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The Desire Accomplished: Sweetness to the Soul

The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil.

Proverbs 13:19

When Jesus was crucified, there were two men crucified with Him. These men were malefactors, or evildoers, who had caused a great deal of injury to others.

One of these men desired to depart from his evil way and be saved. He turned to Jesus, who hung on the cross next to him, asking to be remembered when Jesus entered into His kingdom. Jesus assured him that He would do so. "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise." How sweet this must have been to the soul of the malefactor. How wise he was to turn from evil to Jesus. He was not wise to wait to the last day of his life, but it was wisdom (that he received

from on high) that led him to turn from evil.

The other malefactor continued in his evil and died that day in his sin. He, with the others that day, held Jesus in contempt. No doubt he held the repentant malefactor in the same contempt. How disgusting to grovel in repentance. He would cling to his evil to the last breath. He died that day in the bitterness of sin. What a fool!

These two malefactors illustrate the truth of the proverb that we consider.

The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil.



A wise desire!

Although the wise are not mentioned in this proverb, they are implied by the mention of fools. This proverb contrasts the wise with fools.

What is wisdom? And what is folly? Wisdom is the ability to reckon with reality so that one comes out ahead. Foolishness is to

ignore and even act contrary to reality so that one ends in disaster.

And so we inquire into the great realities of life.

The greatest of all reality is God and His work of salvation in Jesus Christ. God has eternally determined to save out of a fallen human race a people for Himself, a people with whom He will live eternally. He accomplishes this amazing purpose through Jesus Christ — His incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and return at the end of history. The way to receive and enjoy this salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ. All of history is explained by this great work of God. Many things take place in history and in our lives. None of it takes place by chance. All things are directed by the hand of God. Central to all that God does in history is His work of saving and gathering a people to Himself in Jesus Christ.

In this light we understand wisdom and folly. Wisdom is to reckon with this great reality, so that one believes on Jesus Christ to the sal-

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vation of his soul. Foolishness is to ignore this reality, so that one lives without Christ in his own sin and ultimately perishes under God's wrath.

Mention is made in this proverb of evil. Evil speaks of moral wickedness that is hurtful and destructive.

This brings us to another important reality of life. God's law is good. It is good in that it reflects the absolute perfections of God. It is good also in that it promotes the welfare of those who keep it. When one keeps the law of God and walks in the goodness of God's perfections, he finds life and peace with God. He also finds peace and prosperity in marriage, the family, and society. On the other hand, evil, which is the violation of God's law, brings injury and destruction. It makes a peaceful and harmonious relationship with God impossible. It also destroys marriage, the home, and all society as it brings hurt to those around us.

Wisdom and folly will react differently to this reality.

The wise man will desire to depart from evil. He sees that reality of both good and evil. In response he desires to depart from all evil, that he may walk in obedience to God and enjoy the blessings of God. This is the desire mentioned in the first part of this proverb. The fool, however, finds such a departure from evil to be abominable. His love for evil blinds him to the reality and consequence of evil. To depart from evil is detestable to him. His desire is to walk in evil.



A wonderful accomplishment!

The wise accomplish their desire, which is to depart from evil.

This brings us to another great reality of life. One can depart from evil only in Jesus Christ.

We are naturally depraved. Our depravity finds its origin in the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Their fall left us hopelessly

lost in sin. So much is that true that we cannot possibly free ourselves from evil.

Escape from evil is only in Jesus Christ.

This is true because escape from the power of evil requires, first of all, the forgiveness of sins. We must remember that the evil that naturally dominates our lives is part of God's punishment for sin. God punishes sin with sin. God will release us from sin's power only through forgiveness. And there is forgiveness only in the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus went to the cross with the guilt of sin. There He endured the full penalty of sin for all whom the Father had given Him. On that basis God forgives, freely and completely. This forgiveness is found in the way of faith that leads us to confess our sin in godly sorrow and to cling to Jesus' perfect sacrifice.

Once one is forgiven, deliverance from the power of sin and evil is possible. Also this deliverance comes only in the power of Jesus Christ and by faith in Him. This is a faith that brings us to our knees in prayer. It is a faith that diligently seeks the faithful preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments. It is a faith that brings us into the fellowship of the saints.

What an important reality!

The wise act in harmony with this reality and are able to depart from evil.

There are those who wisely desire to depart from evil but lack the wisdom to turn to Jesus Christ to accomplish that desire. They seek to depart from the evil in their lives in their own strength. They do not accomplish their desire. The power of evil is greater than they can handle.

The way of wisdom is the way of turning to Jesus Christ and departing from evil. All who turn to Him in true faith will find the power to turn from the evil that so readily fills their lives. No, this does not mean perfection in this life.

The works of God's grace are only begun in this life. We must wait until glory to be free completely from all evil. Then we will walk in the joy of perfect righteousness. Yet, no sin in this life can dominate and control those who turn to Jesus Christ in faith. In Christ we can put evil away from our lives and advance in godly living.

This is what the wise accomplish in Jesus Christ.

And the fool? The fool also accomplishes his desire. His desire is to live in sin. He finds departure from evil to be abominable. And so he pursues the way of sin. The judgment of God is upon him for this. That judgment is that he will have his evil life. And he will grow in evil so that he becomes exceedingly wicked.



A blessed sweetness!

The desire (of the wise) accomplished is sweetness.

That which is sweet is pleasant and satisfying. Think of how pleasant and satisfying sugar is to the tongue.

When the wise accomplish in Jesus Christ their desire to withdraw and escape from sin, that accomplishment is sweet to their soul. This is true because in the accomplishment of their desire they find all the goodness of God's blessings. They find the blessing of God's friendship and fellowship. They find the blessing of good marriages and families. They find the blessing of unity in the church. One day they will find the blessing of eternal glory in heaven. All this is sweet to the soul. It is much sweeter than the pleasures of sin that last only for a while.

But with the foolish there will only be bitterness.

The fool desires evil because he considers it will be sweet to his soul. But the judgment of God is that the sweetness of evil soon turns to horrible bitterness. It turns to bitterness in this life as the evil of the fool destroys his marriage,

his home, and everything that is worthwhile. And ultimately there is the bitterness of hell.

Will you be wise, or foolish?

You know the great realities of life. They center in God and His

Son Jesus Christ. They include the scourge of evil and the blessings of departing from evil in Jesus Christ. What will you do with these realities?

Do not be the fool, who ignores

them and perishes in the bitterness of sin.

Be wise to embrace Jesus Christ, that you may find the sweetness of life and eternal joy.



Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters

Preaching and the Real Battle for Worship* (1)

(The Vision of Revelation 4)

The graduation tonight brings the PRC to the conclusion (and a celebration of that conclusion!) of the training of Mr. Dennis Lee and Mr. John Marcus—two men who feel deeply that they are called to preach.

The Protestant Reformed seminary (the churches, really) is interested in and committed to training men to be *preachers*. I am thankful to God for that commitment, and insofar as I have a part in that training I am thankful to be a part of the seminary's work. We depend on God to maintain that commitment among us, as well as to use that training to make preachers. Without God's blessing and grace, we neither have the commitment nor can we expect fruit in faithful and able men.

But the reason we seek preachers must be clearly understood. It

is not only, and not even primarily, because the preaching is the means of grace to save God's elect, to gather and preserve His church, to forgive sins, to comfort saints, to give grace to bear burdens and obey the commandments—though the preaching is God's mighty power to do all that. To limit preaching's purpose to that fails to keep in mind the ultimate goal of the preaching and the real purpose of the church—that the gathered church may be a *worshiping* church, a church that lives for one purpose—to praise and honor God.

It is my contention tonight, a contention that you must test by the Scriptures, that at the heart of the Scriptures is this truth: that the revelation of God's glory leads to a glad worship of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And ... it is my contention, that it is the function of preaching to give that vision of God as He is revealed in Scripture, so that the people do worship Him whom they have seen. That's the battle that we—as churches and preachers—are engaged in.

Vision and Worship

Repeatedly in the book of Revelation a clear vision of the glory

of God and His Son leads to a holy and zealous worship of God. The twenty-four elders of Revelation 4 represent the victorious, worshiping church. "Twenty-four" is the number of the complete, elect *church* of God—the twelve of the Old Covenant and the twelve of the New Covenant combined. Crowned with crowns (also 2:10 and 3:11), and sitting on thrones, reigning with Christ (Rev. 1:6), this church is a *victorious* church.

What we have not usually seen is that these twenty-four elders represent the *worshiping* church. In the Old Covenant's temple, priests led the people of God in worship—twenty-four courses of priests. Also in the temple, there were singers and instrumentalists engaged in the worship of God—also numbering twenty-four courses (cf. Leviticus). John, who saw this vision, and the saints who heard of it, would have recognized this number as the future and perfect fulfillment of the Old Testament *worshiping* people. "Twenty-four" had been a feature of worship for 2,000 years.

But this victorious church *worships* because she *has seen God*!

She has seen the one sitting on the throne, beautiful like a jasper and a sardine stone, an emerald

* This article is the text of the address given for the graduation exercises of the PRC seminary for Seminarians Dennis Lee and John Marcus on June 20, 2005 in Byron Center PRC. The speech was based on Revelation 4, and is given here much as it was actually delivered, thus retaining the spoken style.

rainbow arching above and about Him. From His throne proceed thunderings, lightnings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire burn before Him. A sea of crystal stretches out in front of the throne to reflect the glory of the one who sat upon it. The whole creation (that's the four creatures full of eyes around the throne) surrounds the throne and rests not to give praise, saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was and is and is to come."

Then, when the twenty-four elders witness that, they fall down before Him in honor, worship this one who lives forever, cast their crowns before the throne, and cry out, "Thou art worthy, O, Lord, to receive glory and honor and power...."

The central purpose of the church, and of all creation, is: To see, exult in, and praise God.

All Scripture

This is one of the great themes (if not *the* great theme) of the book of Revelation. Chapter 1 is the vision of one like unto the Son of Man on the throne, before whom John fell down in the terror of dread. Chapter 5 has the four beasts and the victorious church bow down again to worship; except here they are joined by an innumerable multitude of angels, and here the reason is that they have seen and heard of the Lamb's power and authority to execute the decrees of God. They say with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing...." Then every creature in heaven and earth, under the earth and in the sea, says, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and *worshipped* him that liveth forever and ever."

