

The Standard Bearer

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The Work of the Lord

Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.

And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

Psalm 90:16, 17

It is now almost the time of year for the planting of crops and gardens. We begin another season of work after things have been lying dormant through the winter months. It is customary that we ask the grace of God upon us in our labors. We do not pray with and for the world on its World Day of prayer, because the unbeliever cannot come to God in prayer. It is an abomination in His sight, a stench. They pray for material goods and for peace that is no peace, for it is apart from the cross of Christ. They are devoid of the grace of God and seek only for self-advancement, rather than for the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

We pray for something far richer than mere material things. We pray for the work of God that is salvation in

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Christ. Unto this end must all things work. Therefore, we do not pray for the things of the world in themselves, but only as they benefit the church and the glory of God. As the Lord taught us, we pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done."

Psalm 90 is a psalm of Moses, the only one that he ever wrote. It is characterized as a song in the night. It was sung when the children of Israel were perishing in the wilderness, and God's work seemed wrecked on the rocks of man's unbelief and rebellion. Therefore, it is Moses' prayer that the manifestation of God's work may again appear in all its glory and beauty to His servants and children. Moses did not pray for the things for which Israel was asking: bread, water, meat, etc. Instead, he prays for the work of the Lord, the mercy of God upon His children, that is, the fruit of salvation through the cross.

We must follow this example of Moses. Instead of praying merely for crops, sunshine, and rain, we must pray for these in the light of the cross.

We do not pray for man's work, or for the inventions, advancements, and doings of this world. That is the prayer of pride and of selfishness. But, like Moses, we pray for the work of God. Moses looked back to the be-

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ginning of time and declared that, from everlasting to everlasting, "thou art God." It is His work that Moses prays will again appear.

Just what work is this? Moses does not mean the everyday work of providence. Indeed, it is God that causes the sun to rise in the east in the morning and to cast its powerful rays to melt ice and snow and to warm the earth. He causes the rain to fall, the thunder to roll, and the seed to grow. He also causes His work to appear in the affairs of men. He governs the mind and the heart. He sends the evil as well as the good, poverty as well as riches, death as well as life. Where can you go without beholding the work of the Lord?

Yet, in all this there is manifest the richness of the one work of God for which the servants of Jehovah long and pray, *the work of salvation*. It is the revelation and the realization of His covenant with us through Christ Jesus, the covenant of friendship in which He is our God and we are His people. This work He has promised us from the beginning: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel."

To the realization of the promise, the saints always looked forward. Its realization came in Christ when God sent into the world His only begotten Son, Immanuel, God and man in unity of divine person. The basis for that covenant was the blood of the cross, through which God reconciled us unto Himself, nevermore imputing our trespasses unto us. The glory and beauty of that covenant was revealed in the resurrection and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was exalted to highest glory at the right hand of God. This same covenant of friendship was realized with us on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ was poured out upon the church.

But although that covenant of friendship is centrally realized, it is not yet manifested in its final perfection. To this, with all the saints in heaven and on earth, we look forward, and for this we pray. We look for the time when Christ will return, when the new heavens and earth will be created, and the tabernacle of God will be forever with men, and we can see Him face to face. This one work God accomplishes throughout the ages, and unto it must all things work. All things in creation and providence concentrate in that one work.

The antithetical side of this work is the destruction and condemnation of the wicked, the reprobate. This is part of the one work and serves its purpose. All must work unto that one final end, the glory of God.

We pray that this work may appear to us. Seeing it, we behold the glory of God. That glory we desire to see in order that we may show forth the praises of our God, who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. The glory of God is the shining forth of all His marvelous virtues. His divine greatness and majesty are emphasized in this text, the power and wisdom as they are concentrated in the work of salvation. This glory is revealed antithetically, for God is the God of light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. He has dominion over all things and puts to naught the works of darkness and hell.

God's glory and His work are not always seen. They are hid. The work of God does not advance by leaps and bounds, but is steady and constant. We do not always see it, because we are creatures of time, while God is infinite. We can see only a phase and a moment of the eternal work. What was yesterday we see no more, and tomorrow is not yet. Therefore we cannot see our moment of time in relation to the whole, to the end. Moreover, God often hides Himself. He walks through depths that we can never follow. Besides, we are still in the world in the midst of death. Out of these depths we cry for salvation and its appearance. In these depths we sometimes see nothing but our own works, our own sin and misery, and our own death. We also see the works of the ungodly, who seem to have victory and dominion.

Yet we behold this work by faith, by faith in God's Word and testimony. In that Word He has revealed to us the work that He has already accomplished in the past in Christ through the cross, the resurrection, and the exaltation. By that Word, and through His Spirit in our hearts, He is still accomplishing His work and will perfect it even unto the end. In the light of the Word we see the light. We see Christ crowned with glory and honor, and the certain perfecting of the work of salvation.

This causes us to pray: "Grant, O God, that Thy work may appear unto Thy servants. Give unto Thy servants grace always to see Thy work upon us and upon our children, to see it in our present darkness in the light of Thy Word. For only when we behold Thy work, O Lord, is our soul satisfied. Whatever betides in this present time,

in all our sorrow and tribulation, in the midst of all the tumult and confusion of this world, if we may only see Thy work, and behold the beauty of the Lord God upon us, all is well. And we pray: realize Thy work for us and in us and for and in all Thy church. Realize it from age to age, whatever may be the way, until it shall be finished and be manifest in its eternal glory.”

The blessedness of this is God’s beauty upon us and our children. By beauty is meant God’s loveliness, His pleasantness, which He is in Himself. This is closely related to His grace. He is beautiful and pleasant in His gracious attitude toward us. Therefore the beauty of the Lord is upon us when He blesses us with all the blessings of salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord. We pray for this in order that we may enter into God’s eternal covenant of friendship. When His beauty is upon us, He makes us partakers of His divine nature, of His love, of His knowledge, of His wisdom, of His righteousness, and of His holiness. This He bestows not only upon *us*, but also upon our *children*, for He

maintains His covenant in the line of continued generations.

Thus, He establishes the work of our hands. We realize that this is not our work as such. All our churches, buildings, Sabbaths, and feasts mean nothing unless the Lord bless it, establish it, and crown it with the grace of the Spirit of Christ. The work that we perform as servants of God, as friends in a world that hates Him, as children of light—that work He establishes.

Our work has value and is established only when our work is God’s work, and when it stands in His service and before His face. This is true whether we be minister, elder, deacon, farmer, housewife, or any common laborer. Only that work can have value in the sight of the Lord. Then, realizing our imperfection, we look forward to and pray for the day when there shall be no darkness anymore. We long to behold in perfection God’s work in us and for us and through us. Knowing that this will not be accomplished until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray: “Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly.” 

