

Moses' Failure as Mediator

And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.

And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.

This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.

Numbers 20:11-13

The children of Israel had come to Kadesh in the desert of Zin. This was the same Kadesh from which Moses had earlier sent out the twelve spies to spy out the land of Canaan. Ten spies had come back with an evil report, which the children of Israel believed. In response to Israel's murmuring and rebellion, Israel was sent to wander in the

wilderness until all those who were twenty years and older had died. Now, after thirty-seven years of wandering, the whole congregation was again at Kadesh.

At this time a sad event took place in the life of Moses. There was no water in Kadesh. The people began to murmur and complain. The Lord instructed Moses to speak to the rock and God would give them water. But in disobedience Moses struck the rock. In anger, he addressed the people, "Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?" The outcome of it all was that God gave Israel water from the rock. But as a consequence of their disobedience, God forbade Moses and Aaron from leading Israel into Canaan.

This whole account is very significant. One might wonder why one failure on Moses' part disqualified him from leading Israel into Canaan. The answer is that Moses failed as mediator of God's people. This brings us to the glorious gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ we have a Mediator who will not fail like Moses.

A wicked unbelief!

We are confronted here first with the unbelief of the nation of Israel.

The lack of water in Kadesh became the occasion for Israel to level horrible charges against Moses and Aaron. They charged Moses and Aaron with leading them out of the goodness and abundance of Egypt and into the barren wilderness exactly so that they would die. They indicated that Moses and Aaron had accomplished their purpose with many of their brethren. (Remember, a whole generation had already died in the wilderness.) And now Moses and Aaron had brought them to this Kadesh so that the rest of them would die. What horrible charges!

These charges were ultimately leveled against Jehovah God. This becomes clear from the name that was subsequently given to this place and the explanation given for that name, "This is the water of Meribah (striving); because the children of Israel strove with the LORD."

These horrible charges arose out of wicked unbelief.

The people of Israel had God's promise. The Lord through Moses had proclaimed His purpose to lead

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them from Egypt into Canaan. The Lord had also demonstrated His faithfulness to this promise through many mighty miracles. Through the ten plagues He had destroyed the power of Egypt and gained the release of the people of Israel from 400 years of slavery. At the Red Sea He had made a way of escape for them, while at the same time destroying Pharaoh and his pursuing army. During their many years in the wilderness, the Lord had fed them with manna every day. Again and again He provided water from the rocks of the desert. Miraculously, neither Israel's shoes nor their clothing wore out.

But now in their disgust they lose sight of all these things and foolishly charge God with leading them into the wilderness to die. This arose out of wicked unbelief. This unbelief certainly was to be found in the carnal, reprobate element that was always present in Israel and sometime even dominated the nation. They were not all Israel that were of Israel. But even the believing element of Israel was often weak in faith. They too were a part of this foolishness.

This sad situation was made worse by the reaction of Moses and Aaron. Theirs was a reaction also of unbelief.

In response to the people's complaint, Moses and Aaron went to the door of the tabernacle. There they fell on their faces to inquire of the Lord. The glory of the Lord appeared to them and to Israel. And the Lord gave instruction. Moses and Aaron were to gather Israel before the rock in Kadesh. Moses was to take the rod that was laid up in the tabernacle and that had been used to perform other miracles of salvation. This rod symbolized the power of the Lord to save Israel. But in this instance Moses was not to strike the rock with the rod, as before, but to speak to the rock. And the Lord promised that the rock would give forth water.

Moses, however, did not carry

out the Lord's instructions. Moses did gather Israel to the rock. But instead of speaking to the rock, he hit the rock twice in anger. And when he spoke, he spoke to the people. In anger he rebuked them, "Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water from this rock?"

According to the Lord's own words, Moses and Aaron responded this way "because ye believed me not" (v. 12). What did Moses and Aaron not believe? They did not believe that God would at this time give them water from the rock but would instead let Israel perish in the desert. It is striking that always before, when Israel provoked the Lord to anger with their rebellion, Moses would plead with the Lord to remember His promise to bring Israel to Canaan. Repeatedly Moses turned away the wrath of God from Israel. However, this time Moses' faith in God's promise failed. All he could see was Israel's rebellion. He was convinced that now Israel had gone too far. Surely the Lord, in weariness over their rebellion, would forsake them and allow them to perish.

Moses gave expression to this unbelief in his actions. He was angry with Israel for offending the Lord. Convinced that the Lord would not give them water from the rock, Moses refused even to try. He did not speak to the rock as instructed. He simply hit it with his rod. In his angry question to the people, he made clear his opinion that there would be no water for them because of their rebellion.



An appropriate penalty!

For their unbelief the Lord penalized Moses and Aaron. They would not be allowed to lead Israel into the land of Canaan.

We may be inclined to question the fairness and correctness of this penalty.

Had not Moses and Aaron served the Lord faithfully for all these years? Now, after this very

human failure, the Lord would not allow them the privilege of leading Israel into Canaan? Is not this a bit extreme?

Besides, there was the fact that God allowed Israel to enter Canaan. Their sin in this matter was far worse than that of Moses and Aaron. In fact, Israel's sin was the occasion for the sin of Moses and Aaron. Yet, Israel was allowed into Canaan, whereas Moses and Aaron were not! How could this be?

To see the correctness of this penalty, we must bear in mind that through their unbelief Moses and Aaron had failed to sanctify the Lord in the eyes of the children of Israel (v. 12).

We must remember that Moses was the mediator of God. The book of Hebrews emphasizes that Moses was the mediator of God in the old covenant. It was in this capacity that Moses led Israel from Egypt to Canaan. And Aaron, the highpriest, was inseparably connected to Moses as mediator. Without the altar, Moses could not function as mediator.

As mediator, Moses and Aaron were called to sanctify the Lord in the eyes of the children of Israel.

To sanctify someone in the eyes of another is to present that person as someone special and unique, someone to be revered and honored. It was Moses' calling to sanctify the Lord God in the eyes of Israel. And he was to do this by representing the Lord in all His glory.

But Moses and Aaron failed to do this in this instance. In the weakness of faith, they represented the Lord as someone who was about to break His promise to Israel because of Israel's rebellion. They portrayed the Lord as one who now was going to abandon His people. Certainly this did not sanctify the Lord God to Israel. Nor may this stand. Moses and Aaron had made themselves unfit to bring Israel into Canaan. Another must take their place.

Interestingly, by laying this penalty upon Moses and Aaron, God sanctified Himself in the eyes of the people (v. 13).



A blessed gospel!

Moses and Aaron were types of Christ.

A type is a person, event, action, or institution in the Old Testament that pointed God's people ahead to Christ and the work of His salvation.

As the mediator of the old covenant, Moses was called, along with Aaron, to bring Israel out of the bondage of Egypt, through the terrible wilderness, and into Canaan.

As such they pointed to a greater Mediator, who was to lead the church of God out of a greater bondage, the bondage of sin, through the wilderness of this world and into the heavenly Canaan. Not only are we able to see this from the vantage point of New Testament revelation, true Israel was also able to see this. In

Moses they saw Christ leading them from sin and hell to heaven and glory. And in the altar that Aaron tended they saw the atonement for sin, which alone could deliver them from the bondage of sin into Canaan's glory.

The blessed gospel we must hear is that, as our Mediator, Jesus succeeds where Moses failed.

In response to Israel's rebellion and murmuring, Moses lost sight of God's faithfulness to His promise. And so he failed also to sanctify the Lord God in the eyes of Israel.

This Jesus will never do!

Oh, we are no different from Israel. How often don't we complain? In spite of God's demonstrated faithfulness to us, repeatedly our faith in His promises fails. We quickly despair and are even inclined to charge God foolishly!

Yet Jesus Christ our Mediator always sanctifies the Lord God before our eyes. He never despairs of God's faithfulness to save us. He does not despair because He has sealed the promises of God by His perfect payment for our sins at

the cross. At the cross He has covered and overcome all our miserable sins. This is something Moses and Aaron did not and could not do. On the basis of His perfect sacrifice at the cross, Jesus Christ has perfect confidence that the Lord will forgive us and lead us on all the way to Canaan. In fact, He knows that in response to His highpriestly prayers the Lord God will provide us with Himself as the Water of life so that we may continue our way. Not only is this the confidence of our Mediator, this is also His word to us through the preaching.

This gospel, however, is not for the hardhearted who rebel without repentance. Those whom the Lord Jesus leads to Canaan He also smites with His word, so that they humble themselves before God in repentance. To them He gives the assurance that their sins are forgiven in Him and that the Lord their God will continue to lead them to Canaan.

And the Lord God is sanctified in our eyes. 

The Standard Bearer: Past

There is value in bringing to light the history of a religious periodical such as the *Standard Bearer*. A study of its origins will reveal its purpose as intended by the founders. The history demonstrates the character that the magazine has striven to maintain. Familiarity with its origin and character will serve the readers well. On the one hand, they will not be surprised by the content of the magazine that appears in their mailbox twice a month, so long as the content is in harmony with the history of the

magazine. On the other hand, if the magazine strays from the established course, the readers have the right to call the writers back to the original purpose, and to the historically established character.

Knowledge of a publication's history is important for the writers, too. If the original purpose and character of the religious magazine is biblical and right, and the goals far-reaching, the staff of the twenty-first century, complete with a set of new editors, are well advised to "hew the line."

For these reasons, the new edi-

tors are convinced that the history of the *SB* is important. We consider it worth our time, and yours, to review past events in the history of the *SB*, and in that light to set forth our goals for the *SB* in the future.

I must admit that the study of the *SB*'s history was more significant than I envisioned. It was more than interesting; it was fascinating! It was also sobering.

The *Standard Bearer* has a rich and weighty history. It was born in battle. The conflict concerned the Three Points of Common Grace

officially adopted by the Christian Reformed Church's synod of 1924. That same synod had requested its members, ministers, and seminary professors to discuss and develop the concept of common grace.

Two of her ministers, the Revs. Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, were ready and willing to discuss common grace. They would describe its implications as completely as their capable minds and ready pens would allow. Their openly stated intent was to demonstrate to their churches that the notion of a common grace of God to all men, elect and reprobate, was neither biblical nor confessional. But they had no voice in their churches, that is to say, no means of printing their analyses. They were cut off – the official church papers refused to print anything more than that they wrote on the subject.

Concerned members of the CRC formed an association for the purpose of publishing these two men in particular, starting with pamphlets. The other intent was that a monthly magazine be published for the defense and promotion of the Reformed faith. The *Standard Bearer* was born on October 1, 1924.

One can scarcely imagine the excitement for those involved – the writers and supporters – to take in hand the first issue of the fledgling magazine. On the cover of Vol. 1, No. 1, in bold print is the significantly descriptive title, "THE STANDARD BEARER," with the subtitle, "REFORMED MONTHLY." There are found also the names of the four editors – Rev. H. Danhof, Rev. H. Hoeksema, Rev. G. Ophoff, and G. Van Beek. The yearly subscription price is \$1.50. Everything about the first issue rings with the confident announcement: We have weighty matters to treat, and we intend to publish this magazine for a good long time to come.

