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A New Song

And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;...

Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

Revelation 5:9, 12

The song had not been heard before. Heard before was only a question: Who is worthy?

An important question indeed! At the center of the question is a book. Not just any book. This is the book that is held in the right hand of Him that sitteth upon the throne. It is the possession of the almighty God. He is its sole author. This book is comprehensive. It contains all the events of the universe. It is about the stars in the heavens above. It is about the mountains, the forests, and rivers.

Rev. VanderWal is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

It is about men and nations. It is about angels and devils. It concerns judgment and mercy. This book is powerful. It is not a record. It is not a history. It is not even a foretelling of things that are to come. The book, written within and on the backside, is the counsel of God, His wisdom ordaining all things from the foundation of the world. The loosing of its seals brings all things written therein to their execution and completion.

But this book is closed in the hand of Him that sits on the throne. It is sealed with seven seals. It must be received from the hand of Him that sits on the throne. It must be opened. Its seven seals, one after another, must be loosed. Only then will its events come to pass. Only then will the glory of God be vindicated. Only then will the redemption of the elect be accomplished.

Who is worthy? A great question!

A search is undertaken. A mighty angel asks the great question with a mighty voice. Who is worthy? Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

To this question there is no an-

swer. There is only silence. For there is none worthy. None worthy in heaven. None worthy in earth. None worthy under the earth. None is found able to open the book, neither to look thereon. No one steps forward to take the book, to loose its seven seals, to open it, and to look upon it.

In the silence following the question, one voice is heard. Not a voice offering to take the book from the right hand of Him that sat on the throne. Not a voice proclaiming its owner's worth or merit. But a voice of unworthiness. The voice belongs to one who knows his unworthiness. It belongs to a child of God, the apostle beloved of the Lord.

The voice is the voice of weeping, even of much weeping.

The voice weeps much because of the silence. It weeps because none was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. It weeps because this child of God longs for the vindication of God's glory. It weeps in longing for the redemption of the elect of God.

But that weeping must fall silent. In its place must come instead laughter. The mourning must be

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: dykstra@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603
PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033
(e-mail: doezema@prca.org)

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

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

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

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

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

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

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changed to gladness and joy. The voice must be lifted up with shouts of acclamation and praise.

For there is one that is worthy. Not one in heaven, nor in the earth, nor under the earth. This one is in the midst of the throne of God. In the midst of the four beasts and in the midst of the elders He stands. He is the Lion of Judah's tribe. He is the Root of David. He is the Lamb that was slain.

He is the one that stands forth in the midst of the silence. He is the one that must still the weeping voice of the apostle. Having stood forth in the midst of the silence, He proceeds to the throne. He takes the book out of the right hand of Him that sits upon the throne.

This Lion of Judah has prevailed! The Lamb that was slain is worthy to take the book. He is worthy to loose its seven seals, worthy to open it, and to look thereon.

How? How is He worthy? How has He prevailed?

Hearken to the new song. Hear the words that now fill the silence and take away the weeping. The new song is glorious, its words exalted: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!

Hear the new song as sung by the four beasts and the four and twenty elders about the throne of God. "Thou art worthy...for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood...."

He is worthy!

Worthy not by fortune, not by riches measured by silver or gold or precious stones. Worthy not by earthly conquest or dominion, the gathering of nations into a mighty empire. Worthy not by fame given by adoring multitudes.

Worthy He is by His blood. Worthy He is by being slain. Worthy by sacrifice, making redemption by His blood, laying down His life unto death. This lamb is accounted foolish and weak by men. But He is accounted worthy before God.

Worthy for us! Hear the joy-

ous tidings of the gospel in this new song. "Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood ... and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." His worthiness is our worthiness. His blood is the full price of our redemption. By His blood we are made kings and priests unto our God. By His death we shall reign on the earth.

Worthy is the Lamb!

Hear the new song as sung by the voice of many angels, the mighty host numbering ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

He is worthy! Worthy of all this glory — for all things in all the creation, of heaven and earth and the sea, are His. Even as He spoke upon earth, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," so is it in heaven, before the throne of the Almighty, and at His right hand.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!

Along that deepest, darkest way He went. The Lamb bore the shame and reproach of men. Their scorn and mockery filled His ears. Accursed of God in the shedding of His blood, slain was He on the wood of the cross. To the depths of hell He went. There is His worth!

Worthy is the Lamb, worthy of power and riches. By His blood, He is worthy of wisdom and strength. Slain, He is worthy of honor, and glory, and blessing. To the Lamb, who has emptied Himself, must be given all fullness.

Worthy is the Lamb!

Hear the new song as sung by all creatures in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them. "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

He is worthy! Worthy of all this praise and all this exaltation. Worthy that every creature should have these high words of adoration in their mouths and upon their tongues. No glory may be held for the creature. All glory for the Lamb, to be given unto Him who alone is worthy.

That praise belongs first to Him that sitteth upon the throne. He is the thrice-Holy One, the Lord God almighty. He created all things. For His pleasure they are and were created. Before Him the four and twenty elders have fallen down. To Him they give their worship. To Him they say, "Thou art worthy to receive glory and honor and power."

Now that same praise must be given to the Lamb. To the Lamb be blessing. To Him be honor, and glory, and power. For He Himself is of God, the only-begotten Son, the one that stands in the midst of God's throne.

Worthy is the Lamb!

A new song!

He is worthy to take the book. By that worthiness, He came to the throne, to receive the book from the right hand of Him that sat on the throne. The Lamb looses its seven seals. The Slain opens the book. Worthy by His blood, He looks thereon. Exalted to the highest glory, He has the power and authority to execute what is written within and on the backside. It belongs to Him to vindicate the glory of God, to accomplish the full redemption of the elect He purchased with His blood.

All that work He does in the midst of this new song: Thou art worthy!

That new song is given to the church. It is given to him that hath an ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. It is given to us who are the redeemed, who are made by His blood kings and priests unto our God. It is given to us who shall reign on the earth.

The new song is given to us, to fill the silence of our wondering hearts, our questioning minds. It is given to us in our mourning, when we see God's glory trampled

underfoot. It is given us in our weeping, as we long and groan in hope for our promised redemption.

This new song we keep in our hearts as a most precious treasure. To it we tune our voices. With our

tongues we echo its words. To Him we sing, "Thou art worthy!"

Worthy is the Lamb!

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain! 

The Churches' Need for Preachers (3): Preachers and the Judgment of God

Lack of preachers in the church world, felt also in the PRC, motivates God's people to pray more fervently: "Lord of the harvest, *thrust out* (see previous editorial) laborers into the harvest.... Graciously move men to prepare for the gospel ministry.... Provide us pastors after Thine Own heart (Jer. 3:15).... Ride forth, victorious White Horse of the gospel!"

Especially vacant churches feel this lack. Some feel it more keenly than others. Churches with regular preaching from retired ministers or the seminary do not experience the lack as a great hardship. Where elders must read sermons, or run a tape recorder twice on Sunday, they do. But even those who have regular supply on the Lord's Day are aware of all the catechism students who *need* their own pastor. And how many merely plod along in their personal or family troubles because no pastor is aware to assist them with the Word?

Along with the problem of the lack of ministers is a lack *in* ministers. There are preachers, but without the graces that make their work edifying. The gospel is heard, but barely. The people are fed, but in meager portions. Then the diffi-

culty is not the absence, but the presence of the preacher.

The churches need preachers. Soon. Always. Who of the young (or older) men will take up the preparation for the rewarding work of a lifetime labor in the gospel?



The explanations commonly given for the lack of ministers are unsatisfactory. They range from the mundane and prosaic (baby-boomers are retiring and not enough are alive to take their place, or churches neglect to encourage their young men to enter the ministry), to the humbling (men are leaving the ministry on account of the increasing expectations, high pressures, or for disqualifying sins). Pollsters query active ministers and men who have left the ministry for explanation. They present statistics, offer solutions. If the churches follow the suggestions, they ought to get their ministers. So they think.

With regard to the lack *in* ministers, the explanations are often as unsatisfactory.

God's Judgment

But who will ask God for *His* explanation for this lack? And who will dare ask whether God may *withhold* preachers in His judgment upon churches?

God may well withhold, remove, or give unqualified preach-

ers in judgment (or chastisement) upon churches.

This is implied in the reality that ministers are God's gift (Jer. 3:15). Lack of ministers is God withholding His gifts. When Jesus taught the church to pray for laborers, He said, Ask my Father that *He* would send out laborers (Matt. 9:37,38; Luke 10:2). Unless the Lord sends ministers, there will be none.

But Scripture is explicit in indicating that God sometimes judges (or chastens) a people by withholding His Word. That may be why churches lack *preachers*. It may be why a church suffers from *weak* preaching. In His displeasure, God allows the people to suffer spiritual hunger. Calvin recognized this: "Nothing is more ruinous for the church than for *God to take away faithful pastors*" (emphasis mine: BLG).

In Amos' days, God warned Israel of an impending famine. No ordinary famine, this would be a famine of the Word. God would withhold the refreshing and life-giving Word (Amos 8:11). During this famine, the people would feel as though God had turned their "feasts into mourning, and all (their) songs into lamentation ... as the mourning of an only *son*" (v. 10). God would no longer send His Word. And they were "the church."

In the book of Revelation, God's first warning to the churches was to Ephesus. Ephesus' sin is

familiar: they were leaving (or had *already* forsaken) their “first love” (Rev. 2:4). Even the warning is well-known: If they did not repent and “do the first works,” God would come to them “quickly, and... remove (their) candlestick out of his place” (v. 5). That is, they would cease to be a true church of Christ.

What is not so familiar is the description of the one who issues this warning. He is the one who “holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks” (v. 1). This description may well indicate one way in which He would bring about their judgment. The seven stars are “angels” or “messengers,” that is, the *pastors* of the seven churches (Rev. 1:20). The declining church at Ephesus is reminded first to see Jesus as the one who provides these “angels” for the churches. His judgment (chastisement) upon a falling church may be to remove these “angels,” or allow unfaithful men to occupy pulpits. In this way, He removes their *candlestick*, that is, their place as a true church.