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

Controversy and Confusion over the Covenant: Is it not time to settle it? (2)

The doctrine of God’s everlasting covenant of grace is central to the Reformed faith, which is to say, it is the heart of Reformed doctrine. It is an essential doctrine of salvation. All the doctrines of salvation by grace come together, are harmonized, in the doctrine of the covenant. It connects God’s decrees, the atoning work of Christ, the sovereign grace that saves, justification, sanctification, and preservation unto everlast-

ing life. The covenant also brings a warmth and personal experience to the doctrines of sovereign grace.

That is not merely my opinion. Herman Bavinck is representative of Reformed theologians on the significance of the covenant. Bavinck wrote:

For dogmatics as well as for the practice of the Christian life, the doctrine of the covenant is of the greatest importance. The Reformed church and theology have grasped this fact more clearly than the Roman Catholic and Lutheran

churches. Basing itself on Scripture, it consistently viewed the true religion of the Old Testament and the New Testament as a covenant between God and man....¹

For that reason it is particularly reprehensible that so much confusion exists in the Reformed church world on this central doctrine, and so little agreement. Adding to the opprobrium is the fact that heretics

¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3: *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, tr. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 212.

Previous article in this series: March 1, 2011, p. 244.

are taking occasion to introduce serious, gospel-denying heresy into Reformed churches—heresy based on unbiblical covenant theology.

How is it possible that confusion over a doctrine, a truth of the Bible, could exist in the church? Why cannot the Reformed believer simply open the Bible and settle the matter—define the doctrine of God’s covenant of grace, explain the necessary elements, and reject the erroneous views?

The answer, first, is that the Bible is not that kind of a book. The Bible is not an encyclopedia with an index so that one can simply look up a doctrine—be it creation, the atonement, or the covenant—and turn to the chapter or the section that defines and explains the doctrine. The truth of God must be drawn out of the infallible Word, then organized and defined through hard work and careful study. This does not happen overnight. The doctrines ordinarily go through a process of development. Hence it is possible to study the history of a doctrine, as it is drawn from the Bible, sharpened, refined, and finally accepted by the church as an established dogma.

Allow me to explain further that idea of a history of dogma.

God gave a complete revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, in whom dwells “all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). Jesus could say to the disciples, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). God also raised up holy men (II Pet. 1:10, 21) infallibly to write down that revelation, and the result is the holy and inspired Scriptures.

In the old dispensation, the revelation of God was often very direct—God gave the words to the prophet, and the prophet wrote them down. Although there were false prophets in the old dispensation who opposed God’s perfect revelation, the test for a false prophet was clear. If the prophecies of a man did not come true, then he was a false prophet, and must be put to death (Deut. 5:8). And if anyone sought to turn Israel from serving the Lord to an idol, he must likewise be put to death (Deut. 13:9).

In the new dispensation, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the church entered a new phase. The church, i.e., all believers, possess the promised Spirit of Jesus, of whom Jesus prophesied that He would guide the church into all truth (John 16:13). That work of the Spirit of truth was manifest, first, in His inspiration of the New Testament writers, completing the canon of Scripture about A.D. 100 with the book of Revelation.

The second aspect of the Spirit’s guidance is ongoing. He enlightens the hearts and minds of believers, motivates them to study the Bible, and leads the church to set forth God’s truth in a clear and logical way. He guides them into all truth.

This activity of believers often takes place under the pressure of heretics and their damnable heresies. That is, as heresy would arise, the church would be forced to study the Bible, reject the error, and then set forth the truth in a deeper and clearer way.

This process of battling heresy, and setting forth the truth, is the history of dogma. This is the work

God gives to His church, in harmony with the figure of the church as “pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15). Without going into the whole figure, suffice it to say that, as pillar and ground of the truth, the church is called to defend God’s truth over against the lie, to set forth His truth plainly, and then to proclaim that truth boldly in the preaching.

It follows, then, that there is a certain development of doctrine though the ages. All the doctrines were not established at once.

God is in control of the process of development. He is sovereign over heretics and heresies. God did not allow the new dispensational church to be flooded with every form of the lie, all at once. God determined when error would arise, and He determined which error. The study of the history of dogma reveals His wise determination and providential control. Early in the new dispensation, God raised up a Marcion, who rejected large parts of the accepted inspired Scriptures. In the same century arose Mantanus, claiming that he and his followers received new revelations from God. This forced the church to establish the canon of Scripture, and to insist that God’s revelation was complete. All that the church needed to know for faith and life was set forth in the Bible.

God next raised up an Arius, who denied the deity of Christ, and thus that God is triune. Years of struggle gave rise to the clear explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Nicene Creed. Next, through a series of battles over vari-

ous errors, the doctrine of Christ was developed—that He is very God and very man, one person, two natures, united indivisibly in that one person of the Son.

Next in God's providence, Augustine battled Pelagius and his heresies on natural man's depravity, God's saving grace, and sovereign predestination. The battles over the doctrines of grace were taking shape. Sad to say, Augustine's hard fought battles for truth were gradually buried under the perversions of the truth in the Middle Ages, resulting in the church apostatizing and becoming the whore ruled by godless usurpers, the popes.

But God reformed His church through the mighty work of the reformers, reestablishing the doctrine that salvation is of God alone—justification by faith alone, and salvation through grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone. Yet, not long after, the heresies of Arminius attacked these truths, and the Reformed churches came together to root out “the old Pelagian error out of hell,” and set forth the truth of sovereign grace in the Canons of Dordrecht.

The point I am making is that there is a certain development of doctrine, perfectly and wisely guided by God.

The question is—where does the doctrine of God's covenant of grace fit in this history?

From a certain point of view, the doctrine of the covenant is a very early doctrine, in that the church understood the importance of the doctrine. Adam lived in covenant with God, and after Adam's fall,

God maintained His covenant, evidently by the promise of the Seed of the woman. God indicated something of the scope of His covenant when He established His covenant with Noah and the creation. God further revealed the riches of His covenant as He established His covenant with Abraham and his seed, in their generations. God took Israel as His covenant people. The whole history of the Old Testament is a history of God unfolding His covenant. In fact, the whole of God's revelation is cast in terms of the covenant—the Old Testament (or Covenant) and the New Testament (Covenant).

As to the development of the doctrine, it begins slowly. A diligent search of Augustine's writings (early 400s) uncovers isolated references to God's covenant life with His people. The scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages wrote little on the covenant, but what they did develop was a covenant in harmony with their doctrine of salvation, that gave part of the work of salvation to man. There was really very little development of the doctrine of God's covenant of grace for the first 1,500 years of the new dispensation.