The very first article, a meditation by Herman Hoeksema on Psalm 145:9a and 20b entitled

"Jehovah's Goodness," sets the doctrinal and antithetical tone for the magazine. Inside, Rev. Danhof explains the appearance of the magazine ("The Standard Bearer"). Next, he launches into dogmatical discussion of the nature of God ("God is God"). H.H. follows with "The Antithesis in Paradise," in which he also introduces the concept of the covenant. And he begins a series on the history of the common grace controversy. Mr. G. Van Beek fills out the rest of the sixteen pages. Thereafter, the *SB* would be thirty-two pages. The writing is straightforward, and it is Reformed.

The second issue added B.J. Danhof to the staff of editors. Rev. Ophoff launched into the sea of controversy with his first article, "A Declaration." He explains why he *must* join the ranks of those who oppose common grace. He boldly takes issue with a professor in the seminary from which Ophoff had graduated a scant two and a half years earlier(!). Already in these early issues, G. M. O. never left one wondering where he stood on an issue. In an article on the fall of man, he boldly subtitled one section "Dr. Abraham Kuyper's view of the natural man condemned by Scripture."

Changes Made

The *SB* was a bilingual paper – "Holland" and English. The editors decided that they would include both equally. But the Dutch won out more often than not. Over the years, readers sent in complaints on this – the older readers asking for more Dutch, and the younger readers, more English. Occasionally the editors would publicly commit themselves to maintaining the balance. In 1941, the staff decided that the ratio ought to be one-third Dutch, and two-thirds English. And in February of 1953, the editor informed the readers that the "Holland" would be dropped from the magazine altogether. Hence, Rev. Vos penned

his last meditation in the Dutch – a bit wistfully, one suspects.

Editors and writers changed over the years. After January of 1926, the name Danhof was dropped from the list of editors. In the September 1928 issue, the masthead revealed that the Editorial Staff was H. Hoeksema and G.M. Ophoff. A new category followed: Associate Editor, and listed were G. Vos and Wm. Verhil. Seven years later the number of editors returned to four with the elevation of Vos and Verhil, and all the other ministers in the PRC (sixteen) were called "Associate Editors," five of whom were assigned to write church news from their area of the country.

Improvements would continue to be made in the form and content of the *SB*. In the 1940s the staff appointed H.H. the editor in chief, with what he described as "dictatorial powers." He used the power (as they intended) to lay out each issue of the entire volume year, complete with writers' assigned topics, and the language to be used – Holland or English. He did not assign easy topics. The men had to study and take stands on such theological and practical "hot" topics as "The Theory of Soul Sleep," "Hymn Singing in Public Worship," and "The Angels and Salvation in Christ." Debates were also assigned to two ministers. One such involved the proposition: "Resolved That A Local Consistory Has The Right To Act Contrary To The Church Order."

And if a man did not write? The editor's public notice to one offender was: "I have not assigned new subjects to the Rev. (name given). If the brother wishes to write, he may do so on the subjects assigned to him last year." (!) If the current editors are tempted to use similar methods to spur on neglectful staff members, it should also be noted that his public dressing down did not stir up the Reverend to write – at least I did not discover any articles from him.

It was in this time that H.H. penned the (now) well-known editorial policy of the *SB*, "The Editor is not responsible for any other contributions that appear in our paper than his own."

G.M. Ophoff never got used to this new system. The second time that H. H. laid out an entire volume year, he noted, "Rev. Ophoff prefers to select his own subjects rather than having them assigned to him."

A few years thereafter, the idea of rubrics was introduced, with a minister free to write in his particular area. That practice has been carried on to the present day.

We take note of a few other changes in the *SB* over the years. In May 1926, the subscription price was raised to \$2.50. But the *SB* would announce itself no longer as A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE; now it was "A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE" — of *twenty-four* pages rather than thirty-two. However, the depression soon forced a reduction both in price and number of issues. Subscription was reduced to \$2.00, and the *SB* would be published semimonthly, except in the summer months, when it would come out only once a month, even as it is still today, though not at \$2.00 a year. (Consistent with the \$2.00 subscription rate was the cost of mailing. Affixed to each magazine was ... a one-cent stamp.)

Changes Not Made

H. H. was surprisingly open to suggestions for improvements to the *SB*. However, there was one thing to which he remained adamantly opposed, namely, making the *SB* a church paper. The suggestion would be broached from time to time. It came in a proposal form in 1935. H. H. printed the whole proposal in the *SB* for all to read. The two main parts are reproduced below.

Proposed Plan

1. A paper to be published containing the following departments:

- a. A short meditation.
- b. Editorials.
- c. A department: Our doctrine.
- d. Happenings in the Church-world.
- e. The Sundayschool Lesson.
- f. A Young People's Department.
- g. A Children's Page.
- h. News From Our Own Churches.
- i. An Open Forum.

And:

4. This paper to be entirely under the control of a central board to be elected annually by the association:
 - a. The board shall control the contents of the paper.
 - b. The board shall appoint the editors for the different departments.
 - c. The board shall control the finances of the publication.

H. H. remained neutral in his comments, even pointing out that it had some positive elements. As he wrote, "[T]he question arises, whether the time has not arrived to alter the entire character of our publication, and, instead of the semi-scientific theological paper it originally aimed to be, to offer the public a paper of a more popular and practical nature, somewhat like the well known church-papers." He asked to "hear, if possible, from all our readers what is their opinion of this proposition."

He was testing the readers and the membership of the PRC. Were the days of the *SB* numbered? It was only four years before that proposal that he had expressed his thoughts on the matter as follows:

It must be remembered first of all, that our paper is no Church publication. Neither was it the original purpose of the association that publishes the *Standard Bearer*, that our paper in its general contents should be exactly like a church paper. To be sure, it was to be a religious periodical of the Reformed type. But its contents

were to be devoted to the specific purpose of developing the principles of the Reformed doctrine.... It stands to reason, that the contents, in harmony with this original purpose, were to be chiefly doctrinal, though from the very beginning it was decided also to devote some space to the application of our principles to matters of every day life and current events. It may be admitted, that in this last respect the *Standard Bearer* has been weak, partly due to our limited powers. On the whole, however, it has been faithful to the purpose for which it was originally published.

And if from now on the contents of the paper would be chiefly of a practical nature, its doctrinal material being limited to one expository article like the present meditation, the *Standard Bearer* would be greatly depreciated and certainly it would be far from realizing its original aim.

It would become an entirely different publication. Its contents would be more like those of an ordinary Church publication, like *The Banner*; though even its expository and doctrinal articles are not confined to the meditation.

Personally, I would greatly deplore such a change. At one of its last meetings the board of the association seriously considered this step. I was, as I am now, opposed to the proposition, chiefly because I know that the contents of the paper will be changed radically if the Church instead of a free association should publish the *Standard Bearer*.

The responses poured in, and the results were mixed. But the main changes were not made.

Years later (1949), H. H. looked back on these efforts to change the character of the *SB* and to limit the freedom of the writers. He wrote:

The term "Free" in this name (R.F.P.A.) denotes that the association in publishing its literature does not stand under any ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It also means that the editors alone are responsible for the contents of their writ-

ing, and that they are not under the jurisdiction, either of the Church or of the board of the R.F.P.A. The minutes show that, in later days, the board has sometimes attempted to change this relation and to acquire some jurisdiction over the contents of their writings, but the editors have always jealously guarded their rights in this respect, and they always will, at least as far as the original editors are concerned.

That emphasis would continue to characterize the *SB*. It is not light stuff, but, on the contrary, solid Reformed reading. H.H. was not opposed as such to a church paper. He would later encourage *Concordia* to include more news and to be published weekly. But that was not to be the role of the *SB*. The material of the *SB* was, and would remain, weighty, with biblical exposition and doctrinal development, including polemical defense of the truth.

The *SB* and the PRC

Although the *Standard Bearer* is not a church paper, it is inseparably connected with the Protestant Reformed Churches. As a result, it records the history of the same. Even before the origin of the regular column "News from our Churches," the *SB* reflected the major events of the PRC. For example, the last page of the third issue contained a terse announcement (in Dutch) of the deposition of Rev. Hoeksema and the consistory of the Eastern Ave. Chr. Ref. Church.

The June 1925 issue heralds the "First Annual Field Day of the Protesting Christian Reformed Churches." That indicates a significant move towards the formation of a new denomination.

Interesting too are the reports on the new buildings, since the old church buildings were lost. Kalamazoo (Rev. Danhof's congregation) boasted of the latest "forced air" *verwarmingssysteem*." Eastern Avenue Protesting Chris-

tian Reformed Church anticipated a cost of \$100,000 for a sanctuary to seat 1300.

J.B. Danhof reported on the dedicatory services of the new church edifice in Hull on December 3, 1925. And what a dedication it was! H. Danhof started at 1 P.M. and preached a "full ninety minutes" in Dutch. G.M. Ophoff mounted the platform next, and finished his speech at 5 P.M. At 7:30 P.M., H. Hoeksema addressed the audience (in Dutch) for ninety minutes on "Classical Hierarchy," explaining the history of the controversy in the CRC and the wrongful deposing of officebearers. The audience's appreciation speaks volumes.

More sobering is the sudden absence of any of the Danhofs' columns in the *SB* from volume three on, indicating a significant schism in the already tiny group.

Yet much joy is evident in the announcements (complete with a studio picture) of graduates from the seminary — two in 1927, and then two years later, *six* graduates ready to serve the growing churches. The *SB* records the trios of the various vacant congregations. It also reports on the "Zestal" formed by Waupun, WI — all six candidates on the nomination. I wonder how long that congregational meeting lasted.

One can also read discouragement between the lines of *SB* print from time to time — when the audience at the annual RFP A meetings was sparse; when subscriptions were down, and criticism was up. No doubt this reflected somewhat the spiritual climate of the churches.

From the mid-1930s into the 40s, the *SB* regularly directed the attention of the PRC to significant events in the Netherlands. With some thirty exchanges with Dutch religious magazines, the *SB* was on top of the turmoil in the GKN — conflicts that would result ultimately in the deposition of officebearers, including Dr. Klass

Schilder, and the formation of the Liberated Churches. No faithful reader (of the Dutch, that is) of the *SB* in those days would have been unaware of the pressures building, though no one could have foreseen the ultimate effect on the PRC.

The *SB* was a lightning rod in the conflict over conditions in the covenant that raged in the PRC in the late 40s and early 50s. H.H. commented in those days that the future of the PRC did not look good to him. He was right; the churches split in 1953. The dreadful bitterness in the aftermath is all too evident in the pages of the *SB*. It is not pleasant reading. Even H.H., the giant of a man who could maintain proper Christian deportment even when criticizing the CRC, could not do the same, always, with the ministers who forsook the truth that Ophoff and he had impressed upon them. That feelings ran high is understandable. The ministers who left had nearly destroyed the Protestant Reformed Churches in the process. The wounds were deep and painful.

