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Weeping and Rejoicing Together

“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.”

Romans 12:15, 16

One who is saved by grace alone is to live in a way that harmonizes with this salvation. The doctrines of sovereign, particular grace imply and require a way of living that is “not conformed to this world,” but “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (2) in every aspect of one’s earthly sojourn.

The gifts with which God has equipped us are to be used in a sober and gracious way (3-8). Saved by grace alone, we are to be constantly “serving the Lord” (11). Concerning tribulation, we are to

endure it with patience (12). Being transformed, we are to “bless them which persecute” us, and not curse them (14). And now in our text we are shown that grace-alone-salvation requires an identifying of ourselves with the other members of the body of Christ.



The ability to rejoice with them that rejoice and to weep with them that weep arises from the activity of identifying with others. It implies that we understand their situation and circumstances, judge their experience to be legitimate and real, and feel for them in their joy or hurt. It is possible to see the circumstances that surround others and judge them rashly, concluding that they ought not be happy, or have no reason to hurt as badly as they do. We can easily judge that they deserve some hurt, or that they are exaggerating their joy or pain. Instead of identifying with them, we pass judgment from our perspective, detaching ourselves from them and condemning them for their joy or sorrow.

It is our fallen human nature that makes us inclined, when we see others rejoicing in some good that has come to them, to speak evil and to live in “malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Tit. 3:3). It is our sinful nature when we see others struggling in some difficult trial to be “glad at calamities” (Prov. 17:5).

It is generally easier to weep with them that weep, than it is to rejoice with them that rejoice. When someone weeps, it is because they are humbled by some difficulty. And when someone rejoices, it is because they are exalted by something they judge to be a success. Selfish pride looks at others from our perspective — how we compare to them — and we always want to be better than they. So when we see others exalted by success, then there is great likelihood of jealousy and envy. We instinctively see the success of others as our loss, or as making us less.

But God shows that salvation by grace alone, without works, enables us and requires of us to iden-

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tify ourselves so much with our fellow-Christians that we rejoice with them in their joy, entering into their happiness and being pleased with their success, or to weep with them in their hurt, saddened by their pain and loss. We can try to hide our envy when we still feel it. Unbelievers are able to put on an artificial smile and mouth congratulations, while underneath jealousy and envy simmers. But God calls for more; He requires of us something positive. We may not detach ourselves from others (in their success). Instead we are to be positively happy with them and for them. God requires of those He so graciously saves that they rejoice with others in their joy. We are called to identify ourselves with others.



It is the Spirit of Christ who alone is able to make possible something so unnatural to us sons and daughters of Adam. We all have the one and same Spirit working regeneration and sanctification in each of us. As a result of this work of the Spirit we are able to mortify our pride and to identify with the other members of the body of Christ.

Thus we can obey this command. We begin to realize that nothing happens to our fellow-saints without affecting us, for “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” So “whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (I Cor. 12:13, 26). Whatever happens to the other members of Christ’s body affects us. And, still more, whatever happens to one member happens to Christ (cf. Is. 63:9) our Head. We identify ourselves, not only with each other, but also with our Head, Jesus Christ.

Practically, for us humans to live harmoniously with all our fellow-saints, it is necessary that we be “of the same mind one toward

another.” Literally, we are to be thinking the same with one another. It is surprising how many times the apostle admonishes Christians to be of the same mind one with another: I Corinthians 1:10; 11:17-19; Philippians 1:27; 3:15, 16; Colossians 2:1-3, 6, 7. We are to think the same things about God, about His Christ, about His adopted children, about the salvation He so graciously imparts to such undeserving sinners. We have the same mind when each of us does not “think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Rom. 12:3). We are to be of the same mind, so that our distinctions (being different members of the same body) do not create division but instead exhibit beautiful harmony. The members of the body of Christ are to work together under the Head for the sake of the whole.



How are we to be of the same mind one toward another? We are to “mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.”

To mind high things is to be “high minded” (Rom. 11:20). It is to think high or exalted things about ourselves, to be proud or arrogant. It can be intellectual pride. In the history of the church there have always been those with intellectual pride who constantly needed to be reminded that “knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (I Cor. 8:1, 2). It can be high desires or ambition for riches and honor or company with great people (I Tim. 6:17). Thinking high things about and for ourselves always makes us look down on others. When we think proudly of ourselves, then we consider others to be either a threat or inferior.

The members of the body of Christ are to work together under the Head for the sake of the whole.

May God give us the grace to say with the psalmist, “Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters or in things too high for me” (Ps. 131:1).

Instead of minding high things, we are to “condescend to men of low estate.” “Low estate” is something that does not rise far from the ground — that which is lowly, meek, or depressed. Pride and selfishness are mortified by condescending. The idea is that we must readily identify and associate with humble things and humble people. Jesus urged His disciples, when making a dinner, to invite, not their friends and family (“lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee”), but the poor, maimed, lame, and blind (Luke 14:12, 13). Bear up the weak, be concerned for the poor and ignorant. Condescend to the weaknesses of others in order to help them.

When God, in His boundless grace, gives us to have an intellectual understanding of His precious truth, there is reason for humility. We are to be humble not only with those who are given, in God’s wisdom, to know the truth less well, but especially with those who do not have what we have been given (cf. I Cor. 3:18). We ought not

care whether people are high or low, intelligent or unintelligent, but whether they are Christ’s. Our Lord washed our feet! Social distinctions are completely inconsistent in the church of Christ. And any ideas of high and low are especially incongruous in the Reformed church, for the Reformed believer ought to know, better than any other Christian, the nature of human depravity and the wonder of grace.


That is why our text concludes: “Be not wise in your own conceits.” We are not to be wise concerning

ourselves. We become wise in our own conceits when we forget our natural face and what manner of men we are (cf. James 1:23, 24). We may never forget that “we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Tit. 3:3-5).

This is what enables one to show “all meekness unto all men” (Tit. 3:2). To be full of self takes away the ability to love others, for love seeks not her own (I Cor. 13:5).

The sin of thinking of ourselves and being wise in our own conceits is what makes us most like the devil, who constantly thinks about his own desires and goals. Besides, we have nothing of which to be proud, for all that we have has been given to us (I Cor. 4:3, 4, 7). Then we realize that the more we

know, the more we understand that we know so little. The greater the knowledge, the greater the humility.

Let us walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). Consider our Lord, who was meek and lowly (Matt. 11:29). May the knowledge of the greatness of our own sinfulness and the graciousness of salvation lead us more and more to identify with those saved by the same grace. Then we can weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice. 

Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters

Intelligent Support of PRC Missions (2)

The mission labors of the Protestant Reformed Churches are worthy of heartiest support and earnest prayers. I showed this last time by emphasizing that missions stand at the heart of the church’s work. Thus, Jesus Christ is displeased with the church that is not busy in preaching the gospel outside of her own boundaries.

But I pointed out that the support given to missions must be intelligent support — that is, support should not be blind funding of and prayers for missions.

Without ignoring the possibility that improvements could be made in PRC missions, we may be very thankful for what the Lord has given us in the labors of our missionaries. Men lay down their lives for the cause of Christ in the USA and abroad, preaching the gospel. In obedience to Christ, they seek

to gather God’s elect and make them members of Christ’s body, of a local congregation.

This work deserves our heartiest support and fervent prayer.

All the more, PRC missions are worthy of support because of what they are *not*, but might otherwise be. If our missions were what many missions are today, they would not be worthy of support. But the PRC missionaries are not clamoring to be what modern missions are, with all their novelties. Although I believe the PRC may do more to prepare her missionaries for the unique work of a missionary, much of what missions training is available outside our seminary would be a molding of the prospective missionary into a social reformer, community developer, a master at improving civil society. Let me explain.

Modern missions are radically different from what missions were a century ago in Reformed churches. True, modern missions

do not fail to organize or plant *churches*. But the churches that are formed are no longer the final goal of the missionary. Instead, the new group gathered and formed has a more ambitious goal—to renew the *community* in which the group lives. In this way, they believe, they will be truly establishing and promoting Christ’s kingdom.

One of the conservative Reformed church magazines has devoted the rubric on missions in the last months to a reprinting of a book whose title expresses hope for peoples of the southern hemisphere. Notice, the book is being printed serially under the rubric *missions*. What the book describes and promotes is the call to reform nations and influence governments. For the author, influencing governments is important, but the prospering of the nation by the changed government is the goal. The book includes instruction to improve education, both Christian and public; to better the health care of the

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nation; to promote vocational training and “work associations.” Sometimes the church as an institution may speak to social issues, in some cases addressing the government, because “the church as an institution is an important part of society.” The hope for the southern hemisphere apparently does not center in the church.

The book is representative of much mission theology in Reformed churches today.

These actions are justified in especially three ways. First, modern mission theology claims that Jesus taught Christians to influence society for good. Jesus taught this, allegedly, in Matthew 5:13-16 (where the disciples are called salt and light) and Matthew 13:33 (where the kingdom of heaven is likened unto leaven). Without explaining these passages, the book mentioned above claims that they “clearly” call Christians to work to improve the societies of which they are a part.

Second, modern churches justify their attempts to reform society because they claim that *the kingdom of God* is in society. The kingdom is far broader than the church. To them, the church is a *sign* of the kingdom or an instrument to *promote* the kingdom. According to this view, God’s (great) kingdom is not the (little) church, even though the church is part of God’s kingdom. What, then, is the kingdom? For them, God’s kingdom is *creation restored*, restored as closely as possible to its original condition. Restoration of this earthly creation in all its spheres—society and government, etc.—becomes the church’s work. Those who have attended Christian colleges in the last 30 years will recognize this teaching. This is the teaching of Abraham Kuyper, a teaching alive and well in Reformed circles.

Third, this view of missions and the church’s calling in the world is based on a particular and new interpretation of Jeremiah 29:4-7:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the

God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; Build ye houses, and dwell *in them*; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace (the Hebrew is *shalom*) thereof shall ye have peace.