But the doctrine of the covenant began to come into its own as the reformers Luther and Calvin made reference to it, though not as a separate doctrine. The Swiss Reformers Heinrich Bullinger and Johannes Oecolampadius wrote separate treatises devoted to the doctrine of the covenant. Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, authors of the crown jewel of Reformed catechisms, the Heidelberg Catechism, were covenantal theologians. Steeped in Calvinism, they wove into their writ-

ings the glorious doctrine of God's covenant of grace.

Together with their other writings on the covenant, the Catechism profoundly affected Reformed theology in the Netherlands. Dutch theologians majored in this vital doctrine, and the development began in earnest. Johannes Cocceius and Herman Witsius are two such early theologians. From them issues a line of Reformed giants who placed heavy emphasis on the covenant—including Simon Van-Elzen, Abraham Kuypers, Herman Bavinck, G. H. Kersten, and Klass Schilder.

The development continued in the Reformed churches in America. In the Christian Reformed Church, William Heyns. In the Protestant Reformed Churches, Herman Hoeksema. Among the Presbyterians, Meredith Klein. Most recently, Douglas Wilson, John Baruch, and others have developed a covenant theology that goes by the name Federal Vision.

I do not say that all this development is positive, biblical, and Reformed. Some in fact ought to be declared heretical—contrary to the Reformed confessions. Some of the views of the covenant flatly contradict other views. And yet all, or at least most, claim to be within the bounds of the confessions. This leads to the confusion and the controversy.

Sad to say, after almost 2,000 years of doctrinal development in the church, and almost 500 years since the Reformation, this vital, central doctrine is not yet established.

Is it not time to settle this? 

The Place of Laity in Missions (7)

Families Moving to a Mission Field

In the last several articles we have raised the idea of whether some families of established churches of a denomination ought to consider moving to a mission field. We studied the biblical and historical precedent that reveals that families of the church did this in the past. It was, in fact, a powerful means Christ used to build His church in the world.

The suggestion of families or individuals moving to and becoming a part of the life of a mission does not mean that every family ought to make this a consideration. To be sure, this would not happen even if pressure were applied to families to do so! Neither is the question raised in order to give a way of escape for families that are being hounded in their own congregations for ungodly living. Families of this sort would be a detriment to the work of a mission.

The question is raised because of the wonderful advantage godly families or individuals from established churches would lend to the labors of a mission. We will write of these advantages in another article. In this article we first wish to address a number of important concerns raised against families moving to a mission field. These concerns are not raised by people who show no interest in missions or who search for opportunities to stymie the work of missions. These are legitimate concerns that need an answer.

Here is the first concern: Is it right for members of the instituted church to “leave” their church in order to join themselves to a small group of believers who are not (and maybe never will be) an instituted church? By stepping out of the instituted church into a mission field, members remove themselves from the rule of

Christ over them through the elders. They leave the place where the sacraments are administered for the confirming and strengthening of faith. They leave the communion of the saints. Is not this a spiritual step backwards? Will this not ultimately lead to the spiritual downfall of such a family or individual?

To answer this concern requires a proper understanding of mission work. From our earliest history, the Protestant Reformed Churches have insisted that the work of missions is a work of Christ through the instituted church. Rev. Herman Hoeksema, in a short syllabus on the *Principles of Missions*, writes on page 22,

But what I want to emphasize in this connection is that the church is not called in general, but only through the official ministry, to preach the gospel. Ambassadors are called. And they are called by the church. They are called to the ministry of the Word. And by the same church they are sent to the mission field.

This means that the church institute does the work of missions. That work is carried on through the offices of the church. In the June 1932 minutes of the combined consistories of the PRC it was stated:

This task (missions—W.B.) must be carried out by the church...through her offices which Christ has instituted in His church.... We are dealing with the official labor and the official calling of the church.... The work of missions must be regarded as official ministry, and this must be performed by the church.¹

This means that mission work does not stand out-

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Previous article in this series: December 1, 2010, p. 115.

¹ These two quotes are taken from a study of Protestant Reformed missions conducted by Prof. Barry Gritters, professor of missions in the Protestant Reformed Theological School.

side the sphere of the instituted church. It is carried on by the instituted church *through all of her offices*. Believers who belong to a mission group are not a small body of people who are a law unto themselves. They do not make their own decisions. They are not free from the admonition of the church. They are under the rule of the elders of the church that supervises their labors—even though they are not members in the instituted church. A family of the instituted churches that decides to join with a mission group is not free from the rule and authority of the instituted church. The missionary/pastor labors in that group bringing the official proclamation of the Word through the authority of the church institute. Even the deacons labor in such a group, seeing to it that the financial needs of the poor are met. Such is the nature of mission work.

Neither does a person remove himself from the sacraments of the church. Already when a mission work is in its infant stages, baptism of children and adults can take place. It is true that the Lord's Supper is not administered until the mission group has revealed spiritual maturity and stability in the Reformed faith. But we believe that the faith of new believers on a mission field can grow and flourish under the preaching before the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered. The Lord's Supper is a secondary means of grace. It is no different for those members of the instituted church who belong to a mission field. Besides, when families or individual saints of the instituted church join themselves with a mission group, the spiritual maturity and stability of the mission will be accelerated. The sooner this takes place, the sooner the sacrament of the Lord's Supper can be administered.

The idea of the communion of saints is addressed in the next two concerns that are raised against families moving to a mission field. First: where is the wisdom in a family pulling their children from one of our Protestant Reformed Christian schools and taking them to a place where there is none? Ah, now there is a serious consideration! Any parent who has sent his children to a Protestant Reformed Christian school knows how valuable those schools have been in the lives of his children. Not only are these schools of high academic standards, but they are of high spiritual standards too. Families in the areas of our Christian schools under-

stand the blessing such schools are in the education of their children.

But here is another consideration: Has God been faithful to us as believers and churches *because of* our Christian schools? Or do we have Christian schools because God has been faithful to us? I was born and raised a member of the Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, IL. This church was organized in 1926. A Protestant Reformed School was not started by the Christian School Association there until 1961. This means that the members of the church grew and flourished under God's blessing for 35 years before a PR school was started. This congregation was able to start a Christian school because God had been faithful to her in her generations. Is it any different when a mission church is established? It may be that a Protestant Reformed Christian school is not immediately established after organization. Yet God is faithful to gather His church.

But is it *wise* to take our children from such a school and go to a place where one is not established? Some years ago, when my children were just starting school, I took a call to serve as missionary on the island of Jamaica. I was told by a few that I was sinning against my children by taking them away from our churches and from our Christian schools. The years spent in Jamaica were some of the most spiritually rewarding years of my life—and my children that remember Jamaica will say the same. They were given a perspective of the church that few children in the confines of the church institute have the privilege of experiencing. There are unique blessings for children too when a family becomes a part of the life and labor of a mission group. Again, we will speak of those advantages in another article.