But the important thing is boldly announced in the *SB*, namely, the Reformed Semi-Monthly and the PRC had not forsaken the glorious heritage of sovereign grace and the unconditional covenant of grace. God had preserved the Protestant Reformed Churches and the precious truth entrusted to them.

The subsequent recovery of the PRC is also reflected in the *SB*. The return to normalcy, the growth, the mission activity at home and abroad, along with the struggles that mission problems can bring, the announcements of new congregations being formed — it's all recorded in the *SB*. Surely it is a living, eighty-year record of a true church of Jesus Christ doing battle, struggling, wounded, yet persevering in the spiritual warfare. It is a record, therefore, of God's faithfulness.

...to be continued. 

An Interview with DJE (2)

The October 1 issue of the *SB* carried the first part of an interview with Prof. David J. Engelsma, the magazine's retiring editor. We conclude, below, the transcription of that recorded interview, confident that our readers will find it as profitable as did the newly appointed editors.

Prof. Dykstra: Are there any doctrines in particular that you consciously tried to develop in your editorials? If so, why those?

DJE: To my mind, in keeping with the purpose of the magazine as set up in the beginning (maintenance, development, defense, and promotion of the Reformed faith as known and confessed by the Protestant Reformed Churches), every editor of the *Standard Bearer* is committed to emphasize in a special way the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, particularly in the salvation of sinners; is required to emphasize and develop the doctrine of the unconditional covenant; and is required to emphasize the distinctively Reformed life that flows out of the truth of the sovereignty of God and that belongs to the doctrine of the unconditional covenant. I am referring, in general, to the antithetical life of the people of God and with particular, not special, reference to the sanctity of marriage as the symbol of the covenant as relationship between God and His people in Christ, in particular in reference to the family. Now it so happens that at the same time the society or culture in which we live forced these very issues upon us, as every pastor knows (I'm talking about marriage and the family, now). And it is also interestingly the case, and this to my mind is one of the most significant developments within the Reformed community in the past number of years, that the development of doctrine, which really amounts to

apostasy in the Reformed church-world, forces those issues of the sovereignty of God and of the covenant as an unconditional bond upon us. So, the purpose that we have out of our own tradition, and the calling that comes from developments in society and in the church world, come together as far as the *Standard Bearer* is concerned, and as regards the doctrinal developments. I'm talking, of course, about the recent astounding spread of the denial of the justification by faith alone grounded in a conditional covenant! That is one of the most significant developments, certainly, in recent times.

But then there are also other doctrines. We are Reformed, and, to paraphrase the church fathers, nothing Reformed is foreign to us. Everything that is going on in the Reformed church world is something that we may want to address and often do address in our own way — because all of truth is of a piece. So there were matters that I didn't have any intention of addressing when I became editor that, for one reason or another, became issues that I thought I had to address. I'm thinking now particularly of postmillennialism.

You are led (as so often in life ministers are, editors of the *Standard Bearer* are too) by God's providential ordering of things — areas that otherwise you wouldn't have chosen yourself. It makes the work interesting!

Prof. Dykstra: Perhaps you have already answered the question then: As you look back at sixteen years of editorials, what are the most significant, in your judgment?

DJE: The judgment as to what was significant is made by the readers. The judgment of the readers may be different from my judgment. But I think the most significant edi-

torials I wrote were editorials during the time that what is now the United Reformed Churches were breaking with the Christian Reformed Church. And this, by the way, goes back to your question earlier about addressing Protestant Reformed Churches and even addressing the Protestant Reformed denomination. I was doing that when I wrote editorials about the developments that have resulted in the formation of the United Reformed Churches. I wasn't only or even mainly addressing them, even though the editorials might have been pointed that way. But I was also attempting to give instruction and warning to the Protestant Reformed Churches. I'm referring to such editorials as "Aloof From the Alliance," "The Date Is 1924," and "Jelle in Wonderland." I regard those as the most significant editorials that I wrote. There certainly was the thinking in the leadership of the United Reformed Churches that the mere fact that they rejected women in office and were breaking with the Christian Reformed Church ought to be reason for the Protestant Reformed Churches to cozy up to them and even to engage in serious ecumenical discussions with them apart from the great issues that separate the Protestant Reformed Churches from the Christian Reformed Church. And I thought it was possible that there might even be such thinking within the Protestant Reformed Churches. I regarded that as calamitous if that would be the case.

So, by those editorials, I made an effort to show people who later became the United Reformed Churches but also to give a warning to the Protestant Reformed people that a common rejection of women in office serves as absolutely no basis whatsoever for any coming together of the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Chris-

tian Reformed Church. The Roman Catholic Church also rejects women in office. That doesn't mean a thing as far as oneness in the faith is concerned.

I took the opportunity, at the same time, to give a word to the broader Reformed community that issues that are really issues of fundamentalism vs. modernism (that is what you have in the women in office matter — sheer modernism because it is based on a rejection of the inspiration and authority of the Word of God) do not constitute a basis for the union and communion of Reformed churches. That union has to be on the basis of the three forms of unity, at the heart of which is the truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation. Of course, time has shown that the United Reformed Churches simply carry on the denials of sovereign grace that are imbedded in the mother church.

Prof. Dykstra: Every work in the kingdom of Jesus Christ has its trials and rewards. What are some of the sorrows of these years as editor?

DJE: I can't really speak of sorrows. I haven't been sorrowful in the work.

I've been extraordinarily burdened simply because of the demand to get the editorials out and carry on the correspondence and do the other work that is connected with the *Standard Bearer* while at the same time I was trying to do the other work that I'm called to do (i.e., full-time work of seminary professor, RJD). And I have been disappointed that certain things that I wanted to happen didn't happen.

But I can't say that I've had any sorrows in the work. There have been sharp, bitter criticisms, and that is painful. Maybe that would be one of the sorrows of the work. And when that bitter, sharp criticism comes from within the Protestant Reformed Churches, that makes it all the more painful. But, even then, that comes with the ter-

ritory. I knew that there would be that when I accepted the appointment. I was, after all, a minister for twenty-five years before I became editor. By that time, you are not a stranger to sharp criticism from within the Protestant Reformed Churches.

I haven't been able to develop the proverbial hide like the rhinoceros. Some men say they have that — I envy them.

I've been disappointed, too, that some of our able men haven't written as we wanted them to write. I would have liked that the subscription list had risen even more than it did. But, that again is in God's hands.

Prof. Dykstra: Reflect on some of the benefits, from a spiritual point of view, of being the editor of the *Standard Bearer*.

DJE: My joy, my gladness, is that, by the grace of God, the *Standard Bearer* has continued faithfully in the course laid out for it, rightly I believe, by my predecessors. My joy is that I could participate in that way by carrying on the witness to the Reformed faith within the Protestant Reformed Churches and without — there is joy in that.

And, after the article is written, there often is a joy in writing. As far as the writing itself is concerned, after all these years I continue to find writing to be a very demanding and difficult activity — one of the most demanding and difficult activities that I know of. I've heard the story that the famous sports columnist for one of the New York papers a number of years ago, a man by the name of Red Smith, who was a very good writer, was asked one time about the ease or difficulty of writing. His answer was, "Writing is very easy. You just put a blank sheet of paper in the typewriter, and then sweat blood." I can appreciate that description of writing! But after you have finished it, occasionally you will find this, that you are sat-

isfied with what you have written and how you have written it. I believe that editors of the *Standard Bearer* ought to be concerned about style as well as about content. There is a joy in writing. Yes, that has been a joy for me, too.

Maybe I could add this, too, to the joys of it. There are contacts that are made with people in far-flung places. Just about all of the correspondence that was negative and critical I have published. Only if it was obscene (and there weren't too many of those) or if the critic said, "I don't want this published," did I answer the criticism privately and not publish it. But besides that, there were many favorable responses and many, many questions from people who did not want the questions answered in the *Standard Bearer*. So there is more work involved than meets the eye. I have boxes, by this time, of correspondence — letters that I took time to answer, questions that also required study and some research. That's a joy, that is, the contact with people, outside the Protestant Reformed Churches for the most part, but who are genuinely interested in the truth of the Christian religion. Some of the questions are not distinctively Reformed, but have to do with some aspect of the Christian faith or life. But to help people like that and to have contact with people like that — that's refreshing. And that is joyous. So I would say that would be another aspect of the work that was gladsome.

Prof. Dykstra: You touched on this earlier, but do you have anything to add concerning the question of why you decided to decline reappointment as editor of the *Standard Bearer*?

DJE: My first and main reason was the conviction that — the fear that — I could stay too long in the position and lose my usefulness to the churches and to the witness and to whoever outside the Protestant Reformed Churches are listening. It is healthy that other men — men

with the same commitment but different views as to what the *Standard Bearer* must do within the churches and without — take over.

A secondary consideration, one that wasn't decisive — but if there needed to be any tipping of the scales it tipped the scales — was, I'd like to be relieved of the burden. I recognize it's a privilege, I recognize that. But it's also a burden. I'm not talking now about the time mainly. A lot of time has been expended over the last sixteen years to the wee hours of the morning and all day Saturday. I doubt that there have been many days in the last sixteen years that I have not given some thought and usually some time to the *Standard Bearer*. Every day. But when I say I would like to be relieved of the burden, I'm talking about the fact that it weighs on me. Not at all alone — all of the writers in the *Standard Bearer* share that, but still it falls on the editor in a special way. It weighs on me that the magazine has to make a clear, wise witness twice every month most of the time. After sixteen years, I'm ready to let that burden fall on somebody else's shoulders.

I don't know where that comes in in your questions (maybe it doesn't), but I want to insert something of my own. That is to acknowledge, with greatest appreciation, the cooperation in the work of Don Doezema and of Judi. As far as Don is concerned, I don't even speak of assistance, but of cooperation. The way I looked at it, and the way I look at it now in retrospect, is that Don and I simply worked together to make the magazine the very best magazine that we could make it. Again, I am not at all excluding the tremendous contributions that every writer makes. But the managing editor and the editor are in a position of leadership in the magazine. And we simply cooperated to make it the best magazine we could make it, both in content and in appearance.

And then Judi sets up the paper. As far as I am concerned, she really has been a great help because patiently she has carried my penchant for revising right up until the manuscript is going out the door to the printer. There are men (they have said this about themselves) who can write an article and after it's written, the first edition is the final edition. I am cursed with a different mentality. I am revising steadily until the magazine flies off to the printer. And Judi's patience is helpful. She is always willing, has always been willing, to drop this line, insert this line, correct that phraseology. That's been very helpful.

Prof. Dykstra: Would you care to divulge some of your future plans for writing? We trust the pen will not be set down.