In this passage, God’s captives in Babylon are called to seek, that is, pray for, the peace of the city in which they find themselves in Babylon. Because Babylon stands for the world we live in, seeking the city’s *shalom* is seeking the *shalom* of the world we live in. There are two unique aspects to the new interpretation of this passage. First, the welfare of Babylon becomes as important as and more important than the welfare of the church. Second, Babylon’s peace actually becomes the *goal of missions*. Not only are individual believers called to live in the world as good citizens, promoting the peace and welfare of their community and country (something we promote and call every believer to do) but the new view has believers *devoting their lives* to this, and it has this as the work of *the church in missions*. Put in the context of Judah in Babylon, the good of Babylon would have been the main focus for them in captivity. In the minds of some today, the *shalom* of the USA or Canada appears to be the main focus for the church in the world.



These must not be the views of the Protestant Reformed missionary.

First, Scripture calls the missionary to see the church not as salt that preserves the world from full corruption so that there is good in it (Abraham Kuyper’s common grace explanation), but as a *savor* (see Matthew 5’s own explanation of the function of salt). He sees the church not as a light that Christianizes business and entertainment and government, but as light that witnesses against the sinful world, and becomes God’s instrument to bring unto Christ (the Light!) His elect children who are in the dark world. And he interprets the parable of the leaven, not that God’s church/kingdom influences the structures of society for good (although they might); but that God’s church/kingdom so spreads over the world that people in every nation and every place are brought to Christ and into His body, the church. The church spreads so extensively.

Second, with regard to the *kingdom*, the church *is* the kingdom. The Protestant Reformed missionary sees the church and kingdom as coextensive. The church is not a sign of the kingdom or an instrument to promote the kingdom. She *is* the kingdom. The *Standard Bearer* has written enough about that. Here it is necessary only to state the position. The Old Testament nation of Israel, as a great kingdom, is fulfilled in the New Testament church. It is not fulfilled in a Christianized earthly government, United States or any other.

Third, with regard to Jeremiah 29, to hang on such a text a mission-theology that calls for Christianizing urban areas is to prostitute the text. God’s purpose and goal was not Babylon when Judah lay pining in this Antichrist’s lair. God was not going to save Babylon. Babylon would soon come under God’s judgment (read the prophets). God is concerned about His *church*.

The church is not a sign of the kingdom or an instrument to promote the kingdom. She is the kingdom.

The explanation of the text runs this way: God said, I have caused you to be carried away as captives. Now, you must pray to me for this land, because “in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.” You see, false prophets had made their appearance in Babylon, too (vv. 8, 9). They had given the captives the vain hope of a quick return to the promised land. Instead, God has Jeremiah instruct the people to settle down, give their children in marriage, build houses, and plant gardens. They would be there for seventy years. Because of this, they were not to pray for the ruin of Babylon, or that Babylon would be overrun by an enemy nation. They were to pray for Babylon’s peace. God’s church would be living in Babylon, and must survive there for a couple of generations. In Babylon’s *shalom* would be the church’s *shalom*. The church is the focus.

So Israel must seek Babylon’s peace, first, because to seek her ruin and destruction would be to rebel against God. The remnant’s temptation was to call God to destroy Babylon for Babylon’s destruction of Judah. But God’s will for Judah was that they be chastened in Babylon, and by Babylon. So seeking Babylon’s peace was to submit to God’s chastisement. Second, the church’s peace must be maintained. She must prosper there, even flourish. She would, only if Babylon did. To base a massive New Testament campaign and program of reforming society on such a text, therefore, is to abuse the text.



The Protestant Reformed missionary is interested in establishing churches. He is interested in the welfare of God’s church in the world. He will do all in his power to teach the converts so to live and think—with regard to the church, God’s precious church in the world.

He will teach them that they *are* the light of the world, and must shine so, as a witness against ungodliness and as a means to gather

God’s elect, who will then “glorify our Father in heaven” with other believers. He will teach them to live godly lives in every sphere—in business, industry, law, medicine, and government—and participate in all those areas if they have the gifts and opportunity. But he will instruct them to pin their hopes not on a redeemed society, but on the second coming of Christ and the new heavens and new earth.

In this connection, a positive explanation of Jeremiah 29 is helpful. The church must pray that the nation she lives in may be maintained in peace and quietness, so that the church herself may survive and even flourish in her midst. New believers are not taught to pray for another terrorist attack to humble this wicked nation. The church must be busy bringing forth spiritual sons and daughters who are given in marriage. She will build spiritual houses (homes, schools, churches) in which the children may live, and plant spiritual gardens from which the church’s children can eat and prosper. What the church and her children await in this anti-Christian world is not the ref-

The church must pray that the nation she lives in may be maintained in peace and quietness, so that the church herself may survive and even flourish in her midst.

ormation of the nation, but the return of Jesus Christ to destroy the world and bring the church home to the land of promise.

While the church awaits the “return,” she will concentrate on training men to be elders, deacons, and pastors for the church. The missionary will teach the people to focus on godly homes, where the children learn from word and example to hope in the Lord; and on good Christian schools according to covenant demand, where young men and women learn to think, work, cooperate, and do good to others. The young men will be taught to be good men for family, church, and society, well able to

provide for the ministry, the schools, the poor.

The missionary will be eager to teach the new converts about denominational life: the seminary that trains her future pastors, the mission work done in cooperation with the other churches, the support of the needy churches and retired pastors, and the contact that the denomination has with other denominations. For the sake of the unity of Christ’s church in the world the new members will be taught to have a strong denominational consciousness.


The hope of missionary and church family is to be busy with life and witness in the community, seeking to shine as lights to others and be attractive as church.

Then, there is a warning about Babylon (the nations), too. “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities” (Rev. 18:4, 5). You are not a friend of Babylon. Your witness to Babylon is this witness: All who remain spiritually a part of her will be destroyed

with her when the vials of God’s wrath are poured out. Your hope (in whichever hemisphere you live) is to become part of the kingdom of priests, that holy nation of peculiar people who are called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light (I Pet. 2:9; see also Ex. 19:5, Deut. 26:18).

That is the message of the Protestant Reformed missionary. That is the life of the Protestant Reformed congregation established by the missionary.

The missionaries and their families are worthy of our prayers and hearty support.

When did you or your family last write to tell them so? 

The Prophecy of Malachi

Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness (8)

The Second Disputation: Chapter 1:6-2:9 (continued)

2:4. *And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.*

2:5. *My covenant with him was of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.*

2:6. *The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.*

2:7. *For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.*

We must understand that, even though God's covenant is unconditional and everlasting, a covenant that cannot be broken and destroyed, a covenant that depends only on God and His grace, God's people have obligations and responsibilities in that covenant. The covenant does not depend for its existence on them and on their faithfulness, but those duties are nonetheless important in that they are evidence of God's relationship to His people and prove the power of His covenant of grace.

Indeed, though the covenant it-

self does not depend on the faithfulness of God's people, their own enjoyment of covenant blessings and their own assurance of their place in God's covenant do. When they are unfaithful they cannot possibly have any assurance of a place with God. When they walk in sin, their own consciences testify that they are God's enemies, not His friends. As the Canons of Dordt put it:

By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their consciences, and sometimes lose the sense of God's favor for a time, until, on their returning unto the right way of serious repentance, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines upon them (V, 5).

Here God speaks of the covenant responsibilities that belonged to the priests and through them to all Israel. Those duties and responsibilities include those already mentioned: the worship of God through the sacrifices and offerings and the duty of being separate and holy to God. These duties the priests had neglected and despised. Now God speaks of a third responsibility, that of knowing and teaching the law of God, and of judging Israel according to that law.

That this was a priestly duty is clear from Deuteronomy 17:8-11 and 19:17, 18. The first of these passages reads:

If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then thou shalt arise, and get thee up into the place which the Lord thy God shall choose: and thou shalt come unto the priests and Levites, and come unto the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: and thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the Lord shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee.

This does not mean, of course, that the priests were the ones who ordinarily and actually executed the law as Phinehas did. That was usually the duty of the judge or king. But the priests were the ones who interpreted it and who told all Israel what the law said and meant.

That duty of the priests in regard to the law had three parts, all mentioned here. First, the priests had to know the law. This is implied in what God says of Levi: "the law of truth was in his mouth." It is also implied in the fact that the priest's lips were to "keep knowledge." The idea is not just that he had the responsibility of teaching the law, but that he had to have it ready to hand as it were. Second, the priest had to be a teacher of the law. Seeking the law at the mouth of the priest did not just mean seeking a judgment from him, but learning the law from him. There is an example of this being

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done in I Chronicles 30:22, where the Levites in the days of Hezekiah are referred to as those "that taught the good knowledge of the Lord." Last, the priest was a judge who interpreted and applied the law to the people, explaining what the law required and admonishing Israel to live in obedience to God's law.

In all of this the priest was the messenger of the LORD of hosts. He was bringing the word of the great King to the people of the King. He had to be sure, therefore, that he brought nothing but the word of the King and that he brought that word as the King had given it, not taking away or adding to the message. Especially he had to do this because the word of the King is always the law by which the citizens of the kingdom are governed and under which they prosper.

In the Old Testament this meant that the priests were always also prophets. Even wicked Caiaphas could prophesy of Christ because he was high priest. Of this we read in John 11:49-52: "And this he spake not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation...."

In the New Testament it is a reminder of the responsibility that every teacher and minister of the Word of God has. He must bring only the word of the king and must add nothing to it nor take anything away from it. He may not do that as far as the Scriptures themselves are concerned (Rev. 22:18, 19), and he may not do that in preaching the Scriptures. It is also a reminder, however, of the priestly duties of every believer. Holding the office of a priest (Rev. 1:6), every Christian is also a prophet, and as prophet he must know, teach, and judge according to the Word of God. He must do that in his own home as a married person and as a parent. He must do that in his daily calling as a witness. He must do that in the church and in relation to the other members of the church. Always

and everywhere he is God's prophet.