In chapter 7 John sees the in-

numerable multitude, clothed in white robes, *worshipping* God: "Salvation to God who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb." Then the angels join in *worship* and say, "Amen: Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be unto our God forever and ever."

So no one is surprised by chapter 14 where John sees another angel fly in the midst of heaven, carrying the "everlasting gospel." What gospel does this angel preach with a loud voice? "Fear God and give glory to him ... and *worship* him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Worship God.

When the song is approaching the final refrain (19:1-7), John hears the multitude like the sound of many waters, and mighty thunderings, "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honor to him...."

And in the very last chapter of the Bible, when John is ready—mistakenly, again—to worship the angel, the angel said, "See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God."

The book of Revelation concerns *worship*.

The entire Scripture calls for worship. The first commandment enjoins: Worship God.

Isaiah has similar themes. Early on, Isaiah has a vision of the glory of God, before whom angels cry out, "Holy, holy, holy...." And Isaiah says, "Woe is me, for mine eyes have seen the king...." And then he preaches what he has seen: "Behold your God!" For, "everyone called by my name ... I created ... for my glory" (43:7). "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise" (43:21).

Then, I mention the angels. (Does anyone think or speak of angels today? Plenty of nonsense, but little of biblical truth.) Michael, great Archangel of God, has a work

that accords with the meaning of his name—to say to all angels, and then all created beings: "Who is like unto God?"

Thus, redeemed *men* will say: "Who is so great a God as our God?" (Ps. 77:13). And, from the core of their being: "All my *bones* shall say, LORD, who is like unto thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?" (Ps. 35:10).

Is it any wonder that Revelation 14 teaches: "The everlasting gospel is, *worship God*."

This is what the Reformed faith is all about.

This is the commitment of the PRC and our seminary.

And this is the Grand and Glorious Occupation of a preacher: to see and speak of the glory of God!

This is why we train *preachers*. This is *how* we *must* train them.

Sermons

It is the business of preachers to describe God as He has revealed in Scripture, so that the people can, and will, worship! The people will not praise Him unless they see and know Him!

It's not "Man and What Man Must Do"—mainly—that the preacher preaches, even though that's a part of his ministry. The preacher must describe God and what God has done. And then when it is "Man and What Man Must Do," the message is, "This is what you must do: Worship God! In all your doing, worship Him."

Preachers must resist the temptation to try to address what the people think they need. The people think—and we preachers are inclined to agree—that they need to hear sermons on divorce or drugs or parenting or anger or abuse or intimacy or depression. Then the people are attracted to the church because it meets their "felt needs."

I am here to contend for the truth that the preachers must show the people *God*! And that's not

unrelated to their depression, and experience of abuse, and need to struggle against anger, and all the rest. But it goes this way: The goal of preaching is the honor of God, so that the people may say: "How good is God, who works in Jesus Christ to save us, out of thankfulness for which we work, serving Him and His cause in Jesus Christ."

We must see God before we will worship Him! It's the preacher's duty to say, "See Him."

Brothers Lee and Marcus, call the people to see God in His absolute sovereignty (He's on His throne in the vision!), His holiness and beauty of holiness (the visions in Revelation have God and His Christ beautiful if anything!), His beauty in Himself, in all His works, and especially the beauty of His grace, His power over and judgment upon his enemies (the thunder and lightning come out of His throne in fearful power and judgment). Really, call them to see Him in all His virtues and works in Jesus Christ: who He is, what He has done, and what we are on account of His great work of salva-

tion. His value and worth in Christ's precious blood. His triumphs over sin and death and hell and Satan. His knowledge, which makes the library of Congress look like a matchbox, and quantum physics like a first-grade reader. His wisdom, which has never been and can never be counseled by men. His authority over heaven and earth, without whose permission no demon can move an inch. His providence, which upholds and governs the universe and keeps the atoms and molecules together. His power to walk on water, cleanse lepers, heal the lame, open the blind eyes, cause the deaf to hear, still storms, raise the dead. His trustworthiness, never to break His word or let one promise fall to the ground. His justice, to render all accounts settled, either in hell or on the cross. His patience, endurance. His grace, which justifies the ungodly. His love, to die for us even while we were yet sinners.

This will get at their "felt needs." This will satisfy the longings of their hearts. This will address their problems—in a thousand wonderful ways!

When we have such a vision of God, and see Him as He is for us in Christ, we truly say, "There is no one like unto God; there is nothing that will satisfy me except Him."

A good sermon is not one designed to make the people feel good, or even happy (although it will!). It is certainly not one that makes the people go home and talk about the minister. A good sermon is one that makes the people go home and think about God, love God, serve God. It will make them wonder in awe (the important Greek verb is *thaumazo*—please remember that word). And if they say anything at all about the preacher, they will humbly and quietly reflect on how God has used him to exhibit the glories of the God who chose them and loves them in Jesus Christ.

Until the great day of days, when Christ shows Himself directly, the work of preachers will be to show the people their God, and bring them to say: "WHO IS SO GREAT A GOD AS OUR GOD?" (next time: "The Battle")



Letters

■ Personal Evangelism?

This is written concerning the use of evangelism in the article by Rev. Kortering in the March 15, 2005 *Standard Bearer* entitled, "Evangelism in the Established Church (3)" and also the article by Rev. Mahtani in the April 15, 2005 issue entitled, "Equipping Our People for Personal Evangelism." Although I disagree with their use of the word evangelism I am appreciative of the good instruction, effort, and time put into the articles.

While not a writer by profession nor desirous to enter into public discussion, I contend that the concept that we all should evangelize or be equipped for personal

evangelism is biblically incorrect. Thankfully, the writers and others in our churches who use evangelism as described in the articles confess preaching is the main means God uses to save and instruct His people. In that light my warning is comparatively minor, but nevertheless this relatively new use of evangelism in our churches causes confusion.

Young's *Analytical Concordance* shows that preaching and evangelism are the same. The reference for preaching lists many verses under the Greek word *euangelizo* and also many verses under the Greek word *kerusso*. Admittedly I do not know Greek, but I am confident that the concordance and our Bible

translators are correct. In almost all verses the Greek word for evangelism translated as preaching refers to men called and ordained. One may conclude that *euangelizo* refers to unofficial preaching and *kerusso* to official preaching, but such an argument fails to show that everyone is to be equipped for personal evangelism.

Prof. Engelsma, in his pamphlet entitled "Evangelism and the Reformed Faith," written many years ago, writes, "Evangelism is the activity of preaching the gospel to those outside the congregation already established in the truth, in order to bring them to Christ."

The pamphlet also states,

Evangelism, or missions, therefore, is the work of the Church. It is the Church, the instituted Church, that preaches the Word. This is the Biblical pattern: the congregation at Antioch, Syria sent out Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey and supervised their work (cf. Acts 13:4; 14:26, 27). Evangelism is not to be done by societies and par-ecclesiastical organizations. They have no authority. They have no power — they lack the office of preaching.

But does not every saint have the duty to evangelize? Is not every child of God a missionary? Emphatically not! It is unbiblical to hold that every believer may and must evangelize. This is to maintain that every saint can and must preach the gospel. Where in Scripture is this authority given to every believer? Where in the practical parts of the New Testament epistles is this made the responsibility of every Christian? The notion that every member of the church is a missionary destroys the fundamental truth of the office in the church. Most pernicious of all is the utterly reckless act of putting this awesome burden on the shoulders of our teenage children who, altogether apart from the matter of office, ought not to be teaching, but learning the Word of God.

This new view of everyone being active in personal evangelism was not promoted twenty or thirty years ago in our churches (my age is showing here). Certainly our evangelism committees and our members ought to be eager to speak and encourage those with whom we come into contact to come and hear Christ where faithful preaching takes place from Lord's Day to Lord's Day. But that is not evangelism according to Scripture.

To say that all our members must be equipped for personal evangelism conflicts with the teaching of Scripture concerning various gifts that God gave to *some*, not *all*, as we read in Ephesians 4:11, "And he gave some, apostles; and some,

prophets; and some, evangelists...." Saying that evangelism is an activity all members of the church are to do clearly conflicts with this verse. The logical implication of saying that all members must be involved in personal evangelism is to say that all are to be evangelists.

All of us who are sinners saved by grace should live a life of thankfulness as Christians for the salvation we have in Christ. But let's not confuse our walk and talk with evangelism. It is also not my intention to accuse the writers or others of any personal or intentional wrongdoing in their application of evangelism. May we and our evangelism committees earnestly promote the Word of God faithfully preached. We may need encouragement to be willing to confess Christ in a world of unbelief but we are not all called to evangelize.

Ken DeJong,
Lansing, IL

Response:

We thank the brother for taking the time to read our articles on evangelism, but more particularly to send our way a question that he has with the use of "personal evangelism." We also appreciate the spirit in which he writes, not judging us but posing an apparent difficulty he has. We trust that this discussion will enhance our understanding of the Word of God as it relates to mission work.

The word evangelism is a transliteration of the Greek word *euangelizo*. As the brother indicates, it is used most frequently (but not exclusively, as he desires to maintain) as referring to preaching, which is not the work of individual Christians but the work of the church through her pastors and missionaries. There are, however, uses of that same word as it relates to individual Christians. Acts 8:4 is the most often referred to in this connection: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere *preaching* the word."

Certainly more people were scattered abroad by this persecution than ordained men. It is noteworthy that, in connection with Philip, who is mentioned in the very next verse, the Greek word *kerusso* is used. This word means to herald and is always used for official preaching: "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and *preached* Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). The word evangelize is used in Philippians 1:14-17: "And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel." In this passage as well, verse 15 uses *kerusso*, but verses 16 and 18 use *euangelizo*. This would allow for the fact that certain members of the church, as well as the clergy, were involved in this preaching.

It is not correct to say that the English word evangelism must always be used as referring to the official preaching of a pastor or missionary. What is important, and this appears to be what the brother seeks to preserve, is that we must not confuse official preaching with personal evangelism. This is done very often in our day, and that is a fatal error in the work of missions. We must not, however, be so reactionary that we force this view on the Bible. We must be open to the instruction of the Word of God. Evangelism is the general word that covers all aspects of outreach. Evangelism by the church is her official ministry, preaching. Personal evangelism is personal witnessing concerning the gospel. Both are recognized and taught in Scripture and both must be maintained today.