DJE I've asked to be excused for a year from the *Standard Bearer*, but I hope that I will be asked to write again after a year. In the meantime, I am going to be working on a couple of books that the RFPA has asked me to write. The two or three that are on the front burner are really books on Old Testament history, continuing the project that the RFPA has begun under the title of *Unfolding Covenant History*. Prof. Hoeksema got as far as the book of Joshua, and I'm supposed to carry on from there. I'm finishing off, right now, a volume on Judges and Ruth.

Then I have a commentary on the Belgic Confession that I am writing out. It's handwritten, but in my writing, there are always two stages: the first, I write it out long-hand and then type that manuscript, making revisions as I go. I also have started, by way of some articles in the *Standard Bearer*, a book on eschatology. If I'm asked to write in the future, I think I would like to be asked to pursue that rubric so that I can combine writing on eschatology with producing a manuscript that can be a book later on.

Prof. Dykstra: What advice do you have for the new editors?

DJE: My advice is probably superfluous because it is that you be thoroughly conversant with the purpose of the magazine from its outset and maintain that purpose as I've described it before and as you know well enough. Because that purpose has to do with the sovereignty of God and His covenant, that isn't limiting but it is as comprehensive as the whole of life, the whole of God's revelation.

Second, my advice is: "Pray for wisdom." Pray for wisdom as editors of the *Standard Bearer*. I may confess that very few days have gone by that I did not specifically make that request in my own prayers. I did not want to do anything foolish, write anything foolish, that would be harmful to the churches or be harmful to our witness or be detrimental to the glory of God. Without exaggerating the place of the *Standard Bearer*, it certainly has an important place. And folly will be ruinous. So pray for wisdom that you may see what has to be said and know how to say it in the right way.

Thirdly, be, if not bold, courageous. I think I mentioned to the committee that was looking for a new editor, that one of the requisites of the editor of the *Standard Bearer* is that he (or now they) must be tough. There are pressures — sometimes pressures that are wrong. We have to be open to criticism — consider the possibility that we might be wrong, too — and listen to others. But at the same time, there comes the point at which, regardless of pressures even from one's colleagues, he is convinced that a certain stand has to be taken, a certain stand has to be defended publicly, and he does that. That calls for a certain courage. Editors must have a certain courage. So, my advice to you is to be tough in that sense of the word.

Then, another thing that comes to mind is that you must be your-

selves. It's crippling in this work, as it is in the ministry, if a man is constantly laboring with the notion that he has to be somebody else, be like somebody else, and do it like somebody else has done it. It's one thing to learn from our great predecessors. It's another thing to make the demand of ourselves, which God doesn't do, that we have to *be* those people. They were who they were in their time. And

I'm talking now about our predecessors in the Protestant Reformed Churches, but also in the Reformed tradition. Many of those men were giants. If I had to be a minister or a professor of theology or an editor of the *Standard Bearer* demanding of myself to measure up to their stature, why, that would destroy me. God doesn't demand that. They were giants, but even we dwarfs, standing on their shoulders, can sometimes see a little far-

ther than they could see. So, be yourselves with your own style, your own insights, and then there will be life in the magazine and further development.

Prof. Gritters: On behalf of the new editors and the staff, the whole denomination as well as all our faithful readers, we thank you for sixteen years of good work. Just those few words don't express what we feel but we are very grateful to God for you. 

Feature Article

Prof. Barry Gritters

“A Christian’s Self-Assessment”(2)

“Let your joy in God be stronger than your sadness in sin.”

(Luther, on Philippians 4)

“The highest and best part of a happy life consists in this, that God forgives a man’s guilt, and receives him graciously into his favour.” “The Holy Spirit has exhorted the faithful to continue clapping their hands for joy, until the advent of the promised Redeemer.”

(Calvin, on the Psalms)

Some unfaithful sons of the Reformation (preachers) have removed the ancient landmarks, so that their flocks wander about, doubtful of what is their spiritual heritage. As we saw in the last article (October 15, 2004), our heritage is the ancient confession of our natural spiritual depravity. Without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). Based on Scripture, the Reformed confessions put this testimony in the mouths of the church’s children, on account of which depravity we all “often sigh.” Though we are not

naturally (!) inclined to this confession, we make it anyway in obedience to the Scripture’s description of us. But many have lost this heritage.

Confessing our depravity, we reap the copious harvest of a proper humility in our lives together, a sense of our need to mortify our flesh, a healthy wariness of ourselves, and a humble trust alone in Christ for our salvation. Robbed of this proper assessment of myself, I will not live in humility, do not confess daily the source of my sinful deeds deep in my nature, neglect the painful work of mortifying the flesh “more and more,” and lose sight of the path to the cross.

When a Reformed Christian witnesses a denial of our present depravity, especially in the name of “helping the poor man have a little self-worth,” he weeps, because the results are quite the opposite. Rather than building him up in Christ, this new thinking builds him up *apart* from Christ. But when a man is driven to the bottom to see himself as he is, God’s mercy lifts his head up, to consider Jesus Christ and to find his “worth” in Christ. Strange con-

tradition. But not to one who knows Scripture: The last shall be first. To live you must die. To seek one’s life is to lose it, but to lose one’s life is to find it.

Then the Christian can live (and die) happily (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 2)! I am a happy Christian only when I live so. I am happy in my relationship to God. I am happy in my relationship with others. I am happy as I live with myself. I am happy under the blessing and favor of God, who makes the humble happy (see the Beatitudes). Contrary to the thinking of some, the confession of depravity—assessing myself properly—does not produce the fruit of a depressed, gloomy man. It creates a happy man, whose happiness is deep, solid, and lasting. A Reformed believer is a happy believer. Sorrowful (indeed, often), yet always rejoicing (II Cor. 6:10).



To our great dismay, we have found how shallow is the happiness that comes in other ways, especially the ways that take an end run around penitence.

To make that clear, I want to show more than what are the bit-

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ter fruits of refusing to confess the depravity of my nature. True, the believer must have vital interest in the danger of neglecting to come clean with regard to what his flesh really is. But I am interested in the danger a Reformed believer faces at this point when he maintains his Reformed theology intellectually, but denies it practically.

For the danger is very real that, unable to put a chink in the theological armor of the Reformed believer, the Adversary finds the opening where the theology must be *lived*. To confess the truth is one thing; to live it from the heart is quite another (“they confess me with the mouth, but their heart is far from me”; cf. Is. 29:13; Matt. 15:8). The great Adversary loves folk whose lives contradict their confession, who are “holy blasphemers” rather than “pious sinners” (to use the language of the colorful Reformer). Or who have not assimilated the lessons of James: “*Show me your faith.*”

Reformed Christians, heavily fortified against the theological denial of depravity, must pray for thick bulwarks *all* around the city. The way of salvation to which we have been chosen is belief of the truth; it is also a holy life (II Thess. 2:13).



Let me ask myself, in my relation to God, whether my daily happiness truly comes in the right way. The “right way” starts with a deep sorrow “towards God” and faith in Christ. Our gracious God then thoroughly cleanses our soul with the blood of His Son, delivering us from the excruciating misery and awful shame of sin. This is the joy and peace that surpass understanding. In this way, and no other way, we find what Luther calls the “joy in God” that is “stronger than our sadness in sin.” When he explained his 95 theses, Luther worked out the theology of Romans 5:1:

The confidence of Christians and the joyousness of our conscience

(are) that through faith our sins become, not ours, but Christ’s, upon whom God laid the sins of us all and who bore our sins.... All the righteousness of Christ, in turn, becomes ours. For He places His hand upon us, and it is well with us; He, the Savior, blessed forever, spreads His garment and covers us.

When I “own transgression,” then God forgives me (Ps. 32). Then the floodgates of God’s blessings open, and I am swept away in the consciousness of His love. Then I know myself to be chosen by God, precious to Him, purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. Then I experience the real beauty of being renewed by His regenerating Spirit, an heir of all things, and even holy with the goodness of His Spirit. But only when I confess transgression.

Is this the experience of the Reformed Christian? Do I stand in public, quietly thanking God that I am not like “those others.” Or am I on my knees, begging mercy? Do I trust in Jesus Christ for God’s approval of me, or in my own faith or holy life? Do I yearn for God’s “approval from on high” (Ps. 17), or do I love someone else’s judgment of me more? Those are the tests of an orthodoxy that is alive.

When we go off track here, the wheels come off quickly.

How does it go between me and my neighbor? Is the blessedness of our relationship that I, *in lowliness of mind*, esteem him better than myself (Phil. 2:3), because I truly understand myself? Is this the life of the communion of the saints for me: that in deep thankfulness to God for loving such a wretch as I am, I use my gifts for the advantage and salvation of others?

What a delightful life together (to say nothing of how God-honoring it is!) when this is the first battle we wage: to live so! What joy, when God

gives us such a good beginning, that others see us not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). What safety when such perfect love casts out fear of others (I John 4). What a delightful life among the brethren when the knowledge of God’s love for us proves itself in a charity that is not puffed up, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, believes all things, bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things (I Cor. 13:4-7).

And what relief for the poor, tired believer, who has spent his life trying to find significance in himself and in things, rather than in *Christ*. Then the rich man who has found his way to Christ (*remember: because he’s first traveled to the bottom*) can truly imagine driving to church in a rust-heap, wearing an old pilled suit, or go home to a crooked, leaking bungalow, without the means to improve it...and be happy. He’s learned to sing, “And, having thee, on earth is naught that I can yet desire.” Or, retaining his riches, he can come to church and honor the poor member whom he formerly despised as “lazy.” Then the educated man will lay aside his arrogance in his degreed erudition, and use his knowledge to bless the “least” of

*How blest is he whose trespass
Hath freely been forgiven,
Whose sin is wholly covered
Before the sight of heaven.
Blest he to whom Jehovah
Imputeth not his sin,
Who hath a guileless spirit,
Whose heart is true within.*

*While I kept guilty silence
My strength was spent with grief,
Thy hand was heavy on me,
My soul found no relief;
But when I owned my trespass,
My sin hid not from Thee,
When I confessed transgression,
Then Thou forgavest me.*

Psalter #83

Christ's brethren (Matt. 25:40). Then the capable athlete will not exalt himself over the klutz, the pretty girl will humbly love the Leahs among her peers, and the successful businessman will shed his corporate conceit for humble charity.

Why? Because they have all assessed themselves according to Scripture, found themselves "wanting," and fled *together* for shelter to the cross of the One "altogether lovely." Then our winters will be past, the rain over and gone, the

flowers will appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds will come, and the voice of the turtle will be heard in our land (see Song of Solomon 2:11-12).

What a faith is the Reformed faith! Lived! 

The Grass Withereth, the Flower Fadeth

Autumn

In some parts of England autumn is still called "fall." The common word used overseas for the waning part of the year is the familiar word "*autumn*," an expression derived from the French. But however widely this French word gained the field, the original word is by no means passed away, and in ordinary conversation one still uses the descriptive, significant word of "fall," precisely the same word that is used for the fall of Adam and Eve in paradise.