The value of the knowledge of God that is the province of every priest-prophet cannot be overestimated. Scripture speaks of its value in Proverbs 1:4; 2:6; Jeremiah 22:16; Hosea 4:6, and many other passages, but it is John 17:3, more than any other passage, that shows us that this knowledge is indispensable, for it is eternal life. This knowledge the priests of Malachi's day had despised and withheld, and so it is today. The famine of hearing the words of the Lord, prophesied by Amos, has come (Amos 8:11).

Levi himself had been faithful in his duties, but these priests, his descendants, and many others today have been unfaithful. For their unfaithfulness God always judges them.

2:8. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

God continues here to rebuke the unfaithfulness of the priests as teachers of the law. Instead of judging the people according to the law of God, they judged falsely and so had caused the people to stumble at the law. They had protected evildoers by misinterpreting the law, and had been a bad example by their own refusal to keep the law of God. Verse 9 speaks of partiality in judging, that is, the taking of bribes and the favoring of the wealthy and influential. The following section is an example of such evil judgments. Though the people themselves are addressed and the priests not mentioned, they too were involved in the sins of contracting heathen marriages and in divorcing for any cause. Not only did they allow divorce for any cause, as Jesus' controversies with the Pharisees demonstrate (Matt. 19:3), but they themselves had married heathen wives in the days of

Nehemiah. Nehemiah 13:28 mentions especially one of the grandsons of Eliashib the high priest, who was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite, one of Israel's enemies. They were the leaders in wickedness.

By their wickedness they corrupted the covenant of Levi, that is, they were unfaithful to their covenant responsibilities and to the great God of the covenant and led the people astray as well, so that they too were unable to enjoy the blessings and privileges of fellowship with God. The covenant relationship between God and His people was harmed and interrupted by the evil deeds, the evil example, and the evil teachings of these false priests.

Such unfaithfulness corrupted the covenant of God with His people but did not destroy it, for even though Phinehas and his descendants eventually lost their priestly office, that covenant was continued and fulfilled in Christ. Of that there are hints already in these verses, for He alone is the one in whose lips is found no iniquity (v. 6); He only is able truly to turn many from iniquity (v. 6); and He, as we shall see in chapter 3:1-3, is the true Messenger of the LORD of Hosts (v. 7).

2:9. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my way, but have been partial in the law.

In the justice of God, His judgments are always fitting, or as we sometimes say, the punishment always fits the crime. Because they polluted the offerings of God, He would pollute them by spreading the dung of their solemn feasts on their faces, and He would destroy their place and reputation among the people (v. 3). Because they turned away from His law and would not uphold it, He pronounces a law of judgment and cursing against them. Here, be-


cause they had treated not only His offerings but also His law with contempt, God promises to make them contemptible in the eyes of the people.

This is usually understood to mean that God would take away their credibility and honor in the hearts and lives of the people, so that the priests would more and more lose their influence. We see something like this happening today with the Romish priesthood, through its wickedness and corruption, and it often happens as well with other church leaders who have departed from God's ways. Sometimes this comes about when

God leads them into falls and sins that destroy their credibility. Sometimes it happens simply because they begin teaching and preaching such nonsense that even the fools who listen to them begin to realize their folly.

God is not mocked. What a man sows, even in church office, he also reaps. He who sows to the flesh, as these priests did and as many priests do today, of the flesh reaps corruption. What he gains is itself corruptible and does not deliver his soul from eternal corruption. The same is true of those priests who in the office of believer

sow to the flesh. They, too, for their unfaithfulness reap unrighteousness, indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish and do not profit from their covetousness.

In the last day, the great day of judgment and wrath, every unfaithful priest will receive a just reward. Though in this life he may have had the adulation of men, he will be made contemptible and base. Not just before the people whom he cheated and deceived and to whom he lied, but before all the nations he will be told by Christ, the true Messenger of the covenant, "Depart from me; I never knew you." 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. James Laning

Holy Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant (1)

There has been much debate among Protestant churches over the subject of baptism. The disagreement has had to do with some questions that are of fundamental importance. Is baptism really a means of grace? And, if so, is it a means of grace to everyone who receives it? In other words, does every baptized person receive a gracious promise from God? Should the infant children of believers be baptized? And, if so, what is the basis for baptizing all the children of believers, when we know that they are not all elect children of God? The answers to these and other questions have been hotly debated for centuries, and they remain a cause for division today.

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When considering the truth concerning the sacrament of baptism, it will be important to see how different views on baptism are rooted in different views of God's covenant and of our salvation in that covenant. Both sacraments testify to the truth that God's covenant is unconditional. According to Answer 67 of the Heidelberg Catechism, they both "direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation." To teach a conditional covenant is to teach conditional salvation, and thus to deny that Christ's work is the only ground of our salvation. Thus, when setting forth the truth concerning baptism, it will be of utmost importance to show how the unconditionality of the covenant and of our salvation are clearly illustrated by the sacraments God has given to His church.

The first thing considered in

this series of articles on baptism will be the truth that the sacrament of baptism really is a means by which God gives grace. In later articles, Lord willing, the fact that this sacrament is a means of grace only to believers will be set forth, and the reason why infants of believers are to be baptized will be explained. Throughout the treatment of this subject, I will endeavor to show how erroneous views on this sign of the new covenant are rooted in wrong views of that new covenant and of our salvation within it.

A Means of Grace, Yet Not Necessary for Salvation

The sacrament of holy baptism is really a means of grace. The Spirit of Christ uses baptism as a means by which He strengthens the faith of His people by sealing unto them His covenant promise. This really happens.

God's people receive not only the sign but also the grace that is signified by it.

There are many who deny that this is true. Most Baptists, for example, will refuse to call baptism a sacrament, and instead prefer to call it an ordinance. We use both terms (ordinance and sacrament) to refer to baptism. But the latter term they reject. The term sacrament has long been used by the church to refer to a church ordinance that is both a sign and a means of grace. Therefore, those who deny that baptism is a means of grace will not refer to it as a sacrament.

The typical Baptist argues that when it comes to baptism (or the Lord's Supper, for that matter) there can be only two options. Either it is sacramental in nature, and thus necessary to go to heaven, or it is merely symbolic in nature, and in no sense necessary for salvation. By using such an argument they show their ignorance of what it means for a sign to be a sacrament.

That a sign is sacramental in nature does not mean that one has to receive that sacrament in order to go to heaven. The fact that God gives grace by means of the sacrament does not mean that one has to have received this grace in order to go on to heavenly glory. Indeed many little children have died and gone to glory before they have been baptized. But the fact that it is not necessary for salvation does not mean that there is no grace of God given to His people by means of it.

Both baptism and the Lord's Supper are means of grace to those who have already been saved by grace. First they are saved by irresistible grace, and then they receive more grace by means of the sacraments. The sacraments are a blessing to those who already have faith. First the Spirit of Christ breathes faith into them and saves them. Then they partake of the sacraments by which that faith is strengthened. This is how the sac-

raments can be means of grace, and yet not be necessary for salvation.

Where the Promise Is Found

It is important that we be able to prove that baptism really is a means of grace. For this sign to be a means of grace, God has to have added a promise to it. So the question is, Where do we find such a promise in Scripture? The answer the Heidelberg Catechism gives to this question is correct:

Q. 71 Where has Christ promised us that He will as certainly wash us by His blood and Spirit as we are washed with the water of baptism?

A. 71 In the institution of baptism, which is thus expressed: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." This promise is also repeated where the scripture calls baptism the washing of regeneration, and the washing away of sins.

This is where our fathers found the promise that Christ attached to baptism. They found it first of all in the words Christ spoke in connection with the institution of baptism, and then secondly in other places in the New Testament where Scripture calls baptism the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5), and the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16). Therefore, it behooves us to take a closer look at these passages to see how the promise truly is found there.

Let us first consider the words Christ spoke when He instituted baptism. Christ commanded the church to baptize believers *into the name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Although the King James Version has *in the name*, the verse literally reads *into the name*. For a person to be baptized into the name of the triune God is for him to be brought into the covenant fellowship that the

triune God has within Himself. One who is baptized is thus admitted into the Christian church, which is the one house that is called by God's name (I Kings 8:43). As God's people say to Him in Jeremiah 14:9, "thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name." Therefore, when Christ told us to baptize people into the name of the triune God, He was also promising us that baptized believers will be as certainly washed and brought into His fellowship as they are externally washed with the water of baptism.

Let us turn now to the two passages in the New Testament epistles in which baptism is referred to as spiritual cleansing. The first passage quoted is Titus 3:5, which reads: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." The term *washing* is another word for baptism. To baptize someone is to wash him. Here this washing (or we could say this baptism) is referred to as a washing of regeneration, which is a spiritual renewal. Although this must not be taken to mean that the external baptism itself regenerates a person, it does mean that Christ is promising to give His people the real washing as certainly as they receive the external washing.

This perhaps comes out more clearly in Acts 22:16. In this verse Ananias tells Paul, who has just been converted, to arise and be baptized: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." This is a rather amazing statement. Ananias actually refers to baptism here as a washing away of sins. If we heard someone make such a statement today, we might be inclined to correct him, pointing out to him that the sacrament of baptism is not in itself the washing away of sin. But this is not what is meant by what Ananias said. When Scripture here

and elsewhere speaks of the sign and gives that sign a name or a description that properly belongs to the grace that is signified by the sign (such as when Christ called the bread His body), it is a way of saying that Christ promises to give the reality as really as one receives the sign. In other words, when we see the visible sign we are to think on God's promise to give the invisible grace that the sign represents.

Receiving the Grace Through Faith


When we refer to the sacrament of baptism as a means of grace we are saying that it is a means that God uses to give us His grace and to strengthen our faith. When a true church properly administers the sacrament of baptism, the result is that the faith of the believers is confirmed. The preaching is the means of grace by which more conscious faith is worked into our hearts, but the sacraments, including the sacrament of baptism, are the means God uses to strengthen the faith that He has worked in us

by the preaching.