The quote from Prof. Engelsma's pamphlet *Evangelism and the Reformed Faith* indicates this as

well. Prof. Engelsma is quite capable of interpreting the use of this quote for himself. To expedite the matter a bit, we can make this observation. In the context of the quotation, the brother is dealing with every individual Christian preaching, which is a pernicious error that keeps on eating at the heart of the gospel in our day. From this point of view, he says that evangelism is the work of the church and not of individuals, because preaching belongs with the church. Notice that later in his pamphlet, in the context of the individual Christian's role in evangelism, Prof. Engelsma says,

This is not to say that the believer should not witness to the truth as he has the opportunity; he should — this belongs to the office of believer (I Pet. 3:15). Let us not forget, however, that we witness, not only with our mouths, but also — and very powerfully — with our behavior. By our godly conduct, others may be gained to Christ (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 86). Nor do we intend, by denying that every believer is an evangelist, to exclude the saints from the great work of evangelism. How could this be? Evangelism is the work of the Church, and the saints are the Church.

Then he explains how they do this, they do it through the work of the missionary as they speak through him, they support him by their prayer, they confirm the gospel by their action.

The brother is not contesting the work of evangelism by the individual Christian, but rather he contends that it ought not be called evangelism, since that term ought to be reserved for official preaching. You notice, however, that Prof. Engelsma refers to this activity by the individual Christian as his being involved in "the great work of evangelism."

Clearly, our use of the term "evangelism" in the phrase "personal evangelism" does not refer to preaching but to the things that

evangelism and mission committees do to promote the preaching. If one disagrees with using the word "evangelism" for such labors, then these evangelism and mission committees ought also to have a name change. But everyone understands, we think, that the labors of these evangelism committees and that of Christians in personal evangelism is not the official preaching of the Word but rather a lively witness that serves the preaching of the Word.

In conclusion, we may on the basis of Scripture call all outreach ministries evangelism. We bring the good news of the gospel to others. The content of this good news is the same whether it is brought by a preacher or by an individual believer. Nevertheless, we must insist on a distinction. The church preaches. The minister, who serves as the ambassador of Christ, says in the place of Christ, "Be reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20). The Old Testament prophets expressed this authority with the resounding, "Thus saith the Lord." The personal evangelism of the believer is much different. It is the believer testifying and speaking (witnessing) concerning Christ Jesus as he shares the Word of God on an individual basis. It lacks the authority of the church and office. Nevertheless, it is very effective because the same Holy Spirit works through such witness both as spoken and obeyed. Such witnessing is not on the level of preaching, nor in competition with it. Rather, it is always subservient and obedient to the word preached.

Pastor J. Kortering
Pastor J. Mahtani

■ On Separation of Church and State

In reference to the article "Islam (3): A Little Politics and Law; Shari'a (concl.);" in the May 15, 2005 edition, I have a question and some comments. How can the State be deemed separate from the Church in civic obligations, and to

have any role other than a subordinate role under God's sovereignty? As in the misinterpreted and misused "separation of church and state," the State is one function of power under God, as is the Church. Christian citizens and magistrates must abide by biblical mandates and laws. To give an inch of ground in interpretation of these institutes is not biblical. Christians are losing the battle in everyday conversations by not confronting relativism or pragmatism or whatever the illogical argument the false prophets and self-claimed atheists offer. We are told to study to show ourselves approved, so we then can offer a ready answer when questioned of the faith residing in us.

Jesus tells us to render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. He (the Word) also tells us in Deuteronomy 8:18 that God gives the ability to get wealth. Caesar (or Pharaoh) does not have autonomous authority outside of God's authority (common grace) to demand or accept anything, but rather must render to God. Are faith-based initiatives wrong? Yes, if the agenda is Statism. Who gave the federal government the power to rule over us? The federal government was designed and instituted for the overseeing of the States, to protect her citizens from foreign invasion and tyranny, to provide aid for her citizens. It was not created to usurp her citizens' rights and prohibit the pursuit of happiness. So who is the U.S. Government to assume anything other than bowing before Christ Himself as Potentate and before His bride?

In Article 34 of the Maryland 1776 Constitution it was stated that a magistrate should be tested by no other test than his oath and fidelity to the State and Christian faith. You could not hold office otherwise. I agree with that prerequisite. In Article 33 it states that a general tax was collected to support the Christian faith. Keep in mind that every State has the right

to set itself up under the Constitution. Was it fair to impose a tax on the Catholics (and others) to pay for the Protestant church of 1776?



In reference to the Descartes/Rationalism article in the same issue. What Descartes and other philosophers failed to understand is the Transcendental proof for God's existence. This proof states that to the impossibility of the contrary, no other worldview can account for abstract, universal, and invariant entities. No other worldview can either keep contention from its premise and conclusion, or maintain a coherent approach to logic and the explanations needed to express that particular view. As for the author's use of explaining God by human logic, I assume he refers to autonomous human logic. As for just dismissing all other views without refuting them, we cannot be fideists when addressing those who question our faith. A fideist says that where science or reason ends, faith begins. The truth of the Christian faith is that reason and faith can and do co-exist when we engage in reasoning.

Michael Ramel
West Bend, WI

Response (1):

Thank you for your reaction to my article. In your letter you express concerns involving the separation of church and state, and the role of the magistrate with respect to "biblical mandates and laws."

The separation of church and state must be maintained, not because Thomas Jefferson discovered a "wall of separation" between them, but in light of the fact that they have very different purposes under the rule of our sovereign God. The state's work is primarily the keeping of good order in society. God has given the magistrate the physical sword as his weapon to accomplish this. However, the state is not equipped to take on the church's task of preaching the gos-

pel. This is a spiritual work for which the church only has been given the sword of the Word. A few references to Scripture and the Reformed confessions make this clear: God requires of governments the exercising of justice, keeping good order in society and providing for the defense of the nation (cf. Rom. 13: 1-7; I Pet. 2:13-17; Belgic Confession, Article 36, with the appended note of the Synod of 1910). On the other hand, God mandates His church to provide for the spiritual needs of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven in order that they faithfully fight the battle of faith (cf. Matt. 16: 13-19; Rom. 10:14-15; Eph. 6: 11-18; Belgic Confession, Articles 27 and 29; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21). In my articles I tried to demonstrate from examples in history that the meddling of one (church or state) in the affairs of the other leads to serious trouble.

For the state to function in its God-ordained place, civil authorities need not be Christians or even know about God's written law. Romans 2:14, 15 explains why: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness...." This is also expressed in the Canons of Dort, where natural man apart from God's grace is described in this way: "There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil" (Canons III & IV, Article 4).

Thus by virtue of the works of the law written in his heart, even the unbelieving magistrate knows his God-ordered responsibilities. He doesn't need God's *written* law to know that lying, stealing, murder, adultery, and rebelling against authority are wrong and must be punished. If he is to have order in his realm, these may not be permitted. Consider, for example, the ancient Babylonian king Hammurabi. Secular historians extol him for his famous Code of Laws. But where did these laws come from? Had he somehow heard about the Ten Commandments? Since God's law had not yet been written, this was not possible. Clearly Hammurabi's laws were a product of the works of the law written in his heart.

Further, I submit that it would be a mistake for the Christian magistrate to impose the Ten Commandments on his subjects. Will he imprison or fine the atheists under his rule for failure to attend God's house on the Lord's Day? What will he do about the young woman coveting the evening dress on the showroom floor at Yonkers? Will all the Deists be shot at dawn? His executioners will be busy! Remember, this is exactly what has resulted in Islamic countries where Shari'a law has been enforced. Interestingly, our own country is headed in the same direction with its "hate crime" legislation.

History demonstrates that godless magistrates serve God's church *without* enforcing the Ten Commandments. Paul in Romans 13 identifies the higher powers of the Roman Empire as ministers "of God to thee for good." After all, it was the good order in Roman society that served well the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. Furthermore, unbelieving magistrates serve the cause of God's church without even realizing it, as the case of Cyrus recorded in Isaiah 45: 1-7 clearly shows. Surely this continues to happen today unbeknownst by the church. "Thy way

is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known" (Ps. 77:19).

If what I have written has raised more questions in your mind, or I have missed something that is of concern to you, feel free to respond. Also, you might find helpful the special issue of the *Standard Bearer* on the subject: "The Reformed Faith on Civil Government" (Dec. 1, 1988), and the article by Prof. D. Engelsma titled: "The Messianic Kingdom and Civil Government" found in the April, 2004 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* (www.prca.org).

Mr. Cal Kalsbeek

Response (2):

Concerning the matter of logic in its relation to faith, I much prefer and find much more correct Luther's description of reason as the handmaid of faith. The statement: "A fideist says that where science or reason ends, faith begins." That statement makes faith the handmaid of reason, coming to reason's rescue only when reason fails.

I reiterate: Reason is no proper

epistemological tool for the Christian because man's reason is blinded by sin. He can and will reason only that which is contrary to God and God's Word.

Faith gives us the key of all knowledge, for faith has as its object Scripture. And faith in Scripture is faith in Christ.

This is not to deny that all truth is logically consistent. It is. The letter writer is correct. Unless this were true, no apologetics is possible. God is a logical God. His revelation is also logical.

No rational truth can "prove" God's existence. Rational proof deals with human (earthly) categories. God is transcendent: infinitely beyond and essentially different from all human categories. And there is no such thing as "natural revelation" in the sense that it can give us true knowledge of God.

Prof. Herman Hanko

■ The TNIV

I am a new reader of the *Standard Bearer*, so I hesitate to speak up. But in your current issue (May 15), in the "All Around Us" section, Rev. VanBaren reports on the

problems and controversies surrounding the TNIV. When the New Testament TNIV was first published several years ago, I happened to be on a conservative, fundamentalist Baptist e-mail list, and readers were notified that the real danger of this translation was that it changed the requirements for the offices of elder and deacon. I was able to go to the TNIV website and search specific passages, and so here below is one such problematic verse. Notice "husband of one wife" is no longer there, but instead just the call to be "faithful" to whatever number wife a man happens to be on. In other words, through silence, it condones divorce and remarriage among church leadership. Slick, huh? What's worse is that the Council for Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, who reviewed this new version for *Christian Renewal* years ago, never mentioned this important omission.

"Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach..." (I Tim. 3:2TNIV).

Sharon Gordon (Mrs.) 

All Around Us

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

New Reformed Denomination

From a May 17 press release (*Christian Observer*, June 2005), we learn that a new Reformed denomination has been organized.

