



The Standard Bearer

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

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Timothy's Unfeigned Faith

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

II Timothy 1:5

These words of the apostle Paul were penned to his beloved Timothy.

Paul is in prison in Rome awaiting death for the gospel's sake. He sends this final letter to Timothy, instructing him in his work as minister of the church in Ephesus and summoning Timothy to come to him in Rome.

Paul begins this epistle by assuring Timothy that he remembers Timothy in his prayers day and night. This reminder of Timothy stirs up Paul's desire to see him. Then Paul elaborates on his memory of Timothy. He remembers Timothy's tears, evidently tears shed the last time they parted from each other. And Paul remembers Timothy's unfeigned faith, a

faith which was first in his grandmother Lois, and then in his mother Eunice. Evidently something happened in Rome to remind Paul of Timothy's faith.

Every covenant parent earnestly desires that his children show the unfeigned faith of Timothy.

Interestingly, the faith found in Timothy was first found in his grandmother and mother. This is no coincidence but reflects the pattern of God's work of salvation in His covenant. It also reflects the faithful labors of a godly grandmother and mother to instruct young Timothy.

When godly parents provide the same instruction to their children and grandchildren, they can expect the same results.

We first come to know of Timothy on Paul's second missionary journey.

Timothy was the son of a Gentile father and a Jewish mother

named Eunice. Timothy was probably converted to Jesus Christ under Paul's ministry, for the apostle refers to Timothy as his "beloved son and faithful in the Lord" (I Cor. 4:17) and his "own son in the faith" (I Tim. 1:2). This conversion probably took place on Paul's first missionary journey as he labored in Lystra or Iconium. Timothy was held in high regard by the churches of these two cities, who then recommended Timothy to Paul.

Timothy became Paul's friend and chief associate. Timothy played a prominent role in Paul's missionary journeys. He was present more than once as Paul composed his epistles to various churches and is mentioned no fewer than six times as joint sender of these epistles. Timothy also was a companion of Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome.

In keeping with all this Paul now speaks of Timothy's faith.

True faith is both knowledge and confidence.

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Faith is knowledge of God as He has revealed Himself in His Word. This knowledge is first an intellectual understanding of what God has revealed and a hearty consent to its truth. But faith is more than head knowledge; it is a knowledge of the heart. It is an intimate knowledge of love whereby one comes to know God as the God of his salvation in Jesus Christ, embraces this God and His salvation, loves this God, desires to serve Him in gratitude, and is deeply grieved when in weakness he fails.

Faith is also confidence in God. Faith leads one to rely upon God for all things and to rely upon what God has accomplished through Jesus Christ on the cross. One who lives in faith relies upon the cross for his righteousness before God, for the power to overcome sin, for the power to be obedient, for comfort in time of sorrow, for peace in time of upheaval....

This faith Timothy had.

Paul speaks of an unfeigned faith. Unfeigned means not fake, not pretend, not hypocritical, and therefore genuine, sincere. Paul uses this negative term, "unfeigned," to suggest that there were many in the church whose faith was feigned or fake. For various ulterior motives they put on a show of faith and joined themselves to the church. Perhaps they did this for business reasons, perhaps for the praise of men, perhaps for acceptance, or even for marriage. Most often a feigned faith is exposed. This is true especially when the way of faith requires sacrifice or brings persecution or when one no longer derives the "benefits" he sought by pretending faith. Then one whose faith is feigned will quickly abandon his "faith." There was evidently a great deal of that in the early church, just as there is in the church today.

Paul was persuaded that Timothy's faith was unfeigned.

Paul had known Timothy, worked with him, and observed

him for a number of years. During the course of time Paul had become persuaded that Timothy's faith was unfeigned, not fake, but genuine. This was no doubt evident to Paul in a number of ways. There was Timothy's faithfulness to the gospel, when so many had departed. There was Timothy's willingness to suffer for Christ's sake. There was Timothy's loyalty to Paul, even in prison. This did not mean that Timothy was without fault. Paul's instruction to him indicates that he was often fearful. He was too timid. He also struggled with youthful lusts. Nevertheless, Timothy had proven himself by his devotion to the Lord and perseverance in that devotion to be a man of faith.

It should be the prayer of every covenant parent that his children have and show the faith of Timothy.

Paul indicates that the same faith that Timothy had first dwelt in his grandmother, Lois, and then in his mother, Eunice.

This faith was initially the faith of the Old Testament saints. In the Old Testament the saints knew God from the Old Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament Scriptures pointed them forward to the time when the great Savior of God would come to secure their salvation and give to them the fullness of salvation, which they then had only in part. By faith the Old Testament saints laid hold of these promises and looked for the coming Savior, upon whom they pinned all their hopes. This had been the faith of Lois and Eunice.

But when Paul came to their community with the gospel that the Savior had come in the person and work of Jesus, they embraced this gospel and believed on Jesus as their Savior.

The faith of these two was an unfeigned faith, not hypocritical but genuine. We do not know much about Lois and Eunice. But Paul evidently did. This is sug-

gested by the fact that he refers to them by name. And Paul had become persuaded also of the genuine character of their faith.

Now Paul indicates that he is also persuaded that the faith that dwelt in Eunice and Lois also dwells in Timothy.

How is it to be explained that the faith of Eunice and Lois is also found in Timothy? Is this just coincidence? This is the inevitable conclusion of those who embrace the doctrines of free will. According to this view the decision to believe in Jesus as Savior rests not with God but with each individual sinner who hears the gospel. The inevitable conclusion to this must be that to find faith in three generations is quite a coincidence.

But this is not the case. The beautiful situation in Timothy's home has been repeated over and over again in the history of the church. What happened with Eunice, Lois, and Timothy is not a coincidence, but a well established pattern!

This pattern is to be explained by the sovereign work of God's grace in salvation.

Salvation is not dictated by the will of man but by the will of God. God has eternally determined whom He will save in Jesus Christ. Those whom He has chosen, He also saves in Jesus Christ. He secures their salvation in the cross. He irresistibly brings them to a genuine faith in Jesus Christ by the power of His Word and Spirit. In that faith He draws them to Christ, the fountain of their salvation.

In this great work of salvation God normally saves families in their generations. Very seldom does God bring faith and salvation to only one member of a family. Generally God brings faith and salvation to families in their generations. No, God does not always save every member of a family. Yet, His work of salvation is found in families and in their generations. This is in keeping with God's covenant promise to Abraham, the fa-

ther of all the faithful: And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7).

And so it is that the same faith found in grandmother, Lois, and in her daughter, Eunice, was also found in Timothy.

What an encouragement to us as covenant parents.

As godly parents we want many things for our children. We want to provide them with food and drink, clothing and shelter. We want a good education for them, etc. But above all we want for them something that is not in our control, namely, the faith of Timothy.

What an encouragement to know that God is the One who

works faith, not us. And He works faith in family lines! We can expect therefore that the faith we have in Jesus Christ will also be worked by God in our children, and their children, and their children....

But bear in mind that God gives the faith of the parents to their children through means. And the chief means He uses is the Word.

This is how the Lord brought Timothy to the faith of his mother and grandmother. In this same epistle (II Tim 3:14-15), Paul also writes to Timothy, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

From childhood on, Timothy had been taught the Old Testament Scriptures by his mother and grandmother. Paul suggests that Lois and Eunice not only taught Timothy what the Scriptures reveal but also taught by their own example how the Scriptures are to be lived. This God used to bring the faith of a godly grandmother and mother to the heart of Timothy.

And God uses the same means also today.

Let godly parents take heart as they raise their children in these evil days.

Let them bend every effort to teach their sons and daughters, their grandsons and granddaughters, the holy Scriptures from childhood on.

Then they can expect to see their faith in the hearts and lives of their own children and grandchildren. □

Editorial

Shall We Please God or (Certain Kinds of) People? or, The Regulative Principle of Worship (3)

Reformed believers and churches may not differ as to the fact and importance of the regulative principle of worship. As the preceding editorial demonstrated, the regulative principle is confessional. The importance of the regulative principle,

according to the confessions, is nothing less than this, that it is the truth of the second commandment of the law.

Difference among Reformed and Presbyterian Christians and churches has to do with the *functioning* of the principle in the worship service. The difference can be divisive.

The question is: How does the rule that God determines the manner of worship *apply* to the public worship of the church?

Misunderstanding of the application of the regulative principle, on the part of some of its most ardent advocates, is responsible for a great deal of the division between Reformed and Presbyterian

churches which are, in fact, one in the gospel of sovereign grace.

Elements of Worship

Generally, the regulative principle applies to the *content*, or *elements*, of the public service of worship. The function of the regulative principle is to prescribe the *elements* of the public worship of the church. The regulative principle limits the church to these prescribed spiritual activities as the means of communing with God, praising God, and being edified ourselves.

What these elements are, the Reformed and Presbyterian churches have known ever since the Reformation. Both of these ecclesiastical sisters have made these elements a matter of confession in their official creeds. The Reformed have done this in Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The Presbyterians have done the same in Chapter 21 of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

According to Lord's Day 38 of the Catechism, in which the Catechism is explaining the fourth commandment, Scripture prescribes as the elements of the only worship that is pleasing to God the following: the reading and preaching of the Word; administration of the sacraments; prayers and singing; and offerings, particularly for the poor.

No other activity is permitted. Whatever is not commanded is forbidden.

It is not the regulative principle that there must be an express biblical command for everything that goes on in a worship service, for example, what the minister wears; whether we stand or sit to pray and sing; how the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are distributed; whether the singing is accompanied by an organ, begun with a pitch-pipe, or led by a precentor, and the like.

Some zealots like to present the regulative principle as requiring biblical warrant for every de-

tail of a worship service, but this is to mistake the principle. The southern Presbyterian worthy John Girardeau was guilty of this error. His is the dubious honor of having authored what may be the most violent assault upon instrumental accompaniment of congregational singing ever launched. He called the accompaniment of congregational singing by an organ or piano "heresy in the sphere of worship." But Girardeau brought instrumental accompaniment under the condemnation of the regulative principle by misstating the principle. He described the regulative principle this way: "Whatsoever *in connection with* the public worship of the church, is not commanded by Christ ... in His Word, is forbidden" (*Instrumental Music in Public Worship*, 1888, repr. New Covenant Publication Society, 1983, p. 200; emphasis added).