This is not meant to minimize the value of our Christian schools. But sometimes God gives children a good spiritual education when faced with the realities of being a godly witness to others and the need to defend the faith. To leave the larger area of the communion of saints, to leave places where there are Protestant Reformed schools, is not for everyone. But neither is it necessarily foolish.

One last concern that is often heard is: is it not a denial of the covenant God establishes in our generations to move away from parents, siblings, and fellow saints? We ought to recognize the fallacy in this reasoning. God establishes His covenant of friendship with believers in

Christ. God then promises to His church that He will establish His covenant with believers born into their generations too. Nowhere does the Bible teach, however, that God saves these children only when parents remain in a little closed community refusing to spread into other places and lands. It is always interesting to hear the observations of non-hostile people who are outside of our churches looking in. Recently the remark was made by a visitor who is genuinely interested in becoming a part of our Fellowship here in Pittsburgh: "So, how was it possible for a young man from your 'almost Amish' churches in Michigan to find your daughter way out here?" There was no malice or reproach in what she was saying. It was merely an observation. Is that really what we look like to others?

On the one hand, that can be taken as a compliment. Our children are looking for believing spouses. The best place to find those spouses is in the church. We well know how many godly marriages have developed out of this principle of God's Word. On the other hand, the label "almost Amish" gives us a little pinch. Are we so unwilling to give our blessing upon our children when they decide to move elsewhere, perhaps far away from parents, siblings, and friends? Do they deny God's covenant if they move to a smaller church or a mission field where their presence would be so greatly

appreciated and needed? Or does God bless us in our generations only if our children and siblings all live within 25 miles of each other? Are we so governed by sentimentality that we make it impossible to look out for the greater welfare of the church by insisting that we cannot live without family and friends close by?

The communion of saints is much broader than what exists in one area of the country or world. Even as it becomes manifest in the church institute, it is broader than a little confined area of the world. When we leave our church to affiliate with a mission work, then we are expressing that life within the church can be found in a new and different place outside of my safety zone. I can establish friendships with others besides those I have been friends with in the past. I can help in the church by being an active, useful member, where my presence and life make a real difference. And God's promise remains true that wherever I live He will establish His covenant with my believing children too.

It is true: moving to a mission field is not for everyone. Neither will the need for help in missions convince a large number of us to move. But maybe there are some who are willing to rise up to the challenge that many others have accepted in the history of the church. All that is needed is a few. 

SPECIAL ARTICLE

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMAS

Herman Bavinck on Covenant and Election (1)

Editor's note:

This article is offered to the readers to help clear up some of the confusion on the doctrine of the covenant. It comes to the *SB* as a result of a private conversation of the undersigned with Prof. Engelsma. I expressed disappointment concerning the lack of clarity in some of the summaries that have been written on Herman Bavinck's covenant theology. Prof. Engelsma informed

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me that he had written a summary of Bavinck's doctrine of the covenant, and he offered it to the *SB*. We readily accepted it. It is as straightforward and clear as Bavinck himself on this vital doctrine. Come to find out, this summary of Prof. Engelsma is part of a book that he is completing entitled *Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition*. If the book is as helpful as this presentation of Bavinck, we eagerly await its publication by the RFPAs later this year, D.V.

The summary of Bavinck's doctrine of the covenant will appear in two installments in the *SB*. —RJD

In the long-standing controversy over the doctrine of the covenant in the Reformed churches that God now brings to a head by the heresy of the Federal Vision, the relation of covenant and election is fundamental. The covenant theology of the Federal Vision, like the covenant theology of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”), which the Federal Vision is developing, denies any relation between covenant and the eternal decree of election. Covenant must be “liberated” from the divine decree. Election only “oppresses,” “hampers,” and “enslaves” the covenant. The only relation between covenant and election is one of “tension.”

But purported critics of the Federal Vision evidently share this fear of and aversion to election, at least with regard to the relation of covenant and election. Either they remain silent about the relation of covenant and election, or they nervously warn against allowing election to govern the covenant. Or they so obfuscate the relation as to make it impossible for the theologian, much less the Reformed layman, to know what the relation is, or whether indeed there is one. One thing they never fail to make clear is that those who teach a close relation between covenant and election are on the furthest fringes of the Reformed tradition, if they have any place in the tradition at all.

Thus wounded in the house of its friends, the Reformed faith concerning the precious doctrine of the covenant of grace suffers grievously.

Defense and development of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant at the beginning of the twenty-first century demands a clear, orthodox understanding of the relation of covenant and election.

Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), held in high esteem as a Reformed dogmatician by virtually everyone, can help the Reformed churches in this regard.

Election Governs the Covenant

Bavinck teaches as his own belief the position of the Reformed tradition and the doctrine of Scripture that election and covenant are closely related. Treating explicitly of covenant and election in his Reformed dogmatics, Bavinck writes that election is the source and fountain of the covenant. This is Bavinck’s own figure: “The covenant of grace is

the channel by which the stream of election flows toward eternity.”¹

Election governs the covenant; the covenant is God’s execution in history of His elective will of salvation in eternity. “Election only and without qualification states who are elect and will infallibly obtain salvation; the covenant of grace describes the road by which these elect people will attain their destiny.”² “The elect...[are] gathered into one under Christ as their head in the way of the covenant.”³

Basic to this conception of the relation of election and covenant is the recognition of Jesus Christ as head of the covenant of grace, as Adam was head of the covenant of creation. For Bavinck, Jesus Christ is “head of the covenant of grace,” as well as “its mediator.” This means that “the covenant of grace has been made with Christ.” In and through Christ, the head of the covenant, the covenant “reaches out also to his own.”⁴ “His own” are all those whom the Father has given to Jesus in the decree of election (John 6:37, 39; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 9, 11, 24).

In support of his teaching that God has made His covenant with Christ, as head of the covenant, and, in Him, with “His own,” Bavinck appeals to Galatians 3:29: “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed.”⁵ This text depends on a preceding verse, Galatians 3:16, which teaches that God made the promise of the covenant to Abraham’s Seed, Jesus Christ.

¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3: *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, tr. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 229. The editor of the English translation of Bavinck’s dogmatics rightly gives this section of the dogmatics the heading, “Covenant and Election.” Here Bavinck states, not only his own definitive theological thinking on the subject, but also what he considers to be the biblical and Reformed (and for Bavinck “Reformed” means creedal) doctrine concerning the relation of covenant and election. With specific reference to the relation of covenant and election, Bavinck explains the relation clearly, precisely, and thoroughly, if briefly. This passage is decisive regarding Bavinck’s understanding of the relation of covenant and election. One may fill out this explanation from other places in Bavinck. But all efforts to weaken and even contradict Bavinck’s doctrine in this passage by references to other writings of Bavinck, sometimes ignoring this passage—the *locus classicus* on the subject—are smashed, and must be smashed, on the rock of this passage.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

Difference of Covenant and Election

Of course election and covenant are different. Bavinck does not “identify” them. No Reformed theologian has ever “identified” them. When opponents of Bavinck’s teaching that election and covenant are closely related, as a fountain to its stream, charge those who confess this close relation with “identifying” covenant and election, what they really intend to deny, and to root out of the Reformed churches, is the teaching that election *governs* the covenant. Invariably, an examination of the mantra, “covenant and election are not identical,” will show that those who sound the mantra mean: “election does not govern the covenant.”