An organizing committee of pastors and elders today announced formation of The Evangelical Reformed Presbyterian Church (ERPC). The new denomination is being established in response to conservative Presbyter-

ians' increasing concern over the acceptance of the teaching of justification by faith plus works, and water baptism as an instrument of salvation, in denominations such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

"Clearly, these teachings are un-Biblical. Scripture calls them 'another gospel,'" said Dr. Clinton S. Foraker, pastor of Calvert Reformed Presbyterian Church in Calvert, Maryland and a member of the ERPC Organizing Committee. "These doctrines go by various names including Federal Vision Theology, the New Perspective on Paul, and Shepherdism. Collectively they represent the

most serious and insidious attack on Protestant orthodoxy in the 500 years since the Reformation. The problems go far beyond justification and baptism, but those are the main issues. Sadly, too few people in the churches are really aware of what has been happening. "The Bible does not leave these matters open to question," Foraker continued. "The Council of Jerusalem in Acts chapter fifteen, and the Apostle Paul in the first chapter of Galatians, both condemn these kinds of teachings in no uncertain terms. The problem is that many ministers in the existing denominations say they fully agree with the Scriptures and the confessional standards of their

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churches. But what they are actually preaching is contrary to the Bible and the confessional standards, and they are being allowed to do it. The existing denominations are trying to preserve unity at the expense of the thing that matters most: the Gospel, how the Bible says that people are saved. In contrast, the ERPC will be unequivocally committed to the authentic Protestant Gospel of justification by faith alone."

Dr. Jeffery A. Sheely, pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Hanover, Pennsylvania and moderator of the ERPC Organizing Committee, said, "Many of us have attempted, over many years, to address this spiritual crisis from within our denominations. Some men have been fighting this battle since the 1970s. But these efforts have been blocked by those in positions of leadership who are, sadly, either committed to these false doctrines or are willing to tolerate them.

"Because these elements hold sway in the OPC, our congregation voted unanimously to separate from that denomination last year," Sheely continued. "The present situation is very similar to what happened in the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) three generations ago. In 1936, conservatives left the PCUSA to form the OPC. One of the founders of the OPC, Dr. J. Gresham Machen, said that when the liberalizing elements hold sway in a denomination, and the Gospel is at stake, conservatives have no choice but to separate and begin again. That is what we are doing. History is being repeated."

"There is a groundswell of interest in forming a new denomination that will be true to the Gospel," Sheely observed. "People from around the country have contacted us to say that they are interested in affiliating with the ERPC. A number of ministers have said they would like to bring their congregations out of the existing denominations because of the compromise of the Gospel. But they don't feel they can do it without having a new denomination to join. We've also heard from groups of church members

who have left existing congregations because they just couldn't live with the compromise anymore. Many of these people are interested in forming new congregations. We hope that many people in existing congregations and new ones alike will see the ERPC as their new denominational home."

The article, by Paul M. Elliott, also lists a web address for further information — www.erpchurch.org. From the web site, one learns that the churches are drawing up Articles of Affiliation and a Form of Government for the new denomination.

This development is of interest to the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). Certainly it highlights the departure of Reformed denominations from fundamental teachings of the Reformation. There is either a tolerance or an endorsement of "faith and works" as the ground for justification. Ministers and officebearers have appealed these decisions to broader assemblies in the OPC and PCA and have not been heard. Thus, there appears to be a legitimate reformational work in the forming of this new denomination.

Because of this interest, I contacted Paul Elliott, also a member of the organizing committee of the ERPC, with some questions.

RK: Justification for the formation of a new denomination must be that there is a genuine reformation taking place. What reformational work are you doing in forming this new denomination, and what do you see as the main errors against which you are now taking a stand as a denomination?

PE: The reformational work is reflected in our Articles of Affiliation, which form chapter one of our Form of Government (see our web site). The focus is principally on these areas: 1.) Doctrinal integrity — restoring the authority of Scripture, grammatical-historical hermeneutics, and an unequivocal approach to secondary doctrinal standards; 2.) Getting the Gospel

straight — restoring the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from human works of any sort; 3.) Proclaiming the Gospel freely — restoring a proper focus on evangelism; 4.) Biblical presbyterian government — restoring, as our FOG states it, "a simplicity of presbyterian church government, in which Christ shall have the pre-eminence in all things, and in which those who hold office in the church shall not act as lords over those entrusted to their care, but as examples to the flock of God, clothed with humility."

RK: To what specific denominational decisions and positions are you reacting in the formation of this denomination?

PE: This is not a reaction to one particular decision but the biblical response to the collective downward trend during the past thirty years. There are many parallels to the crisis in the PCUSA that came to a head in the 1920s and 30s. It begins with the OPC's and Westminster Seminary's refusal to take a clear stand on the issues of salvation doctrine in the Norman Shepherd controversy. This has allowed his teachings to spread in the OPC, PCUSA, and beyond in the years since. This has been (and continues to be) facilitated by what the OPC now refers to as "a hermeneutic of trust," which says that what is really important is not the words of Scripture, but the ability to all come together — conservative and neo-liberal — under highly elastic definitions of the words of the confessional standards. That hermeneutic is also operative in the PCA.

RK: From where has your denomination drawn its membership, and how many congregations and interested groups do you have?

PE: A number of existing congregations and newly-forming ones in the U.S. and Canada have expressed interest in affiliation. Some are present or former OPC and PCA churches. Others are churches that are Reformed but currently unaffiliated. Still others are groups of people who have left OPC and PCA churches because of doctrinal problems either at the

denominational or local church level, who are beginning to form new congregations that are looking for a sound denominational home.

We had asked that all of these people not affiliate with us until the ERPC Organizing Committee completed our Constitution, so that they could make a fully informed decision. On June 25th the O.C. completed and adopted constitutional documents, Doctrinal Standards, a Form of Government, a Directory for Worship, and a Book of Discipline. We will be publishing them on the web and in book form during July. So now a number of congregations and newly-forming groups, literally from coast to coast, will be considering affiliation and putting it to a vote. We expect to receive the first churches in the next three months.

RK: Do you view any other denominations as faithful to the biblical and Reformational teachings on Justification?

PE: There is a tremendous lack of clarity on these issues. Precious few denominations have made clear statements, couched not only in terms of affirmations agreeing with what Scripture says and their secondary standards affirm but also in terms of denials, calling heresy by its right name, and naming names. Biblically, the churches have a responsibility to do both. Affirmations without denials are incomplete and open to equivocation. We thank the Lord for the few that are doing so, and pray that more will.

RK: With whom do you intend to pursue ecclesiastical relationships?

PE: At this early stage we have not made any decisions in this regard, but we do intend to form such relationships both with denominations and other agencies such as mission boards that remain unequivocally true to the Scriptures and the Gospel.

Beyond this, I also asked some questions about the covenant and its relation to the present justification debate. This, of course, is a special area of interest to the PRC,

because the present heresies on justification are closely tied to an unbiblical view of the covenant. The erroneous view is that the covenant is conditional, a pact or agreement between God and the sinner, in which the sinner is under obligation to exercise faith, and that act of faith becomes the condition on which he is accepted by God into the covenant community. This incorrect view of the covenant has been used by many to support this new perspective on justification. Faith, it is said, is man's work, and God will accept a man as righteous based on the worthiness and obedience of his faith. Some go so far as to call their unbiblical view on justification "The Federal Vision" — "federal" meaning "covenantal."

These were the questions I asked Mr. Elliott,

RK: Are you aware of the Protestant Reformed Churches' teaching and material on justification (e.g., Engelsma's publication, *The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary Debate*)?

PE: I am aware of it but have not had the opportunity to study it.

RK: What would be your position as a denomination on the covenant? Would you view it as conditional or unconditional?

PE: I would not want to comment specifically because we have not published a defined position as a denomination. There is a desire among members of our Organizing Committee to have an ERPC General Synod, once established, prepare position papers on this and other key issues. But we certainly understand the Covenant of Grace to be eternal (Ephesians 1), unilateral on God's part (only He passed between the pieces in Genesis 15), and with the elect through Christ the Mediator (Isaiah 42; Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24; 1 Timothy 2:5); and that fulfillment of the covenant rests completely on Christ, and not on man's "covenant faithfulness."

A further question I asked was,

One of the labels for the new doctrine on justification is the "Federal Vision." What relation do you see between the doctrine of the covenant and the erroneous views on justification being promoted and allowed in the PCA and OPC?

In response to this Mr. Elliott sent me two rather lengthy excerpts from a book he has written that is being published by The Trinity Foundation titled, *Christianity and Neo-Liberalism: The Spiritual Crisis in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Beyond*. From these sections it became very clear that the men involved in the formation of the ERPC are aware of problems with the conditional covenant view and do see its connection to the new perspective on justification.

Also of interest to the PRC is the connection between the conditional view of the covenant and the well meant (or free) offer of the gospel in which it is taught that God graciously offers Christ to all who hear the gospel and that He sincerely desires that each of them be saved. The conditional covenant view is simply a bringing into the covenant sphere this incorrect view of the preaching of the gospel. I asked Mr. Elliott this question,

RK: What relation, if any, do you see between the current errors on justification and the "free offer of the gospel" endorsed by the OPC earlier in its history? Are you open to reconsidering this teaching, or have you adopted the doctrinal positions of the OPC up till this point?

PE: The ERPC Form of Government includes the following statement: "We are united in our conviction that the Gospel is to be freely offered to all men. The free offer of the Gospel does not entail universal salvation, nor is it contrary to the doctrine of man's total inability to save himself, nor is it contrary to the doctrine of God's complete sovereignty in salvation. The free offer of the Gospel is God's means of calling His people to repentance, and the re-

jection of the Gospel offer is also the condemnation of the lost." And we believe that statement is fully compatible with a biblical view of justification by faith alone.

From this it appears that the ERPC has adopted a position on the free offer and that they do not, at this stage, see the connection of the free offer to the conditional covenant view and the new perspective on justification.

What these men and churches have done in making this break with the departing denominations takes much faith, courage, and conviction. Already, it appears from different discussion forums on the Internet, they are being slandered and persecuted for their willingness to uphold the truth. It will be of great interest to us to watch this fledgling denomination develop.

Perhaps the PRC can be of help to them, at least in the area of instructional literature. If nothing else, this development does alert us to the increasing departure in Reformed churches from the Reformation gospel. May God use it to alert brothers and sisters in Christ to the heresies being promoted and tolerated, and to bring them out of that way of apostasy.



In His Fear

Rev. Richard J. Smit

I Will See You Tomorrow!