In fact, the church has liberty "in connection with public worship" to arrange a great many details of her worship: what time she meets; how often the Supper is administered, and how; the order of worship; sitting or standing for prayers and songs; form prayers in administering the sacraments and in exercising discipline; instrumental accompaniment of the singing, and more.

There are "circumstances" attending worship, as well as the elements themselves, and one reduces the regulative principle to an unworkable principle, if not to absurdity, if he attempts to apply it to every detail of worship. The New Testament church has liberty in Christ to arrange the details of her worship, and this liberty is important. The Belgic Confession claims this liberty for the Reformed church. In the context of "the worship of God," the Confession states that "it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the church" (Art. 32).

Can we agree that the *elements* of worship are regulated by express command of Christ in Scripture? And can we agree what these elements *are*? If so, we are a long way toward oneness in worship, and we ought to be encouraged to pursue oneness of mind on the differences that remain.

Let us bravely consider certain of these differences regarding worship that divide Reformed and Presbyterian churches which are truly one in the gospel of grace.

Instrumental Accompaniment

There is the issue of instrumental accompaniment of congregational singing. Instrumental accompaniment of the singing of the congregation is not an element of worship. The element of worship is the singing of the congregation. Instrumental accompaniment is merely an attending "circumstance" intended to serve the singing of the congregation. The regulative principle is completely uninterested in instrumental accompaniment, has nothing to say about it. The church has liberty here. She is free to use an organ or piano; she is free to get started singing by means of the twanging of a pitch-pipe; she is free to have a strong-voiced precentor lead the singing; she is free to sing without any accompaniment.

The second commandment has as little to do with instrumental accompaniment as it does with the means by which the deacons take the offerings, whether by a plate or by a bag or even by a box in the corner with a hole in the top.

If only the instrument serves the singing of the congregation!

Forms and Formulas

Then there is the matter of occasional use of form (as opposed to free) prayers, the reading of the law, and the congregation's confession of her faith by means of the Apostles' Creed. These are legitimate aspects of the elements of worship that God prescribes. God

requires prayers. Some may well be form prayers. Some can *better* be form prayers. The prayers that are part of the administration of the sacraments and of the exercise of excommunication, precisely declaring the doctrine and exactly spelling out the application to the lives of the people, should not be left to the phraseology of the individual minister. The Lord's Prayer is a form prayer. The important thing about the prayers offered at church is that they display the "requisites" of those prayers that are acceptable to God and that He will hear (see the Heid. Cat., Q. 117).

God requires the reading of Scripture. The law is part of Scripture. Reading the law every Lord's Day is proper under the regulative principle, to say nothing of the benefit of doing so.

God requires praise, including confession of His truth. Reciting the Apostles' Creed is such confession. Reciting the Apostles' Creed is proper under the regulative principle, to say nothing of the benefit of doing so.

Observance of Christmas

Some Presbyterian advocates of the regulative principle vehemently denounce Reformed churches for observing Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and Christmas with special worship services. Such observance is alleged to be violation of the regulative principle. Their argument is that God has not commanded the church to worship on April 21 or December 25 in observance of Good Friday or Christmas. In reality, they

charge Article 67 of the Church Order of Dordt and thus the synod of Dordt and the entire Dutch Reformed tradition with image worship.

The charge rests on a misunderstanding of the regulative principle. The regulative principle prescribes the *content* of the public worship, not the *time* when the church worships. It is the fourth commandment that prescribes the *time* of public worship. And, although the fourth commandment insists that the church worship on the Sabbath Day, it permits the church to worship also on other days. The Heidelberg Catechism explains the fourth commandment this way: "... that I, *especially* on the Sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God."

In the heyday of the Reformation, there were preaching services virtually every day of the week. As regards the Reformed church's observance of the great events in the ministry of Christ, one of the earliest and most respected Reformed creeds, the Second Helvetic Confession (1566)—not a Dutch creed!—explicitly approved it, "*highly*," as an aspect of the church's "liberty":

Moreover, if in Christian liberty the churches religiously celebrate the memory of the Lord's nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, and of his ascension into heaven, and the sending of the Holy Spirit upon his disciples, we approve of it highly (Chapter 24).

One may like Dordt's rule in Article 67, or one may dislike it, but observance of Christmas and the other "Christian festivals" has absolutely nothing to do with the regulative principle whatever. What the regulative principle requires is this: *If* you have a service of worship to remember Jesus' birth on December 25, this service must consist of the same elements as the worship on Sunday. The special Christmas service must consist of preaching, praying, congregational singing, and giving of alms. It may not take the form of dramatic presentations of the manger scene, liturgical dance, instruction by means of banners, and the like.

I plead with our Presbyterian brothers and sisters not to find differences that divide where none exist.

There remains the question, whether the regulative principle requires exclusive Psalmody. Does the regulative principle demand that the Reformed church sing only the Psalms at church, or does it allow for the use of certain hymns? This is a controversial issue. Treatment of the issue in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) has sometimes been ambiguous, leaving both members and those without in doubt, what precisely the stand of the PRC is.

This aspect of the application of the regulative principle, we will look into in a subsequent issue of this magazine, God willing. ■

— DJE

(to be concluded)

A New Sunday School Paper

The forgotten "school" for the rearing of the children of the covenant among us is undoubtedly the Sunday School. The work of the home is constantly held before us. The church's instruction

in the catechism classes receives due attention. We stress the importance of our good Protestant Reformed Christian schools. But Sunday School is overlooked.

Many of our churches have

their Sunday School. Although Sunday School is not an official work of the church like catechism, the consistory promotes and supervises the instruction in Sunday School. Sunday School is for the

younger children of the church, usually between the ages of 4 or 5 and 12 or 13.

The hour of Sunday School on a Sabbath morning after the worship service is devoted to the teaching of the history of the Bible by a competent member of the church, the children's reciting of Bible texts that they memorized, and singing the Psalms.

Sunday School in the Protestant Reformed Churches teaches covenant children the Word of God.

It is not an hour of crafts and entertainment. There are no puppet shows.

Neither is it a meeting for the evangelizing of unregenerated little heathens. The teachers are not Arminian soul-winners, playing on the emotions (and off the ignorance) of little children, so that they "accept Jesus as their Savior."

Protestant Reformed parents must beware that they do not send their children to the anti-covenantal, baptistic Vacation Bible Schools where the heresy of free-will is practiced. This would be a deliberate exposure of our baptized covenant children to the lies that overthrow everything we believe about the covenant of grace and God's salvation of our children in this covenant.

I recall the incident, now many years ago, involving a dear uncle. However it happened, a small child of this Reformed stalwart attended a neighborhood Vacation Bible School. At supper of the first day of the school, the little fellow let drop that he "got saved today." "You *what?*" exclaimed the astonished father, nearly choking on the potatoes. "I accepted Jesus at Bible school," explained the boy, matter-of-factly. A surprised Arminian Baptist soon heard the gospel of sovereign grace, the truth of God's saving elect children of believers usually in infancy, and that one little boy would not be returning to the Bible school.

Most of the Protestant Reformed churches with Sunday

School conduct the classes during the summer months. The season, therefore, is upon us.

Helping in the teaching of the very youngest children this season will be a new Sunday School paper. And this is the main point of this editorial, to make the parents of these Sunday School children aware of the new paper.

The Protestant Reformed Sunday School Association has always published a fine paper, *Our Guide*. But this paper had to present whatever Bible history was being studied for the whole range of ages of the students. If the story was pitched at the 11-year old children, it was too hard for the 5-year olds. If the history was told to the 5-year old students, it tended to be too simple for the older children.

The new paper is for the youngest children, between the ages of 4 and 7. It is called *Our Guide for Little Ones in the Sunday School*. The writer is Mr. Don Doezema, who also continues to write the companion paper for the older children. The new paper tells the history in an interesting way. It brings the history down to the level of the very young. There is explanation of the history. It too is in language that the little ones can understand. Each lesson includes questions about both the facts and the meaning of the lesson. An example.

The history, or story:

No room left for two poor travelers from Nazareth. So a barn, a stable—that's the only shelter left for Joseph and Mary in the town of Bethlehem.... Think about that. The promised Messiah. The King who would sit on David's throne. Wrapped in rags ... and put in a manger for His bed. Can you believe that?

The explanation:

Earthly riches and earthly power have *nothing* to do with the kind of King that Jesus is.... He took on Himself our *poverty*, our *spiri-*

tual poverty, to give us freedom from *sin*.... The second reason why Jesus was born in a stable was to show *what kind of people we are*. No room in the inn. When Jesus came into this world, there was *no room for Him*. That's the way it was. That's the way it always is. No one wants the kind of Savior Jesus is. No one invites Jesus into his heart. No one, by himself, *comes* to Jesus. The Father in heaven *brings* him.

The questions: "When Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, how did it happen that they had to stay in a barn at night? Where did they lay the baby Jesus when He was born?"

To get the children's attention, there are fitting pictures drawn by Connie Meyer. None is of Jesus. There are also maps, pictures to color, dot-to-dot devices, and the like.

Each lesson gives a Bible text for the children to memorize.

This season, the Bible history is that of Jesus in the gospels, beginning with His birth.

Good as the paper is, it will not serve its purpose if parents merely hand it to their children. Parents should read the lesson to their children. Each lesson is divided into two parts so that parents can cover the lesson in two sittings. Especially the youngest—the 4 and 5-year olds—will need some parental explanation about this word or that idea. Then the parents can go over the questions with the children.

Both editions of *Our Guide* are available to all who may be interested, particularly parents or Sunday School teachers outside the Protestant Reformed Churches. For sample copies, write the Protestant Reformed Sunday School Association, 4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW, Grandville, MI 49418.