One receives this grace, however, only by faith. When one believes the promise signified by baptism, his faith gets stronger. When one uses his hand, his hand gets stronger. Similarly, when one uses the hand of his soul, which is faith (as stated in Article 34 of the Belgic Confession), his faith gets stronger.

If we understand and believe this truth, then we will be doing what we are supposed to be doing when the sacrament of baptism is administered. When we behold the sacrament of baptism, just as when we partake of the elements in the Lord's Supper, we are to be thinking about and consciously believing the promise that Christ has attached to the sacrament. The visible sign is to direct our faith to the invisible promise. Only when we are consciously believing this promise do we experience the sacrament to be a means of grace to us.

And we ought to experience this throughout our whole life. Article 34 of the Belgic Confession states this clearly: "Neither doth

this baptism avail us [i.e., profit us — JAL] only at the time when the water is poured upon us and received by us, but also through the whole course of our life." Through the whole course of our life we profit from being baptized. But we consciously experience and enjoy this only when we are believing the promise signified by baptism. When we see someone baptized, we are to think of how we also have been baptized, and how Christ has promised us that just as water washes away the filth of the body, "so doth the blood of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, internally sprinkle the soul, cleanse it from its sins, and regenerate us from children of wrath unto children of God" (Belgic Confession, Art. 34). When we believe this promise, our faith is strengthened, and we come away enjoying the comfort of knowing and of being assured that we have been brought into the body that bears God's name, the body that communes with the triune God in and through Jesus Christ, and that shall forever live to the glory of His name. 

All Around Us

Rev. Michael DeVries

■ "Global Warming" and a Green Gospel

A poll released in February 2006 shows that seventy percent of American evangelical Christians see global warming as a "serious threat" to the future of the planet. According to a report by WorldNetDaily.com, this survey, conducted by Ellison Research, indicates a majority of evangelicals agree with eighty-six Christian leaders who signed the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI): Cli-

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mate Change a Call to Action, which was unveiled on February 8, 2006. The ECI calls for government action to deal with so-called global warming and includes a campaign of newspaper, TV, and radio ads.

The purpose of the initiative is to "encourage action by evangelical Christians and all Americans to make life changes necessary to help solve the global warming crisis, and to advance legislation that will limit emissions, while respecting economic and business concerns." Those who signed the ECI include, among others, Rick Warren, pastor and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rich Stearns, president of

World Vision, Commissioner Todd Bassett, national commander of The Salvation Army, and David Neff, executive editor of *Christianity Today*.

The cover article of *Christian Renewal*, March 22, 2006, by Peter C. Glover, sounds a much-needed word of caution regarding this initiative. Glover writes in his article, "Hot and Cold on Global Warming":

But there is need for caution — not least because the initiative (signed by a group of 86 evangelical leaders in the USA) was seed-funded by a leading international abortion group.

Those behind the ECI were given \$475,000 by the William and Flora Hewitt Foundation, one of the top funders of abortion programmes worldwide, in an apparent effort to mobilize Evangelical Christian support against global warming.

The discovery was made by the Concerned Women for America (CWA), a group that rightly questions the political motives and moral authority of those behind ECI....

...The CWA's revelation comes hard on the heels of another devastating critique of the claims of the ECI document. Iain Murray, a senior fellow at the US Competitive Enterprise Institute, has written a paper entitled "Beware False Prophets: On the dangers of ignoring the harmful effects of reducing carbon emissions" ([National Review Online](#), 9.2.2006). He takes up the ECI's four claims, beginning with its foundational one that "Human-induced climate change is real." He writes: "This is true as a simple statement, but the evidence the group proposes for it is weak and its meaning far from clear. The group claims that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has 'documented the steady rise in global temperatures over the last fifty years.'

"This is not the case. The earth actually cooled between 1942 and 1980. The earth has warmed steadily over the last 25 years and the evidence from satellites is not consistent with the idea that global warming is actually global."...

...The ECI document further claims that IPCC has "attributed most of the warming to human activities." In fact the IPCC actually said it was "likely to have been mostly due to greenhouse gases" — but added a caveat that they could not be sure. As Murray says, more recent evidence tends to show this as a less likely scenario.

Greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide are also produced naturally and burning fossil fuel contributes only about 3% of total emissions.

It becomes increasingly clear that the ECI document may well

have entirely misread the IPCC's findings. Murray shows how claim 2 — that "the consequences of climate change will be significant, and will hit the poor the hardest" — is meaningless in the absence of any degree of certainty over claim 1....

...In other words," says Murray, "we can do more to help the poor by combating their problems now than we would by reducing carbon dioxide emissions. There is a terrible... cost to drastic action to reduce climate change and that cost would likely weigh heavier on the world's poor than the effects of global warming itself."

Such "costs" include holding back developing economies and restricting trade with third world countries — both of which would keep people in poverty in the name of environmental conservation.

Murray's conclusion is biting. "Evangelical leaders need to give more thought to the unintended consequences of their well-intentioned acts. By devoting spiritual and temporal energy to reducing carbon-dioxide emissions, they will probably hurt the poor more than help them.

"As Matthew 7:15 says, 'Beware of false prophets, which come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves.'... By adopting a green agenda, the Evangelicals may have thrown the poor to those wolves."

As much as we might wish it, modern science does not have all the answers. Consequently, science and the media can all too easily translate science-faith into science-fact — and motivate the well-intentioned to put their faith into action for all the wrong reasons.

Tom Bethell, author of *The Politically-Incorrect Guide to Science*, observes, "We are strongly inclined to substitute faith for uncertainty." As regards the highly controversial science surrounding "climate change" there are far too many willing to sign up to what may well turn out to be a new religion — simply peddling their own science-faith as science-fact. When you consider that climatolo-

gists cannot say with certainty what the weather will be like next week, it's odd that so many should be so certain what it will be like in 100 years time."

Columnist Cal Thomas puts it well, "If evangelicals make the environment another 'cause,' they are likely to be as frustrated and disappointed as when they exercised misplaced faith in politics to cure other social evils. Should they desire a real effect on the planet, let them return to the eternal message that has been given them to share with a world that needs it now more than ever."

■ Arm-In-Arm-In-Arm-In-Arm: Polygamy in The Spotlight

Strange as it may, or may not, seem "polygamy" has increasingly been in the headlines in recent months. Exhibit 1: In an article entitled, "Pandora and Polygamy," Charles Krauthammer writes, for [JewishWorldReview.com](#) on March 17, 2006, "With the sweetly titled HBO series 'Big Love,' polygamy comes out of the closet. Under the headline 'Polygamists, Unite!' *Newsweek* informs us of 'polygamy activists emerging in the wake of the gay-marriage movement.' Says one evangelical Christian big lover: 'Polygamy rights is the next civil-rights battle.' Polygamy used to be stereotyped as the province of secretive Mormons, primitive Africans and profligate Arabs. With 'Big Love' it moves to suburbia as a mere alternative lifestyle. As *Newsweek* notes, these stirrings for the mainstreaming of polygamy (or, more accurately, polyamory) have their roots in the increasing legitimization of gay marriage."

Exhibit 2: Stanley Kurtz writes in *The Weekly Standard*, on December 26, 2005, under the title, "Here Comes the Brides — Plural Marriage is Waiting in the Wings":

On September 23, 2005, the 46-year-old Victor de Bruijn and his

31-year-old wife of eight years, Bianca, presented themselves to a notary public in the small Dutch border town of Roosendaal. And they brought a friend. Dressed in wedding clothes, Victor and Bianca de Bruijn were formally united with a bridally bedecked Mirjam Geven, a recently divorced 35-year-old whom they'd met several years previously through an Internet chatroom. As the notary validated a *samenlevingscontract*, or "cohabitation contract," the three exchanged rings, held a wedding feast, and departed for their honeymoon.

When Mirjam Geven first met Victor and Bianca de Bruijn, she was married. Yet after several meetings between Mirjam, her then-husband, and the De Bruijns, Mirjam left her spouse and moved in with Victor and Bianca. The threesome bought a bigger bed, while Mirjam and her husband divorced. Although neither Mirjam nor Bianca had a prior relationship with a woman, each had believed for years that she was bisexual. Victor, who describes himself as "100 percent heterosexual," attributes the trio's success to his wives' bisexuality, which he says has the effect of preventing jealousy....

... News of the Dutch three-way wedding filtered into the United States through a September 26 report by Paul Belien, on his Brussels Journal website. The story spread through the conservative side of the Internet like wildfire, raising a chorus of "I told you so's" from bloggers who'd long warned of a slippery slope from gay marriage to polygamy.

Exhibit 3: Here in Canada a major headline in *The Record*, newspaper for Kitchener, Cambridge, Waterloo, was "End Ban on Polygamy: Study" (January 13, 2006). The article by Canadian Press reports:

A new study for the federal Justice Department says Canada should get rid of its law banning polygamy, and change other legislation to help women and children living in such multiple-spouse relationships.

"Criminalization does not address the harms associated with valid foreign polygamous marriages and plural unions, in particular the harms to women," says the report, obtained by Canadian Press under the Access to Information Act.

"The report therefore recommends that this provision be repealed."

The research paper is part of a controversial \$150,000 polygamy project, launched a year ago and paid for by the Justice Department and Status of Women Canada.

The paper by three law professors at Queen's University in Kingston argues that Section 293 of the Criminal Code banning polygamy serves no useful purpose and in any case is rarely prosecuted.

Instead, Canadian laws should be changed to better accommodate the problems of women in polygamous marriages, providing them clearer spousal support and inheritance rights....

...Chief author Martha Bailey says criminalizing polygamy, typically a marriage involving one man and several wives, serves no good purpose and prosecutions could do damage to the women and children in such relationships.

"Why criminalize the behaviour?" she said in an interview. "We don't criminalize adultery.

"In light of the fact that we have a fairly permissive society... why are we singling out that particular form of behaviour for criminalization?"

Instead, there are other laws available to deal with problems often associated with polygamous unions, which are not legally recognized as marriages in Canada....