As we part from our friends for the day, we often say, "I will see you tomorrow." As we part from our wife, husband, or children, we often say, "I will see you later."

Most often we simply assume that as we have spoken, so our future and our tomorrow will be. We do not give much thought to the possibility that we may *not* see each other later or tomorrow.

Our heavenly Father warns us against a sinful presumption regarding tomorrow and our future when in Proverbs 27:1 He commands us: "Boast not thyself of tomorrow!" By this command, the Father instructs us to submit to Him and to fear Him in the knowledge that His foreknowledge and counsel concerning our tomorrow is all-authoritative.



The word "tomorrow" makes us think immediately about our future. When we think of "tomorrow," we think of the health, food,

drink, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other necessities that we will need tomorrow and in all the tomorrows of our future. Often, we think too much of the luxuries that we think we need. "Tomorrow" brings to mind all the means by which we receive the earthly gifts and things we need for our life. "Tomorrow" brings to mind our concerns for our health and the health of our family members and friends. Our thoughts are filled with our plans for vacation, family gatherings, holiday activities, upcoming weddings, young people's conventions, young adults' retreats, buying, selling, visits to family, visits to the lonely saints in the church, and on and on the list goes.

The truth of Proverbs 27:1 reminds us that in all our plans and human predictions for our future we face a serious spiritual danger. This danger arises in light of the fact that very often our Father in His providence does bring our plans to pass. The vacation that we have been planning since January and for which we have made many preparations already, may very well take place this summer just as we have planned. Indeed, we may have a wonderful and re-

freshing time just as we planned. Now, the danger is that when our plans, whether simple or complex, come to pass so regularly, we expect that everything we plan should come to pass and will come to pass as we have so planned.

That kind of presumption about our future, our heavenly Father forbids. He condemns it as evil boasting about tomorrow. He forbids that we expect that tomorrow and all its events will occur exactly as we have desired and planned today.

Let us understand clearly that Proverbs 27:1 does not forbid proper planning for tomorrow. We must make our plans for tomorrow, rather than making our decisions or doing our work on the spur of the moment. Our children and young people must plan and prepare for their tests and examinations so that they may come to the classroom for their examinations ready and well prepared. Our mothers plan ahead for future needs of the family's meals and lunches by baking and cooking a large supply in advance. Our pastors plan ahead what sermons they will preach on future Lord's Days. I am sure that you can think of

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many other examples of planning ahead for tomorrow.

Nevertheless, even as you and I make all these plans, our heavenly Father does not permit us to cross over the line from proper planning to the sinful expectation that our plans shall certainly be fulfilled as we have willed them. We may never presume anything about our plans. The husband may not presume that as he walks out the door to go to work in the morning, so he will surely return home to his wife and family again that same day. We may not presume that as we have worshiped on the Lord's Day with our fellow saints, so we shall certainly see our fellow saints in church on the next Lord's Day. Even though you are walking today, yet this does not guarantee that you will be walking tomorrow. Can you be absolutely sure before God that you will and must be healthy tomorrow because you are healthy today?

We often say, "I *will* see you tomorrow!" We plant our gardens and fields with the automatic assumption that we will surely harvest the fruits of our fields and gardens. We expect these things as planned without the least thought that God might not allow what we expect to happen. That spiritual ignorance about the actual uncertainty of our plans and the unreliability of our predictions is only proud boasting before God. That sinful boasting ignores God's sovereign and all-powerful Hand, which determines and governs all the events and details of our today as well as of our tomorrow.



In addition to that, all such boasting about tomorrow is evil because "thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Prov. 27:1). The words "bring forth" point to an illustration of parents bringing forth a child. When parents are expecting and look forward to the day when the mother will bring forth the child, they do not know

what the child will look like or whether it is a boy or a girl. The parents do not know ahead of time whether the child will look like them, their parents, or other relatives. They know that the child will be born soon, but all the details they do not. Likewise, our knowledge of tomorrow is very limited. We might generally expect what tomorrow will bring forth, but the precise details and actual events that will take place we do not know for sure. In fact, by the end of the day, when our future quickly has become our past, we have often experienced many surprises and events that we never had in our plans. That reflects clearly the truth of James 4:14, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow."

The fact is that only Jehovah knows our tomorrow. His knowledge of our tomorrow is all-determinative and authoritative.

First, Jehovah's knowledge of our tomorrow is His determinate counsel and foreknowledge about tomorrow. He knows all the details of our lives. He has known our entire life as an open book from eternity. Even all the plans we make today are part of that divine foreknowledge. That means that even our plans, whether they are fulfilled or are not fulfilled, are never independent of His sovereign knowledge and control.

Secondly, Jehovah's knowledge of our future is not a mere accurate understanding of what will happen. God is not merely a future-knower. His knowledge sovereignly and all-powerfully brings our tomorrow to pass as He has willed according to His good pleasure. What God sovereignly knows in His counsel, that He will bring to pass. God sovereignly causes us to make our plans. God sovereignly fulfils them or does not fulfill them according to His sovereign foreknowledge and counsel. Therefore, the only reason why many of our plans are fulfilled and others are not fulfilled

is God's sovereign foreknowledge and counsel.

Since we in no way have the kind of knowledge that God does, we sinfully boast when we act as though our plans must and will surely come to pass. Whether we see our friend or family member tomorrow depends not on our will, but entirely upon the will and foreknowledge of our Father. Whether we harvest soon any of the fruits of our labors in our fields and gardens depends not upon our will or desires, but upon what God knows about the tomorrow of our future. Hence, our life and times are not in our hands, but solely in the Hand of our heavenly Father, who leads in life whithersoever and howsoever He knows and wills.



As His faithful children, we may boast then in Jehovah alone.

We may glory in Him because our heavenly Father knows us and our tomorrow in His love in Jesus Christ. God does not know everyone's tomorrow that way. There are many whose future God knows in His wrath. He brings to pass their tomorrow also, but only to prepare them for their eternal tomorrow in hell. But, in Christ, the Father has known His people. He has known you in His sovereign and electing love in Christ. Around that central thought the Father has clustered all the details of your life on earth from the beginning unto the very end.

This truth assures us that our Father's purpose for our tomorrow is to do us good for Christ's sake. His goal is to use our tomorrow for our blessing. The Father knows how to make your tomorrow serve your salvation.

Do *you* know what you need in your tomorrow that will serve your salvation and eternal profit? Of course not. However, the Father knows! In His love and wisdom, He knows exactly what you need tomorrow for your salvation. Sometimes that means that the

plans we make must come to pass. Often the plans we make do not come to pass because those plans, if fulfilled, would not serve our salvation and eternal profit. Be thankful, therefore, that the Father knows what our tomorrow will be and what it must bring forth for our good and His glory.

That tomorrow will be for your good because of Jesus Christ alone. We may be assured of that because Jesus Christ suffered for us on the cross of Calvary long ago and there secured our salvation. A wonderful and undeserved benefit of His atoning sacrifice and redemptive work is that, as our Father has in


our yesterdays and in our today, so also He will bless us through whatever our tomorrows must bring forth.

What then is the most important thing you and I need to know about tomorrow, the thing in which we may boast?

The most important thing that I need to know about tomorrow is not the weather, nor the condition of the financial markets, nor any other earthly consideration. The most important thing for me to know about my tomorrow is that what the Father knows tomorrow will bring forth He will bring to

pass for my salvation and for His glory for Christ's sake alone. Therefore, even if my tomorrow is entirely contrary to all of my plans, so be it according to His will. The Father in His wisdom knows best what will serve me tomorrow with a view to my eternal life in glory with Christ.

Let us in the confidence of faith trust in the Father's knowledge and wisdom and submit ourselves to His will no matter what He will cause our tomorrow to bring forth.

Let us also make our plans for tomorrow, but always including those very important words: "if the Lord will" (James 4:15). 

All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee

Mr. Jon VanOverloop

The Butterfly's Metamorphosis (1)

The metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly is one of those natural events that fascinate people. Its appeal stems from the marvel of the dramatic change and also from the mysterious processes occurring within the enclosed capsule from which it emerges.

The Lord in His infinite wisdom surely created the butterfly to undergo just such a mysterious change with the intent of causing man to marvel at the "natural" world, and to leave him without excuse. However, for the Christian, there is additional fascination in watching the transformation, because he is aware that the creation is part of God's revelation. Although he looks through a glass darkly and has lost the acumen of father Adam, he is still able to see

and appreciate the spiritual realities that God manifests in earthly processes. In this article we will explore how God specifically created the "natural" metamorphosis of the butterfly to help us comprehend the spiritual truths of our own transformation, as we grow in grace throughout our lives.

Butterflies begin life as eggs that are often laid on the undersides of leaves. They quickly outgrow the small confines of the eggshells and emerge as small caterpillars with voracious appetites. In a few short weeks they will grow to be about 3,000 times their original weight. Once grown to this extent, the caterpillar is large enough to undergo metamorphosis and will do so once the environmental conditions are just right.

The caterpillar does not have the biological knowledge to decipher the best time and place for metamorphic activity, but the Creator has designed its body to respond automatically to several environmental triggers, including day

length. Once a sufficient number of environmental triggers have occurred and the caterpillar body is sufficiently matured, the caterpillar will begin to metamorphose. These environmental triggers specifically affect the hormonal balances in the caterpillar.

One hormone of particular importance in metamorphosis is called juvenile hormone, the presence of which keeps the caterpillar from metamorphosing. When the level of juvenile hormone decreases, the caterpillar changes its behavior. First it gives up eating and wanders around until it finds a suitable spot in which to form a chrysalis (the outer shell of a pupa). After the chrysalis is formed, the same juices that in the past were used to dissolve the caterpillar's meals now dissolve nearly the whole organism. Its antenna, head, stomach, intestine, and all of its internal organs liquefy in the presence of these digestive enzymes. The notable exceptions to this include the tracheal system (for

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gas exchange), the blood system, and some tiny but incredibly important structures known as imaginal disks.

These imaginal disks are the important groups of cells that God uses to give rise to the whole new adult body. Gaining an understanding of metamorphosis requires a grasp of the significance of imaginal disks.

Each imaginal disk is a group of cells that is genetically programmed to produce just one adult organ or body structure. There are therefore many imaginal discs inside each caterpillar, one for each part. For example, there are four imaginal disks for the four wings of the butterfly and six imaginal disks for its six legs. Instead of dissolving like the rest of the body, the cells of these disks begin to multiply and become organized.