May God bless the work this summer of our forgotten school. □

— DJE

On a Distinctive Reformed Doctrine of Salvation

I have a couple of questions and comments about "Distinctively Reformed Soteriology" by Rev. Laning in the February 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. First, at the end of the "Limited Atonement" section, we find this phrase: "...and that He did not die for those whom God had reprobated." I find it more accurate to put it this way: "...and that He did not die for the non-elect." The difference? I understand that we are all born as reprobates (original sin) and that only the sovereign electing love of God converts us from reprobate to saint. The writer uses the word "reprobated" in a way that suggests that God had an active hand in committing some to reprobation. I understand that God "passed over" some to actively save others.

Second, at the end of the "Irresistible Grace" section, we find this phrase: "...yet in such a way that He causes them *willingly* to come to Him." Would it not be more precise to say that He *overcomes* our resistance? (As sinners we hate and passionately resist His grace.) The question: Does regeneration occur before or after we are drawn by/to Him?

Third, under "Perseverance of the Saints," I know that the Protestant Reformed denomination makes its mark with respect to its stand on common grace, but I fail to see the connection between a faulty view of common grace and the fact that some who hear the preaching of salvation are not saved. It seems to me that God is gracious in allowing the rain to fall on the just and unjust alike. The fact that sinners spurn this grace, and that this spurning will lead to their further detriment in hell does not detract from God's benevolent

grace. The troublesome quote: "The fact remains that they teach that God gives His grace to all who hear the preaching with the desire that they be saved, and that this grace fails to accomplish its purpose." God's grace and mercy *always* accomplishes its purpose! I don't think that a distinction between saving grace and common grace is an invention by man. If it were not a reality, the non-elect would immediately be cast into hell. Blessings to all.

John Moerman
Ridgetown, ON Canada

Response:

I will answer your questions in the same order in which you asked them.

First, you err when you say that we are all born as reprobates, and that God in this life converts some from reprobate to saint. God's decree of election and reprobation is not something that takes place in time, but rather is eternal. Ephesians 1:4 says that the elect have been chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. In other words, there was never a time in which the elect were reprobates. There was a time in which the elect were dead in sin; but there was not a time in which they were reprobates.

With regard to your comment about God "passing by" certain people to save others, we confess that God is just in electing some and "leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves" (Belgic Confession, Article XVI).

But this does not deny that God actively appoints certain people to destruction. This latter truth is clearly taught in I Peter 2:8, which says that the reprobates "stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed." God does not merely al-

low them to stumble and be destroyed. Rather, in eternity, He actively determined that certain people would stumble at the Word and be destroyed in the way of their sin. They are vessels of wrath which He Himself fitted to destruction (Rom. 9:22).

Secondly, you ask whether regeneration occurs before or after we are drawn to God. By nature we are dead in sin, and refuse to come to God. For us to come to God, He must first regenerate us, taking away our heart of stone, and giving to us a heart of flesh in which Christ dwells. This work of regeneration is clearly irresistible and efficacious. Then, having regenerated us, God calls us through the preaching of the gospel. The Holy Spirit works with this preached Word, drawing us inwardly in such a way that He causes us willingly to come to Him.

Thirdly, you say that if common grace was not a reality, the reprobate would immediately be cast into hell. The truth is that the reprobate are under the wrath of God from the moment they are conceived and born (John 3:36). They experience this wrath more and more throughout this life, even more so after physical death, and then even more so when they are finally cast into the lake of fire when Christ returns.

You insist that God's grace always accomplishes its purpose. But if God gives His grace to the reprobate, then He does so desiring that the reprobate be benefited by this grace. And if they are not benefited by this grace because they "spurn" it, as you say, then this grace does not accomplish its purpose.

The biblical truth that God's Word never returns to Him void, but always accomplishes the purpose for which it is sent, gives the child of God great comfort. It is

only in the way of confessing this truth that God's people have the

assurance that the good work God has begun in them He will perform

until the day of our Lord Jesus' return. □

— Rev. J. Laning

A Word Fittingly Spoken

Rev. Dale Kuiper

Comfort

The believer's only comfort is his sure conviction that with body and soul, in life and in death, he is not his own but belongs to his faithful Savior, Jesus Christ (L.D. I). The believer needs this comfort, no matter what his age or circumstances, because outside of Christ there is exposure to the wrath of God, fear, misery, and death. We need this sense of "belonging"; how wonderful that God provides it to us with an abiding comfort that can never be taken from us and that will prove sufficient no matter what the trial!

The original term in its verbal forms means to call to the side of, to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation, to intercede, to act as an advocate. The cognate nouns refer to one who pleads another's cause before a judge, a counsel for the defense, an advocate.

Ultimately, all comfort is of God. He is the God of all comfort (II Cor. 1:3), the God of patience and consolation (Rom. 15:5). God provides His church with comfort through Jesus Christ who, when He was about to leave the earth, assured the church that He will not leave us comfortless (John 14:18), but would give another Comforter. That He speaks of another Comforter implies that He Himself is a Comforter (Matt. 9:22). Throughout His earthly ministry Jesus called His people to His side, and even now He is our Advocate in the presence of God. The Holy Ghost is the other Comforter that Jesus gives to us. He leads the church into all the truth as the Spirit of Truth (John 15:26), always testifying of Jesus, and bringing to our remembrance whatsoever Jesus has said unto us (John 14:26). The idea is that we have *two* Comforters. Jesus Christ the righteous is our Advocate with God in heaven (I John 2:1), and the Holy Spirit is our Advocate who testifies with our spirits, our consciences, that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). Marvelous provision God has made for our much needed comfort!

Always the comfort of the Spirit is ours through the preaching of the gospel. It is God's rod and staff that comfort us (Ps. 23:4). Isaiah is told to

comfort God's people by *speaking* comfortably to Jerusalem, that is, to her heart (Is. 40:1, 2). It is through the comfort of the Scriptures that we have hope (Rom. 15:4). As the church continued in the doctrine of the apostles she was edified: "and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). The Holy Ghost leads the church into a deep understanding of the gospel and comforts through the gospel.

True comfort is a matter of the heart (Eph. 6:22) and is ours by a true faith (Matt. 9:22). For those who are joined heart to heart with Christ there is comfort in tribulation (II Cor. 1:40), comfort for those who are cast down (II Cor. 7:6), for those in affliction (Ps. 119:15), for those who walk the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4), for those who mourn (Is. 61:2). "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).

So God is the God of all comfort. Christ is our Comforter, having accomplished our warfare and pardoned our iniquity; the Holy Ghost comforts our heart; the gospel is the gospel of comfort; *and* the saints are called to comfort one another! How sad if there is none to comfort us, but many are glad when they hear of our troubles (Lam. 1:21). What miserable comforters are they who speak vain words to us, but not the Word of God (Job 16:2). But we must be careful also, in the midst of our afflictions, that we do not refuse to be comforted as Jacob did (Gen. 37:35), and conclude that all things are against us (Gen. 42:36). That this is a very real temptation for us is shown by the words of Asaph in Psalm 77:1-3, where we read of his troubles, troubles which were increased when he remembered God, and his soul refused to be comforted!

We may safely believe that the God who has called us according to His purpose will work all things together for good to those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). We may live in the comfort that whether we wake or sleep (are living or dead when Christ returns) we shall live together with Christ who died for us (I Thess. 5:10, 11). And we are always to be comforting one another with the Word of the gospel that we never need sorrow as others who have no hope (I Thess. 4:13), for we have the victory in Jesus who died and rose again! □

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Christian Education and Service (2)

In the last issue of the *Standard Bearer* we took notice of a trend in Christian high schools and colleges, namely, that of encouraging or even requiring students to perform various kinds of Christian "service." This service, usually not clearly defined, includes volunteer-type activities — helping the elderly, the poor, the handicapped, etc. Increasingly, schools are requiring students to fulfill a minimum number of hours of service, either for a class, or as a graduation requirement.

A mainstay in the programs are "service projects" — planned and sponsored group service activities. These service projects often involve light construction in city slums or economically depressed areas of the country. The service projects are usually set up by churches or by organizations on college campuses.

As was noted last time, the rationale for promoting or requiring service hours of the students is that the Christian school seeks to instruct the whole person. Learning Christian values and standards requires not only thinking, but doing. The Christian school has the structure to encourage as well as monitor the activity. Showing love to God and the neighbor is the necessary exercise of the Christian's faith.

Supporters also insist that this

wholistic service ("whole" or "complete") is required to meet the physical needs (not merely the spiritual) of those who are served. If the Christian does not engage in this, he falls under the condemnation of the James (1:22-26) against those who only hear the word, but do not do it. Indeed, not the "forgetful hearer," but the "doer of the work, ... shall be blessed in his deed."

Service hours, it is maintained, has additional biblical support. James 2:14-26 teaches that faith must produce works, otherwise it is no faith. The judgment set forth in Matthew 25:34-40 demonstrates that Jesus expects His people to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the prisoners.

In addition, service hours are in harmony with the Reformed confessions, it is asserted. The three parts of the Heidelberg Catechism are summarized by the words *Sin*, *Salvation*, and *Service*. The knowledge of sin, faith, and the gift of salvation must lead to service.

What must the Reformed parent, teacher, and school board member say about this? An answer is required, for friends or relatives may inquire as to why your school does not require service hours, or why you do not allow your children to participate. School teachers and administrators encounter others in their vocation who ask, "What is your school doing for service?" School boards may well deal with parents who request that the school provide some opportunities for service.

Let the issue be clearly understood. There can be no objection to the fact that the students are forced to perform some unpaid labor. On the contrary, this is one of the best things that covenant young people can do. It is required of all believers that they demonstrate the love of God in their hearts by concrete acts of love for the neighbor. How spiritually valuable it is for believing youth to help the elderly with yard work or to volunteer in nursing homes and hospitals! In this age and society where it seems that all that counts is the financial reward, it is most profitable for covenant youth to learn the joys of giving themselves freely — serving Christ by serving His body in some way, or showing love to the neighbor whom God puts on the path. Parents ought to look for such opportunities for their children.

It is quite a different matter for schools to promote, or worse, require service hours. A number of objections must be raised against this practice.