God judges churches, denominations or congregations, by not giving them pastors. And sometimes by giving pastors not *according to his heart*.

“Self-examination”

If there is a lack of preachers, or weak preaching, or bad preaching, churches—including the Protestant Reformed Churches—must examine themselves. God does. God examines them.

This is not often the response to a lack in preachers. Usually, one looks at the minister: “If the minister would work harder, we would have sermons that feed us.” Or the elders are faulted: “If the elders would take better oversight of the minister, we would see improvements.” Or they examine the semi-

nary: “The seminary must do more to train the men and recruit more and better students.” Or they take polls to explain the absence of ministers: then it’s the pressure, the workload, the long hours, the thankless labor....

But how often do members examine *themselves*? God’s people must look within. In humility, they must ask: “Lord, why this lack of ones to bring the life-giving word? And if there is a lack *in* the preachers, why this lack? Show us, O great Lord of the harvest! Try us, and examine us, and see if there be any wicked way in us!”

To refuse to ask that question would be like Israel—after their stunning and humbling defeat at little Ai for the sin of Achan—to examine everything but whether God was judging (chastening) them. “Were our soldiers not rested well? Has their training been insufficient? Was the number of warriors too low?” Whereas they ought to have asked: “Lord, why art Thou not giving us victory?” Our response today must be that of Joshua at that time:

And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD... he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD.... For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name? (Joshua 7:6, 7)

God’s great name!

Indeed, the pressures are high enough to keep some away; the minister may lack important gifts; the seminary may be at fault; the elders lax. But that all begs the question: “Why, *Lord*?” Why would the *Lord* withhold His blessings, permitting the seminary to slip, the elders to be asleep at the

switch, the minister to be interested in many things besides making solid sermons? Why? Is God chastening a declining church? Is God judging a falling church?

What is it, Lord?

The year the famine (of the Word) came to Israel was a sad year. It should not have been a surprise. Through Prophet Amos, God explained: judgment comes because the people, smug in their wealth, cannot wait for Sabbath to end so they may get on with commerce. They mistreat the needy for selfish gain. They practice business deceitfully, driven as they are by greed (Amos 8:4-6). “As my judgment upon your impenitence, I send a famine of the Word.”

Judgment on Ephesus, however, was surprising, at least from one perspective. Ephesus maintained right doctrine (Rev. 2:2). The church exercised discipline (2:2, 6). She was even active in her proper work (2:3): preaching, catechism instruction, missions. But God may still remove her candlestick! Why? All her activity was not rooted in love for God in Jesus Christ.

There are other reasons the Lord may deny a church preachers. Maybe she falls into the sin Ezekiel warned of:

And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not (Ezek. 33:31-32).

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion (Amos 6:1).

Or the church members are busy criticizing the preachers, blatantly or, what is sometimes worse, more “carefully.” Some take the attitude

“Nothing is more ruinous for the church than for God to take away faithful pastors”
— John Calvin

that there are really only one or two preachers worth listening to or having. A “Corinthian” party-spirit prevails that says, “We’ll listen to Rev. So-and-So; but when Rev. Such-and-Such comes, we’ll be visiting elsewhere. You’re fans of Prof. X; but we like Prof. Y.” Surprisingly, the apostle Paul himself suffered this treatment, as one Corinthian faction preferred Rev. Apollos over him. Ministers themselves can be guilty of this. The Lord judges such carnal folly (I Cor. 3:1-5).

Or the people are guilty of Israel’s sin in Isaiah’s day, when the proud people said to others, “Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou” (Is. 65:5). Then my haughty pride attempts to remove the motes from everyone else’s eyes, while the beam remains in my own.

Or the church members gradually come to love many things besides the things of the kingdom. Their confession, if asked, is: “I

seek first the kingdom.” But the time has come that the people of God are tempted to be busy with almost anything *except* the labors of the church: Bible studies and catechism and good reading and visiting the needy and other activities that constitute “pure religion” (James 1:27). As in another day, what most makes the people happy is “bread and circuses,” that is, fine food, entertainment, and the money to get both.

The Lord’s call

To these the Lord says, “Repent, and remember from whence thou art fallen, and do the first works” (Rev. 2:5).

For believers, the judgment is chastisement—loving chastisement.

The warning is not intended to cause believers to despair, but to repent. The proper response is not wringing of hands or lamenting “good old days.” The proper re-

sponse is (united) godly sorrow that leads to repentance. Cry to God for an end to the famine. Cry that the famine not become worse.

Believers will seek God in the sorrow that trusts His Son for mercy—mercy upon the churches. Mercy that forgives follies. Mercy that *delivers* from follies. Mercy that sends pastors.

Believers seek Him for the grace to stand together in genuine support of the God-appointed servants who stand in the front lines of the battle. Even in earthly battles, how few are on the front lines, and how many thousands are needed as support, behind the lines. Pray for the leaders in the heat of the battle. They are weak and sinful.

Lord of the harvest, care for the preachers. Care for Thy dear church, precious blood-bought heritage! Humble us. And for Thy name’s sake (Josh. 7:7), do not withhold the gift of pastors ... according to Thine heart. 

Letters

Keepers at Home

Having followed the articles by Rev. Bruinsma in the rubric “When Thou Sittest in Thine House,” I was concerned with some things said in the last article on this in the February 1, 2005 issue.

God, right after the fall, judged the man to earn his and his family’s bread in the sweat of his face. To the woman God said that in sorrow she shall bring forth children (Gen 3:16-19). It is this present world’s folly, especially of the women, that in addition to their own sorrow they want to take upon themselves the curse placed on man. God commanded the man, not the woman, to work to sustain his family.

While this is not censurable sin, and in that sense it is a matter of Christian liberty, yet God’s commandments do have a bearing on this issue. The effect of ignoring it can and does lead to discipline issues, because of the *effect and re-*

sults of not being a keeper at home — on marriage and on the family in the generations.

I believe that Scripture plainly teaches that the woman must be a keeper *at home*, not merely a keeper *of the home*. It is so often the worldly woman’s discontent with the position in which God has placed her that causes her to seek work outside the home. Thus she scorns the authority of her husband (sin against the 5th commandment), and desires what the world has to offer (sin against the 8th commandment), in her coveting that which is not hers (the 10th commandment). This is one of the great curses of today’s society. It is gradually taking away any remnants of a Christian family life. And it is very hard for anyone, man or woman, to hold down two jobs and do justice to both.

Let us not be deceived into thinking that we, as Protestant Reformed believers, are immune to

the spirit of the age we live in.

Is there no room for a Christian wife and mother to work outside the home? Yes, a wife may help her husband in his earthly occupation, just as many farmers’ wives do. But she in those cases is not seeking her own vocation, but is helping her husband in his.

What is phariseeism? As Christ says in Matthew 23:15, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.” In this, as well as many other places in Scripture, the Word plainly teaches that phariseeism is living the life of the hypocrite. If we live an outwardly godly life, but do not have the new life living inside us, or take a holier than thou attitude, then it would be phariseeism. Christian liberty, however, is the liberty that we are set free from the slavery in the house of bondage of sin — free to start to live, not only according to some, but according to all the

commandments of God. We have to be obedient to what God's Word and our own conscience dictates for our family. The accusation of phariseeism will often come in the false charge, "They want to take away our Christian liberty." Let us not call God's people hypocrites.

It is the husband's godly calling to earn a living for his family. God does not, however, require husbands to work so many hours at their calling to the detriment of their responsibilities not only to church, but also to home and family. God has provided His church with a *diaconate*. Both the father of the family earning his daily bread, and the aid of the deacons, are equally good gifts of God through which God provides for us.

Let us live in Christian love with each other, not resorting to name-calling, but each esteeming the other better than ourselves. Let us build up each other in the faith.

Bert Mulder

Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada

RESPONSE:

I have been responding to people individually as they have written to me personally with questions and comments about my four *Standard Bearer* articles on the place of the woman in the home. But since this one is written directly to the *Standard Bearer* and seeks a public response I will attempt to answer it briefly.

I appreciate the concern that Brother Mulder expresses: "Let us not be deceived into thinking that we as Protestant Reformed believers are immune to the spirit of the age we live in." It was for this reason I wrote the articles in the first place. I share his concern. We must indeed not allow the "the spirit of the age" to influence us to think that the place of the mother is in the work force together with the father who is the provider for the home and family. This was expressly the point of all of my articles, not only on the place of the mother but also of the father in the home.

A complicating factor, perhaps, is that the articles, five of them altogether, appeared in the *Standard Bearer* spread out over a long period of time. The result of this, I fear, is that the brother's comments are made only in response to the last article. In the article "God's Command to Mothers" (*SB*, March 1, 2004, Volume 80, Number 11) I laid out the biblical principles of the place of the mother in the home "looking well to the ways of her household." In the article "Working Mothers" (*SB*, April 1, 2004, Volume 80, Number 13) I state forthrightly: "How can a mother look well to the ways of her household and work full time outside of the home and family? Impossible!" But in this same article I also emphasized that we can maintain this without making it a *law*. We need not declare: "It is a sin for mothers to do any kind of work outside of the home." The fact that it is a matter of Christian liberty is what I defended also in the final article I wrote.

Brother Mulder responds by agreeing with my position. He writes: "While this is no censurable sin and in that sense it is a matter of Christian liberty, yet God's commandments do have a bearing on the issue." I am in complete agreement with him. He himself proves this point by coming up with a possible scenario of a mother working outside of the home.

It is exactly because of this that I brought up the whole matter of Phariseeism. The brother's conclusion that, in so doing, I became guilty of name calling puzzles me. But let me clarify once again what I meant by Phariseeism. The Pharisees taught *work righteousness*. They believed that a man earned his righteousness before God by the keeping of the law. In connection with this, the Pharisees made up a whole list of laws that, they believed, further defined and fine-tuned the laws of Moses. These were known as the "tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:1-13). Jesus says in Matthew 23:4 that these "traditions" were heavy burdens and

grievous to be borne, which the Pharisees laid upon men's shoulders. It is this Phariseeism, or *legalism*, that we must be very careful to avoid in the church.