The imaginal disks now operate like many young embryos in a mother's womb. Each is taking in the precise molecules that it specifically needs for the cell division and the growth of the body structure for which it is responsible. Yet, the disks are not growing independently, but instead they are also communicating with neighboring disks. Each imaginal disk must know where the others are so that it can line up in such a way that the resulting body structures are in the appropriate spots on the finished organism. Their growth is thus coordinated, so that each disk fuses with the others to complete the body plan. In the end, by God's sovereign direction, a winged adult butterfly is formed, with each part in its proper location. The whole process clearly requires a lot of energy. The fact is, the emerging adult is only about half the weight of the caterpillar from which it was formed.

The result of metamorphosis for the butterfly is an organism that God has totally changed. Although it had before crawled on the ground, now it takes flight. It had biting mouth-parts, but now it has

sucking, straw-like mouth parts. It used to smell with its tiny antennae by its mouth, but now it smells in many places, including through its feet. As a caterpillar it was able to digest all kinds of molecules and had a whole spectrum of digestive enzymes, now its only digestive enzyme is one type of carbohydrase, known as sucrase. Sucrase is a very specific enzyme that is able to break down the sucrose that it typically finds in the nectar of flowers. It used to be a creature of the night and of shadows, but now it has become a creature of the day that enjoys the light. It used to blend in with the surroundings, but now it is beautiful and stands out in its environment. Nearly every organ has been dissolved, and all brand-new organs have been formed. It truly is a new creature when the process is finished.

It is interesting to note that Scripture speaks in several places of another metamorphosis, one that is even more dramatic than that of the butterfly. This transformation is mentioned in II Corinthians 3:18. Here we read that: "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." The word "changed" in the text is actually the word "metamorphosed" in the Greek. So the text could read: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are *metamorphosed* into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

The glass that the text refers to is actually the glass of a mirror, and more specifically, it is referring to the mirror of God's Word. The text says that when we look into Scripture we get changed so that we gain some of the very glory that we are looking at. That is, we gain some of the glory and attributes of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Is not this much more glorious than the change that a butterfly undergoes? And this increase in glory contin-

ues all our life long. That is the significance of the words, "from glory to glory." Although God has already made us somewhat glorious at the moment of regeneration, we continue to grow in glory as we read His Word. The more we become devoted to the Word, the more we grow in glorious grace, by the work of the Spirit.

The original word metamorphosed is significant because it suggests something of the magnitude and nature of the change. That which is metamorphosed is greatly changed, not just altered a bit. We have seen the drastic changes that metamorphosis has in the life of the butterfly. It is changed from the inside out, so that the end result is a whole new body. The same is true of Christians.

The transformation of Christians begins with regeneration, as a child of God is reborn by the power of Christ. It continues in his conversion, as he daily turns from what is sinful and does what is right. This transformation is manifested in his sanctification as he finds pleasure in living a life of godliness. When our earthly life is complete, then our transformation will advance greatly as we enter heaven and are no longer beset by our sins. Our souls at that time will experience fellowship with the saints, and especially with Christ, in a way that is impossible as long as we are yet on the earth. And then, on that great and final day when Christ ushers in the new heavens and the new earth, our transformation will be complete. We will enjoy heavenly glory with our souls reunited to their perfect bodies. Of all of this the metamorphosis of the butterfly is a picture. What a dramatic change we also undergo! How appropriate that the Scriptures also call our change "metamorphosis." Or, should we say, how appropriate that God also named the change of caterpillars into butterflies "metamorphosis."


Romans 12:2 is a second text

that uses the Greek word “metamorphosed” when it speaks of the Christian’s conversion. The text reads, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” This time it’s the word “transformed” that is actually the word “metamorphosed.” The renewing of our minds requires a dramatic transformation, the result of which is that we are made to think differently. Before God’s work within us, we lived only for ourselves. We quickly and thoughtlessly lived day by day without any regard for the King, for His name, or His demands. The Holy Spirit changes that mindset. Through His work, not only are we able to do what is good and acceptable and in accordance with the perfect will of God, but we also enjoy being occupied with these things. Through our metamorpho-

sis we lose conformity to the world and have a renewed mind that makes us behave very differently. What a great change we as Christians also experience as a result of our own spiritual metamorphoses!

The fact that God creates the desire within Christians to turn away from sin and toward God so that they grow in glory is wonderful. For this reason alone we should give Him all the praise. That God makes this process known to His people through the Scriptures is of additional benefit because it makes us realize and appreciate how important this change is for us and causes us to give Him thanks. But it is striking that God has decided to go still further in His revelation of this truth to us. Additionally, He chose to use His creation as a visual aid, the better to imprint the wonder of this transformation in the Christian’s mind. Every summer we see the butterflies emerge from their chrysalises

with bodies that have changed from one that was often drab, to one that is far more beautiful. Although creation’s revelation is limited when compared with the perspicuity of Scripture, this “natural” transformation is definitely a clear and powerful reminder of the radical change that Christians receive. Through the butterfly’s metamorphosis we are better able to understand the great change that He works in our hearts.

But there is more. From the beginning of creation God not only designed this insect to undergo metamorphosis, but also caused it to change so that its life after metamorphosis very closely resembles the life of a Christian after his transformation. Lord willing, next time we will conclude this article by detailing the ways in which the changes that occur in the adult butterfly are beautiful pictures of the changes that occur in the life of transformed Christians. 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. James Laning

The Power & Government of the Church (3) *No Hierarchy of Bishops*

Churches err in church government not only when they allow the State to have authority in the spiritual matters of the church, but also when they pattern their church government after the governments of the nations of this world. The church is a heavenly kingdom; it is not like the kingdoms and nations of this world. Therefore, the principles of

her government are markedly different from the principles that man invents and follows when building a structure according to his own will.

One fundamental principle of church government is that nothing comes between Christ and His church, that is, between the Head and His body. The State may not come between them, nor may an officebearer or an ecclesiastical assembly. Many place “higher ranking” officebearers or “higher” ecclesiastical assemblies between Christ and the instituted church. This is hierarchy, after the example

of the governments of this world, and is contrary to the instruction that our Lord Himself gave to us.

A hierarchy refers to a government system in which individuals are ranked in levels of increasing authority, with a single individual or a small group of individuals at the top. Such an arrangement is very common among the nations and businesses of the world, but must not be found in the church of Jesus Christ upon earth. The church has one Head and Husband. No one, be it an individual or a group of individuals, can come between Him and His bride.

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Previous article in this series: July 2005, p. 416.)

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Officebearers Not to Lord It Over Others

During Jesus' ministry upon this earth, He tasked his disciples to go around preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. As they not only preached this, but also began to contemplate more the meaning of this, they entertained the notion that there would be a hierarchical structure in Christ's kingdom. While Christ was telling them about His approaching crucifixion, they were busy arguing among themselves as to who was going to have the highest rank in this kingdom. Jesus Himself had made no such appointments, so they began to take matters into their own hands. James and John even came to Jesus and said, "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory" (Mark 10:37). When the other ten disciples heard about this, they were much displeased with James and John. It was at this time that we read that Christ took His disciples aside and gave them instruction concerning a central principle of church government:

42. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.

43. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:

44. And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

45. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Here Jesus clearly contrasts His kingdom with the kingdoms of this world, setting forth for us a principle that must be understood and maintained if a church on earth is going to reflect properly the heavenly glory of Christ.

No officebearer is given authority to lord it over others. When the text speaks of those who "exercise lordship over" or "exercise authority upon" others, it is referring to those who lord it over others, forcing others into subjection to their will. Christ said that the officebearers in His church do not have this right. They are to be servants, ruling not according to their own will but the will of God, and seeking to glorify not themselves but the God who has saved them.

The Development of a Hierarchy

After the death of the apostles, churches gradually began to make changes in the matter of church government, changes that were contrary to the principles found in Scripture. Some officebearers became known as priests, when no such office had been instituted by Christ for the new dispensation. God's people as a whole are a royal priesthood (I Pet. 2:9). But many, going back to the Old Testament types and shadows, taught that there was a special priesthood distinct from the body of the people. Secondly, contrary to the biblical instruction that bishops and elders are one and the same, the term bishop began to be used for a separate office, and that office was said to be over that of the other officebearers.

Gradually more and more power was ascribed to the bishop. First the office of bishop was simply distinguished from the office of elder, and then the office of bishop began to be viewed as higher than the office of elder. As time went on, a bishop was said to have authority over all the people of God in a certain region, known as a diocese. To him was ascribed the authority to ordain officebearers and to discipline within his diocese. Later the bishops themselves were arranged in a hierarchical structure, with the bishops located in the chief cities being placed over the other bishops. Eventually the bishop of

Rome was singled out as being over all the others, and was given the title of pope.

Some thought such a hierarchical structure would help to ensure that the churches remained united. A powerful individual whom they could see and under whom they could unite would serve to keep the people together, so it was thought. Man by nature desires a leader he can see. Old Testament Israel, for example, was not content having the invisible God as their King. They wanted a visible king like the other nations had, a single man under whom they could be united. It was similar in the early centuries of the new dispensation. The King of the church was in heaven; He could not be seen, and some of the people began to long for a leader they could see with the eye of the body.

Although the history is quite involved, the issue can be broken down to a few fundamental questions, two of which are these: Is the office of bishop to be distinguished from the office of elder? And, secondly, has Christ instituted an office in which the bearer of that office has authority, as an individual, to ordain and discipline others. Let us take a look at each of these questions in turn.

Bishop versus Elder: An Unbiblical Distinction

The distinction between bishop and elder was basic to the construction of the entire Romish hierarchy. Today many who reject the papal form of church government still commit the error of distinguishing the offices of bishop and elder, claiming that the bishop is higher than the elder. Episcopalians, Methodists, and the Eastern Orthodox churches are examples of denominations that do this. These denominations may differ as to what they say constitutes the higher authority ascribed to the bishop, but they nevertheless all commit the same error.

In church history there has of-

ten been a debate over whether there are two or three distinct offices in the church of Christ.¹ Many say there are three: bishop, elder (or priest), and deacon. Others say there are two (elder and deacon), with the minister being referred to as the teaching elder, and the other elders as ruling elders. We often speak of three offices, but not in the sense in which the first group mentioned above does. We say the three are the offices of minister of the Word, elder, and deacon. But we insist that the term bishop and elder are two terms for the same office. Ministers of the Word are elders. They are referred to in I Timothy 5:17 as the “elders ... who labour in the Word and doctrine.” Although they are distinguished from the other elders who do not labor full time in this work, both kinds of elders are referred to in Scripture as “elders” or “bishops.”