First of all, service projects, in particular, foster elitism. This is particularly true where the schools give special acknowledgment to those who participate in a service project. As was noted last time, some churches print in their bulletins the names of the young people going to such and such a church-sponsored service activity. Some schools hold special assemblies to honor those who are going on, or have returned from, a service project. This may be done with the best of intentions. A comparison is sometimes made to the honor

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given to the athletes of the school. Understandably, the Christian school considers academics and Christian service to be at least as important as basketball and volleyball. Hence, if honor be bestowed upon the athletes for their work and accomplishments, how much more ought not those who perform Christian service be honored?

No matter how well intended it may be, it still promotes elitism in the school. *These* students performed this service. They are held up for public acclaim, lifted up above the rest of the student body. Ought this to be? Have such students been *more diligent* than the rest in serving others simply because they participated in a service project? (We note, only in passing, that the same argument can be raised against honoring the academic achievements of students.) Rather than to create another group of honored students, schools ought to evaluate the correctness of honoring their athletes as most now do.

Even where the projects are voluntary, for the student who "gave up" a spring-break trip to Florida or the Gulf in order to work in a service project, it is virtually impossible not to have a sense of moral superiority. To the extent that a school promotes such projects, it encourages such a spirit.

A second objection to service requirements is that it promotes Phariseeism. This is so, first of all, because service requirements necessarily emphasize the *external acts* in distinction from the *attitude of the heart*. The activities of the students must be evaluated by someone (usually a committee) to determine whether or not the activities meet the requirements. The judges can only decide whether or not the acts conform to some standards of "Christian service." They cannot judge the heart. They can only declare a work to be "Christian service."

This is spiritually hazardous. It promotes mere external works to fulfill school requirements. It is

difficult enough for the Christian to perform good works from the heart, out of a love for God and a desire that He be glorified. What a struggle the believer has to put down his proud self and give all the glory — even for the good works he does — to God. Add to the mixture, then, that students must write down their good works on paper and hand them in for approval. And that, in order to receive credit for the class, or to graduate. Let not that added stone (stumbling block) be placed in the path of covenant youths.

Even more serious is the objection that this kind of "Christian service" is most emphatically not the calling of the child of God. The Reformed believer ought to object strenuously to the misuse of the Heidelberg Catechism. The three parts of the Catechism are not "Sin, Salvation, and Service." They are rather how great are our sins and misery, how we are saved from sin, and how we may express our gratitude to God. The Catechism does not call the Christian to "service," but rather to gratitude — a *life of gratitude*! Simply stating that service requirements should be done out of gratitude to God will not take away this serious objection.

If the school's service hours requirement is supposed to be the same as "expressing gratitude," it is even worse. What an insult to God that the school would require only ten or so hours of gratitude per semester or per year!

In fact, such a requirement may well militate against a life of gratitude by leaving the impression that after he has completed his ten hours of service, the student has done his duty. Nothing could be further from the truth. Gratitude is required twenty-four hours a day, every day, and in every activity — in work, study, play, worship, and even sleep.

The trouble is that service requirements do not demand gratitude. Rather they demand specific outward acts by the students.

It must also be noted that texts used to justify service requirements are not to the point. There is no doubt that the passages do indicate that the believer is to be ready, no, even looking for ways to do good to the neighbor. But the question is always, who is that one to whom we must be neighbor? The Bible's answer in a word is — the needy one whom God puts on our path. This is demonstrated by the well-known parable of the Samaritan.

That is also the teaching of the very passages cited. James 2 speaks not of believers searching out those who have need in order to do good to them, but rather of someone coming to the believer for help. In Matthew 25, Jesus speaks of His people *seeing* His brethren hungry, naked, in prison, etc., and then giving them the appropriate aid. This confirms the point that the believer is called to a *life of gratitude*, not an arrangement of Christian service for a part of our life.

The convictions stated above can very well be taken out of context and caricatured. Some would view this as world flight. These must be people who live in their monasteries, close their eyes to the needs of others, and go their own way, only helping their own. This is nonsense. The Christian is called to look for ways to help the neighbor. But that is very different from going out (even hundreds of miles) to look for a neighbor who might need help. God places on the path of the believer countless opportunities for serving others in a very natural way. These same believers can continue helping their neighbors as long as they need it, not merely for two weeks. Faithfulness requires that each believer seize these opportunities. The result will be a *life of gratitude*.

Finally, even if there were no serious objections to the concept of service hours and service projects, Christian schools ought still to reject them. Why? These requirements fall outside the school's

realm of responsibility and authority. This is evident from the fact that the parents establish the schools to do for their children what parents cannot do. Covenant youth must be taught from many different disciplines in order to live as God's friend-servants in this world. Many parents could give *some* of the instruction, but not all that their children need. Thus they hire teachers to stand in their place and teach for them.

However, believing parents do not abdicate their responsibilities. Nor do they give the whole training of their children over to the school. The subjects that can be taught by every parent, ought to be. Obviously, parents both can

and must teach their children of all ages true Christian service. By adopting service requirements, the school takes for itself this parental responsibility.

In addition, service requirements result in the school claiming authority over what children do when they are not in school. The school will determine what is a legitimate service. We repeat, service requirements are outside both the responsibility and the authority of the Christian school.

In light of all this, Christian schools may not make service a requirement, and ought not be promoting this kind of service. This is wrong.

It is also dangerous.

There is more to this trend than at first meets the eye. There is a philosophy and theology mixed together that spawns this. It is the theology that produced the social gospel in un-Reformed churches whose goal it is to improve society. It is the theology that looks for a prosperous, earthly (postmillennial) kingdom. It is the philosophy in colleges which spurs on their students to ever greater kingdom work, redeeming the creation, and even allows the colleges eventually to "redeem" godless rock music, the dance, and blasphemous movies. But this must be explored at a later time, the Lord willing. □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. James Laning

The Spirit's Life-Giving Work: Not Merely a Moral Advising

Before proceeding next time to the subject of the order of salvation, we take one more article to look at the Spirit's saving work as a whole. We have contrasted this work of the Holy Spirit with the work of the devilish spirit that moves among the Charismatics. We now turn to consider how this work of the Spirit contrasts with work of the powerless spirit of which the Arminians speak. The Arminians often speak about the work of the Holy Spirit convicting the sinner of his sins and drawing him to Christ. But they greatly err when they explain

how the Spirit does this, for they deny that this gracious work of the Holy Spirit is efficacious and irresistible.

This error is found in almost all churches in these last days. Indeed, there are relatively few on this earth who still confess that the work of the Spirit of Christ is irresistible. Most maintain that the Spirit is gently drawing to Himself every individual, or at least every individual who comes into contact with God's Word. Quietly and patiently He is knocking at the door of every individual's heart, they say. But, they go on to explain, He is also a gentleman, who will not come in where He is not wanted.

If this were really the case, no one would be saved. If the Spirit did not enter a person until that

person opened his heart to embrace Him, then there would be no hope of salvation for anyone. Man by nature is dead in sin, unable to do anything that is the least bit good. He cannot open his heart and embrace Christ. For a man to come to Christ, God must first open his heart, cause him to come to life, and thus give him the ability and the desire to believe and love the truth of the gospel.

The Spirit gives life; He does not merely offer it. He not only speaks the words of eternal life, but also places them in our heart, so that we believe them and love them.

The Spirit's Work Not Merely a Moral Advising

Our confessions reject the teaching that the work of the Holy

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Spirit is merely a moral advising. In the Canons of Dordrecht we reject the errors of those

Who teach that the grace whereby we are converted to God is only a gentle advising, or (as others explain it) that this is the noblest manner of working in the conversion of man, and that this manner of working, which consists in advising, is most in harmony with man's nature; and that there is no reason why this advising grace alone should not be sufficient to make the natural man spiritual, indeed, that God does not produce the consent of the will except through this manner of advising; and that the power of the divine working, whereby it surpasses the working of Satan, consists in this, that God promises eternal, while Satan promises only temporal goods ... (Canons 3&4, B, 7).

The Arminians refer to the work of the Holy Spirit as merely a gentle advising or moral persuasion, so that the grace of the Holy Spirit is merely an advising grace. The Spirit is presented as merely speaking God's Word to us from without, in an effort to persuade us to repent and believe in Christ. It leaves out the fact that the Spirit's work is also the internal, irresistible work of causing us to believe and embrace the Word spoken. This is what our fathers said about this error in the latter part of this same article:

But this is altogether Pelagian and contrary to the whole Scripture which, besides this, teaches yet another and far more powerful and divine manner of the Holy Spirit's working in the conversion of man, as in Ezekiel: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26).

That this new heart is a heart with God's law written in it is evident from passages such as Jeremiah 31:33,

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Those who say that God is lovingly drawing everyone who hears the preaching of the Word mention only the Spirit's work of speaking to us from without, and leave out what our Canons here rightly call the "far more powerful and divine manner of the Holy Spirit's working," which consists in His irresistibly giving us a new heart and His writing of God's Word in our new heart, so that we delight to do it. All those who receive God's grace receive not only the former, but also, and centrally, the latter. Without the latter, the former would not benefit them at all.

Let there be no confusion. By confessing this article, we are not rejecting the truth that the Spirit speaks to us externally in the preaching, persuading us to repent and believe. But we are maintaining that the Spirit also speaks to us internally, giving us a new heart with His Word written in it, and thus efficaciously causing us to embrace it and to obey it.

This truth is very important to remember when dealing with those who teach that God loves and desires to save everyone who hears the preaching. Many of these people know, of course, that the Bible teaches that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him. But they maintain that the Spirit of God is drawing everyone who hears the preaching of the Word, trying desperately to get them to cooperate with Him and to accept the offered salvation. God, they say, is doing His part, but man must cooperate with God and open his heart to receive that which God offers.

This is a denial of the fact that God is the One who sovereignly opens a man's heart, writes the

Word of God in this heart, and thus causes him to rejoice to hear the Word and to embrace it. This work, which is of central importance to our salvation, they make to be the work of man, rather than the work of God. They foolishly insist that man must first open his heart and embrace the Word of God, before God will perform His gracious work of giving to him the life of Christ.

