent of this decision, apparently, so that the Synod of Dordrecht (June 1574) had to explain it:

To clarify the 6th Article of the Synod of Embden (sic), the minister of the Word, elders and deacons shall constitute the consistory. Furthermore, the ministers and elders shall meet and the deacons shall also meet by themselves to handle their own affaires concerning the poor.

However, in places where there are few elders, the deacons may be admitted according to the desire of the consistory. The deacons shall be obligated to appear when they are summoned to the consistory.⁴

This article is clear on the point that the three offices must meet together to take care of some of the work of the church, while each office must meet separately to do the work specific to it.

The Synod of Dordrecht (June 1578) required that “the consistory, with the addition of the deacons,” choose ministers. This was repeated by the Synods of Middelburg (1581) and ’s Gravenhage (June 1586). This latter Synod also required the elders to “be chosen by the judgment of the consistory and deacons.”⁵ The Synods of Middelburg and ’s Gravenhage also prescribed that the deacons be part of the consistory in certain instances, particularly when the number of elders is small.⁶

Thus we see that these ideas were well entrenched in the thinking of Reformed churches by the time the Synod of Dordt met in 1618-1619.



Is there a scriptural basis for speaking of a working relationship between the elders and deacons?

Not explicitly, but implicitly, such a basis can be found.

Remember that Scripture says very little about the work of deacons—or of the deacons’ office, for that matter. Scripture’s explicit references to the office of deacon are found in Philippians 1:1, in which Paul addresses the church in Philippi “with the bishops and deacons,” and I Timothy 3:8-13, which sets forth the qualifications of deacons. That the work of the office is the care of the poor is clear from Acts 6:1-6. Scripture gives no detailed instructions regarding how the deacons should do their work, nor regarding the relationship of the deacons to the elders.

Do not suppose, though, that the scriptural basis for a working relationship between elders and deacons is very weak and tenuous. Rather, the implicit support is compelling.

First is the fact that, whenever the office of deacon is explicitly mentioned, it is so in connection with the elders. Not only does Philippians 1:1 mention both offices in the same phrase, but I Timothy 3 gives the qualification of both elders and deacons. The reason for this is that both the eldership and the diaconate are offices in the church. That very fact presupposes a working relationship.


Second, considering that the three offices in the church are but three manifestations of the one office of Christ, we see that there must be a close working relationship between them. Jesus Christ’s single office is that of Mediator of God’s covenant. As such, Christ is the church’s chief prophet, only high priest, and eternal king. Christ exercises His single office, with its three aspects, through the officebearers of the church. Each office in the church represents one aspect of Christ’s office: as prophet, Christ works through the office of pastor; as king, through that of elder; and as priest, through that of deacon. Yet Christ’s office is one! Therefore the three offices in the church, which represent the one office of Jesus Christ, must function together to manifest that Jesus Christ is the one Head of His church.

Thirdly, the Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ works in each of His saints, all of whom hold the office of all believers. I Peter 2:9 speaks of the church as manifest on earth, made up of many individual saints, as being a “royal priesthood,” who are to function as prophets by showing “forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” The apostle John notes in I John 2:7 that we have the anointing of Christ, so that we know the

truth—a reference to the office and work of prophet. The same apostle indicates in Revelation 1:6 that Christ hath made us, members of the church, “kings and priests unto God and his Father.”

While each child of God is required to manifest this anointing of Christ upon us in all of our life (see the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 12, Q&A 32), the fact is that each child of God also manifests it in the church through the officebearers. The point is that the office of all believers is one office. As the office of all believers functions through the special offices in the church, therefore, this one office must be manifest in a close working relationship among the three special offices.

So from Scripture, by good and necessary consequence, we deduce that which is explicit in our confessions—there is a close relationship between the offices of pastor, elder, and deacon. That close relationship may not cause the distinction between the offices to be erased; but at the same time the relationship must be manifest.

In our next article, the Lord willing, we will explain in more detail the necessity of this relationship of the deacons to the consistory. 

2. Philip Schaff, ed, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, “The Evangelical Protestant Creeds” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 421.