Autumn is the fall, the slow insinking of the season, the time of year of the failing series. Spring climbs and goes upward, in summer to reach its highest point; autumn, on the other hand, goes down to seek its lowest point in winter.

If winter is the delineation in nature which God gives of death and of the grave, autumn shows us on the part of God the languor of disease, which pulls down and consummates itself in dying.

This delineation of God in autumn images the decline of vital forces in the visible. "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (Ps. 103:15).

It images the decline of the spiritual life in the soul. "He shall be like a tree, whose leaf shall not wither. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away" (Ps. 1:3).

It images the decline of well-being and prosperity: "Ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth" (Is. 1:30).

Yea, it even images the decline that awaits all the glory of the world: "The heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their hosts shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine" (Is. 34:4).

And finally it is the image of the judgment that cometh: "I will surely consume them, saith the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, yea, the leaf is faded" (Jer. 8:13).

Though thus, with the exception of Jude, verse 12, the Scripture does not mention autumn by name, because in Israel the seasons were differently divided, yet Scripture knows well the nature-image which we call autumn, and de-

scribes it by like terms, as *the fall, falling, the falling off of the leaf.*



According to one's age, impression differs, which spring and autumn make upon us.

When we are young, for the language, for the speech of spring, we are all ear. We drink in with full draughts the fragrance of spring. We perceive how really, in spring alone, nature outside of us tunes in perfect accord with the speech of our own heart. Autumn, on the other hand, fills everyone who is not young with sadness. The appearance of autumn is not the expression of his life. He lives through the fall as a necessity from which there is no escape, but not as a pleasure. Because spring still sings in his own heart, autumn cannot accompany him in the song of his soul.

But when you are in the decline of your days, and your locks grow thin, even as the foliage of the oak, your impression is quite the opposite. Then spring still refreshes you, but more as a joy that has had its day, that comes upon you strangely, and you are in your element only when the leaves begin to turn yellow, presently to fall. Then autumn is to you the significant season of year, which agrees

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with your own life and condition. And more than from spring and summer, from autumn there goes out to you a language to which, of itself, the echo resounds in your own state of mind and heart.

Yea, as in autumn you see the fall before your eyes, so actually it happens in your own life.

You were child, and have been young: the summer of your life is come; and now you are getting old. Not at once, but imperceptibly and slowly. The eye sees no more so sharply, your movements are less quick and easy. You seek a place to sit down, where before, when you had to sit down, you longed to stand. The mind unfolds less luxuriantly. For what used to give you pleasure, you have no more taste. The blood once so young flows more calmly through the veins. You feel how the yellowing of the leaf in nature is the image of your own withering.

This continues till the wind lifts itself, and the autumn storm in accident or sickness drives through your branches. And then with you, too, falls the leaf, and the foliage begins to be transparent. And time and again it tells you that, from the period of decline, you have passed over into that of demolition.

Till finally the last autumn days come, which will presently lead you into the sleep of winter, those cold, anxious days, of which the preacher sang: "When the keepers of the house (i.e., the hands) shall tremble, and the strong men (i.e., the legs) shall bow themselves, and the grinders (i.e., the teeth) shall cease, and those that look out of the windows (i.e., the eyes) shall be darkened. When the doors shall be shut to the street (i.e., the ears), and you shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree (i.e., the gray head) shall blossom, and as a grasshopper you shall be a burden to yourself. For man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about in the streets" (Eccl. 12).

Then, when with you it comes to this, the autumn of your life runs to its close, that on your deathbed winter might come upon you.

Well for him who, by faith hidden in his Savior, knows that for him, after that winter, the spring dawns of the eternal morn.



Yet this end of the autumn is not all of it, and this season of year is also preceded by a period of transition, sometimes with a beauty of its own.

When the first autumn storms have spent their fury, there follow sometimes quiet, beautiful days, which affect you beneficently, and entice from you an utterance of admiration. Not least in our land this autumn loveliness comes out in its soft colors in a most charming manner, and not least from those autumn tints have our national painters borrowed their most fruitful impressions.

Spring and summer are at times highly colored even to weariness. The tints are few, the colors overwhelmingly many, often too brightly hued.

But in autumn it seems as though these high colors are dulled and changed into soft tints.

Thereby contrasts are less strong. Everything fuses more readily together. And of itself a wondrous harmony is born.

This is brought about in part by moisture in the air, which breaks the force of the light-beams, and in part it is the weaker life-force in nature itself, which makes it stand out less sharply defined.

And thereby God reconciles us to the loss of summer.

Extreme heat no longer oppresses us, and there is no cold as yet to drive us indoors.

Evenings are no longer very short, and yet not too long to be wearisome. Days begin to shorten, but not yet so short as to prevent going out.

So in every way autumn occupies a sort of middle ground, and

maintains a certain poise, a certain harmony, which puts you into a restful state of mind and relaxes you after the tension of the summer.

And not only that by so doing God reconciles you to the decline of the year, but that by this autumnal beauty He also reconciles you to the decline of your own days.

By autumn He shows how, even in later years, you still have a calling of your own, by your character, your disposition, your expression of life, to develop something in you, that thus far has remained hidden, to wit: the beauty of calm, of what is restful, of what is softly tinted. No more distraction but poise. As far as possible among men, completed harmony.

He who in old age is still irascible, is still driven by his passions, or shuns the middle way to walk in sidepaths on the outer edge, makes an unpleasant impression.

A soul, a human heart, a character, that in old age still exhibits a fiery temper, striking colors, wild tossings, and has not come to poise, provokes first your disgust, after that your anger, and finally your laughter.

Autumn rebukes such an one, and passes judgment upon his wasted opportunities of self-discipline.

Like autumn with its softened tints, so in your old age should be the tenor of your inner life.

If such be not the case with you, as man with a human heart you stand ashamed and confused before the face of nature.



Still a third mark of autumn is that of nobler, finer harvest.

Even the word *herfst* with us is derived from that third mark; for it is the same word as the English *harvest*.

Harvest is the gathering in of all ripe fruit; and in this general sense there is a harvest in every season of the year, winter alone excepted.

In spring, harvest of the first vegetables, early fruit, in part even grass, that shall turn into hay.

In summer, you continue the harvest of the grass, of green vegetables, to end it with the ingathering of the grains.

Thus harvest by itself is no distinguishing mark of autumn. On the contrary, as such it is common to spring, summer, and fall.

But the nobler mark of autumn is that then harvest is not gathered from the land, but from what grows on vines and branches; grapes and all sorts of fruit from trees.

As high as the tree top lifts itself above the ground in which it roots, so high in quality stands tree fruit about the fruit of the earth. In paradise, fruit of the tree was man's food.

This mark of autumn, too,

brings you in your older days an admonition of deep seriousness.

There must be fruit on you also in the decline of your days. Not purposeless must be the life of your old age, but a giving out of nobler and finer fruit of soul, of head and heart, than that wherewith thus far you had refreshed the members of your family, your environment, and your compatriots.

The time of spring greens is now past. Time also is gone when grain in full measures is carried away from your field.

Now your family, your associates and friends expect yet nobler, finer fruit.

The fruit of calm wisdom, the

fruit of quiet harmony, the fruit of purer love, the fruit of ripened faith, the fruit of unshakable hope.

There are old men and women of years who are still intent upon money, and with money are busy in their hidden thoughts; who, grumbling and peevish, are burdensome to all; and instead of being much to others, demand from others everything for themselves.

Oh, withered souls, when on your autumn dish you see the noble fruit of vine and peach tree as it were smile on you, by that bunch of grapes and by that noble peach, become at length wise.

Wise for yourselves, wise for your fellowmen, wise for your God! 

The Fundamental Work of the Deacons (5) Visiting and Comforting the Distressed

The fundamental work of the deacons is spiritual in nature.

One might not immediately come to this conclusion when he sees the deacons passing the collection plates, counting the money, and arranging for the payment of the church's bills.

Nevertheless, the fundamental work of the deacons is the work of caring for the poor of the church. This care of the poor involves giving material gifts for the relief of their poverty. But this care is not

simply external and material; it is fundamentally a spiritual care.

The spiritual nature of the work of the diaconate is most clearly manifest when the deacons attend to the work of visiting and comforting the distressed.



Deacons in Reformed churches are required to visit and comfort the distressed. Article 25 of the Church Order requires the deacons "to visit and comfort the distressed." Article 30 of the Belgic Confession gives as the reason why Christ instituted the office of deacon in the church, "that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities." And the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons asserts, on the basis of Romans 12

and 2 Corinthians 9, that the office of the deacons requires them "to assist the poor with compassion and hearty affection.... For which end it is very beneficial that they do not only administer relief to the poor and indigent with external gifts, but also with comfortable words from Scripture."

It is hard to imagine that any deacon in a Reformed church would be unaware of this spiritual aspect of his work. The confessions and liturgical formula are clear. Every deacon heard the Form of Ordination read at his installation. Even prior to his installation he must have read that form, for anyone who takes the office of deacon seriously would surely have studied what will be required of him after he takes his vows.

Scripture, although not stating

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in so many words that deacons must visit and comfort the distressed, does indicate that the work of the deacon is a spiritual work. Romans 12:8 refers to the deacon as “he that sheweth mercy.” This showing of mercy refers to aid given to the afflicted. But Scripture elsewhere indicates that mercy is especially the *spiritual* relief of a *spiritual* affliction. Remember that some cried to Jesus to show mercy, either to them or to one of their loved ones. We think, for example, of two blind men (Matt. 9:27 and Matt. 20:30), of the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:22), and of the father of a lunatic (Matt. 17:15). This cry for mercy was a cry for physical healing, and Jesus granted that healing in each instance. Yet, at the same time, He assured these people that their faith was genuine, and their sins were forgiven. By this, Jesus taught them that His mercy was shown even more by granting them salvation than by granting them bodily healing. This, then, is the mercy that the deacons must show, according to Romans 12:8.

Another passage of Scripture makes clear that the visiting of the distressed is the duty of all Christians. We read in James 1:27: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction....” This duty that God calls all Christians to perform, the deacons must perform officially on behalf of the church.



The visiting and comforting of the distressed by showing spiritual mercy manifests the particular love of Christ for His people in distress.

By such visits, Christ manifests His love for His people in distress, in a way that He does not and will not through any other means. The civil government and other organizations are also ready to dispense material aid to those in need. The poor can receive welfare; those affected by disasters can apply for grants and low-interest loans. Our

government will do everything in its power so that none of its citizens starve! But the assistance of the civil government is outward only. The government does not care about the *souls* of its people. In this respect, “the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel” (Prov. 12:10). And while other organizations might use means to convey the message of the gospel to those whom they assist, their aid still is not a manifestation of the mercies of Christ.

Some might question this statement, that the aid of such organizations does not manifest the mercies of Christ. They might point to the apparent love and faith of the founders and employees of these organizations. And they might remind us that God is able to accomplish His purpose through whatever means He chooses.