...The Justice Department project was prompted in part by an RCMP investigation into the religious community of Bountiful in Creston, B.C., where polygamy is practiced openly.


But the project was also intended to provide the Liberal government with ammunition to help defend its same-sex marriage bill last spring.

Opponents claimed the law

was a slippery slope that would open the door to polygamy and even bestiality.

Focus on the Family Canada, which has been working hard to promote traditional marriage in Canada, is not surprised that the institution is under further assault. "There is little comfort in saying 'I told you so,'" said Focus on the Family Canada senior vice president Derek Rogusky. "However, whenever anyone raised polygamy as an issue in the debate over the definition of marriage, they were quickly accused of being a fear-monger and out of touch. Now we have three professors from Queens University with a government-funded study telling us that polygamy should be legal in Canada, too. Unfortunately, this doesn't come as a shock because the supporters of polygamy are advancing the very same arguments that allowed marriage to be redefined in the first place."

Exhibit 4: In the United States the president of the American Civil Liberties Union says polygamy is among "the fundamental rights" that her organization will continue to defend, *WorldNetDaily* reported in June, 2005. During a question-and-answer session after a speech at Yale University, ACLU president Nadine Strossen stated that her organization has "defended the right of individuals to engage in polygamy," reported *AgapePress*, noting that the comments cited by the *Yale Daily News* received little attention.

Here in Canada, the handwriting may be upon the wall. "If past is prologue," the *Ottawa Sun* predicted, "the matter will find its way to the country's top court for decision and the Supremes will rule once and for all whether we can walk down the aisle arm-in-arm-in-arm-in-arm. Talk about changing the traditional definition of marriage." 

Excommunication: The Extreme Remedy (2)

In our last article we began our consideration of Church Order, Article 77. This article outlines the proper procedure that consistories are to follow in excommunicating an impenitent sinner. We looked at the necessity for Christian discipline as that necessity is set forth in Scripture and our Reformed confessions. We also looked at the decisions of the early Dutch Reformed synods that preceded the formulation of this article by the Synod of Dordt. We concluded by considering the three steps that are involved in public discipline, giving special attention to the three announcements that are read to the congregation. In this article, we want to continue our treatment of this very important article in our Church Order.

The Role of the Classis

As we noted in our previous article, Article 77 requires that a consistory obtain “the advice of the classis” before it proceeds to the second step of censure. Already Article 76 mentioned the fact that “no one shall be excommunicated except with the advice of the classis.” This role of the classis before the second announcement to the congregation and before a person is actually excommunicated is a significant aspect of historic Reformed church polity.

It should be noted that the lan-

guage of these two articles at this point reflects one of the first important changes that the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) made to the English translation of the Church Order that had been adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1920 and was adopted by the PRC Synod of 1944. The Synod of 1946 made two changes to the Church Order. One of those changes was that the word “consent” was changed to “advice” in Articles 76 and 77.¹ The ground for this change was that “consent” indicated “a hierarchical church polity.” Additionally, “advice” is a more accurate translation of the Dutch than “consent.” The Dutch is *advies*, not *toestemming*.²

While it is certainly true that “advice” is the proper translation here, and while a concern over hierarchy is commendable, the “advice” of classis that Articles 76 and 77 call for is not the kind of friendly advice that a consistory may take or leave at its discretion. That clearly does not do justice to the kind of advice that Articles 76 and 77 require, the kind of advice that is the safeguard in Reformed churches against discipline improperly administered. As is the case throughout the Church Order, the advice of the broader assemblies is advice “with teeth,” advice that must be followed by those to whom this advice is given, or properly protested. This is Prof. Hanko’s position with regard to classis’ advice. In his *Notes on the Church Order*, he writes: “Classis must give its advice carefully, for it is giving the Consistory its *approval* (italics mine, R.C.) for excommunication if

the sinner does not repent.” Prof. Hanko goes on to say that “if Classis refuses its permission, the Consistory will have to reconsider its decision or appeal to Synod.”³ Clearly the “advice” of classis on matters of discipline is to be viewed by consistories as a decision that is settled and binding.

Seeking the Advice of Classis

Before a classis can give its advice, the consistory seeking classis’ advice must present the discipline case before the delegates of the classis. The practice in our churches is that ordinarily the request of a consistory for the advice of classis with regard to the second step of censure comes attached to that consistory’s classical credentials. When such a request comes in this way, the delegates to classis are not made aware of the fact that a consistory is seeking classis’ advice for an increase in censure until the day on which classis meets. In most cases this is adequate. But it would also be proper, and in some cases preferable, that a consistory submit to the stated clerk of the classis its request for increase in censure, along with a brief summary of the case, for incorporation in the classical agenda. In this way, delegates would have some time beforehand to consider the matter, and perhaps even to discuss the request in their own consistory.

Whichever method is followed, the consistory requesting the advice of classis with regard to the excommunication of an impenitent member must present its case before the delegates of the classis. Such matters are properly dealt

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with by the classis in closed session. In closed session, only the delegates to the classis, as well as presently serving officebearers, are permitted to be a part of the proceedings. All other visitors and guests are excused from the meeting. Before the classis the consistory presents a history of the case, never referring to the sinner by name, but always as “the member” or “the brother/sister.” This history must include an indication of the sin with which the member is charged (the grounds for his discipline), as well as an account of the labors bestowed by the consistory in visiting and admonishing the erring member.

As with the announcements that are made to the congregation, the history that is to be presented to the classis ought to be formally approved by the consistory. This does not preclude contributions that its delegates may make in the course of the deliberations of the classis, particularly in answer to specific questions of the other delegates. But it does insure that the account of the history of the case has been officially reviewed by the consistory and is presented as an accurate setting forth of the facts in the case. In this way the classis is not left to rely merely on the word of one or two delegates of the consistory, but on the testimony of the consistory itself.

What is important for consistories to remember is that the classis gives its advice on a decision to proceed to excommunication that the consistory has definitely taken. A consistory may not come to the classis in order to seek advice on whether or not they ought to discipline or proceed with discipline. The exercise of Christian discipline is the duty and prerogative of the local consistory. The consistory must have judged the member to be worthy of discipline, and the consistory must have taken a decision to proceed to the second step of censure with this member. VanOene writes:

A consistory would be amiss if it came to a classis without being convinced that it is mandatory to proceed. If a consistory should state: “Brothers, we have not come that far yet but if it appears in a month or two that there is no repentance, could you advise us then to proceed?” Classis would act completely incorrectly if it gave what would amount to a speculative advice. A consistory certainly has bound itself not to proceed without the advice of classis, but it is the consistory that bears the ultimate responsibility and must have reached a definite conclusion before approaching the sister churches for the required advice.⁴

What a consistory ought to do, therefore, before it comes to classis is to take four separate decisions. First, it ought to take the decision to proceed to the second step of censure, along with the grounds for doing so. Second, it ought to take a decision to inform the impenitent member of the consistory’s decision to proceed to the second step of discipline and the grounds for doing so. Third, the consistory ought to take a decision to seek the advice of the classis for the increase of censure, for excommunication. And fourth, the consistory ought to approve a history of its dealings with the impenitent sinner to be presented to the classis. These ought to be four separate decisions in the consistory’s minute book.

Classical Advice Regarding Excommunication

While in closed session, the classis must decide on a motion to advise the consistory to proceed to the second step of censure. With regard to such a decision, Van Dellen and Monsma write:

Before a Classis can express its opinion in a given case, it must ascertain: (a) whether the sin is censurable; (b) whether the admonitions and the suspension of the Lord’s Table according to Article 76 have taken place; (c) whether the first admonition to the church

has been properly made; (d) whether the Consistory has labored sufficiently with the erring member after the first announcement to the Church; (e) whether it is clear that the transgressor is and remains obstinate in his rejection of all admonitions.⁵

As we have noted already, the decision taken by the classis is settled and binding. A classis may refuse to give its consent. Generally, this disapproval is for one of two reasons. The first reason is that although the classis judges the member worthy of discipline, it is not satisfied that the consistory has labored sufficiently with the member. In this case the consistory would continue its work with the wayward member. If the member remains obstinate in his sin, the consistory would return to classis at a later date with another request for approval to proceed to the second step of censure.

The second reason on account of which the classis may disapprove a consistory’s request to proceed to excommunication is that it judges the consistory’s grounds for discipline inadequate and judges, therefore, that the member is not properly the object of discipline. In this case, the consistory must either reverse itself or appeal its case to the synod. If the consistory is convinced by the classis of the necessity of reversing itself, the

1. The other change was that “church” in Article 86, the second instance, was changed to “churches.”

2. As to “advice” being the more accurate translation of the Dutch, consult VanDellen and Monsma’s *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941), p. 319.

3. Prof. Herman Hanko, *Notes on the Church Order* (Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches: Grandville, MI, 1973), p. 153.

4. W.W.J. VanOene, *With Common Consent* (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1990), p. 313.

5. *Church Order Commentary*, p. 319.

member's censure must be lifted and an appropriate announcement made to the congregation.


In the case of a consistory that receives classis' advice to proceed, the consistory ought promptly to notify the member under censure of the decision of the broader assembly. The consistory will also need to compose an announcement to the congregation informing them of the decision of the classis and the increase of the censure of the erring member, which announcement will now for the first time contain the name of the sinner. This announcement will exhort the congregation not only to pray for the member, but also to admonish the sinner against the error of his way and exhort him to repent.

Two things related to a decision by the classis advising a consistory to proceed with excommunication. First, even though the consistory has been granted approval to proceed, this does not mean that a consistory ought not to continue patiently to work with the sinner. The elders ought still to visit the sinner and call him to repentance, at least if he will receive the elders. In this connection, the elders ought to ascertain whether the decision of the classis supporting the discipline of the consistory has any effect on the

member. Although classis has approved the decision of the consistory, this does not require a consistory to rush to excommunication. The consistory is still aiming at the recovery and repentance, the Lord willing, of the wayward member. There ought to be some time between the second announcement, therefore, and the third announcement, which includes the date on which the excommunication will take place, as well as the excommunication itself.