3. Richard R. DeRidder, *Translation of Ecclesiastical Manual, including the decisions of the Netherlands Synods and other significant matters relating to the government of the churches* (originally authored by P. Biesterveld and Dr. H. H. Kuyper), (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), p. 43.

4. DeRidder, pp. 59-60.

5. DeRidder, pp. 81, 109, 141, 144.

6. DeRidder, pp. 121, 147.

Cup


A cup is rather mundane. At least four times per year we hear, “the cup of blessing which we bless....” But we often forget about the cup itself because of the element inside. Cups are like that, mere common household utensils like forks and plates, in themselves insignificant, yet very important as means to collect, distribute, and receive something for personal consumption.

Scripture mentions a number of cups. The first is in a dream, the royal cup that a butler held in his hand (Gen. 40:11-21). Not long after, Joseph hid his own silver cup in the feed-sack of brother Benjamin (Gen. 44:1-17). King David once heard a story about a little ewe lamb who drank from a poor man’s cup (I Sam. 12:3). Cups were also important utensils in God’s house. The massive brass washbasin in the temple had a brim like a cup (I Kings 7:26). And then there were all those solid gold cups. Even though Israel plundered the temple more than once to pay tribute, those cups had remained to be carried away into Babylon (Jer. 52:19). Belshazzar, you will recall, got drunk from them the night he was slain (Dan. 5:1-30), and they were among the few things that returned back to Jerusalem with the children of Israel (Ezra 1:11). Cups are like that too—they can contain blessing for one person and curse for another.

Cups are sometimes called by their owner, like the cup of Pharaoh (Gen. 40:13) or cup of the Lord (I Cor. 10:21). They can be called by their contents. Surprisingly, Scripture mentions only two liquids—a cup of water (Matt. 10:42), the basic life-giving drink, and a cup of wine (Prov. 23:31), the rich fruit of the vine that gladdens the heart. Cups are also called by the effect from drinking their contents, so we read of the cup of trembling (Is. 51:22), cup of consolation (Jer. 16:7), and cup of astonishment (Eze. 23:33). Cups even represent the heart, as a personal container of good or evil. For Jesus once told those hypocrites, the scribes and Pharisees—famous for cleaning the outside of their cups while being inwardly full of sin—that they

should first clean that within their cup, that the outside of them may be clean also (Matt. 23:25-26).

Two cups receive the most attention in Scripture. Both Jesus holds. The first is the wine cup in which the Lord stores up all His fury (Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10). Its contents are a blood red mixture of judgment, and its dregs all the wicked of the earth shall drink (Ps. 75:8). From it He pours out a horrible tempest of snares, fire, and brimstone (Ps. 11:6). Drinking from it moves the ungodly to madness and exposes their raw hatred against the Lord (Jer. 25:16; Lam. 4:21). Babylon, mankind’s great kingdom against Christ, shall receive a double portion from this cup (Rev. 16:19; 18:6), because she made all the nations drink from her own cup of abominations and fornication (Jer. 51:7; Rev. 17:4). Its citizens, identified by this mark of abominable worship and lust, will all drink of the Lord’s wrath, poured out undiluted from the cup of His indignation and be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels...and the Lamb (Rev. 14:10).

But there is another cup in the hand of the Lord. It, too, is full of wine. It is the cup of salvation (Ps. 116:13), the cup of blessing, the communion cup of the blood of Christ (I Cor. 10:16). It is such because the contents are Jesus Himself, so that everyone who drinks from it may say the Lord is the portion of my cup (Ps. 16:5). And no meager thimble full either, but a cup that runneth over (Ps. 23:5), a liberal portion of Christ’s own Spirit, which gladdens the soul (Eph. 5:18). This royal cup is not for everyone. One cannot drink from the cup of devils and drink from this cup of the Lord (I Cor. 10:21). It is a privilege. And those who drink from this cup of the Lord will not drink from that other cup. God promises so: “Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again” (Is. 51:17-22). Jesus drank every drop from that cup of God’s wrath for us (John 18:11). Remember this great blessing the next time you hear, “Drink ye all of it...this cup is the new testament in my blood which is shed for you” (Matt. 26:27; Luke 22:17-20). Remember. So that as often as ye drink this cup ye do shew the Lord’s death till He come (I Cor. 11:26). 