We do not argue these points. But they are beside the point, for we are speaking of the official means through which Christ manifests His mercies. The official means is that of the deacons in the instituted church. The first reason why other organizations that bestow aid cannot be rightly said to manifest Christ’s mercies is that they were not appointed by Christ to be the official agents to dispense His mercies. The deacons were so appointed, as Scripture shows in Acts 6. Second, the “gospel” of these organizations is usually unoffensive, pleasing to all, and therefore no gospel at all. Its message lacks the power unto salvation that the true gospel has. In contrast to such, the deacons come to the distressed in the name of Christ, and with the Word of Christ.

Furthermore, the deacons come to visit the distressed *personally*. Sometimes — I will not say always — other organizations present the gospel in a very impersonal way to those whom they help. They mail a check, or directly deposit money in their bank accounts. They give a tract or pamphlet, leaving it up to the recipient whether to read it or not. This is not wrong in itself —

pamphlets and tracts have their place as a method of doing evangelism work. But, in contrast to these methods, Jesus Christ always presents the gospel to His people personally. Through His Word and Spirit, Christ *personally* calls all who hear the gospel to faith and repentance; Christ *personally* works that faith and repentance in the hearts of His people; Christ *personally* brings into fellowship with Him those who believe and repent; and Christ *personally* judges those who do not believe and repent. Even while on earth Christ, showing true mercy for His people, laid His hands on the sick, visited sinners in their houses, and spoke to them the gospel of salvation.

So the church is called to bring the gospel personally to those who need to hear it. Whether by the pastor in the preaching or counseling, or by the elders in the family visits or work of discipline, or by the deacons in visiting the distressed, the gospel must be brought personally, face to face, in order to manifest the personal love of Christ for His distressed brothers and sisters. Say VanDellen and Monsma in this connection: “Our Diaconates ... must relieve want and distress, but not in a merely functional way, as the county or state would do, but with a heart of sympathy and love. And they must give not merely with a humanitarian sympathy and love, but with the sympathy and love of Christ Himself. This requires interest and a personal, warm touch which only a personal visit can convey.”¹



Emphatically, the performing of the spiritual nature of the deacons’ work requires a personal visit. A telephone call, or brief conversation when the deacon and distressed person happen to run into each other, is not sufficient. Preferably this visit must be in the home of the individual or family. If it cannot be in that home, it should be in some other private location.

This visit must be a visit, in the deepest significance of the term.

It is not merely a social visit. Perhaps at some point during this visit, the subject of conversation may include things mundane and earthly, but the purpose of the visit is spiritual, and this purpose must be reflected in the conversation of the evening.

The word “visit” in Scripture means to attend to, look after, or care for. This meaning is common both to the Hebrew Old Testament word translated “visit” and to the Greek New Testament word. God visits the wicked by noting their sin and punishing them for it (Ps. 59:5; Luke 19:44); but He also visits His people in love, by seeing them in their misery and delivering them from it. The psalmist prayed in Psalm 106:4: “O visit me with thy salvation.” And Zacharias glorified God with these words: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people” (Luke 1:68). Notice — visited *and redeemed*; in other words, God’s visit to His people was not a mere social visit, but a visit to inspect the church’s welfare and to care for her needs.

This kind of visit the deacons are required to pay to the distressed. The deacons must come to the distressed to inquire into their needs, and show compassion by being ready to care for those needs.

Particularly, the deacons must bear in mind that the greatest need of the distressed is to hear an appropriate Scripture passage applied to their situation. The deacons, in bringing material gifts, understand “that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live” (Deut. 8:3).

In addition to the supplying of their earthly needs, the poor and afflicted may need to hear a Scripture passage that teaches them contentment with their lot in life; or that encourages them in their hope for heaven; or that reminds them that God’s grace is not manifest in

things, or in the abundance of things, but that His grace is shown spiritually by giving them all blessings in Christ. P. Y. DeJong writes, in his book *The Ministry of Mercy for Today*, “The only solution to the deep-seated and radical evil which has occasioned the problems of poverty and distress lies in the gospel of Christ. It provides the antidote to the spirit of dissatisfaction, ingratitude, and rebellion to which the poor may easily fall prey. Poverty creates a myriad of problems which can be successfully faced and overcome only in the light of the gospel.”² In another place, De Jong devotes several pages to setting forth the principles that the deacon must bear in mind as he makes these visits, as well as listing many Scripture passages that deacons might profitably use at such visits.³

Furthermore, at such a visit, prayer is of primary importance. The needs of the family must be brought to God in prayer. The family must be committed to God, whose love for His people and whose sovereign control of all history will surely be manifest in caring for this family. In this prayer the deacon should pray for grace to use the church’s gifts rightly; he may petition God to forgive the sins and trespasses of the family, relating to their stewardship; and he must pray in the confidence that God, for Christ’s sake, will certainly hear and answer the prayer.



This aspect of the work will not always be easy. Some in the church might not care for these visits; they might prefer the deacons to give them their money, and leave them alone. Others will resist the gospel and its commands that the deacons bring. Such people will make this aspect of the work difficult.

On account of this, it is possible that a deacon will find this aspect of the work very frustrating. But if he does, he should first examine

himself, and his own relationship to God. He should examine whether his love for the people of God is genuine, and his compassion for them in their distress is heartfelt. He should examine whether he loves God above all, and manifests that love in all his life. He should examine whether he is the kind of man he is supposed to be — that is, a spiritually minded, godly, blameless man (I Tim. 3:8-13). He should examine whether he knows his Bible well enough. He should examine whether he is comfortable praying to his God. He should examine whether spiritual conversations make him feel uncomfortable. He should examine whether he is confident that God will equip him for every aspect of his work. And if he finds deficiency in any of these areas, he should pray earnestly to God for grace to grow, and then go forward and do his work as deacon well.

The deacon who goes on such visits in the confidence that he comes as the agent of Christ to show mercy to the distressed will certainly find this aspect of his work the most rewarding. It will enrich him personally. It will cause him to grow spiritually. And the time spent with the humble saints of God who know their need for Christ’s mercy and readily receive the deacons as Christ’s servants will be positively enjoyable.

Because of the importance of this aspect of the deacons’ work, the church must see to it that her deacons are capable of performing it. When nominations are made for this office, the council must face the question whether the men nominated are truly able, in the judg-

1. Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1941), page 117.

2. Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1952), page 149.

3. *Ibid.*, pages 176-182.

ment of the council, to do this aspect of the work.

If the following statement by Prof. Heyns is true, the state of the church is sad indeed. Regarding the requirement that deacons comfort the afflicted with Scripture, he says: "Even Consistories are little impressed with its importance. When nominations are made for the appointment of Deacons, different qualities are taken into consideration, especially whether the person

under consideration is acquainted with the administration of funds, but whether he is a man of a sympathetic disposition and has the gift of consolation is usually passed by as if it were of no account."⁴

Sad, indeed. And it might be true. I'm sure it is, in many churches.

But it need not be true! And in a faithful Reformed church, it should not be true! I pray that in our churches, it is not true. And if

it has been true in the past that members of Protestant Reformed Churches desire their deacons to be merely financial administrators, I pray God will use these articles to show us that, above all, we need deacons who are godly, compassionate men, who will visit and comfort the distressed. 

4. Prof. William Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1928), pages 333-334.

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ The Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod

In 1976 there was a large exodus from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS). About 300 congregations and 110,000 people left the LCMS. At the time, the claim was made that here was one instance where a denomination reformed by disciplining leaders who had adopted a liberal position contrary to the confessional stand of the LCMS. Those who left formed a new and more liberal denomination called the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC). Those interested can read more of the history on its Web Site (ELCA.org). As a general rule, when denominations depart from their earlier basis, the faithful are forced to leave. In this instance, the liberals (termed: "moderates") left to form another denomination. Those of the ELC eventually joined with several other Lutheran denominations.

But sadly, after some 28 years it has become increasingly clear that the liberal element (again called the "moderates") have taken over from the "conservatives." *World* magazine, July 31, 2004, presents this report:

This month conservatives in the dissension-racked Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod barely missed ousting Gerald Kieschnick, 61, from the denomination's leadership. The vote at the triennial meeting of the 2.6-million-member denomination was 52.8 percent for President Kieschnick's reelection and 47.2 percent for four other candidates. (The three most conservative candidates split 46.5 percent of the vote.)

Kieschnick opponents have worked for a change ever since he approved the participation of Rev. David Benke, the church's Atlantic District president, in a civic interfaith rally. The rally was held at Yankee Stadium 12 days following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. Rev. Benke offered a short prayer there. The critics said his involvement showed syncretism (worshipping the true God along with the gods of other religions) and unionism (formal fellowship with other denominations).

The LCMS officially opposes both. One leader, Wallace Schulz, lost his job as a speaker of *The Lutheran Hour* for trying, in his role as a synod vice president, to enforce the denomination's stated position on the matter. The dispute has been doctrinal and emotional: "The dislike, I've never seen it worse," LCMS pastor Greg Smith of St. Louis told reporters.

Overall, the LCMS is largely a conservative denomination, with both sides affirming commitment

to the inerrancy of Scripture, justification by faith alone, and other biblical essentials. But some LCMS leaders want to make the denomination more like mainstream evangelicalism, and a few want to ordain women. The LCMS is known for practicing closed communion and liturgical worship; Kieschnick supporters often see both denominational teachings as obstacles to church growth.

The article points out other decisions taken by the LCMS. Guidelines were adopted to guide ministers who would participate in prayers with other Christian and non-Christians. They adopted a dispute-resolution process "that allows for only the denominational president and district presidents to file disciplinary charges."

The article concludes:

In other business, the delegates voted 1,163-22 to affirm marriage as "the lifelong union of one man and one woman." They also affirmed the biblical account of creation and said the church would not "tolerate" the teaching of evolution as the explanation for the origins of the universe (as seems to be the case in some LCMS classrooms).

The LCMS continues to struggle with finances....

...Some LCMS congregations already show their opposition to denominational trends by not giving to the synod. Their number is likely

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to swell as others dismayed by the convention actions follow suit. A split remains a real possibility.

The trend within the various denominations is toward increased modernism and liberalism. As the end of time rapidly approaches, doubtlessly this will become increasingly evident. Only by God's grace will His people remain steadfast to the end.

■ "Universal salvation?"

Such is the headline in the religious section of the *Grand Rapids Press*, September 26, 2004. The headline added: "Christian leaders sound off on interfaith concerns."

There is heard increasingly the claim that all religions somehow lead eventually to salvation and heavenly glory after death. Some have insisted that Christianity may be the best way to salvation—but not the only way. One was quoted in the *GR Press*, "We're all in different stages of a journey, and none of us knows the dividing line between the saved stages and the not-saved stages." These conclusions must follow from the teaching that man can save himself in part through his works.

The article states:

The heaven issue was among the topics raised during a panel discussion involving pastors from six denominations.

A group of six Christian pastors would tell their parishioners that devoted followers of other faiths will be saved by God, or at least have hope for heaven. But some of them also feel tension about how the Bible seems to limit salvation to disciples of Jesus.