Second, that a classis has advised a consistory to proceed to excommunication does not rule out the possibility that a consistory never implements its decision as approved by the classis. The consistory is in no way bound to excommunicate because the classis has advised it to proceed. If the member at any point comes to confession of his sin and seeks reconciliation to the church, the process towards excommunication is halted. In this case, when the consistory becomes convinced that the sinner's repentance is genuine, a public announcement is made to the congregation, including the member's confession of and sorrow over the sins that were the occasion of the discipline. At that point, the sinner is restored and his discipline is lifted. If this should happen, a consistory

might also inform the classis of this, thus giving the classis opportunity to share in the joy of the consistory at the positive fruit to its work of discipline. If at some point later, the member should fall once more into the same sin, so that it becomes necessary for the consistory to exercise discipline again, the whole process must start over, and the consistory must eventually approach the classis again for advice to proceed with excommunication.

As a denomination we ought to be thankful that our consistories take seriously their calling to exercise Christian discipline. In the churches today, even in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, Christian discipline is a dead letter. And the result is that the churches are corrupted and sinners are left comfortable in their sins. What a blessing that our elders are concerned to fulfill this all-important aspect of the work of their office. But we ought not only to be thankful that there is not a neglect of Christian discipline in our churches. We ought also to be thankful for the safeguards against the abuse of discipline, safeguards that ensure that Christian discipline be properly administered. One of the most significant of those safeguards is the advice and approval of the classis required by Church Order, Article 77. 

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Worship in His Fear: (1) The Salutation

The formal worship of God on the Lord's Day is the central as well as a most blessed part of our lives as believers. We consciously enter the presence of our heavenly Father. We

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humble ourselves before Him. We praise and adore Him. And as we do so, we experience fellowship with Him. That fellowship is enjoyed by means of a holy conversation that takes place between God and His people. It is a two-way conversation — not only does God speak to us, but we are given

the opportunity and privilege to speak to Him. God is pleased, in this way, to feed and nourish our souls. We therefore return to our homes and to our lives in this world confessing that "it is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High" (Ps. 92:1).

There is always the danger, however, that our worship becomes routine and rather mechanical. We become so accustomed to the various elements of worship, that we do not think much about their importance and fail to worship God through each of them. Although we are in church and thus involved in worship, we simply go through the motions and do not worship God from the heart.

For this reason it is my purpose to consider in this and in future articles the various elements that make up our worship services. May this serve to remind us of the important place that each element occupies in worship. May it also remind us of how we are to worship God sincerely through every element of worship. And may we strive to do so, so that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts are pleasing to His ears and thus acceptable in His sight.



The worship service begins with the salutation, "Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ."

A salutation is a word of greeting. That greeting at the beginning of worship is from God. As we enter God's presence, He speaks to us, welcoming us into His presence and fellowship.

It is certainly appropriate that our worship services begin with this salutation from God. In worship, we who are creatures of the dust and sinners approach the almighty and holy God of heaven and earth. We must do so in accordance with the words of Ecclesiastes 5:1-2: "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." In light of this admonition,

it is proper that God speak first. Knowing what we are in relation to the Almighty One, we humbly enter His presence in order to hear Him speak. Our worship begins, therefore, not with man's speech, but with the speech of God.

We must clearly understand that it is God, and not the minister, who says the words of the salutation. When we worship God, we fellowship with Him through speech. In that conversation, the minister stands between God and His people. At times He is the people's voice to God, speaking to God on their behalf. At other times he is God's voice to the people, speaking to the saints on God's behalf. The latter is the case with the salutation. The minister says the words, but through him God Himself speaks to His people.



The salutation that is commonly used in our worship services is this: "Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ." This salutation, or slight variations of it (such as "Beloved church of Christ"), is based upon the salutations we find in Scripture. The apostle Paul, in writing to the churches, usually began his letters with such a greeting. An example of this is found in Romans 1:7, where we read these words: "Beloved of God, called to be saints."

God calls us His "Beloved." He reminds us, at the very beginning of our worship service, that that is who we are. He as it were says to us, "I love you. You are dear and precious to Me. You are the objects of My eternal and unchanging love!"

We are that. But the reason we are is not because of anything in ourselves, nor because of anything we have done. The only reason we

are the beloved of God is because we are such "in the Lord Jesus Christ." We have been eternally chosen in Christ. We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. We are sanctified by the Spirit of Christ. On account of Christ we are the beloved of God. Because of Christ and His work, God sees us as a holy people whom He loves and with whom He can and will have fellowship through worship.



The words of the salutation are beautiful and blessed words to hear when we enter the presence of God in worship. They are words we need to hear.

Sometimes we come to church and wonder, because of the trials we faced in the past week, if God indeed loves us. Perhaps our lives have been turned upside down through heavy burdens and afflictions. We have faced a difficult week of struggles. Our faith has grown dim. In weakness of faith, we doubt God's love.

Other times we come to church and wonder concerning God's love because of our sins. We know we have sinned again and again against Him. We have committed the same sins that we did in the past, even though we confessed them and resolved not to commit them again. We have been unfaithful. We know we have offended our God and Father in heaven. We hardly dare approach Him in worship.

But then God says to us, "Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ!" We come into His presence and He, in spite of all our sins, speaks these reassuring words: "I love you!"

This assurance of God's love enables us to worship Him. If we did not know that we were His beloved in Christ, we would not dare to enter His presence. We could

It is important that we begin our worship services by laying hold on these words of God and believing that we are what He tells us we are — His beloved.

not enter. We would have no right to enter. Without Christ, God could justly banish us from His house and cast us away from His sight. But knowing His love, and knowing of it as soon as we come before Him, we are assured that He gladly receives us into His presence to have fellowship with Him.

The fact that God speaks to us of His love at the very beginning of the service is also significant for the rest of the worship service. It means that we can receive everything that God says to us in worship as spoken to us in love.

That is especially important for the child of God with regard to the preaching. God speaks to us through the preaching. Sometimes His speech is gentle. He, as it were, speaks softly to His people. He tells us of His kindness and grace. He assures us of the forgiveness of our sins. He comforts us by stating that He is at our side in all the struggles of life. He tells us that He works all things for our eternal good. He says all this in love.

There are other times, however, when God speaks to us harshly in the preaching. He comes with sharp and strong words. He speaks words that are pointed with regard to our sins. What He says stings and hurts, for we see our sins and sense His great displea-

sure with us on account of them. However, having heard the salutation, we know that behind His stern rebukes and sharp words is His love for us. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens. If He rebukes us, it is done in love.




A question arises, however, in this connection. The question is, How can this salutation be spoken to the whole congregation? We know that they are not all Israel which are of Israel (Rom. 9:6). We know that it is very likely that there are those in the congregation who are not people of God, not His beloved. So how can the whole congregation be addressed as the beloved of God, when not everyone is that?

It is proper that the church be addressed this way because this is scriptural. God, through the apostle Paul, greets the whole church as "Beloved." God does this because He views and addresses the church organically. Scripture teaches us that the church can be compared, for example, to a wheat field. In that field there are kernels of wheat. But there is also chaff, and there are also stalks and weeds. This does not alter the fact, however, that the farmer views the field as a wheat field.

And that is exactly how God looks at His church. There is chaff in it. There are weeds in it. But God looks at what is at the heart of the church, and addresses it accordingly. And at the heart of the church are the elect. For their sake the church is addressed as the beloved of God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus the salutation is not for everyone who hears it. It is only for the elect, those who are in truth the beloved of God. The reprobate element in the church are not His beloved, and they know it. The salutation is not for them. God speaks it to His elect. And through the Spirit in their hearts He makes them know they are His beloved.



The salutation is an important part of worship. We must, therefore, give careful attention to this greeting from God. We need to hear it. We need to receive it by faith. It is important that we begin our worship services by laying hold on these words of God and believing that we are what He tells us we are — His beloved. Then, in spite of all our sin and unworthiness, we are able to enter His presence with confidence in order to experience blessed fellowship with our covenant God. 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Modern Heresies: Higher Criticism (1)

Introduction

Although many reasons can be found why heresies arise in the church of

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Christ, one important reason for modern heresies is what has been called "higher criticism." Higher criticism ostensibly inquires into the origin of the sacred Scriptures; that is, it asks the question: How did the Bible come into existence?

Although many answers have been given to this question by higher critics, they all come down to one point: Scripture is not, partially or in its entirety, the Word of God. It is well that we look into this question as we consider modern heresies.

The Origin of Higher Criticism

Higher Criticism has its origin in modern philosophy, particularly the Enlightenment. Antithetical to the Reformation of the sixteenth century was a movement called the Renaissance. The Renaissance had its beginning earlier than the Reformation. Its beginnings can be traced back as early as the publication of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, written in the early part of the thirteenth century. The Renaissance was a humanistic movement that exalted man's reason, made man the center of the universe, and made man's mind the standard of truth. The entire world had no other purpose than man's pleasure. Although some have claimed that the Renaissance is merely one facet of the Reformation and that the two movements were two sides of the same coin, the fact is that the Renaissance was anti-God, while the Reformation was God's renewal of the true church of Christ, and a rescuing of that church from the deadly embrace of Roman Catholicism.

The child of the Renaissance was modern philosophy, which is thoroughly rationalistic. Many of the modern philosophers, beginning with Malebranche and Descartes, claimed to be religious men; but they separated faith from reason. They spoke of an area of faith, the object of which was contained in the Scriptures and was accepted without proof, and an area of reason, in which only that which met the canons of rational proof could be accepted.

For example, Descartes himself claimed that the truths of God, man, and creation could be rationally proved and ought to be accepted because they could meet the criterion of reason, but a reason divorced from and not under the control of faith.

It is not hard to see that this view of the relation between faith and reason was utterly destructive of religion. One cannot, psychologically or spiritually, divide his mind into two compartments, in

one of which he holds to his faith, and in the other of which he accepts what reason dictates as truth.¹ The inevitable result of such thinking is that faith disappears entirely and reason is enthroned as the final standard of truth.