The article of the Canons quoted above also sets forth the basis that such Arminians gave to their argument. The Arminians said that this advising work of the Holy Spirit is most in harmony with man's nature, and that there is no reason why this advising grace alone should not be sufficient to make the natural man spiritual. With this argument such people deny that man by nature is totally depraved. If man by nature is spiritually dead, then no matter how much one may talk to him, one will not be able to persuade him to come back to life. Such a teaching is as foolish as standing in a graveyard and calling to the dead to stop lying there in their graves and to get up and do some work.

The Spirit's Work Life-Giving, Not Life-Offering

The Spirit of God that saves us is God's life-giving Breath. The most common word for *spirit* in the Old Testament is a word that literally means *breath*. It is translated as such in Psalm 33:6,

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by *the breath of His mouth*.

In John 20:22 we read of Christ breathing on His disciples, and saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." It is not by offering to us this life-giving Breath, but by breathing Him into us, that our Redeemer saves us from all our sins and miseries.

The work of this life-giving

Breath of God may be referred to as either efficacious or irresistible. That it is efficacious means that it has the power to produce the desired effect. If the Spirit desires to work in us faith, His work will certainly produce that faith in us. That the Spirit's work is irresistible means that no one can stop the Spirit from doing the work He intends to do. This must not be misunderstood. It is not that the Spirit draws a person, while the person is vehemently trying to prevent it.

Rather, the Spirit first regenerates us, and then draws us in such a way that He makes us "ready and willing henceforth to live unto Him" (Answer 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism).

When explaining our position to someone, there is a good reason for referring to the work of the Spirit as *irresistible*. The term is negative, and states what we deny, namely, that the work of the Spirit can be resisted. It clearly and sharply distinguishes us from oth-

ers. And to set forth the truth distinctively is precisely what we are called to do.

If a man is going to convert, he needs the Spirit not only to speak to him from without, but also to give him a new heart in which this same Word is permanently written. Only then will he hearken to the Spirit's Word as he hears it in the preaching. Only then will he embrace that Word and live out that Word, to the glory of God's name. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Martin VanderWal

Blessed Are the Needy

Matthew 5:1-6

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Surely, everyone who has ever memorized the beatitudes remembers the first of them all. This is well, for indeed this beatitude is first not only as a matter of *order*, in the sense that it stands at the beginning or head of the list, but in the sense that it defines the entire sermon of Christ on the kingdom of heaven.

These opening verses of the sermon describe for us the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The citizens have very specific qualities, qualities which distinguish them from those without the kingdom. The blessedness of this identification is that it conveys a confidence of membership in this kingdom, the blessedness of fellowship with the living God through the King of this kingdom. It is for the believer to

see himself reflected in these verses.

Such is indeed the blessedness of which Jesus speaks: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. This is the crown of blessedness, the essence of blessedness: citizenship in that great, everlasting kingdom. For that kingdom itself is the blessing. The King about whom we have seen so much in pages before is the Head of this kingdom. To belong to this kingdom is to belong to Him, to be blessed by Him with all manner of blessings. This thought must govern the whole of these beatitudes.

Keep in mind that the King Himself is the One who reveals this kingdom. "And he opened his mouth, and taught them saying." His word is authoritative. As He shall define this kingdom, so it must be. The great blessedness of hearing His definition of this kingdom with all its aspects is the knowledge that such is indeed this kingdom. When He describes its citizens, they are very really in that kingdom. It matters not what the

world thinks or says, or what so many churches think or say. As the King speaks, so it must be.

The first 12 verses of Matthew 5 we may divide into three different sections. The first, verses 3-6, describes these citizens from the viewpoint of their need. The second, verses 7-9, describes them from the viewpoint of their reflection of the blessedness of God. The third, verses 10-12, describes them from the viewpoint of the attitude that the wicked world takes toward them. This progression is significant. We can take these sections as three different steps: The citizens' poverty, their riches, and the seal of their blessedness.

Blessed in Poverty

Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Some imagine that the reference here is to material poverty. Since, it is thought, money is the root of all evil, and the rich shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven, Jesus here must be ascribing to those without wealth or riches the

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kingdom of heaven. Now they have nothing. But after this life of poverty they shall possess the kingdom of heaven.

Such may even seem to be fair treatment. The rich receive the good things of this life, while the poor have nothing. Therefore, it would follow that roles should be reversed in the kingdom of heaven, as with Dives and Lazarus. The justice of God would be revealed at the end of time. When the judgment is rendered, the rich shall be brought to the poverty-stricken desolation of hell, and the poor brought into the riches of the kingdom of heaven.

From another eschatological viewpoint, it may be argued that the inheritance of the rich kingdom of heaven ought to be given to the poor right now. If it is our goal to bring about the kingdom of heaven upon the earth, the poor must receive the substance of the kingdom — earthly riches and power. This is the impetus behind the social gospel and liberation theology. The lower classes of society must be brought to an equality with the higher, through the redistribution of wealth. The church's work to bring about this kingdom is to encourage the government to form and maintain many social programs. The church must also work to "liberate" the oppressed working poor in other countries, overthrowing their "capitalist oppressors" even by the use of force.

Such is the way in which the first beatitude is realized, according to many.

All, but for two little words: "in spirit." "Blessed are the poor *in spirit*." Spiritually poor are these citizens who are destined to receive the kingdom of heaven. That makes matters quite different. The materially poor are not necessarily poor in spirit. The materially rich are not necessarily rich in spirit. Neither riches nor poverty determine the glorious inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. Rather, to the *spiritually* poor belongs the king-

dom of heaven. Even more, we must include the understanding. Only those whose eyes are open to see and admit their spiritual poverty have any inheritance in this glorious kingdom. All men are spiritually bankrupt, having nothing. Part of that spiritual bankruptcy is blindness to this actual condition. Only some possess this understanding. They are the elect. They have been regenerated by grace and illuminated by the Holy Spirit, to see their poverty. To them belongs the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed in Mourning

The next three of these beatitudes further describe this spiritual poverty. This spiritual poverty causes mourning. The substance of that mourning is the spiritual poverty. It is the stark realization not only that one is destitute of any spiritual good, but also that one is deep in spiritual debt before God. Infinitely deep. Before the face of the infinitely holy God, the mourner sees the infinite debt caused by his sin. With himself, he finds only reason to be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Out of his deep desire to inherit the kingdom of heaven, he mourns greatly.

That mourning which brings true comfort, therefore, is holy. Not all who mourn will find the comfort of the kingdom of heaven. There are those who mourn over their poverty in material things. They cast their eye of envy upon those who have more. They mourn out of covetousness. For them is not the comfort of the kingdom of heaven, for in that covetousness they are under the wrath of God. There are those who mourn over the heavy (and sometimes not so heavy) afflictions they bear because of their sin. Homes broken by divorce, bonds of kin and friendship broken by animosity. Diseases and famines. All these things are cause for much mourning. Those so afflicted mourn greatly. But they mourn only over the punishment

of their sin, never their sin itself. In that mourning they will find no comfort. That mourning is only the beginning of their sorrow.

Only for such mourners that mourn truly, over their sin, the word of the King is comfort: Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Their broken hearts shall be healed, and their tears dried. Their comfort is the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven. Though they have no claim to that kingdom in themselves, because of their infinite debt, they have a home there. To them comes the comforting word of the gospel, that the debt of their sin has been paid by the King Himself. By His rich grace they have an inheritance in the kingdom. By grace alone. What comfort!

Blessed in Meekness

Then, "Blessed are the meek." The spiritual poverty, manifested in mourning, leads to meekness. Comforted with the gospel of the kingdom that theirs is that kingdom, they walk in calm assurance.

Meekness is difficult even to describe, perhaps because we see so little of it, even in ourselves. It is compared with gentleness, humility, patience. It is the calmness of soul wherein the believer finds all worth and value outside of himself in God. Meekness is the opposite of self-assertion. The one possessing this meekness does not have his feathers ruffled when he meets with things and persons adverse to him. He does not respond to adversity with evil thoughts or actions, but gives way. In patience he possesses his soul.

These meek ones are blessed in that they shall inherit the earth. How very strange! Do not only the great and mighty possess the earth, its wealth and power? Is it not the case that only the strong, those who leave such qualities as meekness far behind, survive? After all, are not the meek trodden in the dust of the earth? Not so, according to the King of the kingdom of heaven.

As the King, He possesses not only the heavens, but also the earth. And He will distribute to those whom He wills, not those who take. By the word of the King, they shall inherit the earth.

And what an earth they will inherit! Not an earth filled with sin and death. Not an earth characterized by corruption. They will inherit a new earth, in which righteousness dwells, a new earth, which contains the heavenly Jerusalem, coming down as a bride from heaven. This is a glorious, holy inheritance, regally given by the glorious King to His meek ones.

Blessed in Hunger

With the final beatitude of this first section, we come to understand the fundamental reason why all these things are true. Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. The citizens of the kingdom are poor in spirit exactly in their hunger for righteousness. Their poverty gives them this hunger and thirst. They mourn over their sin exactly as their lack of righteousness. Their meekness comes from the realization that they have no righteousness in themselves. Such is their hunger and thirst: a deep, spiritual long-

ing for the only thing that truly satisfies.

Their blessedness is having that hunger and thirst fully satisfied. That satisfaction is justification. Having no righteousness in themselves, they find it all in their King, Jesus Christ. He Himself is the righteousness of God, sent to fill their hunger and quench their thirst. To them God imputes His royal righteousness. He feeds them the living bread which came down

from heaven. He causes them to drink the wine of the blood of the Lamb. And they are filled to overflowing. They look nowhere else than to Christ. In Him they find the ground of the inheritance of the new heavens and the new earth. In Him they find not only comfort, but also the joy of their salvation. In Him they find the righteousness that guarantees the kingdom of heaven for them.

Questions for Meditation and Further Study

1. In what ways are the beatitudes contradicted by the world and by much of the church world?

2. What is the significance of these qualities as spiritual? What is the terrible loss when these qualities are seen in physical terms?

3. What things have the tendency to diminish the knowledge of true, spiritual poverty? What things take away from your true mourning? By what means can you build up this sense of spiritual destitution in your consciousness?

4. What is meekness? How is this attribute demonstrated in Moses, according to Numbers 12:3? How is this attribute demonstrated in Christ, according to Matthew 11:29? How does this virtue clash especially with worldly thinking, especially when it comes to ownership of the earth?