Pastors from three branches of Christianity gathered Tuesday to grapple with interfaith issues in a discussion sponsored by Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism.

"We see clearly (in Scripture) overwhelming evidence of God, through Jesus, initiating a plan for universal salvation," said the Rev. Tom Bolster, pastor of St James Roman Catholic Church. That

harvest includes Buddhists, Muslims and others who emit the "spark of the divine" by living in good conscience and looking out for their neighbors, he said.

"That's something we respect, regardless of one's baptismal character."

Catholic, Methodist and Christian Reformed pastors responded to hypothetical scenarios regarding salvation, interfaith prayer and the involvement of non-Christians in church activities.

About three dozen observers then met in small groups to talk through the issues.

Panelists across the board were willing to let a Hindu sing in the church choir but were less receptive to having that person lead a youth group.

They also agreed that interfaith prayer was permissible, especially in response to a national tragedy such as the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks....

...The Rev. Morris Greidanus, former pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, said the "tension is real" regarding biblical passages that describe heaven as a paradise for all God's children and a reward only for those who follow Jesus.

But Greidanus said (the) apostle Paul "bent over backwards to extend a hand of welcome" to non-Christians, noting, "All of us are on a search for God."

...The Rev. Tom DeYoung, pastor of the Basilica at St. Adalbert, echoed his Catholic colleague by suggesting God will save "anonymous Christians" who model their lives after Jesus without knowing it.

The Rev. Eleazar Merriweather, pastor of St. Luke African Methodist Episcopal Zion, said Christians should be wary of viewing God as their own exclusive deity the way ancient Israelites did.

"I don't think I can be exclusive of the rest of the world because they have not had the same (Christian) experience I've had," he said. "The bottom line of what we believe is essentially the same.

"Who knows how long the arms of grace will reach?"

One would conclude that it is disappointing, discouraging, but

not unexpected to hear these conclusions. First, such conclusions follow out of a denial of the infallible Scriptures. How else would one dare to say "Christians should be wary of viewing God as their own exclusive deity the way ancient Israelites did"? It was exactly the sin of Israel that they too often did *not* view God as their own exclusive deity when they followed after the gods of the heathen about them. For this God judged and punished them. How dare one make these claims when Jesus Himself said, "No man can come to the Father but by Me." Did He not also say, "I am the Way, the truth, and the life"? He testified also, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Many other similar statements Jesus made.

Secondly, the conclusions follow inevitably from the denial of justification by faith alone. If one is justified by faith in Christ and works performed by himself (by grace, it is said), then what prevents one from concluding that others, even of different religions, can perform the works necessary to salvation also? Indeed, the Roman Catholics quoted above conclude that very thing. The question at the top of the article: "Universal salvation?" would have to be answered ultimately: "Yes, if salvation is in part or the whole dependent upon the works of man." Then, of course, one would have to define those "works" not as does Scripture, but according to the standard of man himself.

■ Today's Morality

What is the basis of morality in our day? In fact, what is the morality of this generation? These interesting questions are answered in part by John Leo (Universal Press Syndicate) in the *Grand Rapids Press*. He reflects on a book by Thomas Frank, "What's the Mat-

ter With Kansas?” Frank’s complaint was that “Kansas” voted largely on the basis of social issues, while Frank believed they should be voting on their economic plight. Leo writes:

But “the hicks” had a point: Alleged art that traduces religion was now supported and often funded by the same sensitive people who quickly took down or painted over works of art that offended the sensibilities of blacks, American Indians or women. A new value system was descending on the culture. And under that system, not only were prayers disappearing from the schools (a good idea, in my opinion), but student valedictory speeches that included a line of praise for God were being censored, and small schoolchildren, asked to draw a picture of anyone they admired, were being reprimanded if they drew Jesus.

The impact of this cultural shift was profound. John O’Sullivan,

an exceptional commentator on the culture, wrote that one morality was being replaced by another, though most of us were only dimly aware of it as it occurred. None of this was voted on or directly approved by the people (an indicator of how other dramatic change would arrive). What appeared to be a countercultural upsurge mostly confined to sex spread out to cover family, work, public affairs, welfare policies, crime, and almost the whole range of human experience.

O’Sullivan describes the combat between new vs. traditional (get ready for two laundry lists here): “Traditional morality was religious, duty-based, rooted in individual responsibility, governed by objective rules, self-controlled, ascetic, guilt-forgiving, repentant, hierarchical, patriotic and stern. The new morality was secular, rights-based, rooted in social causes, governed by subjective interpretation, self-asserting, hedonistic, guilt-denying, therapeutic, egalitarian, Universalist and indulgent.”

The new morality has mostly

carried the day, taking over the bureaucracies, the schools, the universities, the big-time media, most legal judgment, Hollywood, and the leadership of the Democratic Party. Traditional morality still holds sway in most of the churches, small-town media, the working class, talk radio, police and firefighters, and much of the Republican Party.

Leo makes some very relevant conclusions concerning the state of morality in our land. It can only become worse. Sadly, many of the churches today also seem to favor this “new morality” and are willing to ignore the teaching of Scripture on important issues: on homosexuality, women in church office, abortion, gambling, etc. We ought to be very aware of these developments. The threat not only to us, but also especially to our children, ought to be clear. It is another sign of the soon return of our Lord from heaven. 

In His Fear

Rev. Garrett Eriks

Making Decisions According to God’s Will (1)

During the course of our lives each one of us must make many important, agonizing decisions. We have important decisions to make every day. Parents must decide how to rear their covenant children. They decide where to send their children to school. Parents form rules for their home, decide how to enforce those rules, and determine the consequences for disobedience. A husband and wife make daily decisions

about how they will treat each other. The man on the job makes daily decisions about how he will do his work. When he has a bad day at work, or the mother has a stressful day at home, they decide how they will respond. We make decisions about when to eat and what to eat. When planning a vacation, we make decisions about where we will go and what we will do. If we are away from home over a Sunday, a decision must be made about what to do on the Sabbath. There are decisions to make concerning what we do in our recreation and leisure time. When sickness comes, we must de-

cide what treatment to receive. These are just a few examples of the many decisions we must make in our daily lives.

Young people and young adults especially have important, agonizing decisions to make. They must decide, by making confession of faith, of what church they will be confessing members. Weighty decisions about a vocation and marriage are often constantly on the minds of young people.

In Scripture it is evident that God’s people have many decisions to make. Consider David. When he was fleeing from Saul, David

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had to decide where he would go. There were times he made the wrong decision. After receiving bread from the table of showbread and the sword of Goliath in Nob, David fled to Achish, the king of Gath. This was a wrong decision because he left the land of promise, the land of Canaan. He did not trust Jehovah to protect him from Saul in the land of Israel. He made the wrong decision to stay home from battle and then to commit adultery with Bathsheba. But at other times in his life, David made good and right decisions.

How are we to make these decisions? This is the question we face in all the decisions we make. It is certainly true that God has determined all things in His eternal, sovereign counsel. God governs all things that happen in the world and in our lives according to that counsel. But this does not mean the decisions we make are irrelevant. Before God we are responsible for all our decisions. Although we do not know what God has determined eternally for us until it happens, we do have the written will of God for how we are to live. Our decisions must be made according to God's written will. Psalm 119:105 makes clear that God's Word is our guide in making the many decisions we face in life: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."



When Scripture speaks of God's will, it speaks of two different aspects: the will of God's decree and the will of God's precepts. The decretive will of God is the eternal counsel of God by which He sovereignly determines all things that happen in creation and in our lives. Ephesians 1:11 says, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." God's sovereign will is so exhaustive and comprehensive that not even the

smallest details of the creation and our lives are outside of His decree. In the Rocky Mountains, God determines where each one of the millions of trees grows and which one dies. He determines where every drop of rain falls and where each falling leaf lands. So also God certainly determines everything that happens in our lives. God determines whom He will save. He also determines every event in life that works for the salvation of His people (Rom. 8:28).

Everything God determines in His eternal counsel comes to pass. Man cannot alter or change the will of God by the choices he makes. Never can a man be outside what God determines for him. Whatever a man chooses to do is the will of God's decree. There are those who think they can trick God by making a choice different from what God decreed. This is impossible. God decrees all things that happen in the world.

Living our lives in this world is like finding our way through a maze. We don't know what is around the corner. The future is something we don't know because it is not revealed to us. What we find around the corner in life can be so completely unexpected. Suddenly the job that provided for the needs of the family and the church is taken away. The health we took for granted is replaced by sickness. The death of a family member takes us by surprise. In all these things we have the comfort that God sovereignly determines them for our salvation. What a comfort God gives to us in our sorrows and afflictions. God comforts us with the words of Psalm 73:24, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

Yet, we have decisions to make. In life we must not sit back saying fatalistically, "Whatever happens, happens. I cannot do anything about it anyway." At different junctures in our lives, we have important decisions to make. When we are faced with decisions, whether great or small, we ask, "What is

God's will? Do I go this way or that way?" In the way of making a decision we find out what God's will is for us. God has determined the whole of our lives, and He so guides the decision making process that His will is done. However, when we make these decisions we are answerable to God for the decisions we make. We are responsible to God. Because we are responsible before God's face for the decisions we make, it is vital that we make good and right decisions. This is where the will of God's precept or command comes in.

The will of God's command is the rule of what man must do. This is the will of God that He gives so that we know how to live our lives in obedience to Him. Of this will of God we read in Psalm 40:8, which says, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." In the New Testament, Ephesians 6:6 speaks of this aspect of God's will: "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." This is the will of God revealed clearly in Holy Scripture. All God's people know this will of God's precept because they have God's law within their hearts. The confession of the Psalmist in Psalm 40:8 must be the confession of all God's children.

Just as the will of God's decree is sovereign, so also the will of God's precept is sovereign for us. This means that as the Lord of His kingdom, God alone has the right to determine how the citizens of His kingdom must live. All citizens of the kingdom have the calling to live their lives in obedience to the revealed will of God. Therefore, our decisions in life must be made according to the will of God's precept. This is vital! It is certainly true that many of the decisions we make do not come down to two choices, one of which is right and one of which is wrong according to God's Word. Sometimes God's Word does not determine between the two choices we have to make. However, the Word

of God governs all of our decisions. God speaks to us in His Word. In prayer we ask God, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" The answer is not written across the sky. The answer is not whispered in our ear in the secret chamber of prayer. We are called to study prayerfully the Word of God. In all our decisions we must be sure to do what God calls us to do. We must be sure that our decisions do not oppose the revealed will of God in Holy Scripture.



Before we consider the use of God's Word in regard to the decisions we must make, we should first consider the right focus and attitude in our decisions. Considering the will of God in our decisions places our focus on the One who must be the focus of our whole lives: God. What motivates you in the decisions you have to make? Do you consider first what is best for *you*? Is your focus what *you* want to do? This is wrong! This is the humanistic thinking of the world today. The wicked world makes decisions based on their selfish motives. They have no desire to serve God. They want to please only themselves. We must guard ourselves from such thinking.