What is it that motivates a godly mother in Zion to be a keeper in the home? Is it a *law*? Does she do it because it makes her look good? No. A believing mother does it because she reads God's Word and understands its wisdom. She with a believing heart sees how her place in the family is going to affect the spiritual welfare of that family, and by God's grace she gladly takes up her labors in the home. A law in this matter is not going to convict anyone.

This is where the whole idea of Christian liberty enters in. I agree with Brother Mulder: "we are set free from the slavery in the house of the bondage of sin — free to start to live, not only according to some, but according to all the commands of God." We must allow God's people to walk in that liberty. Christian liberty is further defined for us in several chapters of Scripture, a good one being Romans 14. It is good for all to read this chapter. In the area of Christian liberty, there is given to the saints the right to walk in the liberty of their salvation without enslaving them to man-made laws. This does not mean that this liberty gives a person the right to walk in the way of sin by satisfying his flesh. Liberty simply gives Christians the right, in areas where God's Word gives no specific command, to determine for themselves (prayerfully and with diligent use of the principles of God's Word) how to serve God in a way that is pleasing to Him. This can and may vary from one family to the next.

May God preserve us that we not give in to the temptations of this world. And may He give us the grace and the wisdom to be able to put to practical use in our homes what He teaches us in His Word.

— Rev. W. Bruinsma 

Equipping Our People for Personal Evangelism (2)

Preachers can help a great deal to equip the saints by the preaching itself.

Believing that the best way to equip our people for personal evangelism is by the lively preaching of the gospel, I wish to return to the subject of preaching and discuss some of its finer points as it relates to evangelism. I think we need to remember a few things about preaching.

First of all, let us not forget that the lively preaching of the gospel goes on not only from the pulpit on Sunday and during a formal worship service, but also from house to house through necessary pastoral calls or via regular family visitation. It also goes on in the catechism room among the children and young people.

Preachers can give much aid to God's people in personal evangelism. Recognizing differences in personalities, abiding weaknesses, feelings of inadequacy, fears, etc. in Christ's sheep, preachers must strive to give help to God's people and seek to equip them to this task.

Allow me to be specific without sounding critical in any sense, for I know I have a long ways to go in the blessed work of preaching. Questions should not be limited to: "Do you know the comfort of this truth?" or "What does this mean for you?" Rather, God's people must constantly be placed

before their God-given task to do personal evangelism with questions such as these: "Does this truth mean something to you so that you are excited enough to talk about it at work tomorrow?" or, "How is this reality going to affect the way you live so that others can see Christ in you?" or, "Does your hope in the coming of Christ manifest itself in the way you think, talk, and live?" We might imagine that these questions are easy, or that they come readily to mind. Truth is, God's people do not always think in those terms. Often these questions are considered more in connection with the teaching of children. I am in no way minimizing that aspect of our calling. But I am saying that our preachers can help equip our people to do personal evangelism by asking pointed questions that will help God's people remember this important calling.

But preachers too are different, and so it will come across in their preaching in different ways. I often hear the comment that because I was brought out of heathendom I naturally ask these questions. I think that this is true. But I was humbled and encouraged by an elder out west who responded to a sermon I preached there not too long ago by saying: "You know, I thought that with your background, you were going to pound us with guilt about not being mission minded enough. But you did not! You called us to be faithful to the truth!" I was humbly thankful for that observation and encouragement. Those of us who are given to talk about missions should tem-

per it with solid doctrinal teaching that will persuade our people that evangelism and contending for the faith are not opposites. Hopefully, those of us preachers who are not as ready to emphasize missions will also be willing to inject a dose of mission zeal in our sermons. A balance of this sort will help our people not to say: "I am of Mahtani, he is mission-minded; or, I am of Engelsma, he is doctrinal; or I am of Haak, of the Reformed Witness Hour, he is brief!" We are of Christ, and let us as ambassadors of Christ bring the whole counsel of God's Word, and that includes the emphasis to be busy in personal evangelism. I think this balance will help our people tremendously. For as the leaders, so the people; if our people need help in evangelism, let us preachers examine ourselves and be willing to develop and improve.

In that regard, a personal comment and request: please do not feel that every time you ask a missionary to preach or write an article it should be about missions. This is a mistake. Our people want to hear our missionaries preach the same truths they hear at home. I am glad that at the YP's Convention this year I have been asked to preach on "The Worship of the King!" Now what in the world does a missionary have to say about worship?! Everything! If he has nothing to say about worship and everything to say only about evangelism, he had better not be a missionary!

Let us remember too that we promote personal evangelism not only through the choice of texts and themes, but by the attitude that

Rev. Mahtani is eastern home missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

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we portray in our preaching. We must be polemical; we must condemn error. But we must do so in such a way that the people of God do not become lopsided in their thinking, for then we are in danger of begetting a bunch of haughty minded people who think that to behave in a condescending and unfriendly manner towards unbelievers is to be commended in us. We may not intend it, but somehow God's people might take that with them to the workbench and classroom in a totally wrong way. To avoid this, if we temper our polemics with a mission zeal, pointing out the urgency of the gospel as the only power that can turn a man from such lies, and pointing out that only by grace have we ourselves had our blindness removed, and urging the saints to be ready to speak of that hope to all around them with meekness and fear, then we are doing a good service to the cause of personal evangelism.

To defend our hope, to give an apology instead of apologizing for our faith or becoming brash about our convictions — this is not an easy task. It is a spiritual toil. God's people must see in our preaching that we toil in prayer to be faithful instruments on the pulpit, and then, taking heed to our instruction, they too, by the grace of God, will seek that wisdom to save souls. Proverbs 11:30: "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise."

Not only the preacher but also the elders and deacons must work to equip the saints.

It is not only the minister's duty to equip the saints for evangelism but also the calling of the other officebearers. It is, after all, the church that is called to evangelize. That is why I would like to focus now on the work of elders and deacons in helping to equip our people for personal evangelism. The Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons mandates the elders "to look diligently whether every one

deports himself in his confession and conversation." It instructs the elders "to serve all Christians with advice and consolation." In the oversight of the congregation, the elders ought to be mindful of this their duty to equip the saints for personal evangelism. By their instruction and warning, they must instruct God's people of the importance of giving a good witness so that the Word of God is never blasphemed on account of the sins of the saints. By their own godly example, they must show the saints the way to make a good confession. Looking to them, and thus looking to Christ Himself, the saints will know that personal evangelism is part and parcel of their Christian calling in the midst of a sinful world.

As the elders go in and out among the saints, both from week to week in informal settings and from house to house in official family visitation, they can help equip the saints by prodding them with questions on evangelism such as the following: What is your example in this neighborhood? At work? In school? At college? Do your neighbors and colleagues know you? Why not? How about your children? Are they known to be rowdy and lazy, or godly and hardworking? What kind of friends do you have? Are you giving a good testimony in your neighborhood and at work? Is your lawn such that you are not ashamed to be called a Christian? Is your desk at work a reflection of your Christianity? And addressing young people, they could ask: Is it the love of God, or the love of the world, that drives you in your life? Are you giving in to the pressures of the world, or are you instead giving a good witness to all those around you? They can remind the saints of the calling to love the neighbor, whoever that person is that God has put on their pathway, with questions such as these: Is there a need at work or in school that you can meet that will show Christ's love? Will your

neighbor come to you in time of need? Why not? And the elders, in taking heed to the flock, can surely help the saints to be alert to their calling to give a good witness to what is happening in the world, with questions such as: Are you conscious of what is happening around the world? If not, why not? Did 9/11 affect you in any way? How about the recent tsunami in Asia, have you had occasion to talk about the judgment of God to come? As Christians, do you speak of your blessed hope of the coming of our great God and Savior? Do you speak of your covenant life with others outside the church so that they know why the gospel is so precious to you?

Another practical way by which the elders might equip the saints for personal evangelism is by leading the way to show how every visitor God brings is welcomed in an appropriate way. Considering all the advertising we do, and all the planning and expenses that go into evangelism, no one can justifiably say we are not involved in evangelism. But it is the personal touch that is often missing. A new person comes into our midst, and perhaps such a one has no clue of what a Psalter is, or where to turn to in the Bible, etc. Here is an opportunity for the elders to help our people learn to show godly concern for the stranger. I am not talking about walking across the sanctuary to reach the visitor — that can be rather distracting for others and even embarrassing to the visitor. But if the visitor is sitting nearby, walking up quietly to help the visitor, or simply nudging someone else to pass on an open Bible to the page where Scripture is being read, or turning to the Psalter number to be sung, are things that can help the visitor feel at home.

Making it a point to shake hands with every visitor (and yes, it will not hurt to walk across the hallway to meet and greet) will show our people that this is important. God shows us His love

by inviting us into His house where we taste His covenant mercies in fellowship with Him and with His people. Making a newcomer feel at home at church is a wonderful way to show our concern and love, and it can serve as an excellent opportunity to open the door to talk about the faith. When our people see our elders do that kind of thing, hopefully they will be encouraged to do the same.

What all has been said with regards to elders can surely also be applied to the deacons. They, too, are in an excellent position to help equip the saints for personal evangelism. Since the office of the deacon (again according to the Form of Ordination) is “to assist the poor with compassion and hearty affection, as the apostle requires in Romans 12 and 2 Corinthians 9,” they can by their example show the saints the way to do good to all men; yes, especially to those of the household of faith, but also to all men (Gal. 6:10).

As the deacons administer relief to the poor not only with external gifts “but also with comfortable words from Scripture,” so they can teach the saints a vital lesson: God’s people must not only be a witness by their life and by what they do for the neighbor, but also by the choice of words they employ when they speak to the neighbor. It is not enough that I bring a plate of cookies to my neighbor to welcome a new family to the neighborhood. I ought to be willing and ready to speak of my hope and to invite such a new family to church. It is not enough that I keep my yard neat and tidy so that the neighborhood looks decent, I should make an effort to get to know the neighbor and explain why I live the way I do. Does this mean that we must necessarily go door to door, knocking on everybody’s door, or that each time I see my neighbor coming out of his driveway I bang his head with the Bible? Of course not! But to

go to the other extreme is also inexcusable. “I don’t know my neighbors; I never talk with them!” Please, brethren, why would we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on missions and evangelism and neglect to do personal evangelism with our neighbors?