5. How does the truth of righteousness as identified in verse 6 close off the section that begins with poverty of spirit? What is the relation between this first section and the blessed doctrine of justification by faith alone? □

Special Articles

Report of the Contact Committee

Rev. Ron Cammenga

The Constitution of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches expresses the conviction of the Protestant Reformed Churches that it is "...their sacred

duty to manifest the true unity and catholicity of the church on earth in as far as that is possible, not only in their denominational fellowship but also in conjunction with all churches which have obtained like precious faith with us, both domestic and foreign." This constitution binds upon the Protestant Reformed Churches an ecumenical calling, that is, a calling on behalf

of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ catholic. Not only are our churches committed to missions, both domestic and foreign, but we are also committed to promotion of the unity of Christ's church worldwide. This involves seeking out and establishing sister-church relations with those churches with whom we are in fundamental agreement. And this involves dis-

Rev. Cammenga is secretary of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches.

cussion of differences with various churches with whom we have disagreements. The Contact Committee has been busy this year carrying out various aspects of this calling, as well as mandates given to it by synod 1999. The following is a brief report of some of the highlights of our labors.

Our committee is made up of eight members: two seminary professors, three ministers, and three elders. Professors Robert Decker and Russell Dykstra presently serve on the committee, along with the undersigned and Revs. Kenneth Koole and Ronald Van Overloop, and elders Henry Boer (Hudsonville PRC), Gerrit Boverhof (Southwest PRC), and David Ondersma (Georgetown PRC).

Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore

As in previous years, the Contact Committee has been deeply involved in ongoing relations with our sister churches in Singapore, the Evangelical Reformed Churches (ERCS). Along with the Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Walker, MI, the Contact Committee supervises the labors of our minister-on-loan, Rev. Jason Kortering. This year marks the eighth year of service rendered by Rev. Kortering in the capacity of minister-on-loan to the ERCS. The Contact Committee, Hope Council, and Rev. Kortering continue to enjoy a good working relationship. Our minister-on-loan is to be commended for the zeal he brings to his work. Rev. Kortering took on additional labors in the ERCS this year because Pastor Lau Chin Kwee was in the United States pursuing further education at our Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. He also continues to preach in the churches on a regular basis, takes part in ministering to the pastoral needs of the members of the ERCS, teaches various classes, assists the elders, and is deeply involved in the work of the ERCS to establish their own theological seminary. In

addition to the work in the ERCS, Rev. Kortering is active in the mission work of the churches, particularly the work in Myanmar. Rev. and Mrs. Kortering enjoy good health and express their joy in the work among the saints in Singapore. For their part, the ERCS continue to express their deep appreciation for the labors of Rev. Kortering and the Protestant Reformed Churches in America for our willingness to make our minister-on-loan available to them.

The Contact Committee takes this opportunity to remind the churches to bring the needs of the Korterings regularly before the throne of God's grace. In our congregational prayers, as well as family prayers and prayers in the Christian schools, let frequent intercession be made on behalf of the Korterings and the saints in Singapore.

Of great encouragement to the Korterings was the six-month visit to Singapore this past winter of Prof. and Mrs. Herman Hanko. The main purpose of Prof. Hanko's stay in Singapore was to assist in the establishment of the ERCS's theological seminary, especially development of the school's curriculum. Although that was the main purpose of the visit, it was by no means the only purpose. Prof. and Mrs. Hanko became involved in many other aspects of the life of our sister churches. Having recently returned from Singapore, the Hankos have conveyed their gratitude for being privileged to be involved in the cause of God's kingdom in the churches in Singapore.

One of the main items to which the Contact Committee has recently turned its attention is the matter of securing a replacement for Rev. Kortering as minister-on-loan. Rev. Kortering's present term of labor expires in June of 2002. Synod 1999 went on record as favoring a year overlap in labors of Rev. Kortering and his replacement, in the interests of a smooth transition. In or-

der to make this possible, the Contact Committee and Hope Council have been working together to approve a gross list of ministers from which the Hope congregation can presently begin to call. This promises to be a significant aspect of the work of the Contact Committee in the coming year.

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland

In conjunction with the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, the Contact Committee has also been deeply involved with the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland (CPRC). Although the supervision of the labors of our missionary, Rev. Ronald Hanko, belongs to the Domestic Mission Committee, the Contact Committee has been involved in working toward the establishment of sister-church relations. Synod 1999 approved the establishment of sister-church relations with the CPRC, but held in abeyance the implementation of this relationship so that our sister churches, the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore, might be given the opportunity to indicate whether they had any legitimate objections to our establishing sister-church relations with the CPRC. The ERCS have informed the Contact Committee that they have no objections to our establishing sister-church relations with the CPRC. The Contact Committee will be recommending to synod 2000, therefore, immediate implementation of sister-church relations with the CPRC.

What a joy that our work in Northern Ireland reaches this point! How thankful to God we are for His blessing on our joint efforts in Northern Ireland! May our prayers continue to be with the Hankos and with the congregation! And may the sister-church relation strengthen our ties and further the witness to the Reformed faith in the British Isles!

Conferences

In keeping with the decision of synod 1999, the Contact Committee expressed to the Committee on Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the United Reformed Churches our desire to have another conference with them in order to pursue discussion of the issues that separate us, including specifically the doctrines of the covenant and common grace. A conference was originally planned for the spring of 2000, but because of scheduling difficulties it has been postponed until the fall of 2000.

Recently a delegation from the Contact Committee attended an afternoon conference with the Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). The conference was held at the OPC de-

nominal headquarters in Willow Grove, PA, a suburb of Philadelphia. The focus of the conference was a discussion of the well-meant gospel offer. Our representatives were able to present our objections to the teaching of the well-meant offer, as well as set forth positively our view of the content of the preaching of the gospel. At the end of the afternoon, the men from the OPC expressed appreciation for our willingness to meet with them. A number of them stated that our representatives answered questions and clarified their understanding of our Protestant Reformed position, as well as removed certain misconceptions. They also suggested the possibility of another conference in order to continue the discussion of the well-meant gospel offer and to give us

the opportunity to set forth the distinctive Protestant Reformed position regarding marriage and divorce. No definite decision has yet been made on a follow-up conference. Our respective committees will undoubtedly be considering this in the coming year.

The Contact Committee is grateful for these opportunities to set forth the doctrines and distinctives held by our Protestant Reformed Churches. We trust that our faithful witness will be blessed by God, so that others not only come to know us, but also desire to stand with us in the defense of the gospel of sovereign grace.

Our committee covets the prayers of the members of our churches. As we carry out the important calling that the Lord gives to us, may we do it in conscious dependence upon Him. □

Missionaries' Perspectives

Mr. Don Doezema

Our domestic home missionaries make reports to their respective calling churches and the Domestic Mission Committee on a regular — at least bimonthly — basis. In those reports they keep the two bodies abreast of developments as they occur. In addition to the bimonthly reports, each of the three missionaries also submits an annual report, which is included in the agenda for synod and constitutes an important part of the information provided that assembly to give it a sense of what's actually happening in the various fields of labor. Those annual reports, however, are more than simple overviews of the year's labors. They are, as it were, little windows into the hearts of the mis-

sionaries, revealing what is their *modus operandi* and what is their perspective of the work. For this short report from the DMC for the SB, let's take a look into those windows.

Northern Ireland

Rev. Hanko reflects on the fact that he and his family have been in Northern Ireland for seven years. What have they been doing? "Putting down roots," he says. He doesn't elaborate at all. He doesn't pause to explain what he means by that. Just a single sentence: "In many ways the past seven years we have been putting down roots both as a family"

A little window it is. Did Rev. Hanko take the call to work in the British Isles with the idea that he was willing to serve as missionary for awhile? ... that he was willing to take his family to a foreign coun-

try for a few years and then come back "home"? ... that he would, during that time, make the best possible use of the British educational system so that his children would be up to speed when they returned to their own schools in the States? Was Northern Ireland just a stopping point in a career in the ministry?

No, they've put down *roots*. The family has a "furlough" every two years. They enjoy visiting with family and friends. After those few weeks, however, they're ready to go back *home*. Home now is 7 Lislunnan Road. It's Ballymena. It's Northern Ireland. It's the United Kingdom. Not simply because that's where their *stuff* is. But because that's where their "life" is. The British educational system is *theirs*. The children work hard in school, not to be able eventually to fit into the American sys-

Mr. Doezema is secretary of the Domestic Mission Committee.

tem, but to progress to the next stage in the British. Their church home is the CPRC.

That's from the more personal side. We have still to finish Rev. Hanko's sentence. The putting down of roots applies, he says, "both as a family and as far as the work is concerned." How has he been putting down roots with respect to his work in Northern Ireland? Again, he does not elaborate. But let us consider what has gone before.

When, nearly four years ago, the Covenant Reformed Fellowship was organized and the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland became a reality, an important objective of Rev. Hanko's work was reached. But not the *goal* of it. The work, under the blessing of God, went on. And now, four years later, Rev. Hanko can testify that: there is modest but steady growth of the congregation in terms of numbers; there is significant development in the leadership abilities of officebearers; all the young people in the congregation who were able to make confession of faith have done so; and a son of the church is not far from graduation from the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

And that isn't all. Rev. Hanko has never forgotten his broader assignment, the British Isles. Pamphlet distribution; regular newspaper articles; a large mailing list; numerous speaking and preaching engagements not only in various places in Northern Ireland but in Scotland, England, and especially Wales — all of these have continued unabated since the time of organization. And now, four years later, Rev. Hanko can testify without fear of contradiction that this little congregation of some 50 souls is "known and recognized throughout Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K."

So ... is the work for which he was sent to Northern Ireland finished? No. The roots are down.

That's all. The foundation is laid. Now is the time to build. "It is difficult now," Rev. Hanko writes, "to imagine leaving the work at this stage. It would seem, humanly speaking, that we would be leaving much unfinished."

What is Rev. Hanko's vision for the future? Continued growth of the CPRC in Northern Ireland first of all. And the starting of other congregations there, the Lord willing. Not, however, to the neglect of work which beckons elsewhere in the UK — especially in South Wales, where our missionary sees good hope for the eventual establishing of a church.