We should understand that such a conclusion means that *man* is enthroned and God is ruled out of His own universe.

That reason takes the front seat became evident in Deism, a heresy that arose in Great Britain, but was transported across the English Channel to the continent of Europe and across the Atlantic Ocean to America, where it formed the theoretical basis for the democracy imbedded in the *Declaration of Independence* and *The Constitution of the United States of America*.²

Deism teaches that the relation between God and His world is analogous to the relation between a watchmaker and the watch he makes. God created the world in such a way that it operates according to "natural law," so that it is not in need of any providential guidance on God's part, but can run by itself and under its own power. God, so to speak, winds it up; from that time on it runs mechanically.

Following this notion, Deism accepted as truth nothing but what could be proved scientifically, or, which is saying the same thing, by human reason. Everything that takes place in this world is explainable in terms of natural law; and whatever man may believe, if it cannot be demonstrated scientifically, had to be relegated to the realm of myth, legend, or superstition. Thus, angels, devils, miracles, and everything supernatural were automatically ruled out as being untenable. The world is a closed system. It is subject to no "outside" influences. Those who claim that God intervenes in the world reduce God to a *deus ex machina*, an improbable god who enters only periodically to straighten out some

tangled problem.

In this general intellectual climate higher criticism was born.

The Nature of Higher Criticism

It was inevitable that the principles of rationalism and Deism would be applied to the Bible and the question of how the Bible came into existence.

It is not so easy to describe higher criticism, however, for it has many different faces, and the views promoted by higher critics run through a wide spectrum from downright unbelief to various attempts to make Scripture partially divine in origin and partially human — the percentage of the divine and of the human varying with the particular higher critic.

Another element enters in at this point that must be briefly mentioned. In an effort to explain the fact that Scripture was written (though under divine inspiration)

1. While this sort of theory may sound strange to the reader, we ought to remember that something very similar is held by evolutionists who claim to accept Scripture. Some argue that while the Bible teaches a creation in six days of twenty-four hours, science teaches an old earth. If one questions a theistic evolutionist about his faith in Scripture and Scripture's teachings, he will say something like this: "In church on Sunday I worship and make use of the Scriptures; but in my laboratory or observatory I am a scientist." The impossibility of holding to such a division in the human mind is demonstrated by the fact that those who talk that way soon invent elaborate theories, such as the so-called Framework Hypothesis, to reinterpret Scripture so that it can be twisted in its meaning to agree with science. Science wins out; Scripture is destroyed.

2. Contrary to revisionist historians, to be found also in the Christian Reconstructionist Movement, such leading men as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and others were nothing but Deists. The very language of the *Declaration of Independence* is Deistic.

by different men, whose background, upbringing, personality, style of writing, and individual characteristics are evident in their writings, Reformed theologians spoke of a "human element" in Scripture. Usually these theologians did not mean that the human element limited the divine inspiration of the Bible, but they wanted to emphasize that Scripture was not written by dictation. Reformed thinkers had often been charged with this error.

Nevertheless, the use of the terminology was unfortunate, because higher critics took hold of the term and used that "human element" to explain the presence of what they insisted were errors in the Scriptures, *human* errors, errors that appeared because of the role that humans had in the original writings.

We would not be so concerned about this all if it were not for the fact that the Bible itself, when it describes the origin of Scripture, does not so much as breathe a word about any human element, and, in fact, repudiates the very notion. II Timothy 3:16 speaks of the Scriptures as being "God-breathed," and II Peter 1:21 specifically repudiates the notion of a human element when it assures us that Scripture did not come by the will of man, but by the Holy Spirit who "moved" men to write.

I will give brief descriptions of some of the more common higher critical explanations of Scripture, from the very liberal to the more "conservative."

The most liberal of higher critics do not consider the Scriptures to be written by God the Holy Spirit in any sense of the word. If they speak of the inspiration of Scripture at all, they put it on the same level as the inspiration of Shakespeare in the writing of his sonnets. They look at Scripture as a human record of the history of religion as religion gradually emerged from pagan polytheism and superstition to

more modern forms of religion. While some are willing to admit that once there lived a man by the name of Jesus who may have died on a gibbet, what the gospels contain about Him is mythology and legend.

Others also speak of the Bible as containing myths and legends, but prefer to explain the New Testament especially as an effort to put into mythological or legendary form what the early church believed was true of Jesus. The early church considered Jesus to be a great teacher, a miracle worker, a man who died for His principles, and whose spirit lives on in His followers. These followers of Jesus expressed their faith in Christ by means of stories of miracles that, though not true, express eloquently what they considered Jesus to be.

Many higher critics reject the traditional authorship of various books. Some consider the Pentateuch to be the work of at least four different writers who lived at different times and who had different reasons for writing what they did. The same refusal to accept the traditional authorship of books is applied to Isaiah. Usually two different men are said to have written Isaiah, but some claim that as many as three or four had a hand in the book. This denial of Isaiah's authorship is more pernicious than it appears, for the fact that Isaiah predicted Judah's captivity and return under Cyrus is considered by the critics to be impossible, and so chapters 40-66 of Isaiah's prophecy had to be written by someone who lived after the captivity.


Frequently Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are not considered to be the writers of the gospel narratives by their name, but the four gospels are said to have emerged in their present form over a long period of time, in which many writers and editors had a hand in the writing, and during which process of writing, one gospel narra-

tive was used in the composition of another.

As we drift through the maze of what is euphemistically called biblical scholarship, we find other ideas that keep cropping up. Some promote what they call a *Sitz im Leben* view of inspiration. This German expression really means that the authors of Scripture reflect the conceptions of the universe of their time, the culture and superstitions of their time, the erroneous ideas that may have been current in their time concerning events, the times they happened, and the outcome. The result is that there are errors of different sorts in Scripture in historical narratives, geographical descriptions of places, numbers, etc.

Yet others are not at all loath to explain Scripture in strange allegorical ways in order to make the Bible harmonize with their preconceived notions concerning creation and the flood, and thus introduce evolutionism into the church.

Such men as Dr. Ralph Janssen, who was fired from his position in Calvin Theological Seminary in the early twenties, believed that the miracle of the rock that spewed forth water in Rephidim was no miracle at all, but only a fortunate discovery of water in the rock by Moses. He taught many things current in the thinking of higher critics. He taught that the manna was a natural plant that grew in profusion in the wilderness; that the stories of Samson were myths that Israel invented in imitation of Greek mythology; that Moses' monotheism was developed from pagan sources during his years in the wilderness; and that much of Jewish religion was gleaned from heathen practices. While Dr. Janssen was deposed for his views, those views live on in the Christian Reformed Church.

All are efforts to destroy Scripture as the Word of God. 

Thoughts on the Call to the Ministry

Recently an entire issue of the *Standard Bearer* was devoted to the *Seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Jan. 15, 2006). This prompted Mr. Scott to write this contribution. It is not a response, as such, to any of the articles in that issue. However, that issue led him to contemplate the matter of the call to the ministry, and he took up his pen to discuss certain aspects of the call.

—RJD

Whenever a man aspires to the office of a minister, the question must be faced, has God called him? Normally, one begins by trying to determine whether or not God has given him the proper gifts. But how does one discern his gift(s)?

First of all, may I suggest that the issue is not merely whether one has such and such gifts. For, clearly, not everyone who has the necessary intellectual abilities and a gift for public speaking is called to the ministry. The question is, rather, is it *God's will*?

Then follows the question, how does one know God's will in this matter? This can be answered by examining what comprises a call to the ministry. There is, in my opinion, no better nutshell-definition of this call than that which was given by the eighteenth century preacher Rev. J. Venn. He said, "The call of the Spirit consists in his giving a man grace and a desire, accompanied by great humility and diffidence." Let us take a few moments to examine this definition.

First, "The call of the Spirit

consists in his giving a man grace...." This is the first principle. Before a man is "able to teach others," he must first be found "faithful" (II Tim. 2:2). In other words, a "bishop" must be *godly*! The graces that are listed in I Timothy 3:2-7 are nothing other than outward manifestations of practical godliness. Robert Murray McChesney said, "It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus." "A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God." If personal holiness is the key to God's blessing upon one's ministry, should it not be the first priority of one desiring to be a minister? We must remember, too, that these graces are not cultivated overnight. They don't come easily or quickly. Thankfully, our theological school is not a sterile, sheltered, synthetic institution. Rather, it is part of our churches, and therefore an aspirant to the ministry can grow in these graces as a living member thereof.

Second, "The call of the Spirit consists in his giving a man ... a desire...." Naturally, the question arises, how does one discern whether or not this desire is truly born of God? After all, the Bible does say that "the heart is *deceitful above all things*, and desperately wicked: *who can know it?*" (Jer. 17:9)? The answer lies in this — it must be a desire born of right motives. If one desires to enter the ministry in order that he may spend much time in an ivory tower sipping tea while reading Puritan and Reformed tomes, his desire is little more than a romantic fantasy. A true desire born of right motives will be evidenced by a deep love

for the person of Jesus Christ (John 21:15-19). Not a mere intellectual fascination for doctrines *about* Him. Rather, an intense intimate relationship with the Son of God is what is required. Does one's heart pound with excitement at the prospect of seeing Him face to face? Is his mind disciplined to know Him above all things? Is he resolved to use all his strength to fight against anything that would stand between him and Jesus (Mark 12:30)? Then, and only then, will one be able to say with the apostle John, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (I John 1:3). Also, a true desire born of right motives will not say, what can I get out of this? But rather, what can I do for the strengthening of God's people? How can I spend and be spent for others?