Clearly, the preaching and teaching and godly example of the minister and the other officebearers will be effective means in the equipping of the saints for personal evangelism. God’s people are not blind; our children, and our young people especially, are watching, and although they insist they want to go their own way, ultimately they do follow. If our people are not interested in evangelism, the next generation is going to be even more close-minded to the work of missions; if our people are busy and lively and zealous in giving a personal witness to all those around them, our children are going to follow their godly example.

... to be continued. 

All Around Us

Rev. Michael DeVries

■ Another Nail

It would seem that the Liberal Party-controlled Federal Government of Canada is determined to pound another nail into the coffin of the institution of the family as we have always known it. As if same-sex marriage legislation is not enough, now they plan to spend billions on universal day care for children.

In a timely article in the January 26, 2005 issue of *Christian Renewal*, entitled “The State as Mother — From the cradle to the grave,” Hermina Dykxhoorn writes:

The Liberal Government has, for more than a decade, been toying with the idea of establishing a universal childcare across Canada. Now it appears they are ready to foist this program on the country in the next year....

Sympathetic MPs [Ministers of Parliament, MDV] tell us that they have never had even one ordinary Canadian woman ask for a fully funded government daycare program. This idea is not coming from grassroots Canadians. The pressure has largely come from the civil service unions who see this as a way of increasing wages for daycare workers and increasing their own membership and influence. It’s coming from daycare operators who see government tax money as more reliable than having to do their own collections and from radical feminists, particularly in the Liberal caucus, who see this as a way to liberate even more women from the drudgery

of home and children.

The government can never replace Mom and Dad and has no business meddling in the parental right to determine who will look after children. Neither should the state promote and finance one childcare choice over any other. This obviously has nothing to do with what’s in the best interest of children. It is an ideologically driven plan to control Canadian families, literally from the cradle.

Christian Heritage Party National Leader, Ron Gray, comments in the *CHP Communique*, Vol. 12, No. 10:

The Federal Government has begun foisting its unnecessary, overly-expensive, and destructive plan for a national daycare scheme on Canada.

Their policy — dishonestly presented in terms of “children’s needs” — is really a massive give-

Rev. DeVries is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.

away of taxpayers' money to a self-serving education lobby that generally supports the liberals. It's Adscam on steroids. But it will be harmful to children and families, it will increase social service costs, and it will burden the average Canadian family with about \$1,500 or more of additional taxes every year....

What will we get for it? Our children will be brainwashed in political correctness at ever-younger ages. Their ability to form psychological attachments will be impaired, so social services costs — corrections and psychological remediation — will balloon, possibly for generations. The social engineers don't care; they're after the children. They want to alienate them from their parents and — most particularly — from any residual morality with which parents might 'contaminate' young Canadians....

It should be noted that the Harvard Longitudinal Study shows that daycare children are significantly disadvantaged in later life by the inability to form psychological attachments. The younger the age of which children are put in daycare, the worse is this effect. And a Guelph University study of daycare in Canada found that most daycare centers merely "warehouse." That's a far cry from the "early childhood development" label being slapped onto the proposed federal largesse to the day-care industry.

In an insightful commentary, veteran Canadian journalist Ted Byfield writes in the March 14, 2005 issue of *Western Standard* magazine, in an article entitled, "Hurting Family":

All these people [Prime Minister Paul Martin and other liberal Party officials, MDV] have fundamentally written off the family as it has existed for countless generations. We must face the fact, they would say, that the traditional arrangement — father working, mother at home — is doomed. In order to ease the burden upon those parents who cannot afford adequate day care, the government must step in.

This argument is both false and hypocritical. It's false because it ignores the fact that for most families, the second income does little more than pay the taxes. With the new program, more than ever, the mother will have to work to pay the government to do the work of the mother. It's hypocritical because the federal subsidy could be paid directly to the family, allowing the family to decide whether to spend it on day care, or let the mother stay home. But this very suggestion causes the social bureaucrats to become apoplectic.

Why? Because it would strengthen, rather than weaken, the traditional family, which is the greatest obstacle they face in creating their New Canada. To these "nation builders," children learn from their parents all sorts of unsavoury things that do not accord with the values New Canada seeks to impose. Parents induce in their children things like belief in God, and the belief that God, not government, should be the chief source of their security. Parents implant definite rules of right and wrong. It is from parents that children acquire deep prejudices against such things as abortion and sodomy. The present schools work hard, of course, to relieve children of all this "intolerance" and "bigotry," but the schools get them too late. However, if the state can get hold of the child from infancy onward, then great strides could be made.

That's why the New Canada wants state day care. But it's also why it favours gay marriage. Obviously, if any combination of people living together in one household can be described in law as a "marriage," the institution of the family will have lost all legal meaning. Let's hope that Harper [Conservative Party Leader, Stephen Harper, MDV] becomes even more "obsessed" with the government's plan to take over the raising of our children. Both poisonous flowers spring from the same poisonous root.

Surely we understand, do we not, that there is no real substitute for a loving mother. And Baby Gap clothing and other "name

brand" fashions, family vacations to Disney World, fancy houses, snowmobiles, boats, and whatever other "advantages" or other forms of luxury you wish to mention do not make up for mother's care, correction, and comfort.

How thankful we must be for mothers of Zion, "keepers at home" (Titus 2:5), women who, by the grace of God, dedicate themselves to the well-being of their families. Such is a truly virtuous woman! "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her" (Prov. 31:28).

■ How Low Can You Go?

That is, how low can you go into the pit of immorality and corruption that is sanctioned and promoted by the government? Canada, among other countries, is rapidly attempting to rival the cesspool of iniquity that was ancient Rome.

In the March 23, 2005 issue of *Christian Renewal*, Hermina Dykxhoorn presents a shocking article entitled, "The next frontier in the Europe-ization of Canada." The article concerns the possible legalization of prostitution. She writes:

No sooner is one sexual taboo legitimized, the Liberals look for a new sexual frontier to conquer. Liberal Senator Mac Harb thinks removing Section 213 of the Criminal Code, the section that prohibits prostitution, would be a "great idea" that would promote Canadian tourism just as Amsterdam's red-light district has done for the Netherlands.

Harb obviously hasn't spent a great deal of time in the heart of Amsterdam lately. It is one of the dirtiest capital cities in the world. What legalized prostitution, marijuana and hashish bars and widespread drug use have done for Amsterdam could only be matched by a hurricane. Sure there are loads of sex tourists and drug addicts from around the world frequenting the city, but, legitimate tour operators are increasingly giving it a wide berth. And Canada needs this?...

The Law Commission [of Canada, MDV] conducted a major study culminating with its recommendations in February last year. This study, done by interviewing what they now call “sex trade workers, consider sex work within the theoretical framework of the sociology of labour.” Rather than endorsing the “traditional moral condemnation” they “affirm a growing trend that sees ‘prostitution’ and erotic dance as professions and choices.”

The study concluded that “work in erotic establishments and strip bars is similar to that of a number of jobs in the service sector.” For example, claims the Law Commission, “women choose various professions for very similar reasons: they want to earn a living, they want to meet people and they prefer work activities that are compatible with their personalities and interests.”... “The organization of work also has a number of points in common with other jobs, including hair stylist, real estate agent with respect to, for example, shifts, duties and income structure.” That’ll be news to Canada’s hairdressers. This was endorsed and written by educated legal experts for advice to the government....

Also, the reports adds, “the stigmatization of these jobs conceals the many competencies re-

quired in these occupations.” Imagine the hurt of not being able to boast publicly about “competencies” as a sex trade worker. The report continues, “Their choice of profession may be a source of rejection in intimate relationships as well as generally in civil society.”

But the paper does suggest remedies for these problems. It notes, predictably, that “decriminalization of sex workers activities is necessary” but, that “decriminalization alone does not ensure a safe working place for women, nor does it guarantee the protection of their rights as workers.” The Commission suggests “training and activities by sex workers’ associations should be encouraged” as well as “mechanisms for cooperation with various relevant organizations should be implemented.” Can a promotional tour of Canadian schools be far behind? Perhaps a booth at the high school career day?

It’s obvious that having sex with a stranger is no different to the modern Liberal than shaking hands, going to the movies or sharing a meal. It’s a values-free pastime, pure entertainment for the man and a career option for the woman or young boy he’s hired for pay.

The young Liberals’ policy motion was amended to only study

the issue. But that won’t be the end. The process is relentless.

Canada spans two beautiful ocean coastlines. It has the Rocky Mountains. Saskatchewan’s waving wheat fields, Ontario’s Great Lakes, Niagara Falls, numerous National and Provincial Parks and so much more to attract tourists. But to our liberal government that’s not enough. Canada needs legalized prostitution.

Anything for a tourism dollar — magnificent casinos for gambling, world-renowned “Gay Pride” festivities, now the possibility of legalized prostitution. Whatever is deemed politically correct, whatever the people want — or the powers that be determine they need, as long as no one’s “rights” are infringed upon, is promoted.

Yes, how low can you go when standards of right and wrong are abandoned and all moral ties have been cut? Very low, very swiftly! But God will not be mocked! His Word is, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Is. 5:20).

“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). 

Making Decisions According to God’s Will (2)

Rev. Eriks is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.

Previous article in this series: November 1, 2004, p. 68.