Election is the divine decree in eternity appointing Jesus Christ as head of the church and, in Christ, choosing a certain number of persons to redemption as the body of Christ. The covenant is God’s structured bond of union and communion with Christ and His people in history, in which living relationship God works out the salvation of the church and its members.

The difference that Bavinck emphasizes is that, whereas in election the members of the church are passive, in the covenant the Spirit of Christ makes the elect members of the church active. This activity includes that they “consciously and voluntarily consent to this covenant.”⁶

Bilateral Covenant

This is what Bavinck means by the covenant’s becoming “bilateral.” He does not mean that a covenant that was originally established “unilaterally,” by God alone, now becomes dependent for its maintenance and perfection upon the will and work of the member of the covenant. This is indeed what many Reformed theologians mean by their teaching that the covenant is unilateral (one-sided) in its establishment but bilateral (two-sided) in its maintenance. This is to teach that, whereas the beginning of the covenant with a human is sovereign grace, the maintenance and perfection of the covenant are a cooperative effort of God and men. This is to teach that, whereas the establishment of the covenant depends solely upon God, the maintenance and perfection of the covenant depend upon the sinner. This is to teach that, whereas the beginning of the

⁶ Ibid.

covenant and its salvation is God’s work, in the end the covenant and its salvation are the work of man himself.

Bavinck will have none of this. “The doctrine of the covenant maintains God’s sovereignty in the entire work of salvation.... Into that entire work of salvation, from beginning to end, nothing is introduced that derives from humans. It is God’s work totally and exclusively; it is pure grace and undeserved salvation.... This doctrine of the covenant...purely and fully maintains God’s sovereignty in the work of salvation.”⁷

God not only unilaterally establishes the covenant, but He also unilaterally maintains the covenant: “The covenant of grace...is indeed unilateral: it proceeds from God; he has designed and defined it. *He maintains and implements it. It is a work of the triune God and is totally completed among the three Persons themselves.*”⁸

When Bavinck speaks of the covenant’s becoming bilateral (after its unilateral establishment with a person), he means rather that once God establishes His covenant with a child, a woman, or a man, that person becomes active by the grace of the covenant and is commanded to be active. Bavinck tells us that this is what he means by the bilateral character of the established covenant:

It [the covenant] is destined to become bilateral, *to be consciously and voluntarily accepted and kept by humans in the power of God.... The covenant of grace does not deaden human beings or treat them as inanimate objects.... It does not kill their will but frees them from sin.*⁹

By the covenant’s bilateral character, Bavinck has in mind what orthodox Reformed theologians have taught as the “mutuality” of the covenant. The covenant is a bond of mutual love and fellowship between God in Christ and God’s covenant friends. It is like the marriage of the Christian man and the Christian woman.

By the covenant’s bilateral character, Bavinck has in mind what the Reformed Baptism Form teaches when it declares that the covenant of grace, unilaterally established, maintained, and perfected by the triune God,

⁷ Ibid., 228, 229.

⁸ Ibid., 230; emphasis added.

⁹ Ibid.; emphasis added.

contains “two parts.” Members of the covenant have a “part” in the covenant. Our “part” is “new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”¹⁰

By the covenant’s bilateral character, Bavinck has in mind exactly what the Protestant Reformed Churches declare about the covenant of grace in their “Declaration of Principles” (concerning the covenant):

The sure promise of God which He realizes in us as rational and moral creatures not only makes it impossible that we should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness but also confronts us with the obligation of love, to walk in a new and holy life, and constantly to watch unto prayer.¹¹

That the covenant friends of God undertake their “side” of the bilateral covenant, that they actively enter into the mutuality of the covenant (as a loved and loving wife in a good marriage), that they do their part, that they carry out their obligation in the covenant to love their covenant God—this is due to the sovereign grace of the covenant working in them.

Bavinck thinks so. “Into that entire work of [covenant] salvation, from beginning to end, nothing is introduced that derives from humans. It is God’s work totally and exclusively.”¹² “The covenant of grace...re-creates the whole person and, having renewed it by grace, prompts it, freely and independently, with soul, mind, and body, to love God and to dedicate itself to him.”¹³

Harmony of Covenant and Election

Covenant and election are different in important respects. They are not different in respect of sovereign grace. Covenant grace is as sovereign as is the grace of election. They are the one, saving grace of the triune God in Jesus Christ. And the grace of God in Jesus Christ is sovereign.

¹⁰ “Form for the Administration of Baptism,” in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 258.

¹¹ “Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches,” in *ibid.*, 426.

¹² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 229.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 230.

Neither are covenant and election different, in the judgment of Herman Bavinck, with regard to their extent. That is, for Bavinck the grace of election and the grace of the covenant are coterminous. The grace of the covenant is not wider than election. The covenant grace of God is for the elect and for the elect only. Bavinck expresses this fundamental harmony of election and covenant in these words: “The two [election and covenant] are not so different that election is particular while the covenant of grace is universal.”¹⁴

What Bavinck states concerning the particularity of both election and covenant applies to the physical, baptized offspring of godly parents. Evidently, Bavinck *intended* that his statement concerning the particularity of the gracious covenant apply specifically to the children of godly parents. One essential aspect of the particular covenant is the inclusion of the children of believers. “It [the covenant] is never made with a solitary individual but always also with his or her descendants. It is a covenant from generations to generations.”¹⁵

A few pages after he has insisted that the covenant, like election, is “particular,” at the end of his treatment of covenant and election, with explicit appeal to the distinction in Romans 9:6-23 between two kinds of children of Abraham, Bavinck will affirm that the covenant is established with the elect, and with the elect only.

According to Herman Bavinck, it is not true that, whereas election embraces only some of the physical offspring of Abraham, of Isaac and Rebekah, and of believing parents today, the covenant embraces all of the physical offspring without exception.

Covenant is not the welcome doctrinal instrument by which Reformed and Presbyterian theologians who detest the particularity of election may broaden and universalize the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. Covenant is not a doctrine with which to shove election far, far into the background of Reformed preaching and teaching, until finally it disappears altogether.

Election and covenant do not differ in this respect that, whereas election is particular regarding grace towards the children of believers, the covenant of grace is universal with regard to circumcised or baptized children.