Work enough, that is, for two men. But, as our missionary sees it, not quite yet. More preparatory work should be done in South Wales to solidify a core group which can form another base for the full-time labors of a second man. Rev. Hanko, as our missionary in the UK, plans himself to go there periodically; and, with synod's continued approval, perhaps other of our ministers, active or retired, might be able to go for more extended periods of time, to bring the kind of regular preaching and teaching which Rev. Hanko is not able at this time to provide.

But next year, things may be different. The availability, D.V., of Seminarian Angus Stewart for the work in or by the CPRC after graduation in 2001 could very well change the complexion of the work in the UK, to the point where Rev. Hanko is able to be more active in mission work elsewhere in the United Kingdom. "We hope, anyway," says Rev. Hanko, "that this will be the case."

Such is the vision of our missionary in Northern Ireland. In reflecting on the past, he testifies that the blessing of God on his labors and the labors of the CPRC has been "spectacularly evident." Roots have been put down. Foundations have been laid. Now is the time to begin to build on it. He and they look forward eagerly to

what they consider to be the great privilege of bringing God's truth to those who, in a spiritual wasteland, "appreciate it so very much that it sometimes shames those of us who have always had it and are inclined to take it for granted."

Western Home Missions

The long-term commitment and zeal which is so clearly evident in the report and the work of our missionary in Northern Ireland characterizes also the labors of our eastern and western home missionaries. They, too, can be said to be putting down roots in their respective areas of labor. But, with regard to the specific field of labor which was his in the western US, Rev. Miersma has been recently *uprooted*. His work in the San Luis Valley came to an end in April of 1999. Not easily does a missionary leave a field of labor. Not easily did Rev. Miersma bid farewell to the saints among whom he had labored for some four years in Alamosa, Colorado. That's clear from his annual report, as it was also from his bimonthly reports. But equally clear was his conviction that his move from Alamosa to Spokane, Washington was the right thing, and was the Lord's purpose, for him and for those with whom he had to do.

The work in Spokane is unusual in that it involves a church, an organized congregation, with officebearers in place. Hardly does that mean, however, that Rev. Miersma is not now engaged in the work of missions, that he serves now more as pastor of the Sovereign Grace Reformed Church than as missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Consider that the sincere desire of the congregation is that they be brought into the PRC. There's work to be done before that can become a reality. Though the SGRC is wholeheartedly committed to the *doctrines* of grace as they are taught in the PRC, there are elements of their *practice* which remain still to be brought

more in harmony with our churches. And, too, the congregation is small — about half the size of the little congregation in Northern Ireland, and only a little larger than the Mission group in Pittsburgh. Clearly, therefore, the work of missions, the work of evangelism, is as necessary and as critical a part of the task of the missionary in Spokane as it was in the San Luis Valley.

The work of Rev. Miersma in Spokane has really just begun. His focus, he writes, has been “first of all to establish firmly the work within the congregation.” At the same time, however, he and the consistory of the SGRC have begun more energetically to set forth a witness in the community. The results have been encouraging, to the point where our missionary can report that he is optimistic that “the Lord has given us an open door to preach the gospel in this area.”

Eastern Home Missions

The spiritual vitality of the congregations in Northern Ireland and Spokane has been a source of great encouragement both to the missionaries in those places and to the DMC. The same can be said concerning our eastern home missions. Rev. Mahtani reports that there is in the group in Pittsburgh a “vibrant zeal to make known the newfound pearl of the gospel to

others.” Our eastern home missionary is himself a convert from paganism; so he knows personally the special preciousness of such a “newfound pearl.” And he delights in seeing it in others as they come to a knowledge of the Reformed faith — many, in the Pittsburgh Mission, out of Roman Catholicism.

The “vibrant zeal” shows itself in many ways and places. There is the love for the preaching and teaching. There is the energetic involvement in mission activities, including mass mailings, manning the mission booth at a Christian festival, and, most importantly, personal witnessing. The most recent addition of a family to the group apparently came as a result of a one-minute radio broadcast. But almost all visitors have come at the personal invitation of existing members who talk to others about the hope that is in them.

And what is true of the Mission in Pittsburgh seems also to be true of a small group in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Several families there have for two years been worshiping together using video tapes of services in various of our Protestant Reformed Churches. This group’s vibrant zeal for the truth is an inspiration even to our missionary, who has begun going to Fayetteville on a bi-monthly basis. Their use of Prot-

estant Reformed literature (books, pamphlets, *SB* articles) in personal witnessing is nothing short of incredible. The Mission Committee, after recently sending a delegation to Fayetteville to assess the situation there, has decided to try to arrange for various of our ministers to go to Fayetteville on some kind of a regular basis in order to preach, teach, and follow up on contacts made. What will come of this we cannot say, of course, but we do agree with Rev. Mahtani that such a call for help requires our serious attention.

Pittsburgh. Fayetteville. And that’s not all, in the east. Rev. Mahtani has contacts in New York, Washington, DC, and elsewhere. “I am convinced,” he says, “that we will need more home missionaries to do the work.” We do not doubt that that is true. In fact, we thank the Lord that it is. May we conclude our short article on our missionaries’ perspectives with this from our eastern home missionary: “In the meantime let us pray the Lord of the harvest, that He may give us laborers for His harvest. Remember to pray for your missionaries. The labors are exciting, but also filled with trials and discouragements. Like farmers who plant the seed, so we missionaries must patiently labor, knowing God will give the fruit, in His time, according to His own purpose.” □

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

Authority and Confidentiality

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan.

In the last article we noted that the diaconate is an office of authority. Before treating other aspects of the nature of the diaconate, we add this appendix to

the subject of authority, in which we will show that authority requires confidentiality on the part of officebearers.

Of the need for confidentiality in the work we must all be re-

mind ed regularly. The pastor (or the vice-president of the council in the absence of a pastor) does well to remind the officebearers of this need at the annual council organizational meeting. If comments on the subject of confidentiality can be legitimately supported by the text on which the installation sermon is based, the pastor should take advantage of this opportunity to remind the officebearers of this need. Such a reminder in the presence of the congregation will show the people that the officebearers take this matter seriously. Concrete occasions might also arise at which further reminders are appropriate — for example, when the consistory, diaconate, or council is dealing with a particularly confidential matter, or when (as does happen, sadly) confidentiality has been breached, and the officebearers must deal with the consequences. The purpose of this article is also to remind us of the need for confidentiality in our work.

At least three reasons come to mind why the officebearers must maintain confidentiality in doing their work.

The first reason is simple and practical: the people will not trust their officebearers who do not keep quiet about confidential matters. Certainly this is true if the people need help with a matter which they wish to be kept confidential. It might be guilt which they experience because of a private, secret sin; or perhaps the matter involves their relationship to another person, and they do not want that other person to know they sought advice; or, it could be a financial matter for which they seek help. Because these are very personal, and sometimes awkward, matters, the people do not quickly turn to their officebearers for advice and help. And they will not come for help at all if they cannot trust their pastor, elder, or deacon, to keep the matter confidential. Even if the matter is not so personal and awk-

ward, the people will not trust an officebearer who unnecessarily repeats what he has been told to anyone who will hear.

The second reason is rooted in the law of God: keeping such matters confidential guards one against violation of the ninth commandment. Literally forbidding the child of God to bear false witness, the ninth commandment implies that we must not backbite, slander, judge, or join in condemning any man rashly or unheard. It requires positively that the child of God resolve to “defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 43). The Westminster Larger Catechism explains this commandment as requiring us to have, among other things, “... a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities; ... a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging talebearers, ...” (Answer 144). Specifically indicated as being forbidden by this commandment, in addition to other sins, are “talebearing,” “whispering,” and “unnecessary discovering of infirmities” (Answer 145). Clearly, this commandment regulates what we say about whom, what we say to whom, and how we say it. It is sin to speak even that which is true, when not done in love and for edification (Eph. 4:15). But we quickly commit this sin when we gossip. Gossip, after all, is only a small step removed from backbiting.

Other passages of Scripture also exhort us to holiness and wisdom in regard to what we say. “Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: ... I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:16). “A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter” (Prov. 11:13). “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a mat-

ter separateth very friends” (Prov. 17:9). Let this be part of our blamelessness (a qualification of elders and deacons, I Tim. 3:2, 10), that we keep confidences!

The third reason is rooted in our authority to hold office. God gives authority to men whom He has called to office and equipped for the work. This means that authority is particular — God gives one man authority to do the work of the special offices, and withholds such authority from another man. But then we must not “share” too quickly with others that which belongs to the work of our office.

Now I am certainly not suggesting that our consistories and diaconates be tight-lipped about everything. It is well to let the people of the congregation know as much as they can and may about what work is being done. This promotes trust — the people can see that the officebearers are faithful in doing their work. This guards against a proud notion on the part of the officebearers that they are the privileged possessors of top-secret information, which no others may have. It is for this reason that the deacons and/or council should release financial reports regularly, and report to the congregation on other aspects of their work and decisions. It is certainly no violation of their authority, but a manifestation of their love and care for the congregation, that our officebearers do these things.

However, some aspects of the work of the office are confidential; of *these* aspects we are speaking now. To know about such matters, and to do the work required by them, officebearers have authority, and others do not. Therefore, no officebearer should speak to one who is not an officebearer about such matters. At such time as the congregation needs to know about these matters, the *consistory* and/or the *diaconate*, as a *body*, may and must inform the people. But then the information is given officially,

and not leaked out by any officebearer who had no business speaking about such matters. To “leak out” such matters unofficially and in breaking of confidence is a violation of one’s God-given authority.

While the officebearer must be on constant guard against violating this rule of confidentiality, the threat seems greater in certain instances.