In the first article on this subject, we distinguished between the two aspects of God’s one will: the will of God’s decree and the will of God’s precept. God sovereignly determines all things that happen in our lives. In all the events of this world and in our lives God sovereignly accomplishes His

will. This is the will of God’s decree, which is a great comfort for us in life and in death. Yet, we have important decisions to make in our everyday lives according to the will of God’s precept. God’s sovereign government of all things does not dismiss our responsibility to choose the way of righteousness daily. We

answer to God for everything we do. God has not made us puppets that accomplish His will only as He pulls the strings. He created us to be rational, moral creatures able to make decisions. Under the bondage of sin, we are able only to choose the way of sin. But as those recreated in the image of Jesus Christ we now have the ability to choose obedience to God's Word. This is possible only because God works "in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

As those who belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, we confess with the psalmist in Psalm 40:8, "I desire to do thy will, O my God...." We desire to do the will of God from the heart (Eph. 6:6). This is the inclination of all those who belong to Jesus Christ. In all of life we request, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

We all must make decisions in our lives. Some of those decisions are especially difficult and burdensome because of how they will affect our lives. Pastors must decide between two calls when they receive a call from another congregation. College graduates who have studied to be teachers must decide which contract to accept. High school graduates must decide whether or not to go to college and in what vocation they will serve the Lord. Young people, with their parents, must decide if they will date this person or should keep dating that person. Decisions must be made concerning medical procedures for loved ones whose health is failing.

How do we know what God commands us to do every day? Does God move us by an urge that a certain choice is right and another is wrong? Does He whisper it in our ears? Will He interrupt our sub-consciousness with a dream or vision that we might know His will? God reveals His will to us in Holy Scripture. The God-ordained way of making decisions is to study the Holy Scriptures prayerfully. The only trustworthy guide in de-

termining God's will is the Word of God.



Recently an article in the "Faith" section of the Loveland Daily Reporter-Herald quoted how a local pastor determined it was God's will for him to start a Christian school. The article says,

And Stocker [the senior pastor of the church — GJE] is thrilled with what is happening. "This is the best thing I've ever done in my entire life," he said of starting the school. "For years, I was just not interested in a school," he said. But one morning, as he prayed, "I felt God spoke to my heart and gave me my marching orders."

We would agree that it is good for Christians to establish their own Christian schools. But this man came to the conclusion that he must start the school, not on the principles of Scripture that he had been studying, but as he was moved by a feeling and some mystical voice of God in his heart to embark on this project. This is not the way to determine God's will.

God does not reveal His will by speaking to us directly. This is the error of continued revelation, which is part of the mysticism of the charismatic movement. This is the way many today think God's will is determined, as the newspaper article above reveals.

Neither should we make decisions based solely on feelings. We must be wary of our feelings because our feelings are so heavily influenced by our sinful flesh. Our feelings and emotions can change as quickly as the wind changes direction. Emotions themselves are not evil. But certainly they should not be given preeminence in making decisions where we are seeking God's will. When feelings and emotions become the primary thing, then we will find ourselves doing what we want to do.

Holy Scripture must order our

decisions. Holy Scripture is the only rule for faith and life because it is the Word of God. This is the testimony of Scripture itself in II Timothy 3:16, 17, which says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." All Scripture is the Word of God because all Scripture is God-breathed. Through the wonder of organic inspiration, God used sinful men to write down His Word so that every word of Scripture is His Word. Because Scripture is God's Word, it is profitable "for instruction in righteousness." Therefore, Scripture is our unailing guide in making correct decisions before the face of God.

The Belgic Confession, in Article 7, declares Scripture to be our unailing guide:

We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For, since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for anyone, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul saith.... Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule which the apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God...."

The point of the Belgic Confession is that Scripture alone is trustworthy to know "the will of God." Scripture is the authoritative rule for all of life. According to Psalm 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." In Scripture we find the full will of God for our lives. He has given to us everything we need to know to live a life that is pleasing to Him.



The God-ordained way for making decisions and determining how we are to live our lives is studying the Holy Scriptures prayerfully. God never calls us to do something opposed to His Word. God does not tell His children to accept a job that requires them to work on Sundays in violation of the 4th commandment. It is not God's will for a man to take a job that calls him to move away from a true church of Jesus Christ. If a young woman is dating a young man who is not spiritually one with her, she should not say that if it is God's will that they not marry, God will lasso her while she walks down the aisle at her wedding. God clearly speaks in His Word what His will is in these circumstances.

In all of life God calls us to submit to His Word. Often we find that we know what God's will is. But we simply do not want to do it. We even pray, asking God to show us His will. But it can happen that we pray, while sinfully hoping that there is another answer. This kind of praying and seeking is rebellion against God's will clearly revealed in His Word.

Seeking to know the will of God from His Word requires working with Scripture honestly. A popular idea for finding the will of God in a particular situation is that a man may close his eyes, let his Bible fall open, and with his finger point to a passage. Then he opens his eyes and reads the passage, expecting that verse to provide the guidance that is needed.

Here is an example:

There's a story that has lasted a long time not only for its humor but also because of its insight. It's about a man attempting to discover the mind of God by taking his chances with the Bible. He simply shut his eyes, opened up his Bible, and put his finger on a passage. Opening his eyes, he read this passage from Matthew

27: "Then he went away and hanged himself." Somehow, the fellow didn't think that gave him any direction for his problem, so he closed his eyes again and opened his Bible to another passage. He looked and read Jesus' statement in Luke 10: "Go and do likewise." That wasn't quite what he was looking for either, so he tried one more time. He shut his eyes, opened his Bible, and read the statement in John 2:5, "Do whatever he tells you."*

Using the Bible in this way is unacceptable because the results may be bizarre and because it is not dealing with the Word of God honestly. When the Scriptures are used in this way, we manipulate God's Word by taking the verses out of context. With this practice we do not find out what God's will is. God demands that we study the Word of God in its context to find out truly what He is saying in His Word. This cannot be done with the approach described above. Instead we must diligently study passages that have something to say about the decision we have to make. We must labor to know God's will, trusting that God's Spirit will apply the Word to the decision we have to make.



When studying the Word of God to determine God's will for making decisions, there are a few scriptural keys we must consider.

Pray. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy will be done." Because we belong to God, having been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, we desire that God's will be done in our lives. With this petition of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches that this must be our desire and prayer. As we study the Scriptures, we must pray that God show us clearly what His will is. We must ask God not only that we may see what His will is for us, but also that we may have the grace to submit to it. We

need grace to submit to God's will because of our own stubbornness in sin — we are so prone to resist the clear will of God and do what is right in our own eyes. Be aware of this in yourself in seeking God's will.

Pray for and seek wisdom. Wisdom is a gift of God whereby He gives the ability to choose what is right. This wisdom was the gift of God to Solomon in the way of Solomon's asking for it. This wisdom is not something given without means. Wisdom is the fruit of knowledge and understanding, which is given through the means of studying God's Word. For the daily decisions to be made, we must daily study Scripture, so that when we are faced with those decisions the Word of God comes readily to mind.

Finally, in seeking God's will, seek the good counsel of others. God also provides other members of the church to help us in determining God's will. God's Word speaks of the importance of such counsel in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 12:15 makes the point, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." Proverbs 27:9 says, "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel." (Cf. also Prov. 13:10, 15:22, 19:20.) Do not expect godly counselors to make decisions for you. Such godly counselors will be able to direct you to the teachings of Scripture and can pass on wisdom from their own experience in making similar decisions. This counsel is needed because such counselors will provide the objective perspective that is often negated by our feelings. It is good to seek counsel from pastors, elders, parents, and those who are older and wiser in the church.



In our lives we have many decisions to make. The decisions addressed so far are those in which

Scripture forbids one choice and approves another choice. When we are faced with such decisions, although they may be difficult, we experience that Scripture is our un-failing guide, for which we give thanks to God.

However, there are many decisions to be made that Scripture does not specifically address. These decisions fall into another category when we have determined that the choices before us are not opposed to the Scriptures. If they are not, then how do we know what God's will is? For example,

a family struggles to know if they should move from one part of the country to another (from one church to another). A pastor must decide in which congregation to labor when he receives a call and must consider two calls. When we face these decisions we must pray that God will lead us. This does not mean we don't have to consider God's Word. We need to examine, with Scripture, our reasons for doing one thing or another. We consider the circumstances and the effect of this decision upon others and us. Because God is sovereign,

we trust that the decision we make is God's will. Although acting upon that decision is difficult, we do so having the confidence that this is God's will.

May it be our desire in all of life to do God's will. Let us make our decisions in the biblical way, seeking the knowledge and wisdom found in God's Word with much prayer. 

* Dave Swaverly, *Decisions, Decisions* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003) pp. 7, 8.

Church Power and Government (1)

Christ Speaking Through Special Officebearers

We now begin a study of the government of the church. When a church or group of churches departs from the truth of Scripture, this departure is often manifested in three areas — her doctrine, her worship, and her church government. Christ has specifically taught us in His Word not only what we must believe and how we must worship Him, but also how His church must be governed on this earth. It is of utmost importance that we follow these principles, striving beautifully to reflect the perfections of Christ, our heavenly Husband and Head.

As we look out at the wide variety of churches and denominations, we see clearly that the instructions that Christ has given concerning church government are often not followed. We see a wide variety of forms of church government. Some churches have officebearers arranged in a hierarchical structure, who make all the decisions without any input from the members of the churches. Others call a meeting of all the members, both men and women, whenever any decisions concerning the government of the church need to be made. Some churches have pastors, elders, and deacons; while others have a pastor, deacons, a youth pastor, a minister of music, etc. The reason for these differences is not that Scripture is unclear on the subject, but that many take it upon themselves to deviate

from the teachings of Scripture as they see fit.

We must not be like those who make light of these differences. There is a reason why Christ has given us the specific instructions that He has. When a church deviates from them, she becomes less like Christ and more like the kingdoms of this world.

The Church's King Governs through Special Officebearers

That Christ is the *Head* of the church is clear, seeing as it is explicitly stated in passages such as Colossians 1:18. But there are those, like the dispensational Baptists, who deny that Christ is *King* of the church. That He is such, however, can be clearly *deduced* from Scripture. Although there is no passage in which Christ is specifically called "The King of the church," there are

passages in which the members of the church are called citizens of Christ's kingdom. In Colossians 1:13 (a few verses prior to the text just referred to) God says that the members of the church of Jesus Christ have been translated out of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. The saints who were in the church at Colosse were told that they were citizens of the kingdom of Christ. They were members of Christ's body, and citizens of Christ's kingdom. Christ is King and Head of the church — which means that His body is also His kingdom.