That Bavinck means by the particularity of the cove-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

nant that the covenant of grace is established, maintained, and perfected with the elect, and the elect only, is evident, not only from the statement itself, but also from what immediately follows. Immediately, Bavinck declares that the covenant is “made with Christ [and]...his own.”¹⁶

Bavinck clearly sees that any extension of the grace of the covenant beyond the limits of God’s election necessarily implies the heresy of free will. If covenant grace is wider than election, *covenant grace is resistible*. Some towards whom God has a gracious attitude, desiring to save them, or upon whom God bestows grace as a covenant power, resist this grace, and go lost. Implied is that whether one is saved by covenant grace depends, not upon the grace itself (for many who are objects of this grace are not saved by it), but upon his own decision, his

¹⁶ Ibid.

own will. Extending covenant grace more widely than election necessarily introduces the heresy of salvation by the free will of the sinner into the gospel of the covenant.

Repudiating the idea that election and covenant differ regarding the extent of their grace, Bavinck adds, in the same sentence: “that the former [election] denies free will and the latter [the covenant] teaches or assumes it, that the latter takes back what the former teaches.” The complete sentence reads as follows: “The two [election and covenant] are not so different that election is particular while the covenant of grace is universal, *that the former denies free will and the latter teaches or assumes it, that the latter takes back what the former teaches.*”¹⁷

... to be concluded. 

¹⁷ Ibid.; emphasis added.

Consequences of Evolutionism

Especially over the last half century, one theory after another that denies the literal creation-record of Genesis has been introduced and gained popularity, also within evangelical, Reformed, and Presbyterian denominations. The period theory, the gap theory, the mythical theory, the allegorical theory, the poetical theory, the saga theory, and other views and variations that explain Genesis 1 as a doxology or as a teaching model, and in recent years the so-called Framework Hypothesis have all been put forth. All of these views have one thing in common—they deny the literal meaning of the creation record in Scripture. And, whether it is deliberate or not, they are an attack upon sacred Scripture and the very foundation of the Christian faith.

Many of those who deny a literal creation record argue that whether you believe a literal creation account of Genesis or whether you believe in the period

theory or the Framework Hypothesis really makes no difference as far as salvation is concerned. They insist that these matters have no bearing upon our salvation. They say that Genesis 1 and its interpretation do not belong to the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. “It’s not a salvation issue!” they insist. All of these views ought to be acceptable in the church. This shouldn’t be a divisive issue.

Be not deceived! Undermining the truth of creation brings about the collapse of the entire structure of the Christian religion. All of Scripture, from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22, is the gospel of Christ, the gospel of our salvation!

Seldom has this been more plain than it is with two articles featured in the September 2010 issue of *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, articles written by Dr. Daniel Harlow and Dr. John Schneider, Bible and Theology professors at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. These articles boldly demonstrate the theological implications of embracing evolution. These Calvin College professors propose

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that Adam and Eve are purely symbolic literary figures, that there was no historical fall into sin, and that the doctrines of original sin, Christ's atonement, election, and eternal punishment need major revision.

Dr. John Byl, a professor emeritus of Mathematical Science at Trinity Western University, reports on this bold undermining of fundamental truths of the Reformed (biblical) faith in an excellent article in *Christian Renewal* (November 24, 2010, pp. 6 - 8) entitled, "The Evolution of Calvin College." He writes:

Following mainstream science, Drs. Harlow and Schneider presume that humans did not originate from a single pair 6,000 years ago but, rather, from a population of about 10,000 interbreeding individuals living in Africa about 150,000 years ago.

Consequently, Dr. Harlow (and Dr. Schneider) favor the view that "Adam and Eve are strictly literary figures—characters in a divinely inspired story about the imagined past that intends to teach primarily theological, not historical, truths about God, creation, and humanity."

Drs. Harlow and Schneider both grant that Paul and Luke regarded Adam as a historical person. However, Harlow asserts, "Paul had little reason not to regard Adam as a historical figure, whereas today we have many reasons for recognizing him as a strictly literary one." Dr. Schneider conceded that denying an historical Adam and his fall means rejecting biblical inerrancy.

Drs. Harlow and Schneider also both conclude that, if humans evolved, they could not have been originally upright. Thus, our sinfulness cannot be due to an historical fall. Rather, all humans are united in sin because our evolutionary heritage predisposes us to selfishness and sin. The doctrine of original sin must therefore be reformulated accordingly.

This has implications also for Christ's atonement, Harlow asserts:

Once the doctrine of original sin is reformulated, the doctrine of the atonement may likewise be deepened. But the new understanding of sin requires that we now favor theories of the atonement like the

Christus victor model or the moral influence theory, instead of the theory of a ransom paid to the Devil or a satisfaction paid to God's honor.

In other words, the Reformed notion of Christ's atonement as a payment for human sin is no longer viable.

Dr. Schneider, who seems to be inclined towards a similar revision of Christ's atonement, goes one step further. He writes, "These intuitions about grace have very important implications for Christian thinking on the matter of eternal damnation, which is very hard to integrate well into theology as integrated with evolutionary science, and is also very difficult, if not impossible, to sustain within successful Christian theodicy." He seems to favor a universalism in which all humans will be saved.

Obviously these Calvin College professors blatantly and unashamedly contradict the truth of Scripture and the Reformed confessions with their belief in the theory of evolution. They clearly put to naught the argument that one's belief regarding Genesis and creation does not involve a "salvation issue." They make the consequences of teaching from their "evolutionary paradigm" very clear.

We have always maintained that undermining the truth of the first chapters of Genesis brings about the collapse of the entire structure of the Christian faith. We insist that this is true simply because Scripture is one, an organism, a unity. Consider what we read in Luke 24:27, where Jesus, the risen Lord, was speaking to the travelers on the road to Emmaus: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Jesus

Himself emphasized that Moses spoke of the Christ!

Denial of the historicity of the first chapter of Genesis abolishes the "mother-promise" of Genesis 3:15, the beginning of the gospel of salvation in Christ. If Adam the first is but a symbolic literary figure, what happens to the second Adam, the Lord from heaven? We read in I Corinthians 15:21, 22: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Do we understand? In Genesis we are dealing with

*The spirit that would
rob God of His glory
in creating,
will also ultimately seek
to rob God of his glory
in redeeming.*

the very foundation of our faith! If Adam and Eve are fiction, Christianity is fictitious. If the events revealed in the first chapters of Genesis never really happened, Christianity is just another mythical religion. There is no room for compromise here. For the spirit that would rob God of His glory in *creating*, will also ultimately seek to rob God of his glory in *redeeming*, as the articles by Drs. Harlow and Schneider so clearly demonstrate.