Third, "The call of the Spirit consists in his giving a man ... *great humility and diffidence*." With great humility it must first be said that this does not mean that one must be a Milquetoast. Nobody would accuse Moses of being such, and yet the Scriptures say that he was the meekest man in all the earth (Num. 12:3). Humility must indeed characterize one who is called to the ministry. But how does one know if he is humble? He will know it when through the eyes of faith he sees God as GOD, and as a result he abhors himself (Job 42:5, 6). This was so with Isaiah (6:5), Ezekiel (1:28), Peter (Luke 5:8), Paul (Acts 9:6), and a host of others. This is why one who is chomping at the bit to be the *Dominee* should be suspect. One must recognize that, in and of himself, and apart from the grace of

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God, anything and everyone he touches will become soiled. It does not matter how much learning one has. Let him bring a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, or a PhD, and have an IQ of 195, and be able to pontificate on all manner of things — it does not matter (I Cor. 2:4). But let him come with the

words of God (Ezek. 2:7-3:4) and he will come with power (Is. 55:11; Heb. 4:12). Was it not the eminent John Owen who said that he would gladly give up all his learning if he could preach like that tinker, speaking of John Bunyan. Let it be so with us.

It should be noted, that while it is true that we bring nothing to

the table, we should not be found doing nothing. What are you doing right now? How are you serving the Lord of the church? How are you serving people, right now, in your present circumstances? May God grant unto us grace to be faithful, industrious servants of our King. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

April 3 marked the 50th anniversary of the worst tornado ever to hit the Hudsonville, MI area. To commemorate that event, the National Weather Service and the City of Hudsonville planned a commemoration ceremony at Hudsonville High School on April 3 for survivors and families of those who died. Sometime before that evening Rev. G. Eriks, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, was approached to be part of that evening because of the well-known sermon that Hudsonville's former pastor, Rev. Gerrit Vos, preached on Psalm 46 the Sunday after the tornado. (This sermon can be found in the devotional he wrote, *O Taste and See*.) Hudsonville's consistory approved Rev. Eriks speaking at that event, at which he opened with prayer, read part of Rev. Vos' sermon, and made a few comments. Hudsonville's congregation was reminded to pray for their pastor and that the Word spoken there might comfort God's people and warn that Jesus Christ is coming.

A Special Request/Talent Program was held Sunday evening, March 26, following a farewell supper for Pastor-elect Dennis Lee and his wife, Ling, and their three sons, Jonathan, Benjamin, and Jason,

who have been members of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI for the past five years. You can imagine the congregation's mixed emotions: joy in the Lord's call to the ministry in Edgerton, MN, and sadness in seeing the Lee family leave the fellowship in Georgetown.

We can also add here that Pastor-elect Lee was scheduled to be ordained to the ministry of the Word, the Lord willing, on April 7 at the Edgerton, MN PRC.

The Building Committee of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI was pleased to report recently that the closing on their new parsonage took place in mid March. First expects to take possession of the home in June, when the seller moves out. We believe this home is next door to First Church, as opposed to their present parsonage, which is several miles away.

Sister Church Activities

The Evangelical Churches in Singapore request our prayers for Rev. Lau Chin Kwee, minister in First ERCS. Rev. Lau suffers from Amyloidosis, a rare and potentially fatal disease of essential organs of the body. In Rev. Lau's case, his liver is affected, and it has also affected his food absorption rate and bowel system. As there is no known cure, the only alternative is a liver transplant. However, even that procedure would not reverse the damage already done. Let us remember Rev. Lau, his fam-

ily, and the saints in Singapore in prayer that the Lord may strengthen and sustain them in these difficult trials and that they may continue to put their trust in the Lord.

Rev. and Mrs. J. Kortering hoped to return home the end of March, having been in Singapore assisting our sister churches there since the death of Rev. Cheah back in September of last year.

Mission Activities

An open house to welcome Rev. A. W. Bruinsma as our new Eastern Home Missionary, along with his family, was set for April 1 at the mission office of the Pittsburgh, PA Mission. During the first hour there was a time for refreshments and conversation, followed by an introduction of Rev. Bruinsma by Mr. Brian Suber, a member of Pittsburgh's Steering Committee. Rev. Bruinsma concluded the celebration with a brief speech/meditation.

The truth of the catholicity of the church as we confess it in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21, and taught in Scripture in such places as Ephesians 2:11-22 was brought to our minds recently when we looked at the website of the Covenant PR Fellowship in Ballymena, N.I. (www.cprf.co.uk/articles/languages.htm). They now have some or all of the Three Forms of Unity and the ecumenical creeds in Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian,

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Latin, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Ukrainian, and Welsh.

The Reformed Witness Hour program in Indonesia is being cancelled. Pray that new avenues might be opened for the spread of the Word over the world via radio.

Our churches' Domestic Mission Committee arranged for two visits in March and April with the PR Fellowship of Fayetteville, N.C. Dave, Bonnie, and Kris Moelker were there March 16-19. While there, Mr. Moelker led a Bible study on "The Covenant and Finding a Mate." Rev. M. Dick, pastor of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI, along with his family, were also scheduled to be there, the Lord willing, March 30-April 2. Pastor Dick also anticipated leading a Bible study while there, as well as preaching both services on April 2nd.

Young Adult Activities

The Young Adults of the Loveland, CO PRC hosted their annual Young Adults' Retreat at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes

Park, CO on March 20-23. Professor H. Hanko and Rev. R. Miersma spoke on the topic, "Lessons Learned from Lot." This year's retreat was the largest ever, with 69 young adults from our churches making the trip to Loveland. For the first time ever, the host society arranged for a day of snow tubing and sledding in Rocky Mountain National Park. The plan was to tube and sled on a prearranged tiny hill. The young adults didn't even consider it, and made their own jumps, etc., on a much larger hill. It was a great success and Loveland will be sure to include this activity again in the upcoming years. During the retreat it snowed several inches in Estes Park, so the retreaters from out of state got a nice taste of some Colorado winter weather. Besides the two speeches, the retreat featured two discussion topics, "Attitudes Toward Sinners" and "Overly Concerned About Tomorrow." The retreat was an opportunity to enjoy Christian fellowship with young adults, reflect on God's Word through speeches and discussions, and have a great va-

cation in the snowy Rocky Mountains.


School Activities

The Midwest Society for P.R. Secondary Education hosted a promotional speech on Friday, March 31 in the auditorium of the Hull, IA PRC. Prof. R. Dykstra spoke on the timely topic, "The Covenant, Faith, and Our Own High School."

The students of Covenant Christian School in Lynden, WA presented their school's spring program on March 31 at the Lynden, WA PRC. The theme for the program was "A Living Sacrifice," from Romans 12:1. Supporters of Covenant were invited to join the students as they presented their voices, hands, and minds in a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God.

Minister Activities

Rev. J. Slopsema declined the call extended to him from the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. J. Slopsema received the call from Faith PRC in Jenison, MI to become their next pastor. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Gunnink, Megan, and Isaac in the loss of their stillborn daughter and sister,

LEAH GRACE.

We also extend our sympathy to the grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Gunnink, and to the uncles and aunts, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Gunnink, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Fennema and families, and Sarah Gunnink.

May they be comforted knowing that in life and death we are not our own but belong to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ

Andrew Brummel, Vice-President
Allen Brummel, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to John and Tara Flikkema in the death of Tara's grandfather,

MR. JOHN ZANDSTRA.

May they find their comfort in Christ's word in John 14:2-3, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

Rev. William Langerak, President
Ron Kooienga, Assistant Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to the Lord, the Tolsma family wishes to announce the 60th anniversary of their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents,

JOHN and JENNY (Cnossen)

TOLSMA,

on May 9, 2006, D.V.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- * Emma and Sid Top
- * Henrietta and Jerry Kaptein
- * Harold and Winnie Tolsma
- * Olga and Dick VanderKooi
- * Frank and Sheryl Tolsma
- * John and Carolyn Tolsma
46 grandchildren
56 great-grandchildren

Lynden, Washington



WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On April 25, 2006, our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents,

**RAYMOND and TENA
BRUINSMA,**

celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary.

We thank God for giving to us such loving and godly parents and grandparents, who have instructed us in God's ways, not only by word but by their godly example. It is our prayer that God will continue to bless them with His nearness in their remaining years together.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

- * Raymond Bruinsma, Jr.
(in glory)
- * James and Kathy Bruinsma
Steve and Kristen Prim
Ryan and Jamie Bruinsma
Matthew
Eric and Amy Bruinsma
Zachary, Austin
- * James and Lois Rau
Dan and Carol Boeve
Tyler, Rebecca, Breanna,
Jonathan
Kimmy and Cheryl Kooiker
Christina, Brady, Rochelle,
Shania, Anthony, Joshua
Jeff and Kimberly Scholten
Amber, Brooke, Austin,
Cody
Rodney and Julianne Rau
Madison
- * Jerry and Martha Bruinsma
- * Karen Bruinsma
South Holland, Illinois

CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2005 appointed Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, Michigan the calling church for Synod 2006.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2006 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 13, 2006 at 8:30 A.M. in the Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 12, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. Bruinsma, president of the 2005 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Richard Flikkema, 7807 Coachman Lane, Jenison, Michigan 49428-8377. Phone: (616) 457-3730.

Consistory of
Faith Protestant Reformed Church
Richard Flikkema, Clerk.

REMINDER:

The *Standard Bearer* will be published only once during the months of June, July, and August.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC extend their Christian sympathy to Doug and Sarah Bishop and their children Nate and Tracy VanOverloop, John and Jessica Bishop and Austin Bishop in the death of Sarah's mother,

MRS. NELLE YFF.

May they find comfort in God's word found in Revelation 14: 13, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

Ken Feenstra, Vice-President
Tom Kiel, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to Rob and Judy Moerman and to their daughter Jamie Northup in the death of Judy's mother,

MRS. CORA BONSELAAR.

May they find comfort in the words of our Lord found in Psalm 116: 15, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Ken Feenstra, Vice-President
Tom Kiel, Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for May		
Date	Topic	Text
May 7	"To God, My Exceeding Joy, I Will Go"	Psalm 43
May 14	"One in a Thousand"	Ecclesiastes 7:27, 28
May 21	"Except Ye Be Converted"	Matthew 18:1-5
May 28	"When I Heard, I Wept and Prayed"	Nehemiah 1