There are two terms in the New Testament that refer to one and the same office. One is the term *elder* and the other is the term *bishop* or *overseer*. The first term refers to the honor of the office and the second to the work of the office. The elder is one placed in an honorable office and is to be spiritually mature, and his work consists of overseeing the spiritual life of the members of the congregation.

That the words *elder* and *bishop* (i.e., overseer) refer to the same office can be clearly demonstrated. When Paul said farewell to the “elders” at Ephesus (Acts 20:28), he referred to them all as “bishops” (KJV — overseers). When he began his letter to the church at Philippi (Phil. 1:1), he greeted all the saints there along with “the bishops and deacons.” If the elders were officebearers distinct from the bishops, it would be strange for Paul to neglect mentioning them. In Paul’s letter to Timothy, we read of the qualifications for bishops and the qualifications for deacons, but we do not find a separate section listing the quali-

cations for elders. Similarly, we read of the ordination of elders and of deacons, but nowhere of the ordination of bishops in distinction from elders. Obviously this is because the bishops and the elders are one and the same. Finally, we see this very clearly in Titus 1:5-7, which reads:

5. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

6. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

7. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

After Paul speaks of leaving Titus in Crete in order that he might ordain elders in every city, he proceeds to give the qualifications for these elders. And when he does so, he refers to these elders as “bishops.” From these and other passages we can see that the office of elder is to be identified with the office of bishop.

The Church, Not an Individual, Given Authority to Ordain and Discipline

Those who desire to exalt the office of bishop over that of elder have to explain what additional authority the bishop has that the elder does not have. Some have said, in answer to this question, that it is the bishop who has the authority to ordain officebearers and to discipline within his area of jurisdiction. But this is giving authority to a man that in Scripture is always given to the church. It is the church that ordains and disciplines, working through the body of elders.

When we look to Scripture, we see that the church, through her elders, has been given the authority both to ordain and to discipline. In Scripture we read of the body of

elders, also referred to as the presbytery, ordaining officebearers. In I Timothy 4:14, the apostle Paul says to Timothy, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.” Here we see that the church has received authority to work through her body of elders to ordain officebearers.

The instituted church has also been given authority to discipline, which again she does through her elders. As was set forth in a previous article, the instituted church is the one who has received the keys of the kingdom, one of which is the key of Christian discipline. The inspired apostle Paul exhorted the church at Corinth to excommunicate a member who was walking in sin (I Cor. 5:4). This authority is given not to an individual, but to the instituted church as a whole, who performs this work through her elders. In fact, when a person is excommunicated, the entire body of believers gives their tacit approval, and thus is involved in the discipline process.

Christ: The One Officebearer over All Others

There is only one Officebearer who is over all the saints and all the special officebearers in the instituted churches. That Officebearer is Christ, who is called “the Shepherd and Bishop” of our souls (I Pet. 2:25). We cannot now see Him with the eye of the body, but He is the One who is leading us, protecting us, and keeping us united. May we never seek to have leaders like those of the nations of this world. Submitting to our King who is in heaven, following the instruction He has given concerning all things, including the government of His church, we will show clearly to others that our confidence is not in man, but in God.



1. There has often been debate about a fourth office, the office of teacher. But this will not be discussed here.

“There Is No Place Like Home!”

*Joyful children, sons and daughters,
Shall about thy table meet,
Olive plants in strength and beauty,
Full of hope and promise sweet.*

— Psalter number 360:3:
a versification of Psalm 128:3

We have considered the place of both the father and mother in relation to their children in the home. Father must be with his family as much as possible outside of his secular labors and his labors in the church. He has a calling in the home to lead and instruct his family. Likewise, it is vital for the spiritual welfare of the children that mother is at home with them, from infancy on, nurturing and caring for them.

These are established biblical principles. But there is something more implied in these biblical principles — something that seems to have been lost in many families in the church today. Fathers and mothers can follow these principles formally, making sure the letter of the law is met. But mere formality, mere “going through the motions,” does not make a solid, covenant family. The heart and soul of a healthy covenant family is its home life. Members of every covenant family must find the hub or center of their lives in the home with their family.

This starts already when a husband and wife marry and establish their home. They have been made, through marriage, one flesh. They must create a home in which they

live together as one flesh. In this home a husband and wife live together as a unit. Under the Lord’s blessing that unit of the family grows. Children are added to the family. With each additional child that the Lord is pleased to give a man and his wife, the unit of the family continues to grow in strength and beauty. “As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them” (Ps. 127:4, 5). It is important that, as the family grows, the husband and his wife (who are now also father and mother) not lose sight of the unit or organism of the family. They must focus their time and effort on seeing to it that their family functions as a harmonious whole. This means that their home and family must become their life! The old adage must be true of covenant parents: “There is no place like home!” This is where they must enjoy making their life and spending their time. That same desire and joy must be passed along to their children as they grow. Parents and children alike must not simply understand the need for life in the home, but they must love their life in the home.

This, after all, is the idea of a *covenant* home. God’s covenant with His people is His relationship of friendship and fellowship. In that relationship God binds His people in love to Himself. He becomes their Father and they His children. As a Father, He instructs, counsels, and protects His children. In short, God lives and dwells with His people in Christ. Surely, we can understand how this covenant

of God not only becomes the example of a covenant home, but becomes the very life of that home. God dwells with us in our homes and families! He lives and communes with us there! And we with Him! We enter into fellowship with our God as husbands and wives and as parents and children together, as a unit. We worship God together in our homes. We read His Word and we pray together as families and talk about that Word. There is a whole life of love and fellowship that must be carried on in the home and family.

At least ... there should be. In a covenant home there should be.

Many homes in the church today that may appear squeaky clean on the outside are not truly covenant homes. They take on the appearance of a family unit to those about them in the church. But when it comes to life within the home there is a terrible lack! Parents become too busy with peripheral activities that far too often take them out of their homes. Fathers become preoccupied with their work, their sporting events, spending time with their buddies. Mothers, though they perhaps do not work outside the home, yet busy themselves with going out for coffee, shopping, exercise, or whatever the distraction might be. It is not as if these activities are wrong in themselves. But when they begin to replace the valuable time spent in the home together as husband and wife and children, as a family, the unit of the family is slowly destroyed. When children grow older they no longer want to be home with their parents and siblings. They would rather be out at

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every opportunity — every night if possible — with their friends. Friends begin to replace family. Then, when this becomes the norm among young people, it even becomes socially unacceptable to be with your family. Parents are weird! Siblings are exasperating!

When homes become so busy that husbands and wives have little time to talk, when parents and children can hardly converse with each other, those homes have become empty shells. When this happens, the beautiful picture drawn for us by the psalmist in Psalm 128:3 is lost, “Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table” (Ps. 128:3).

Examine especially the last part of that verse: “thy children like olive plants round about thy table.” One sure indication of a covenant family is the life around their table — not once a week, but, as a general rule (we realize there are exceptions), on a daily basis.

It has always been maintained that family devotions around the breakfast, lunch, and dinner table is a good Dutch tradition. I believe this practice is not simply a tradition. It is something rooted in God’s covenant fellowship with His people. In Exodus 24 we read that God commanded Moses, Aaron and his sons (Nadab and Abihu), and the seventy elders of Israel to come into Mount Sinai to worship God together. We read of them in Exodus 24:11, “...also they saw God, and did eat and drink.” God in His covenant fellowship with the elders of Israel supped with them; He ate and drank with them.

The same idea is to be found in the symbolism of the table of showbread in the tabernacle and later in the temple. This table was prepared every day, implying that every day God entered into communion with His people there in the temple.

Is it really any different in the church today? When the church

of Jesus Christ gathers about the communion table to partake of the Lord’s Supper, the same symbolism implies fellowship with God through the shed blood and broken body of our Savior. We sup with God around His table. We eat and drink with Him. There is more to this symbolism too. Jesus speaks of the blessed truth (Luke 22:29, 30) that one day when we reach heaven we will eat and drink with God there. We will gather about the table set for us in God’s house of many mansions and we will eat and drink with God. We will fellowship with Him there about His table.

Fellowship and communion take place around the table. A husband and wife ought to establish that practice immediately after marriage. In our busy world the tendency is to let this practice slip. Other activities are now pushing aside eating together as a family. The number one spiritual priority in life, that of reading and praying together as a family every day, is no longer viewed as a necessity. Entering into fellowship with God together as a family is being lost! This is a threat not only to the family, but also to the church! Sporting events, television, going places with friends, work, and many other activities — all these seem not only to destroy the family altar around the table, but also are oftentimes allowed to ruin life in the home altogether.

I remember my father loudly complaining when they moved the evening worship service on Sunday from seven to six, “That interrupts my family altar!” The point is: life in the family must not become a relic of the past, as if this is some outdated institution! Family worship, eating and drinking together with each other and with the Lord, may not be pushed aside as unnecessary! These are vital to a covenant home!

This reminds me of the sad example of the young man of the church who was dating a young woman and told her he did not even know how to pray. The reason for this, he said, was that his family rarely sat down together to eat. They rarely prayed together as a family. The result is, he had never learned how to pray. All this was true of a family that gave every appearance of being an exemplary family in the church.

Neither ought life in the church and with friends replace life in the home. This is not to say, of course, that godly friendships within the realm of the church may not be established. These friendships among the saints are vital to the life of the church. We cannot go through life without friends. Families visiting with each other and enjoying themselves with each other is definitely a part of the organic life of the church. Marriages among the young people of the church are most often formed out of such friendships. But when life in the church begins to remove us from the home the majority of those nights or days that we could otherwise be home, or when friends begin to take up more time than family, our spiritual lives will suffer.

How does one begin to convey the joy and blessedness of a family that centers its life in the home? “Behold, that thus [in the way of a wife and children in the home — W.B.] shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord” (Ps. 128:4). A family that enjoys one another’s company and actually enjoys doing things and going places together with each other is a happy home. A covenant home exudes a sense of joy, comfort, and security. It is a haven to which all can flee to escape the pressures of life. A husband can flee there to escape the pressures of work. When overwhelmed by life a husband can go to his wife,

...life in the family must not become a relic of the past, as if this is some outdated institution!


and a wife to her husband, and pour out everything that is in their heart. Even if they cannot always solve the problem, just having them listen and sympathize is often all that is needed.