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Worship in His Fear: (8) The Preaching

Of all the elements of worship, none is more important to the believer than the preaching. True preaching is not simply something the child of God is interested in only if it is convenient for him to come to church, or only if he likes what is said. But it is indispensable. It is the chief (most important) means of grace. It works faith. It comforts the soul. It instructs in the way of righteousness. It makes God's people wise unto salvation (II Tim. 3:15). And most importantly, it is the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16).

The preaching, therefore, must be central in our worship services. And that it is ought to be evident from a number of things. First, the pulpit, from which the Word of God sounds forth, should not be off in a corner, replaced by music stands, microphones, drums, guitars, or a choir, but in the front and center. Secondly, the sermons, because they are the most important part of the worship service, are to be the longest part of it. And thirdly, the church ought to have two worship services each Sunday, which the people of God faithfully attend to hear the preaching of the gospel.

The preaching needs to be guarded by us in our worship services. We should never want less of it. We should never want it to be replaced by other things. It must be central.



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Previous article in this series: April 15, 2007, p. 327.

As we well know, it is the minister of the Word who is called to do the work of preaching. He is given the solemn charge by Christ, "Preach the Word!" (See II Tim. 4:1, 2.) This, the Scriptures make plain, is to be his main work. It is true that he also has other duties, especially as a pastor and shepherd to the flock that is entrusted to his care. But the outstanding and fundamental calling he has is to preach. This is the work he must be busy at, and thus the work that should take up the majority of his time.

The minister has an awesome calling. He is a herald who has been sent to proclaim the words of King Jesus. He has been given an official message from Christ, and must see to it that he brings only Christ's words.

His sermons, then, may not be a setting forth of the words and ideas of men. The preacher may not bring Christ's words and his own, thus adding to what Christ says. Nor may he speak only some of Christ's words, thus taking away from what Christ says. He must preach the official message that Christ has given Him, and he must preach all of it. He should be able to say concerning every word in every sermon, "Thus saith the Lord!"

When we say that the Word of Christ must be preached, we are in essence saying that the main content of every sermon is to be the gospel. That gospel is the good news of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the gospel that assures the people of God of the forgiveness of sins and of life eternal. It is the gospel that gives them hope and comfort and peace. No matter what the text is, from either

the Old or New Testament, this gospel must be proclaimed.

To preach the gospel faithfully is to preach Christ and Him crucified. That involves preaching sin, and preaching it pointedly, so that God's children are humbled and led to seek pardon and deliverance in their Savior. It is preaching that proclaims the grace of God to all who are His in Christ. And it is the gospel that instructs and motivates the people of God to show their gratitude to God for His great and gracious deliverance. The minister of the Word must preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things.



True and faithful gospel preaching in the church of Christ is preaching that comes with authority and with power.

It does so because when a minister, who has been lawfully called and sent by Christ, faithfully speaks the Word, the Lord Jesus Himself speaks to His church. The apostle Paul points this out when he says to the believers, "ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). Christ states the same thing when He says, "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27a). Thus Christ in effect tells ministers what He told His disciples: "He that heareth you heareth me" (Luke 10:16a).

Through the preaching, Christ speaks with authority. He, the Son of God, speaks to us. This means that we must sit up and listen. We should be interested in every word He has to say. And what He says must be gladly obeyed. We may not, as listeners, simply take it or

leave it as we please. We may not view faithful preaching as being simply a man's opinion. We must hear and heed it as the Word that Christ speaks.

Christ also speaks with power—a power that, according to His will, either hardens or saves. No preacher is himself able to save anyone. No matter how powerful his oratory, and no matter how passionately he utters the call to repentance and faith, he is himself incapable of converting a single soul. All his efforts are fruitless and vain without the work of Christ and His Spirit. Only because Christ Himself speaks through the preaching, and only because the Spirit applies that Word to those who hear, is it powerful to accomplish its purpose.

That Christ speaks means that the preaching will always bear fruit. No one can hear Christ and remain neutral in relation to Him, or be unaffected by what He says. No one can sit under the true preaching of the gospel and return home the same as when he or she came to church. One either hates what he hears and thus shuts his ears and heart to it, or else he delights in it, obeys it, and is comforted by it. The Word of Christ will never return unto Him void, but it will accomplish what He pleases, and will prosper in the thing whereto He sends it (Isaiah 55:11). The elect will be saved, and the reprobate will be hardened in unbelief. Faithful preaching is always powerful, effective, and fruitful.