Clearly their teachings are in conflict with the truth of the infallible inspiration of the Bible. Dr. Schneider conceded that denying a historical Adam and his fall means rejecting biblical inerrancy. Once this truth is rejected, the Scriptures and their divine authority are lost. And, as has been shown, a flood of errors and heresies come gushing forth to inundate a church. For we

need not heed the personal opinions of men. We need not follow ordinances that simply reflect the culture of a day long gone by. We need not obey the word of man. But regarding the Word of God, we must say with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." And with the Lord Christ we testify, "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17).

In Hebrews 11:3 we read, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." And that, you see, really explains it. "Through faith *we* understand." Not everyone understands, but *we* do, by the grace of God. We understand and believe. These things are hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes. May God grant us that childlike faith. 

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

In the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord (2)

The familiar words of the title of this article are taken from Ephesians 6:4. This verse describes in a rather comprehensive way the calling of parents. Each word that the inspired apostle uses has its significant nuance of meaning. To 'bring up' means to nurture. The word translated as 'nurture' refers to all the education and training that is necessary to bring a child from infancy to mature adulthood and responsible independent Christian living. The word 'admonition' speaks of discipline and chastening. This word in the original language comes from the verb that literally means to put in the mind, to admonish, warn, exhort, and counsel. We can perform this calling only when we ourselves truly know the Lord, rely on Him, trust in Him, follow Him, and glory in Him alone.

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The work of parenting involves the joint effort of father and mother. The address of Ephesians 6 and the parallel text in Colossians 3:21 is first of all to fathers, because the father must take the lead. The father's role does not end with the procreation of children. Many fathers in the world imagine this to be the case. The grossest violation of God's order imaginable is carelessness regarding children born out of wedlock. There are, besides, wicked men who are married and abandon their wives when they are faced with the great responsibility of parenting their own children.

Fathers must not make their careers so important that they are derelict as fathers. The role of father is more than bringing home the paycheck, or even making enough money so that the family can live in a beautiful home, enjoy all kinds of earthly luxuries, go on exciting vacations, etc. Father must be home enough to be with his family, to give on-going spiritual counsel, discipline, and encouragement to his children.

But the task of parenting is also the duty and obligation of the wife and mother. She is called by the Word of God to be a keeper at home. She is called to love her husband and to love her children and to devote herself to this, even as the major calling of her life.

Children need the influence of both father and mother in their lives as they are growing up. That is exactly why children are given by the Lord to married couples. Both parents have their unique and even mysterious influence. The two complement each other. Those who in the providence of God have lost their spouse in death, or who have been abandoned by them through the treachery of divorce, know how difficult it is to be a single parent. God gives special grace to His children who find themselves in this circumstance of life.

Children must be nourished and brought up. This is far more than a matter of physical care and psychological development. It is above all the spiritual nurture of our children. We have our children in the home for only a very short time. In the time of childhood, principles of truth and godly morality must be instilled in the minds and hearts of our children. Godly character must be molded and shaped. Foundations must be given to our children, upon which they will be able to build by the grace of God for their whole life.

The work of parenting is an awesome responsibility. It requires a great deal of effort on the part of parents. It requires self-sacrificial love, self-denial, and diligent devotion to the task. It requires a willingness on the part of parents to be constantly engaged in the lives of their children. In the Christian family it requires that there be ongoing communication or communion and fellowship. This requires time and personal interest in the lives of our children. Correction is most effective and powerful when it is given in the context of genuine parental love. This love must be deeply personal. Children must have a profound sense of the personal, special affection of their parents. Most of all, great wisdom and spiritual understanding are necessary. They are needed as we deal with our children at each new stage of their development.

Parenting requires a lot of patience, perseverance, and steadfastness on the part of fathers and mothers. The work is by no means easy. Children do not al-

ways immediately show fruits of godliness in their lives. As great a blessing as children are, there are also many struggles and anxieties in raising them in the fear of the Lord. Conflicts will arise between parents and children, especially in the teenage years. Parents need great wisdom and compassion. The firmness required to overcome these conflicts is possible by the grace of God. Patience and persistence have the promise of yielding the fruit of righteousness in our children. Sometimes this fruit will not become evident until sometime later in their lives. Parents must not give up in discouragement and despair but continue in faith and prayer.

The truth of God's Word must be the foundation of the lives of our children. True Christianity needs a doctrinal foundation. Christianity is not just about feeling and experience. True faith and godliness flow from the knowledge of sound doctrine. For this reason we must be members of a church where there is sound doctrinal preaching. How supportive we should be of formal, rigorous, and extensive catechism instruction from early childhood and into the later teenage years of our young people. We are also thankful for our Christian schools, where sound principles of God's truth are taught to our children, and our children are instructed also as to how these principles of godliness must be applied and worked out in every area of life.

Fathers must be teachers of sound doctrine in the covenant home. They are, according to their God-given nature, most qualified for this. They must teach this doctrine with fatherly authority and wisdom and understanding gained through their own careful study of the Word of God and extensive reading. There should in every home be a measure of formal instruction of the father to the children. It is most excellent if the father is really and actively involved in the catechism preparation of the children. He must be well-read and studied and mature in the understanding of the great doctrines of the Word of God. He needs this for his own ongoing steadfastness and for his calling in the church, but also for the raising of his covenant children. As a pastor for many years I have been so heartened to have children in catechism class who obviously have parents, and perhaps especially fathers, who are active in supporting the catechism training of their children.

If children do not receive a strong foundation in sound doctrine in their lives, they are vulnerable in later life to being tossed about by every wind of doctrine and the

cunning craftiness of men of the world, who lie in wait to deceive. Ours is an age of dreadful apostasy in the church world. This is one of the chief signs that we are indeed living in the last days. Sound doctrine can be maintained only when at the same time false doctrine is warned against and rightly condemned on the basis of the Word of God. Children must learn discernment. When they grow up, we hope they will make confession of their faith in the church in which they have been raised. To do this properly they need to know the doctrines maintained in our church. When they face the prospect of marriage, some of our young people leave our church and sometimes go to churches that have gone far down the road of apostasy—all for the sake of mates they have chosen. This will have very serious consequences for their later lives. Is this not the chief reason why we lose some of our young people?

Children must at times be chastened in their lives. “Whom the father loves he chastens.” Let us not go along with the foolish idea that chastisement is cruel and detrimental to psychological development of our children. Discipline teaches our children the seriousness of sin and the fear of God. When children are not disciplined, they will continue in sin. Their hearts will become hardened in the way of sin. Sinful patterns of behavior will begin to develop already in the days of youth, and we can expect that this will only grow worse and worse in their later life. The rod of correction must be properly used in true love for our children to drive sin and evil far from their hearts.