The next question is, since King Jesus is now sitting at the right hand of God in heaven, how does He govern and direct the members of His body that are on this earth? The answer is that He establishes instituted churches that are manifestations or pictures of the universal body of Christ. These instituted churches are organized bodies that reflect the heavenly perfections of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church that Christ has redeemed. That they are organized bodies means that they are united under the supervision of special officebearers, whom Christ has called and qualified to represent Him upon this earth. It is through these special officebearers that Christ, from heaven, governs and directs the affairs of His churches upon this earth.

Every believer is really an officebearer in the church. That we are Christians means that we are members of Christ by faith, and thus are partakers of His anointing (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 12). Every believer is anointed by the Spirit to be an officebearer, that is, to be a prophet, priest, and king under Jesus Christ. But there are other individuals who, in addition to holding the office of believer, also hold a *special* office. Scripture speaks of pastors, elders, and deacons as being appointed to specific positions of authority in the church. These men we often refer to as *spe-*

cial officebearers. Sometimes we drop the word *special* and refer to them just as *officebearers*, but it is important that we not forget that all of God's people are officebearers in Jesus Christ.

Ambassadors through Whom Christ Speaks

It is through these special officebearers that Christ rules His church. Christ rules by His Word and Spirit, and it is through the special officebearers that His Spirit brings His Word to the members of His body.

There are many that deny this. They object if anyone says that Christ is the one speaking in the preaching. They sometimes caricature this truth, and say of a minister who teaches it, "That minister says he is Christ." A faithful minister obviously does not say that he is Christ, but he emphatically does say that he is one of Christ's *ambassadors*.

We often discuss this subject when talking about the means of grace — the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. But it also has a place here, when discussing church government. Christ governs His church by His Word, which is spoken by Him through His ambassadors. The ministers of the Word are these ambassadors, but the elders and deacons are also official representatives of Christ through whom He speaks as they perform the work of their respective offices.

Understanding this term, "ambassadors for Christ," therefore, is of fundamental importance. This phrase is found in II Corinthians 5:20, and its context serves to explain it. To be an ambassador of Christ is to be an official representative of Christ who speaks *in Christ's stead* or *on Christ's behalf*. Ambassadors among the nations of this world are individuals called and qualified to bring the word of the ruler whom they represent. They are not to bring their own word, but the word of the ruler

whom they serve. When they speak in this capacity, they are speaking in their ruler's stead, or on his behalf. This is an earthly picture of the relationship between Christ and the special officebearers who represent Him. These officebearers are men called and qualified to bring the Word of King Jesus, and when they bring that Word they are speaking in Christ's stead and on His behalf.

When an ambassador of Christ brings the Word of Christ, it is really Christ speaking through that ambassador. This also is taught in II Corinthians 5:20. The text literally reads, "On behalf of Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors, as God is beseeching through us." When special officebearers bring the Word of Christ, it is very really God Himself speaking to us through them.

This truth is also clearly taught in other passages of Scripture. To prove this, we often cite Romans 10:13, 14, and point out that the word "of" before "whom" should be removed from the translation as we have it in the King James Version*, so that the text would read:

13. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.
14. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

This text teaches that to believe in Jesus with a conscious faith one must hear Jesus Himself, and that one cannot hear Jesus Himself without a preacher. Jesus speaks through the preachers of His Word, and this Word of Christ is what works within us conscious faith.

But there are more passages. In John 10:16, Jesus teaches that the believers who will be gathered throughout this dispensation will be gathered not merely by hearing about Christ, but by actually hearing Christ's voice. The text reads:

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

This same truth is found in Ephesians 4:20,21, where saints who have come to believe the truth after Christ's ascension are told that they have heard Christ Himself and have been taught by Him.

20. But ye have not so learned Christ;
21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:

The Old Testament prophets also spoke of this. It was prophesied in Isaiah 2:3, that in the new dispensation people from all nations would be gathered to Christ, and would say,

Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.

The text goes on to say that this will happen because "the Word of the LORD" will go forth from the church. It is because God's Word, and not man's word, is going forth from the church, that it has this efficacious power to gather His people, so that they willingly come to Him.

There are some who would respond to these last few passages and say, "These two passages say only that God's people hear Jesus' voice, but they do not say that we hear this voice in the preaching of the Word." Yet that latter point is precisely what is taught in Romans 10:14, when it says, "How shall they hear, without a preacher." If Christ's voice was heard in some other way, then there would not be a need for a preacher. It is through Christ's ambassadors, who speak in Christ's name, that we hear Christ's voice and are taught by Him.

This truth is also spoken of in

our Reformed confessions. The Form for Ordination of Ministers of the Word refers to this in the exhortation to the congregation that is to be read after the man has been ordained and/or installed as a minister of that congregation. The paragraph begins as follows:

And you likewise, beloved Christians, receive this your minister in the Lord with all gladness, "and hold such in reputation." Remember that God Himself through him speaketh unto and beseecheth you. Receive the Word, which he, according to Scripture, shall preach unto you, "not as the word of man, but (as it is in truth) the Word of God."

Note well that our confessions here state what is actually happening when the gospel is being preached according to Scripture. When this takes place, God Himself is speaking through the minister. Of course, this does not happen when the preacher is preaching his own ideas on things. But when a preacher speaks the Word of Christ as Christ's ambassador, it is Christ speaking through the preacher. Not, as some would have it, that God is speaking to the people one thing at the same time that the minister is saying to the people something entirely different. No, God is speaking through the minister, so that the Word the minister brings is not the word of man, but the Word of God.

This last phrase, which our Ordination Form quotes, is taken from I Thessalonians 2:13, in which the Thessalonians were commended for believing this truth concerning the nature of the preaching. To these saints Paul wrote:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

The Thessalonians believed that God Himself was speaking to them in the preaching. They embraced the Word, "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God." If Christ did not speak in the preaching, then one could not say about that preaching that it "effectually worketh also in you that believe." Only the Word of Christ, which is the Word of God, has this efficacious power.

Sometimes those who reject this truth do so because they do not want to submit to the Word of God spoken to them in the preaching. They outwardly hear the Word of God and reject it. But, not wanting to admit that they are rejecting God's Word, they say "that word is not the Word of God; it is merely the word of men." But in this way they deny a truth that is clearly taught in Scripture and our confessions, a truth that is also of fundamental importance for understanding church government and for grasping the idea of what it means to be a special officebearer in the church of Christ.

Not only the Ministers, but also the Elders and Deacons

Christ speaks not only through the preaching of the Word from the pulpit, but also through the expounding and applying of the Word by the elders and deacons. Christ Himself has appointed the offices of elder and deacon (I Timothy 3; Philippians 1:1). These are not positions that man has invented. Christ by His Spirit is also the One who places men in these offices (Acts 20:28), and gives them

* The relative pronoun here is in the genitive case, but it is functioning as the direct object of the verb "heard," which is one of the verbs that takes a direct object in the genitive case. In other words, the term can be translated either "of whom" or "whom" depending on how it is used in a sentence. When it functions as the direct object of certain verbs, such as the verb "heard" in this sentence, it should be translated "whom."

authority to represent Him, and to serve under Him. To the elders He has given authority to rule and govern the church, and to the deacons He has given authority to administer the mercies of Christ to the poor. When elders and deacons bring the Word of God to comfort, admonish, and instruct the people of God, it is really Christ who is speaking through them.

Similarly, Christ speaks through the decisions of the consistory and the diaconate. Again, this does not mean that elders and deacons are infallible, or that every decision taken by a consistory or a diaconate is without error. Rather, it means that insofar as the elders and deacons rightly expound and apply the Word of God, it is Christ who is guiding them and speaking through them, so that one who rejects this word is actually rejecting the Word of Christ.

Christ Speaks through the Keys of the Kingdom

Christ has given the church the

keys of the kingdom of heaven, which are the preaching of the gospel and Christian discipline. When the church speaks in the preaching of the gospel, and when the church speaks when exercising Christian discipline, it is Christ speaking. One may not say, "When I sit under the preaching of the gospel, the minister speaks one word and Christ speaks to me a different Word," nor may he say, "when the elders come to admonish a person, the elders speak one word and Christ speaks a different Word." When Christ gave the keys of the kingdom to the church, He said to them (Matt. 18:17, 18),

17. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

18. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

One who denies that Christ is the one speaking both in the preaching of the gospel and through Christian discipline is really denying that the keys of the kingdom have been given to the church, and that Christ from heaven speaks through her to open and shut the kingdom of heaven. Yet one must maintain this fundamental principle of Reformed church government to be able to understand and embrace the other principles as well.

When we meditate upon the truth that our Husband actually speaks to us through His representatives, we are very grateful. As members of Christ's bride, fighting against spiritual foes that strive to come between us and our Husband, we long to hear our Husband speak to us. Although we cannot yet see Him face to face, what a joy it is to hear His loving voice, and to experience that through the efficacious power of this voice He is really defending us from our foes, and drawing us ever closer to Himself. 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Jan Miersma

Royal Children – Knowing and Fearing the King

The children of God's covenant, as we have seen, are not first of all *our* children, but the children of a Heavenly King, and as parents we serve as His stewards or agents. At the heart of their instruction as royal children pulses the almighty, efficacious love of God in Jesus Christ.

To this love, the royal children of God's covenant respond by faith, loving Him and living in godly fear, but because they are little children, and that by adoption, they must learn the proper way to express their love to Father in the way of godly fear. As the King's servants, we do this by teaching His children to know their Father-King, especially in His word and His works, by leading them to pay homage to Him in His courts, and by training them to humbly trust

Him and His wisdom as their Father. Striving to be the means by which our Father-King instills this godly fear in our children, we labor obediently, for the Lord's sake, unto His glory. And because we seek His glory, our greatest desire for our children is that they be God-fearing children.

What is godly fear? Scripture uses the word *fear* in more than one sense, and it is an idea with many different facets, but, to put it very simply, godly fear, for us as God's

Mrs. Miersma is the wife of Rev. Thomas Miersma, missionary in Spokane, Washington.

children, is that attitude of heart according to which we live continuously and consciously and in God's presence. This conscious life in God's presence has three main elements: personal knowledge of God, which works love for Him and a desire to please Him; awe and reverence before God, which moves us to adoration and worship; and humility before God, which reveals itself in trusting and obeying Him. In this article I will address the first element, knowledge, but we should first look at the means God uses.