True preaching of the Word is critically important for the child of God, for it gives nourishment to his soul. When God's Word is faithfully preached, the people of God are spiritually fed.

The believer comes to church spiritually weary. The daily battles against temptation and sin have caused his faith to become weak, and his assurance of salvation and of the love of God to grow dim. He needs to hear the gospel, for on numerous occasions during the past week he has stumbled and fallen into sin. He is spiritually hungry and thirsty on account of the weariness that results from facing countless afflictions and distresses in life. He comes to the house of God with the need and the desire to be once again fed with spiritual food that will revive and strengthen him again for the battle of faith.

When the believer comes to church each Sunday with this desire, Christ is pleased to feed him. He uses the preaching to strengthen our faith, to comfort our sin-troubled souls, and to assure us of His love and of eternal life. The pilgrim is thus equipped to continue on in his earthly sojourn, strengthened to face whatever the Lord sends in the coming week.


For this reason the church and people of God need good and sound preaching of the Scriptures. If the word that is proclaimed is Christ-less or gospel-less, the children of God cannot survive. If the preaching is simply a moral homily, souls are not fed. The preaching must provide good spiritual nourishment.

Thus the preacher must preach the Word. He may not be controlled by or give in to the pew. That is always a temptation. There are many things that the people of God prefer not to hear, and to which they are not naturally receptive. They would rather not hear pointed and humbling truths from the Word of God, especially truths that touch on their own sins. They prefer that the sins that they love and enjoy be left alone.

Faithful preaching requires that the whole Word of God be preached, and that it be preached sharply and pointedly. The preacher must not be afraid of what men might say or think. He must not cave in to the pressure of the listeners. The pew does not dictate what is preached, but Christ does. And Christ's Word must never be watered down, or have its sharp edges trimmed away. The preacher must ever remain faithful to the charge Christ has given, "Preach the Word!" Only then will the preaching feed and nourish hungry and thirsty souls.



Do not take the preaching for granted. Be truly thankful for Christ's gracious provision of this chief means of grace. Make good use of the preaching. And see to it that the preaching ever remains of central importance, not only in worship, but also in your life.

May God be pleased to continue to use the preached gospel as a powerful means to make us grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

The consistory of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada recently informed their congregation of

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

their decision to discontinue, for the present time, the investigation of a church building addition. This decision was taken because, as reported in July, the Genesis PR School Society received approval from the Immanuel congregation to purchase part of their church property for the construction of a school building in the near fu-

ture. Immanuel's consistory decided that the cost of the construction of a school building and an addition to the church building at the same time may result in a financial burden that neither the congregation nor the school society would be able to bear. Immanuel also felt that a building for the school was a higher priority at this

time than a church building addition.

Immanuel's consistory also approved the recommendation of a special committee that a computer audio-recording system be purchased. This proposed computer system will be able to record worship services into a digital format and distribute copies of those worship services on CD. Storage, cataloging, and retrieval of past worship services will also be easier with this system.

The council of the South Holland, IL PRC informed their congregation in mid-June that the closing on their church and school property took place on June 13. South Holland will now pay rent to Power and Light Evangelistic Church for the use of the church and parsonage for each month they stay. South Holland has the option to rent the church until the end of October and after that to continue renting the parsonage until the end of 2008. Power and Light will take possession of the school building for the summer months until mid-August. At that time the school will have the option to rent the facility on a month-by-month basis until the end of 2007.

The Building Committee of the Byron Center, MI PRC purchased a heart defibrillator in June and hoped to have it installed by the first of July. Training was also made available for anyone interested in learning how to use it.

The Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN hosted a Vacation Bible School June 25-29. This year's school studied "The Ten Commandments." Children 4 years-5th grade were invited to attend.

All prospective members of the daughter church of the Hull, IA PRC, what we will call Hull II, were invited to the Boyden Centennial Park June 20 for an evening of fun and fellowship. Prospective members were encouraged to bring their favorite desserts and toppings. A donation box was present to help cover the cost of a soft-serve ice cream machine. Activities planned for the evening included horseshoes, sand volleyball, softball, and a small bicycle trail.