The first is while visiting with other believing saints, and talking church-talk. Now church-talk is a wonderful subject for a living room or coffee table discussion — if it is good church-talk, and does not violate the ninth commandment! When the subject of discussion is doctrine and theology, Scripture passages, decisions of consistories, classes, and synods, worship, and news about fellow saints which enables us to rejoice and sorrow with them, bearing their burdens, and when all this discussion is carried out in a loving, brotherly spirit, this is good. Let us do more of it! But when the subject of the church-talk is church gossip, and is not carried out in brotherly love, this is bad. At this point the officebearer must be careful what he says, how he contributes, and how much. He ought to set an example by teaching others to avoid gossip and idle talk. And he certainly ought not give detailed explanation of how the consistory finally arrived at its decision, who did and said what in the meeting, and the like.

The second situation, not so different from the first, is when having private discussions with another member of the church. This person may be interested for legitimate reasons in knowing more — perhaps he would like to protest a decision of a consistory, and needs to know what he is dealing with. Or perhaps the officebearer and another person are very close friends, who share much of their lives, who agree on many viewpoints, who seek advice from each other. It

seems to be a situation in which the elder or deacon can let his guard down a little. And then he falls! Too much slips out! The officebearer must remember that he must not speak more than he is allowed; he must keep confidences. The person who has a legitimate interest in knowing more may ask the consistory, diaconate, or council *as a body* for this information. The close friend must remember that friends help friends do what is right.

The third situation, not so different from the second, and perhaps the most dangerous for many officebearers, is in private conversation with one’s wife. Perhaps you have come home right after the meeting, still wound up; and to unwind, you tell it all. Or perhaps, three days after the meeting, your wife can tell that something has been bothering you; so she asks you about it, and you tell her, to try to put it behind you. Or you tell her that you will be going away that evening (on a call regarding a confidential matter — discipline or benevolence, for example), and feel obligated to tell her also where you are going, and why.

Perhaps you ask the question, what *may* we tell our wives? The answer cannot be given in such a way as to cover every situation. Other questions must be asked, to help determine the answer to this question. Some of these other questions, but not necessarily an exhaustive list, are the following: Will this knowledge help her in any way, or not? Is she capable of knowing, and not gossiping about it? Is there already a perception of a man and/or his wife, that they speak too freely about what goes on in the consistory/council/deacons meetings?

But I am dealing with the question, what must we *not* tell our wives? And one answer is that we must not tell our wives *everything*; we must not inform them of confidential matters such as discipline or benevolence cases any more

than we may speak to any other member of the congregation about such cases. This is not a matter of dealing with the pressures such cases put on us individually; this is not a matter of having a wife that can herself keep quiet about these things; this is a matter of our authority.

Caution must be exercised not only in what we tell our wives with our own mouths, but in what we allow them to learn in other ways. I have in mind the fact that some men might ask their wives to do some “secretarial” work, typing reports, letters, or minutes. And such an arrangement might seem to be justified: this will save the elder or deacon precious time; he cannot type anyway; and she can keep confidence. But when it comes to confidential matters, none of these arguments outweighs this one: she has no business knowing, because she does not possess the authority of the special office. Better that the minutes and reports are then handwritten (carefully, please, so we can read them!); better that another way be found in which she can save her husband time; better that her ability to keep confidence not be put to the test, than that the officebearer break the rule of confidence himself!

So, fellow officebearers in the church, let us guard against the temptation to abuse our authority in this way.

The effects of such breaches of confidence can never be reversed. Trust, once lost, is very difficult to regain. And one great danger of telling others what they ought not know is that this knowledge will affect their view of those involved, and how they treat them. This will happen *subconsciously*, if not consciously. But it will be noticed by others, particularly by the one involved, if they suspect the officebearer has told his wife.

How can we guard against such breaches of confidence? Practically, one way would be to “un-

wind" with other officebearers who already know of the situation, and who must also keep the same confidences which we must keep. This also has its dangers (speaking sinfully of others, or speaking in a wrong spirit), but it is a safeguard against the other. Another way would be to remember our author-

ity and seek to use it responsibly in the service of God. Thirdly, we can always bring our needs and concerns and frustrations to God in prayer, seeking from Him wisdom to help us deal with them. And finally, this requires power, which can be found in Christ

whom we serve, to control our tongues. For "if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body" (James 3:2). And one who is able to bridle the whole body is one who is eminently qualified, by God's grace, to hold office in the church of Christ. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

If you can remember back to the February 15th issue of the "News," then you might remember an item about a committee being appointed by the consistory of the Hudsonville, MI PRC to look at possible solutions to their overcrowding "problems."

This committee was contacted by the Hudsonville Reformed Church to inform them that their present building is for sale. This church is located on the northwest corner of School St. and Van Buren in Hudsonville. Some of you "older" readers may remember that the old Hudsonville PRC was located on the southeast corner of that same intersection.

The committee toured that facility and felt strongly that this location could possibly serve as a new daughter church of Hudsonville PRC. They then went ahead and made arrangements for an open house on March 30 for their congregation to view this facility. Interested members of Hudsonville could tour the church, parsonage, and other buildings from 7:00 - 8:00 P.M. At 8:00 the group spent about 15 minutes singing, so they would be able to hear the pipe organ. This was followed by a question and answer period.

The congregation of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI was invited

to a discussion/lecture presented by Mr. Herman Ophoff on April 11. His topic was, "The Split of 1924 and 1953."

At a special congregational meeting in early April, the congregation of the Loveland, CO PRC voted to approve proposals from their consistory to re-carpet their auditorium and paint their sanctuary and narthex ceilings.

Members of the Cornerstone PRC meeting in Schererville, IN found something besides news in a recent Sunday bulletin. Enclosed in the bulletin of April 2 they found a daily Bible reading for the month of April. These are planned for the first bulletin of each month to help as a hand tool to encourage Bible reading.

The Spring Cantata, "Risen This Day," was presented on April 14 by the choir of the Randolph, WI PRC. This was a fund-raiser for Faith Christian School Ladies School Circle.

Choirs from the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL and Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI also presented their annual Spring concerts on Sunday, April 16. Peace sang a variety of songs commemorating the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, while Georgetown performed the cantata, "No Greater Love."

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL invited their congregation to a dinner on March 31 to celebrate the first anniversary of their new

church building. A surprise supper was planned, followed by a program.

On Saturday, April 15, the Young People's Society of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ went to work on the landscaping at the front of their church. They planned to put in a few more shrubs and flowers and to redo the mulch.

Denomination Activities

Revs. Cammenga, Koole, and VanOverloop, members of our churches' Contact Committee, met with the Ecumenicity Committee of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PA on April 11. They planned to discuss the issue of the offer of the gospel. They will be reporting the results to this year's synod.

Prof. and Mrs. H. Hanko returned home from their seven-month stay in Singapore in mid-April. We are grateful that they both could serve our churches in this way in their retirement.

Rev. and Mrs. Kortering and Jack and Judie Feenstra were unable to enter Myanmar because of visa problems. Over 50 men had traveled (some at great trouble) to attend a long teaching session (April 11 - May 5) by Rev. Kortering and instruction in English from the Feenstras. They submit to and wait on the Lord's will.

Evangelism Activities

Our Randolph, WI PRC hosted a speech by Rev. B. Gritters on April 3 in their sanctuary. Rev. Gritters spoke on the theme,

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

"Godly Parenting in an Ungodly World."

The first chapel service at the Holland Mission, sponsored by the First PRC in Holland, MI, went well. Rev. Terpstra spoke on John 14:6, "Jesus, the Only Way to the Father." There were about 30 in attendance from the mission and

12 members from First's congregation.

The Evangelism Committee of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, CN is in the process of establishing a library in their church to provide good reading material for themselves and their children. They asked their congregation for

donations to help get this project started, so we thought, why not place it here in the "News" for your consideration as well? We are sure they would appreciate any good books or donations of money. You may send them to: Rev. R. Miersma, 1 Sunset Way, Rosedale Valley, AB T4L 1X8 Canada. □

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

On March 30, 2000, the Lord suddenly took to be with Him our fellow officebearer,

MR. JAMES JABAAY,

at the age of 38. The council and congregation of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA express their deepest and heartfelt sympathy to his wife Laurie; his children David, Michael, Matthew, and Katie; his parents, Jake and Jeanne Jabaay; and all the Jabaay and Buiters families in this loss. We take comfort in the knowledge that all things, even the death of His saints, are under His control and in His divine plan. We can look to Him for the grace to get through this and the other trials of life until we all shall meet again in paradise.

Rev. Arie denHartog, Pres.
Doug Pastoor, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to fellow deacon Philip Harbach and the Paul Harbach family in the death of their mother and sister-in-law,

MRS. ROBERTA HARBACH.

We are thankful for her years of faithful service to the church of Christ, and our prayer is that the family may find comfort in the word of God: "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).

Rev. Audred Spriensma, President
Jack Brands, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Martha Society of Doon PRC extend their Christian love and heartfelt sympathy to our sister in the Lord, Gertrude VanDenTop.

The Lord took to Himself on April 12, 2000 her husband,

JOHN VAN DEN TOP.

May she know the truth of John 14:18: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."

Rev. Richard Smit, Pres.
Vivian Hunter, Vice-Pres.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Jr. Adult Fellowship of Faith PRC express their sincere Christian sympathy to fellow members Mr. and Mrs. Rick Elzinga in the recent loss of Jill's brother,

MR. JAMES JABAAY.

It is our prayer that they may find comfort in the words of Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

Scott Koole, Pres.
Sara Noorman, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their sincere sympathy to fellow elder John VanderWoude and his wife, and the Rod Kooiman and Ron Corson families in the death of their father and grandfather,

MR. OTTO VANDER WOUDE.

May they find comfort in God's word: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4).

Rev. Audred Spriensma, President
Jack Brands, Assistant Clerk

CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 1999 appointed Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan the calling church for the 2000 synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2000 synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, D.V., on Tuesday, June 13, 2000 at 9:00 A.M. in Georgetown PRC.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 12, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. Cammenga, president of the 1999 synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging, see May 1 SB.

Consistory of Georgetown
David Ondersma, Clerk

NOTICE!

For Thy Truth's Sake, Prof. Herman Hanko's new book on the 75-year doctrinal history of the PRC, will be available soon. Penetrating insights, presented in a popular style. We're confident you'll want this book. Join the Book Club now, using the card which should be enclosed in this issue of the SB, and receive this new publication of the RFPA at a 35% discount.