God uses us to work godly fear in our children in three ways: through instructing our children's understanding, through setting a godly example, and through training them in pathways or habits of godly fear. These habits, which begin as obedience to outward, established patterns of life, when joined with direct instruction and godly example, will, by God's grace, lead to an inward desire to walk in those habits without compulsion. Forming or restoring beneficial habits, even in those things that relate to this earthly life—habits of healthy diet, regular exercise, practicing some skill, such as drawing or a musical instrument—is often a tremendous struggle. Once we lose these patterns, establishing or reestablishing them demands much effort.

How much more is this true of spiritual matters when the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh war to overthrow our desires according to the new man? This is why Scripture emphasizes the importance of training our children in habits or ways of godliness: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths" (Prov. 4:11). A path presents a picture of a well-worn, habitual course. While this path is established by God and it is He who sets the course for our children and

leads them in it, He uses parental training in habits of godly fear to accomplish this, just as He uses the head knowledge we teach to instruct the hearts of His children.

The first element of godly fear, then, is that we have a personal knowledge of God. If we are to live our lives consciously and continuously in God's presence, we must rightly know our God. Rightly knowing Him means knowing Him as He has revealed Himself in His Word. For this reason, as Christian parents we will chiefly concern ourselves with teaching our children the objective knowledge of God in the Bible. That knowledge is found centrally in God's house, where we bring our children to hear the Word of their Father-King officially proclaimed, both in public worship on the Lord's Day and in the catechism class. Normally, God blesses this attendance to us and our children in the way of conscious preparation and instructed understanding.

What is included in this conscious preparation for coming to God's house? What objective knowledge must we convey to our children, and in what patterns of life should we train them? In general, preparation begins with regularly reading the Scriptures to our children, even

when they are very young. For preschoolers, a good Bible storybook may supplement this reading, but can never replace the actual words of Scripture themselves. Although at first children may have difficulty in understanding the words of Scripture, they will quickly comprehend more and more, especially when we stop frequently and briefly explain what we have read in words they can understand. We can engage their minds by asking them questions as we read or, as they become older, by posing a simple question before

we begin reading and asking them to listen for the answer.

There is no hard and fast rule. With some children, posing a question may actually distract from their ability to listen, especially if they become more concerned with "getting it right" than with following the history or thought. The main point is that we should read the Bible, all of it, regularly and reverently. J.C. Ryle, in "Train Up a Child In the Way He Should Go: The Duties of Parents," part of a larger work entitled *The Upper Room*, says of training a child in a knowledge of the Bible,

See that they read it *all*. You need not shrink from bringing any doctrine before them. You need not fancy that the leading doctrines of Christianity are things which children cannot understand. Children understand far more of the Bible than we are apt to suppose.

When children are able to read for themselves, they can follow along with the reading, and eventually participate in the oral reading themselves. This will often

... as Christian parents we will chiefly concern ourselves with teaching our children the objective knowledge of God in the Bible.

help them to concentrate, especially if they are visually oriented learners. Certain reference tools should be available and used in our homes: an English dictionary for checking the meaning of unfamiliar words, a good Bible dictionary to clarify questions that arise and to make certain concepts concrete, a concordance to aid us in comparing Scripture with Scripture, and a Bible atlas to help us understand passages with much geographical detail, like the Exodus and Paul's missionary journeys. As our children grow older, we can sometimes read longer sections of Scripture, or perhaps from time to time read a portion from a good Reformed commentary, such as *Righteous by Faith Alone*, although the majority of our

reading ought to be Scripture itself.

While we will normally read straight through a given book of the Bible, we could also read through the gospels using a harmony of the gospels, or through other sections of Scripture chronologically, reading prophecies in connection with the historical time in which they were originally given. Another possibility would be to study a particular topic in Scripture, using a reference tool like *Nave's Topical Bible*. In our instruction we should apply the Word of God to our lives. We want to stress to our children that the Word of God is living and powerful, speaking to us now, where we are, in every situation of life. All these means will also help our older children establish their own personal study of the Bible.

We specifically instruct our children in the use of the means of grace, catechism instruction and preaching. An official means of grace, catechism instruction feeds Christ's lambs, as He has commanded. Knowing its importance, we will work diligently with our children, ensuring not only that they thoroughly know their memory work and have completed their written work, but that they understand the meaning of the material they memorize or write. Because we want this instruction to be hidden in their hearts, we will not be content with their quickly cramming their memory work in the day or two before class, but will instruct them throughout the week. Not only will our children retain far more through the use of regular systematic review, but they will also see that their spiritual instruction is a priority in our lives. Once again, the words of J. C. Ryle will inspire us:

This is the thought that should be uppermost on your mind in all you do for your children. In every step you take about them, in every plan, and scheme, and arrangement that concerns them, do

not leave out that mighty question, "*How will this affect their souls?*"

We can also specifically prepare our children for sitting under the preaching of God's Word, the word of our Father-King, by teaching them not just to listen to the sound of words, but to follow a logical development of thought. Children learn to listen during family worship or devotions, but we can further their ability to listen intelligently by regularly reading aloud with them. Children who live on a steady diet of television, videos, and computer and video games will have a much harder time learning to concentrate on a sermon. Aside from the content of such material, much of it filled with either violence or silliness, which rarely fosters godly fear, the media themselves, by their very nature, weaken the ability of our children to think conceptually. Visual media, jumping rapidly and intuitively from one scene to another with little logical connection, may make our children mentally lazy because the media think and conceptualize for them, presenting before their minds, not words, but the image. Images tend to evoke emotional responses, encouraging our children just to feel, not to think. Images do not have an objective truth value. Children who regularly listen to stories—good, captivating, exciting stories—read aloud to them will learn to follow the line of a story, to see how details fit into the overall plot, to make "pictures" in their minds that enable them to understand, and to grow in patience and in the ability to slow down and direct their minds, which so readily and naturally seem to flit from one idea to another.

The ability to think and follow

a spoken discourse, such as a sermon, will also be fostered by conversation with us. Opportunities for conversation abound when families eat together, read together, walk together, and travel together. In our hectic lives, preserving these opportunities demands conscious effort. But through these opportunities, our children gain abilities that will stand them in good stead when learning to listen to a sermon or to their pastor's instruction in the catechism class.

How else can we help our children to listen and understand? We could read the Lord's Day of the Heidelberg Catechism, or the text for the evening sermon on Sunday afternoon with our children and discuss in a simple way the sermon topic. When children are able to read, we can point out the theme and divisions of the sermon in the bulletin, and have them indicate by unobtrusively holding up their fingers when the minister begins the first, second, and third point. Above all, we should talk about what we have learned (more conversation) or how we were blessed by the sermon and patiently encourage our children to do the same, not by quizzing them or trying to force a spiritual response from them, but by speaking naturally together about what we love, the words of our Father-King.

An excellent article on this subject, "Family Heirlooms" (2), by Mrs. Connie Meyer, may be found in the February 15, 2001 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

The most powerful teaching of the knowledge of God our children receive is our personal example. If we would have our children learn to know the Lord so that they may live in godly fear, we will ourselves attentively follow after this knowledge by regular attendance in pub-

Aside from the content of such material, much of it filled with either violence or silliness, which rarely fosters godly fear, the media themselves, by their very nature, weaken the ability of our children to think conceptually.

lic worship, Bible study, special lectures, and speeches. Our children will see us study God's Word personally. They will hear our love for that Word in how we speak about it and about the servants of our Father-King, the officebearers who bring us that Word. Do we approach our regular family devotions with joy? Have we fallen into a dullness that takes the privilege of family worship for granted? Are we "in a rut," unwilling to improve in this area, because we have "always done it this way"? When we are in trouble

and distress, do our children see us turn to God's Word for answers? Quoting J. C. Ryle once again,

"Think not your children will practise what they do not see you do. You are their model pictures, and they will copy what you are. Your reasoning and your lecturing, your wise commands and your good advice; all this they may not understand, but they can understand your life.

All Christian parents confess that they often fall far short of the

pattern of godliness that they ought to show to their children and that, by God's grace, they desire to show to their children. Our own knowledge of God is so feeble that we often falter in instructing our children. Yet in the way of dependence on God's mercy in Christ, we will press forward in gratitude to our Father-King, desiring for our children the knowledge of godly fear and trusting His faithful promise, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." 

Islam (3)

A Little Politics and Law: Shari'a

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

I Chronicles 12:32

As we have seen in our previous article, the imposition of the Shari'a in some Muslim countries has resulted in the state prescribing every aspect of both public and private behavior. It makes men slaves to the state and women slaves to men with the threat and exercise of inhumane punishments as the means to obtain compliance. Yet believers in Islam will submit to this set of rules confident that in doing so they will receive Allah's heavenly reward.

For modern-day Issachar, state-

imposed Shari'a serves as an example of the potential result of an unbiblical union between church and state. At the same time, it should serve as a warning to those of Western "Christianity" who would promote their own Western-style Shari'a. Seriously should be taken the words of the Lord, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). Clearly God has made a distinction between the work of the church and the work of the state, and history has demonstrated the sad results of uniting the two.

Roots of Shari'a in the Old Testament?

It would seem, some would say, that uniting church and state was God's purpose, since the two were connected in the Old Testament nation of Israel. Nevertheless, it must be noted that Old Testament Israel as a theocracy was to set the pattern for the New Testament church's relationship to God under King Jesus, *not* to establish the foundation for the proper rela-

tionship between church and state. If theocracy was (and is) the God-ordained pattern for church and state, He surely had a strange way of making that known. His own Son could not have stated it more clearly, "My kingdom is *not* of this world" (John 18:36).