The council of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL decided to sponsor "Sing-Along-Evenings" for their congregation as a way to promote fellowship and singing in their midst. These will probably be held in the months of March, June, September, and December of each year. Bethel's first "Sing-

Along-Evening" was planned for Sunday, June 24, after the evening service.

The Building Committee of the Wingham, Ontario, Canada PRC thanked all those from their congregation who came out to help with the re-shingling of their church roof.

Evangelism Activities

The council of Wingham decided to place a weekly ad promoting their church, including service times, in the Wingham Advance-Times for six months, beginning this summer.

The Evangelism Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC reported to their congregation that during the past few months over 80 of their sermons posted on Sermonaudio.com have been downloaded. Some of those downloads are from Germany, Brazil, and many even from China.

The Evangelism Committee of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI recently provided their congregation with some of the highlights from their June meeting. Included in those highlights was a thank you received by the committee for the audio version of the *Standard Bearer*, which Southeast has provided upon request to anyone desiring it, from an individual who was the first person in Northern Ireland to receive the *Standard Bearer* some 30 years ago. He has since lost his eyesight.


Sister Church Activities

As we have written in the past, we continue to be amazed at the website (www.cprf.co.uk) of the Cov-

enant PRC in Ballymena, NI on account of the tremendous amount of spiritual information they continue to provide. Covenant now has almost 400 pieces in 59 different languages on their "Languages" page. Additions include ecumenical creeds in Albanian, Arabic, Icelandic, Irish, Macedonian, Scottish Gaelic, and Tamil; the Heidelberg Catechism in Indonesian and Korean; six new Portuguese translations; a Ukrainian translation of HC Hoeksema's pamphlet "The Marks of the True Church"; and a much lengthened Italian translation of Prof. H Hanko's "The Covenant with Believers and their Children." We are not alone in that admiration. A visitor to their website writes, "What an incredible service you perform for the body of Christ in that you provide the timeless orthodoxy of the church to so many in their own tongue. The more Christians and newly converted we get started off with their thinking framed by proper doctrine, the better off we will be..." (Ohio, USA).

School Activities

The members of the Genesis PR School Society of Lacombe, AB, Canada sponsored a lecture given by Prof. R. Decker entitled, "Holding the Traditions of Reformed Christian Education." This lecture was held at the Immanuel PRC of Lacombe on June 15.

The Federation of PR Schools sponsored a two-day Summer Seminar on June 21 and 22 entitled, "The Kingdom of God and the PR Christian School." 

Announcements

NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will convene at the Lynden PRC in Lynden, WA, on Wednesday, September 5, 2007, at 8:30 A.M. All material for the agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, August 6, 2007. Delegates or visitors who will need lodging or transportation should notify Lynden's clerk, Mr. Henry Buiter (360-966-1171).

Rev. Richard J. Smit, Stated Clerk

NOTICE!

The board of Eastside Christian School, Grand Rapids, Michigan anticipates the retirement of Miss Agatha Lubbers, as administrator, in the summer of 2008. Persons from the Protestant Reformed community interested in her position may direct their inquiries to Mr. Dan Monsma at (616) 293-4120.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

On Monday, June 4, 2007, the Lord in His sovereign good pleasure called home

MRS. JULIA BLANKESPOOR.

The consistory and congregation of the PRC in South Holland express their Christian sympathy to Mr. James Blankespoor on the passing to glory of his wife, at the age of 91.

"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm 73:24).

Rev. Allen Brummel, President
Gysbert VanBaren, Clerk

NOTICE

Annual Meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Thursday, September 27, 7:30 P.M., at Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church.

1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

THE *June 1, 2000* STANDARD BEARER

PERIODICAL
Postage Paid at
Jenison,
Michigan

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 12, 2007 at the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 12, 2007.

Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 15, 2007, D.V., our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents,

MR. and MRS. STUART BYLSMA, will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to God for them, and for blessing their marriage these 60 years. We are deeply appreciative of the covenant instruction they have given to us and the love of God that they have shown to us.

May our covenant God continue to bless and keep them in the days to come.