Our focus and attitude must be that which is expressed in Psalm 40:8, "I delight to do thy will, O my God...." It must be the focus of the end of Ephesians 6:6, "as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." Is your desire, in *all* of life, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" This must be the desire of parents in the training of their children. This must be the desire of husbands and wives in marriage. This must be the desire of young people as they choose a vocation and look for a godly spouse.

We desire to do the will of God because we love God more than anything else in the world. God demands this love from us in the Ten Commandments and in the whole of His Word. We are to love Him with all our heart and soul

and mind and strength. The child of God is governed by this law of love in all of life. This must be the constant desire of the child of God in all the decisions that he must make. Is this true of you?

The fundamental truth behind this calling is the purpose of God in creating and saving us. God has created and saved us to glorify Himself. The purpose of God in our salvation is not that we enjoy salvation. Certainly those who are saved enjoy the blessings of salvation in Jesus Christ. But God saves to glorify Himself in the way of our loving Him and living a holy life to Him. Ephesians 1:4 speaks of the purpose of God in electing the church: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." The purpose of God in election is that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. This is the purpose of God in salvation so that God is glorified in our salvation.

Doing God's will begins with remembering who God is and what He has done for us. Remember what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Jehovah God sent the Son of His love to suffer and die on the cross in the place of His people. Not only did He bear the brunt of wicked man's hatred, but also He bore the fullness of God's wrath for all the sins of His people. This is the unspeakable gift of our salvation.

Remember what God has done for us through the working of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit assures us that Jesus Christ died for all our sins on the cross. The Spirit opens our eyes so that we personally know Jesus Christ and the benefits of His work on the cross. The ability to seek God's will and to do God's will is, then, all God's work in us through the Spirit. Philippians 2:13 says, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

As those saved by grace, we must do the will of God!



Making decisions according to God's will requires that we trust Him to lead us rightly. If we trust in ourselves to make the right decisions, we will always make wrong decisions. Proverbs 3:5, 6 instructs us, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." To lean upon our own understanding is foolish because our own understanding is defiled with sin. Proverbs 28:26 makes clear that those who trust in their own hearts are fools. We can, of ourselves, choose only the way of sin. Instead, we must rely completely on our sovereign God. We must trust that He will guide us through life. We must trust that in the decisions we make God will guide us to do what is right in the way of seeking Him.

The child of God who trusts in God to lead him casts his burdens upon God often in prayer (I Pet. 5:6, 7). Prayer is a vital aspect of how we come to know God's will for us. When we face a difficult decision, we must first pray that God will make known to us clearly what His will is for us. We must constantly cast our burdens upon Him, for God demands that we ask and seek and knock repeatedly.

In the way of praying, God answers us. How does He answer those prayers? Does He whisper it in our ears? Does He write the answer in the night sky with the stars? Will He perform some miracle to show us the right way? No! He makes known His will for our lives in the way of studying His Word. The correct way of making right decisions before God is to pray and to study Holy Scripture. This is the God-ordained way of making decisions. We must go to God's Word and ask, "What does God have to say about this situation, this decision?" We will consider this more fully next time, the Lord willing. 

Minister Activities

At a congregational meeting on Sunday, October 3, the members of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI extended a call to Rev. R. Cammenga to become their next pastor.

From a trio of the Revs. A. Brummel, J. Mahtani, and J. Slopsema, the congregation of First PRC of Edmonton, Alberta, CN extended a call to Rev. A. Brummel to serve as their next pastor.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI sponsored a lecture on September 30. Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, spoke on the theme "The Christian: A Country's Best Citizen."

Sunday evening, September 19, Rev. M. Dick, pastor of Grace PRC in Standale, MI, preached a special sermon from Isaiah 60:1-3 to guide his congregation into the truth of God's Word concerning their calling to witness, even to rise and shine as those upon whom the glory of the Lord has risen. This sermon was preached, in part, to encourage Grace to consider prayerfully their calling to witness and to invite others to come to a speech that Rev. Dick gave on the following Friday, September 24, at Grace PRC. Grace had its first Evangelism Day that Friday, and it was very profitable. There was a good turnout, and some visiting families. Rev. Dick led the church in a discussion of the subject of "The Big God," knowing that every day is a blessed opportunity to witness. The congregation at Grace looks forward to more special opportunities like this.

The Reformed World and Life View Conference sponsored by the Christian Fellowship Society of the

Hull, Iowa PRC was held September 14 and 15. On Friday evening, September 24, Prof. D. Engelsma gave a lecture on the topic "Reformed Worldview of Particular Grace" at the BJ Horn Auditorium at Dordt College. This was followed Saturday morning, September 25, with activities at Hull PRC. Beginning at 9:30 A.M. Dr. Syd Hielema, Professor of Theology at Dordt College, gave a lecture on their worldview. Prof. Engelsma then spoke on the topic "Flawed and Fatal Worldview of Common Grace," and at 1:00 P.M. there was a symposium/debate, with Prof. Engelsma and Dr. Hielema.

Denomination Activities

On September 21 the League of PR Adult Bible Study Societies held its annual Mass Meeting at Grace PRC in Standale, MI. Rev. W. Langerak, pastor of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI spoke on "Bible Study in an Age of Apostasy: Lessons from Three Theologians."

The annual meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association was held September 23 at the Grandville, MI PRC. Prof. D. Engelsma, past editor of the *Standard Bearer*, addressed the association on "Reflections on that Rare Creature: Editor of the *Standard Bearer*." Not only did this prove to be an interesting message, but it also gave RFPA members an opportunity to thank and congratulate Prof. Engelsma for his many years of faithful work as editor of this magazine.

Members of the Ladies Circle of the Doon, IA PRC invited the women from neighboring Hull, IA and Edgerton, MN PRCs to join them on October 1 for a Fall Noon Luncheon in their church basement.

Congregation Activities

On the evening of September 22 members of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI enjoyed their an-

nual Fall Fellowship Supper. Their pastor, Rev. J. Slopsema, closed the evening with a short devotional centering on the need of each member to be faithful in Bible studies this year. Many at First live a distance from each other and often do not visit in each other's homes, so these times of fellowship around God's Word in Bible study are especially valuable.

This fall's latest meeting of the "Men's Book Reading" took place at Bethel PRC September 25. Their pastor, Rev. C. Haak, led the men in a discussion of the book "Shepherding a Child's Heart," by Tedd Tripp.

Rev. C. Haak preached his farewell sermon to the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL on Sunday evening, September 26. Rev. Haak chose for his text Deuteronomy 33:27a and preached on the theme, "Underneath Are the Everlasting Arms."

Young People's Activities

The Young People's group of our Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, CN continues to experience numerical growth. A recent bulletin from Immanuel indicated that their numbers had increased to such a size that it was now impossible for them to continue to meet in many of the homes of church members. Church members were asked to sign up if they thought they had enough room.

The young people of First PRC in Holland, MI planned a camping/canoeing retreat for Friday and Saturday, October 1 and 2, at White River Campground in Montague, MI. If some members could not make the camping on Friday night they were encouraged to join in the canoeing part of the weekend on Saturday morning.

The Young People's Societies of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, the host society for next summer's young people's convention, sponsored a Hayride/Hymn Sing/Bonfire on Saturday, September 25 at the farm

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

of one of the Faith families. Desert and beverages were provided. A donation box was also available, to help with efforts for the 2005 convention.

Mission Activities

Our churches' missionary to the eastern United States, Rev. J. Mahtani, along with Mr. Ron Bauman, a member of the Pittsburgh Fellowship, drove to Allen-

town, PA on September 24. Our missionary led a Bible study that evening, conducted house visits on Saturday, and preached for the saints in Allentown on Sunday.

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathies to Mr. and Mrs. Henry VanMaanen in the death of Jacques's father,

MR. JACK VAN LEEUWEN.

May their comfort come from God's Word in Isaiah 26:1, 4, "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.... Trust in the Lord forever; for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength."

Rev. Steven Key, president
Mr. Alvin Bylsma, clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to fellow members Harlow and Judy Kuiper, Matthew Kuiper, and Joel and Kelly Dykstra and their children in the passing away of their mother and grandmother,

MRS. ANNE DE BEER.

May they find comfort in the words of Psalm 73:23, 24: Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

Rev. William Langerak, Pres.
Tim Pipe, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

The 11th of November marks 35 years of marriage for our parents,

HENRY and SHIRLEY BERGMAN.

Praise be to our heavenly Father who deals mercifully with us and our children. "He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations" (Psalm 104:8).

- ❖ Randy and Barb Moorman
Stephanie, Matt, Jon, Nate
- ❖ Tom and Mindy Bergman
Jack
- ❖ Julie Bergman
- ❖ Dan Bergman

Hudsonville, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathies to Mrs. Marie Brummel in the death of her sister,

MRS. EILEEN ANEMA.

May her comfort come from God's Word in Psalm 62:1, 2, "Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved."

Rev. Steven Key, president
Mr. Alvin Bylsma, clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The congregation and consistory of Edgerton PRC express their sympathy to Al and Sharon Brummel in the death of Sharon's mother,

MRS. CORNELIA KUIPER,

who was recently taken to glory. May God be their strength and comfort in this loss. "My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:2).

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, President
Glenn Gunnink, Vice-all

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to fellow members Rev. Peter and Pauline Breen and Jim and Beth Koerner in the passing away of their brother and uncle,

MR. DORIS STEGENGA.

Psalm 73:26, "My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

Rev. William Langerak, Pres.
Tim Pipe, Clerk

Marriage — God's Institution

The Bible's Teaching on Marriage

Rev. R. Cammenga

Marriage and the Culture of Divorce

Rev. K. Koole

Marriage and Homosexual Union

Rev. C. Terpstra

and sermon by Prof. Engelsma:

The Vile Sin of Homosexuality

Now available, video and audio (\$12.00/set),
from Southwest PRC Evangelism Committee
4875 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418;
tel: (616) 532-6876; e-mail: dlschip@altelco.net.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope PRC (Walker) extends Christian sympathy to fellow members: son, Clare Kuiper; son-in-law, Rich Peterson; brothers-in-law, Rich Bloem and Peter Petroelje in the death of

MRS. JACOB KUIPER.

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

John Buiten, president
Tom Oosterhouse, secretary

NOTICE!!

With thanks to God, the council and congregation of First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids expresses its gratitude to our pastor, Rev. James Slopsema, for thirty years of faithful ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. "And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:15).

Dan Pastoor, Vice-President
Ron DeVries, Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for February

Date	Topic	Text
November 7	"Flee the Everlasting Fire!"	Revelation 14:11
November 14	"Who Is Going to Hell?"	II Thessalonians 1:8
November 21	"Repent and Believe!"	Acts 11:18
November 28	"Knowing Whom We Believe: Jesus"	Matthew 1:21