By inspiration the apostle Peter also makes this known in I Peter 2: 9: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people...." Note who it is that Peter is calling a *nation*: not Old Testament Israel but the New Testament church. Not a church that *would be* a nation, but one that *was so* at that time. A church, by the way, that was in no position to exert any form of political power or influence on the powerful Roman Empire. Furthermore, it was a church that had no geographical boundaries. Clearly this holy nation of which Peter speaks is the church, not some political entity or combination of the two. This is obvious from subsequent verses, which instruct this "holy nation" to "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (I Pet. 2:13).

Mr. Kalsbeek is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

Previous article in series: March 1, 2005, p. 254.

Our *Confession of Faith* Article 27 makes this clear as well:

We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is an holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost. This church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be. And this holy church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world;...Furthermore, this holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit.

The kingdom that God's people presently experience, and for the complete realization of which they look to the future, is a spiritual kingdom: a kingdom that is not limited by time and geography; a kingdom whose citizens are members of the human race from the beginning to the end of the world, and are gathered from "over the whole world"; a kingdom that is one in the same Spirit; a kingdom that in God's providence is served by the good order established in society by the civil magistrates (Confession of Faith, Article 36).

Considering the God-ordained, distinct roles for church and state, that which calls itself church today should be warned by the example of Islamic Shari'a that such an alli-

ance between church and state spells trouble.

Western Experiments with Shari'a

Furthermore, Western Christianity has some skeletons in her own closet to emphasize the point. Already in the early 300s the Christian church's favored status under Emperor Constantine had disastrous consequences for the church. Along with the state's smile came a significant increase in church membership by those who joined only for carnal reasons. Little wonder that corruption and pagan influences resulted.

The church's experiments with Western-style Shari'a during the Middle Ages proved to be just as disastrous for the church, but in a different way. One example involved Pope Innocent III, who came closer than any other pope to the papal goal of establishing universal rule.

The pope lost no time in proclaiming to the world that he would tolerate no opposition from temporal powers....

The majority of the princes of Christendom became vassals of the Church. Thus it was that during the rule of Innocent III, from 1198 to 1216, the Church rose to its greatest height of temporal power.

But the ideals of Pope Innocent III went beyond the desire for temporal power. In 1215 he held an ecumenical council in the Lateran Church in Rome. In summoning this council Innocent declared: "Two things I have especially at heart, the conquest of the Holy Land, and the reform of the Church universal."*

To achieve the "reform of the Church universal," the Dominican Order of monks was founded: an organization that would plague the church for many years to come by means of its dreaded Inquisition. Considering this, one wonders: Is Islam under the Shari'a any worse than Christianity was under the Inquisition?

But that was Roman Catholicism. Would not the Reformation and the resulting birth of the Protestant churches be an improvement? Indeed it was, but even here an unbiblical relationship between church and state would result in untold suffering for God's people and serious conflict in the countries where state-churches were established. An obvious case in point is the state-church situation in the Netherlands during the early 1600s that would shelter the likes of Jacobus Arminius and allow the Arminian heresy to flourish there. Two hundred years later, God's people in the Netherlands would again experience the terrible consequences of a state-church run amuck. The Secession of 1834 would be the only solution for the faithful to the state-church's apostasy, with persecution as the consequence.

Church history demonstrates over and over again that whether it's the state exerting its influence on the church, the church exercising influence on the state, or some united effort between church and state, the outcome is the same: trouble for the church. 

* B.K. Kuiper, *The Church in History* (Grand Rapids, MI: National Union of Christian Schools, 1951), pp. 176-177.

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

School Activities

On Tuesday evening, March 22, the Wingham, Ontario PRC hosted a concert of sacred music presented by 51 members of the Covenant Christian High School

Choir from Grand Rapids, MI. The concert was held at an old country church in Westfield, Ontario. There were many visitors from the area in addition to most of the Wingham congregation. The

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

Wingham ladies provided supper for the students; and a time of fellowship, refreshments, and combined singing of visitors and choir members followed the concert. The choir also presented a short program at nearby Lucknow Christian School on Wednesday morning, and were able to experience their first attempt at the sport of curling in Wingham the following afternoon before returning home.

Dr. Carl Kerby, from the "Answers in Genesis" organization, was in Hudsonville, MI on March 23, sponsored by Cornerstone United Reformed Church. Cornerstone also arranged for Dr. Kerby to speak at Heritage Christian School that same day.

First he spoke to Heritage students in grades K-5. His topic showed how evidence that God created the earth can be found in the earth itself. Then he spoke to the students in grades 6-9 in a speech called "The Bottom Strip," which emphasized the fundamental importance of the first seven chapters of Genesis as it relates to the rest of Scripture.

Some ten students from Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI spent part of their spring break (April 6-11, to be exact) visiting our denomination's mission work in Pittsburgh, PA. Plans called for this to be a working vacation, since the students hoped to catalog Rev. J. Mahtani's library, attend an Evangelism Seminar, and do some sightseeing. The students also planned to worship with the Fellowship and attend their Young Adults' meeting on April 10, before returning home.

All parents, alumni, and friends of Covenant Christian School in Lynden, WA were invited to come to school March 30 for a softball game against the Junior High.

The School Board for Midwest PR Secondary Education invited school society members, and anyone else interested, to join together for an evening of fellowship as Rev.

A. Brummel, pastor of the South Holland, IL PRC, spoke on the topic, "Promoting and Establishing Good Christian Schools." This speech centered on Proverbs 4 and Church Order, Article 21, and was given in the Hull, Iowa PRC on April 1.

The Foundation from Hope PR Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored their annual Ice Skating and Hockey Night Saturday evening, March 26, at the Walker Ice and Fitness Arena. Open skating was from 6-8 P.M., followed by a very competitive hockey game, which, thankfully, ended in a 6-goal tie.

The Northwest Iowa PR School presented their annual all-school program, entitled "The Five Points of Calvinism," on Tuesday, March 22.

Denomination Activities

The first meeting of the "Singles Fellowship" for 2005 was held Thursday, March 31 at the Hudsonville, MI PRC. Dinner began at 5:30 P.M., followed by a very informative talk by Prof. H. Hanko on the mission interest shown in Wales. You may remember that Prof. Hanko recently spent several weeks with our missionary in the United Kingdom, Rev. A. Stewart, and has firsthand knowledge of the work there.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC informed their congregation about some of their recent work. They write that they continue to advertise PR literature in *World Magazine*. Typically a book or pamphlet is advertised free and can be requested via mail, e-mail, or by phone. In November '04 the book *Reformed Worship* was advertised; in December '04 the book *The Mysteries of Bethlehem*; in February '05 the pamphlet *Try the Spirits*; and most recently the pamphlet *Good News for the Afflicted*. The number of responses varies with each pamphlet. *Try the Spirits* drew the larg-

est response, with over fifty requests to date.

Congregation Activities

Friday, April 1, the choir of the Randolph, WI PRC presented a program on the various aspects of the life of Christ.

At a recent congregational meeting the Hudsonville, MI PRC voted to approve two proposals from their Building Committee. One was to do a major redecoration of their church kitchen, and the other was to reseal their church parking lot.

Everyone in our congregation of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA was invited to stay after their evening service on March 27 for their choir's Easter Program.

Mission Activities

Our Domestic Mission Committee and the PR Fellowship of Fayetteville, NC have been given the opportunity to air a new program on television. Each program will be a thirty-minute message from God's Word. These programs will air twice a month beginning March 21 at 5:30 P.M. and then every other Monday throughout the year. And the good news is that this is all free.

Minister Activities

Rev. D. Overway preached his farewell sermon at Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ on March 27. He and his family planned on arriving in Doon, Iowa the week of April 4. He will be installed as pastor there, the Lord willing, on April 15.

First PRC in Holland, MI will call a pastor on April 17 from a trio of the Revs. W. Bruinsma, D. Kleyn, and A. Spriensma.

The Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL extended a call to Rev. J. Mahtani to serve as their next pastor.

First PRC of Edmonton, AB, Canada extended a call to Rev. S. Houck to come over and help them.

Rev. A. Brummel received the call from the Hudsonville, MI PRC.



Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On May 9, 2005, our parents, **CHARLES and BARBARA ENSINK**, celebrate their thirtieth wedding anniversary. We, their children, celebrate with them and give thanks to God for the marriage He has given them. We are also grateful to our parents for the love, care, instruction, and Christian example they have given us. We pray for the Lord's continued blessing on them in the years to come. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do His commandments: His praise endureth for ever" (Psalm 111:10).

- * Scott and Kelly Ensink
Victoria
- * Brian Ensink
- * Sarah Ensink

Hudsonville, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Byron Center PRC express their Christian sympathy to David and Ruth Gunnink family in the death of Dave's father,

REV. FRED GUNNINK.

May the Gunninks be comforted by the words of Psalm 23:4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Rev. Ron VanOverloop, President
Leroy DeVries, Clerk

NEW BULLETIN CLERK

Please note the new bulletin clerk for Covenant PRC (Wyckoff, NJ):
Tammy McHugh
tammy_mchugh@hotmail.com

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Hudsonville Ladies' Society expresses Christian sympathy to Garrett Jansma in the death of his wife, **ELLAMAE JANSMA.**

Mrs. Jansma was a member of the Ladies' Society for many years. Our prayer is that the family may be comforted in knowing that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Andy Lanning, President
Donna Boven, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the PRC of South Holland, Illinois express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Loretta DeBoer on the passing away of her husband,

MR. MELVIN DE BOER.

"But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple?" (Psalm 5:7).

Rev. Allen Brummel, President
Gysbert VanBaren, Clerk

CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2004 appointed Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, Michigan the calling church for the 2005 synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2005 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 14, 2005 at 8:30 A.M. in the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 13, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. Koole, president of the 2004 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Leroy DeVries, 2090 72nd St. SW, Byron Center, MI 49315. Phone: (616) 878-0075.

Consistory of
Byron Center PRC
Leroy DeVries, Clerk

**Have you checked out
the RFPA website
lately?
... www.rfpa.org**

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for May

Date	Topic
May 1	"Spiritual Alzheimers"
May 8	"Intimacy in Marriage"
May 15	"Enoch, the Man Who Walked with God"
May 22	"Enoch, the Man Who Witnessed for God"
May 29	"Enoch, the Man Who Went to God"