"He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great. The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children" (Psalm 115:13, 14).

✿ Gary and Marilyn Bylsma
(Karen in glory)

David and Chris Linker
Steve and Rosie Bylsma
Dan and Jean Bylsma
David and Amy Brands
Andy and Shannon Bylsma
Ryan, Brett

✿ Rich and Marcia Flikkema
Dan and Tammy McHugh
Mike and Tricia Brummel
Joe and Heidi Kleyn
Kyle (in glory)

✿ Carole tenHaaf
Mike and Andrea tenHaaf
Jon and Sharon tenHaaf
Brian and Michelle tenHaaf
Ben and Carolyn Leppink
David and Casey tenHaaf
Gary

✿ Phyllis Bylsma

✿ Tim and Sharon Rus
Chad and Jill Rus
Jer and Kelly Langerak
Courtney, Alisha, Charity
31 great grandchildren
1 great grandchild in glory

Jenison, Michigan

NOTICE

Seminary Convocation will take place on September 5, 2007, in Grandville PRC, at 7:30 P.M., with Prof. Cammenga giving the address.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

ALVIN and BETTY BLEYENBERG as they celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary on August 28, 2007. As their children and grandchildren we are grateful to God for many years that He has given them together.

We are thankful for the years of covenantal instruction and guidance that they have shown to us. Our prayer is that our heavenly Father will continue to bless and guide them in the years to come.

"... but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

✿ Nelson and Wanda Oostra
Brandon (in glory), Keri, Heidi, Katie,
Vernon, Brandi, Kindra, Mariah,
James (in glory), Brandon

✿ Alden and Twyla DeJong
Veryl (in glory), Erica, Jordanna, Dana, Seth

✿ Randy and Cheryl Corson

Jason, Steven, Rachel

✿ Herman and Ruth Boonstra
Renaë, Stephan, Karmin, Dolan, Philip,
Lenora, Karlene, Kyle

✿ Wayne and Brenda Bleyenbergh
Titus

✿ Ryan and Laura Kats
Avery, Kenedie, Trayle, Maci

✿ Chad and Dawn Andringa
Jacilee, Shayna, Mandi, Silas, Shelby

✿ Daryl and Melinda Bleyenbergh

✿ Jeff and Sara VanMeeteren
Easton, Taryn

✿ Mark and Nancy Kooima
Connor, Ethan, Gracia

✿ Evan and Kim Bleyenbergh

✿ Myron and Amy Bleyenbergh

✿ Janna Bleyenbergh

✿ Jerry Bleyenbergh

✿ Derek Bleyenbergh

Hull, Iowa

EVANGELISM CONFERENCE

September 22, 2007

Sponsored by

Heritage PR Fellowship
of Sioux Falls

Theme:

*Ready to Bear Witness
of Christ*

1. The Role of Individual Believers
by **Rev. Kortering**

2. Evangelism:
How and How Not
by **Rev. Lee**

3. Preparing Ourselves
as Witnesses of Christ
by **Rev. Key**

4. Excited to Testify of
the Reformed Faith
by **Rev. Overway**

If you plan to attend or would like further
information please send an e-mail to
heritageprf@sio.midco.net.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to God for His covenant faithfulness, we rejoiced with our parents and grandparents,

DAVID and MARY KREGEL,

as they celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary on June 30, 2007. We are grateful for the years that God has given them together, and pray that He will bless them with many more. We sincerely appreciate the years of Christ-centered instruction they gave us, and the godly example they continue to provide for us in their marriage and their daily lives. "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).

✿ Bradley (in glory)

✿ Michael and Lisa DeBoer
Jenna, Allyson, Troy

✿ Brent Kregel and fiancée Kara Kamps

✿ Jason and Jill Kregel

✿ Ryan Kregel

✿ Emily Kregel

Byron Center, Michigan

Reformed Witness Hour

August 2007

Date

Topic

Text

August 5

"Waiting on Jehovah"

Psalm 27:14

August 12

"The Final Gathering of the Church" I Thessalonians 4:13-18

August 19

"Watching for Christ's Return" I Thessalonians 5:1-6

August 26

"The Great Good of Christian Education" Isaiah 38:19