Children and young people can hide in the home to be safe from the hurtful remarks and scorn of peers. They can get away from the pressure that is placed on them. They can act themselves without putting on a false front for others. In the home we can relax and just be ourselves, not having to meet anyone else's expectations. As a young person I am able to go to my parents and talk anything over with them. What better place to go for advice? Do I honestly think that friends, who are my peers, having no more experience in life than I, can give me better advice than my parents? Again, I am not saying that our struggles may not be shared with friends. They certainly may! But if the atmosphere

in a home and family is right, as it should be in a covenant home, children and young people will not hesitate to spend time just talking with mom and/or dad.

This kind of attitude in our children is something that must be nurtured already when children are very young. If dad and mom are too busy to listen to their little children's stories, to sing songs with their children, or to take an interest in what they are doing, then dad and mom ought not to think that these children will simply grow up to converse freely with them. If parents do not take an active interest in their children's life, especially as they grow older, or if all that parents do is criticize their children, we cannot expect our children to come to us for advice when they reach the years of discretion.

All of this takes a solid, spiritual, lively life within the family unit. If the family is not the center of our lives as married couples or

as children, we are truly missing out on something! This is where happiness is found! What wonderful times are to be had sitting around the table joking and laughing with each other, discussing and arguing issues of life, throwing napkins at each other, and just plain enjoying the fellowship — the good wholesome fellowship of a covenant family. What memories of singing together and crying together. There is no better camaraderie, even after one is grown, than to get together with brothers and sisters with whom one remembers sharing his or her life as a sibling in the home. When a father and mother look back and see their children and children's children sharing the same joys with their families as they have shared in their own home, then they truly see the joy of a covenant home and family. And then they can say from the heart too: "There is no place like home!" 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Young People's Activities

This past month about 320 young people from across our denomination traveled to Missouri for their annual PRYP Convention. This year's convention, held June 27-July 1, and hosted by the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, considered the theme, "Royal Citizens in the Kingdom of God" (I Pet. 2:9). Revs. M. VanderWal, J. Mahtani, and A. Spriensma were the speakers. It was a very warm and busy week at a very beautiful camp with very few problems. We pray that you young people have returned from the convention spiritually refreshed and renewed to fight the good fight of faith. May the friendships you renewed, or found for the first

time, continue to be a blessing to you.

June 18 the young people of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada hosted their annual pancake breakfast at their church. Following breakfast there was also opportunity for everyone to join in playing volleyball and soccer on the church grounds. (After pancakes, that probably was a good idea.)

Congregation Activities

The congregation of Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN hosted a Vacation Bible School June 20 through June 24. The theme was "Joseph, the Faithful Dreamer," based on Romans 8:28, and was intended for children from 4 years old to children who will enter the 5th grade this fall.

We cannot let this issue of the SB pass without at least a mention

of annual church picnics. Is there any church in our denomination that does not have one? What can be more enjoyable than a warm summer day with lots of good food, good Christian friends, and good fun? A Bonfire Game Night was sponsored in Randolph, WI on June 17. Games and contests began at 7:00, followed by a fire at 8:45 P.M. Unfortunately, the greased pig contest was cancelled. (Fortunately for the pig.) On July 2 the congregation of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada gathered for their annual picnic at Cardiff Park. Besides children's games, followed by softball and volleyball games, members were also encouraged to take along water guns and balloons for some water fun too. Now that sounds interesting.

On Sunday, June 26, Mr. Cory Griess, one of our seminary students, came to the Byron Center

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

PRC during their Sunday School hour to show slides and tell about Christians in India. All the Sunday School classes were invited, as well as anyone else in the congregation.

Ladies and children of Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI were invited to join together at Hughes Park for a time of coffee and fellowship on June 30.

This summer two groups from the Georgetown PRC made trips to Romania. The first group of twelve were there for about two weeks and planned to assist in the construction of a bakery for an orphanage and in the repair of a church parsonage. The second group of five left soon after and hoped to follow up on the work started by those who visited first.

Denomination Activities

On June 30, members of the Singles Fellowship in and around Grand Rapids, MI met for dinner at the Community Restaurant in Zeeland. From there they went to First PRC in Holland, MI for a program. Mr. Wes Koops acquainted the singles with the Pittsburgh Mission, showing videos taken recently while he and his wife were there for three weeks as missionary assistants.

Mission Activities

On June 19, at the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, Rev. J. Mahtani preached his farewell sermon after serving as our denomination's eastern home missionary for the past seven years. Rev. Mahtani chose to preach his sermon based on the Word of God found in I Timothy 6:12 under the theme, "Fighting the Good Fight." There was an open house and farewell program for the Mahtanis following the worship service that evening.

The PR Fellowship of Fayetteville, NC continues to meet from Sunday to Sunday. They listen to DVD's of sermons from Grace and Hudsonville, MI PRC's. Some visitors have begun to attend the services regularly and some also are coming to weekly catechism classes taught by Dr. P. LeMaster. One family who became familiar with the PRF via the PRC website even traveled 2 1/2 hours to attend one service of the PRF. Rev. M. Dick, along with his wife and family, traveled to Fayetteville June 16-19. Plans called for a lecture June 16 on the covenant. Rev. Dick's Sunday sermons on June 19 also followed the theme of the covenant as this applies especially to fathers and their calling and delight to raise their children in the fear of the Lord.

The council of the Doon, IA PRC, with the concurrence of the Foreign Mission Committee, has granted Rev. A. Spriensma permission to perform the sacrament of baptism in the Berean Church of God Reformed in the Philippines. We give thanks to our heavenly Father for this fruit upon our labor in the Philippines.

In early June the members of the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship of Spokane, WA were invited to a camp-out at Porcupine Bay in the FDR Federal Recreation Area.

June 29 Rev. A. Stewart, our denomination's missionary to Northern Ireland, gave a lecture in Limerick entitled, "Christ Will Build His Church."

Minister Activities

A special welcome was extended to Rev. J. Kortering, minister emeritus in our churches, and his wife, by the congregation of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada on Sunday, June 19. He had agreed to provide preaching of the Word for them for eight weeks this summer.

On July 3 the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI extended a call to Rev. Dick to serve as missionary in the eastern United States.

Announcements

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 14, 2005 at the Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, Michigan.

Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 12, D.V., our parents, **REV. and MRS. CARL HAAK**, will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. We thank them for their godly example and for demonstrating the love of Christ in their marriage.

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant" (Psalm 25:14).

☼ Bethany, Keri, and Melanie Haak
Hudsonville, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Senior Bible Study Society of Grace PRC express their Christian sympathy to members Phyllis King, Bill and Lori Smeda, and Marilyn King in the death of their husband, father, and brother,

MR. ROGER KING.

May the bereaved family find comfort in the assurance of God's Word, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Rev. Mitchell Dick, President
Barb Feenstra, Secretary

NOTICE

RFPA Annual Meeting will be held on September 22 in Georgetown PRC.

PUBLIC LECTURE Christian Stewardship Prof. Herman Hanko

Sponsored by
the Evangelism Committee of
Peace PRC
18423 Stony Island Avenue
Lansing, Illinois

Plan to attend this lecture on Friday,
August 26, 2005, at 8:00 P.M.
in Peace PRC.

OFFICEBEARERS CONFERENCE

CLASSIS WEST OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES
South Holland PRC, South Holland, IL - Tuesday, September 6, 2005

Our Denominational Seminary:
Committing the Truth to Faithful Men
"And the things that thou hast heard of me ...
commit thou to faithful men...." 2 Timothy 2:2

KEYNOTE

9:00 AM *A Trained Ministry: The Basis and Benefits of
Seminary Training* **Rev. Allen Brummel**

SECTIONALS

10:30 AM *An Overview of the Department of Dogmatics and
Old Testament Studies* **Prof. David Engelsma**

Training Ministers: The Church's Responsibility
Prof. Herman Hanko

1:00 PM *An Overview of the Department of Church History and
New Testament Studies* **Prof. Russell Dykstra**

*The Responsibility of Consistories in Training Men for
the Ministry* **Prof. Barrett Gritters**

2:30 PM *An Overview of the Department of Practical Theology and
New Testament Studies* **Prof. Robert Decker**

The Position and Task of the Professor of Theology
Rev. Arie denHartog

All past and present officebearers, as well as all interested people,
are invited to attend. Lunch will be provided,
and a freewill offering will be taken to defray expenses.

NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by South Holland PRC in South Holland, Illinois on Wednesday, September 7, 2005 at 8:30 A.M. All material for the agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, August 8, 2005. An officebearers conference is being planned for Tuesday, September 6, on the subject of "Our Denominational Seminary." Delegates or visitors in need of lodging or transportation should notify Mr. Gysbert VanBaren (219-322-9428, or gvanbaren@sbcglobal.net).

Rev. Daniel Kleyn
Stated Clerk, Classis West

CORRECTION

The telephone number given for Dennis Lee was incorrect in the July issue. The correct number is: (616) 669-3406.

NOTICE

Seminary Convocation will be held on August 31, 2005, at 7:30 p.m. in First PRC. Prof. Engelsma will be the speaker.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to God for His covenant faithfulness, we, the family of

FRED and RUTH HANKO,
announce their 50th wedding anniversary on August 11, 2005. Their love of the Reformed faith and their godly example and advice throughout the years have been a source of encouragement to us and a constant reminder that we, like them, must be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58).

✿ Pete and Jan Westra
✿ Ellen (in glory)
✿ Fred and Cathy Hanko
✿ Dave and Joan Hanko
✿ Dan and Andra Hanko
✿ Rev. Angus and Mary Stewart
27 grandchildren

(and one in glory)
Jenison, Michigan

Notice!!!

New Seminary Publication

Notes on the Church Order, a syllabus written long ago by Prof. Herman Hanko, has recently been updated by the author. More importantly, it has also been *expanded*. It includes now also a 50-page unit on the *practical application* of the regulations of the Church Order and the principles underlying it — application especially to the life of those who, though they are not in one of the special offices in the church, nevertheless occupy the all-important office of all believers.

This publication (plastic ring bound) is available from the seminary at a cost of \$8.00 plus postage.

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for August

Date	Topic	Text
August 7	"Pitying Our Children"	Psalms 103:13
August 14	"Restraining Our Children"	I Samuel 3:13
August 21	"Rearing Our Children"	Titus 2:4, 5
August 28	"Praying for Our Children"	II Samuel 12:15-23