Children must be strongly warned against the sins of the world. They must be taught the reality of the truth that friendship of the world is enmity against God. All that is in the world is the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Never before has there been in the world such a threat, especially for our young people. We know that, according to Scripture, this will increase more and more as the end of the world and the day of final judgment of the world is hastening. There are two sins especially that our children and young people must be warned about, because of their power and potential destructiveness. First, the sins of immorality are increasing more and more in the world in which we live. We ourselves must realize how dreadful the situation really is. The movie industry, the worldwide Internet, and the constantly developing and changing

new electronic media are threats to our young people. As amazing as this electronic media is, and as much potential there may be for good and proper use of it, this industry is also the most powerful instrument ever in the hands of the devil to promote more and more gross and brazen immorality in the world. Immorality is more and more being accepted as normal. And the consequences are grievous. Many marriages and homes are being destroyed. The sins of immorality are leading many strong men to hell’s destruction. Our young people need to be warned about the soul-destroying power of this philosophy.

The second sin warned against very often in the Word of God and equally powerful and destructive to true spirituality and godliness is the sin of covetousness. Maybe there is less awareness of the dangers of this for ourselves and our children than we as parents realize. The love of money is the root of all evil. Our children must be taught in their covenant homes to seek the kingdom first in their life and to consider material things of only secondary importance. This is no doubt one of the greatest challenges of parenting. We cannot expect to nurture our children in the fear of the Lord if we by the example of our own life are covetous and addicted to materialism.

Much more can be said. This article is too long already. One more thing of primary importance. Our children must be nurtured in the love of God. We believe that, because we ourselves and our children are conceived and born in sin, we are, by nature, prone to hate God and the neighbor. We cannot even begin to love, except by the power of God’s love in our hearts. The greatest thing we need to nurture in our children is love for God and love for the neighbor. The world presents to our children such a depraved, perverted form of love. It is urgent that in our parenting we teach our children the true love of God and the neighbor. This love must be guided by His truth and holiness. This love must be shown in our every word and deed and not just be a theory. Central to true godliness is kindness, compassion, and real concern and sympathy for the neighbor. Our children must learn these things in our covenant homes. May God help us to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. 

Freedom Found in the Fishbowl

The young people who attended the 2010 young people's convention may recognize the content of this article, because it is based on the speech I gave there. After receiving some encouragement to put the speech into writing, I decided I would write on the subject of sin's bondage. The difficult part of writing this article is that I cannot use the visual aid that I used at the convention. So please picture in your minds as you read the article a little goldfish, named Sidney, swimming around in a bowl of water.

Christians are captives set free from sin. This is our spiritual identity according to Jesus' words in John 8:32: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Being set free implies bondage. To understand what Jesus is teaching in these words, we must understand the difference between bondage and freedom. Sidney, the goldfish, helps us to distinguish. Freedom for Sidney is in the fishbowl because in the fishbowl he swims and lives. Bondage is outside of the fishbowl because he cannot swim or live there. Outside the fishbowl, Sidney dies.

But what does this mean spiritually? Bondage is doing whatever you want—living outside the fishbowl of God's Word. Freedom is found in the fishbowl of obeying God's Word. The One who gives us this freedom is Jesus, who is the truth. Jesus instructs us in John 8:36, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." True spiritual freedom is found alone in Christ. He puts us into the fishbowl of obedience by His sovereign grace. Living in freedom is obeying His word. The sinful, deceitful world turns this upside down, "No, no, no. You have it all wrong. Freedom is doing whatever you want. Keeping laws is bondage."

What they are saying in terms of Sidney and the fishbowl is that freedom is found outside the bowl, and bondage is found inside the bowl. Clearly this is a lie.

Rev. Eriks is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Because this spiritual bondage is so appealing to your flesh, I want you to have a better understanding of the enslaving power of sin. Sin is not a toy to be played with. Although it is true that Jesus has freed us from sin's bondage by His death and resurrection, we can become enslaved to sin in our lives. Satan pours blood, sweat, and tears into tempting you to live outside the fishbowl of God's Word in your youth, so that a particular sin dominates your entire life. The choices you make now will impact you for the rest of your lives.

Sin is a ruthless enemy that imprisons. Sin enslaves. Sin takes captives. This is the implication of Jesus' words in John 8:32: "and the truth shall make you free." The Pharisees understood that Jesus implied bondage, which is evident from their words in the next verse, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" The Pharisees' response to Jesus' words was clearly false because, historically, the Jews were often in bondage. But Jesus' point is not this kind of physical captivity. Jesus' point is that they and all men are in bondage to sin. In John 8:34 Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of *sin*."

There are two aspects to the spiritual bondage of sin. First, there is the bondage of sin's punishment. For our sin we deserve God's wrath, and there is no way for us personally to escape this punishment. We are delivered from this only by Christ's cross, because He bore the wrath we deserve on the cross. Second, there is the bondage of sin's power. This bondage is total depravity. Man in sin, without grace, can do no good. He is under the strong delusion that sin is good for him. I want to focus on this power of sin because we can be trapped by the bondage of sin.

What is sin? Sin is disobeying God's law. Sin is rebellion against God. When we sin, we put our selfish desires above what God demands. Really, sin is idolatry, because we place our selfish desires above God. In sin, I want life to revolve around me. This is true of any sin.

It can happen in our lives that we come under the power of sin, so that we repeat a sin or activity again and again. Putting it in terms of Sidney and his bowl, in a certain sphere of our lives we continue to live outside the fishbowl. Another word for this is *addiction*. Maybe you do not want to use this word to characterize your sin. But it can. I define addiction as habitual sin. An addiction is being under the rule of something other than God, so that this thing or this activity becomes the center of life. It is a sin that becomes a cruel taskmaster that victimizes and controls.

What are addictions? Any sin or activity has the possibility of becoming an addiction (habitual sin). Here are some examples: alcohol, smoking, drugs, porn, anger, sleep, lying, weight lifting, TV, work, gambling, sports, sugar, sex, lust, caffeine, shopping, chocolate, disobedience to your parents. I could go on, but you get the point. Some of these activities are clearly sins (porn, drunkenness, lying, etc.). Repetitive sinful behavior is an addiction. But other activities are not sinful in themselves (eating, sleeping, working, etc.). These activities become sinful addictions if we depend on them or seek them for the wrong reasons—to find comfort, an escape, or satisfaction. For example, eating is not wrong, but if I eat to deal with stress, eating can become a sinful addiction.

Maybe you are thinking, “This could never happen to me. These addictions are found in the unsaved and not in the church.” It *can* happen to you. Maybe it already has. We all battle with habitual sins. Not only is this our experience, but the Scriptures also warn us in I Corinthians 10:12, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” There are examples in the Scriptures of God’s people who fell into habitual sin in their lives. Jonah continued for some time refusing to obey God’s call to preach against Ninevah. For some time, David held on to his sin of adultery and murder. Peter denied Jesus, not one time, but three times. Can you think of more examples? This is a real danger because of total depravity and the sinful natures we still have. Do you believe in total depravity? Total depravity means it is possible for us to become enslaved to sin.

What drives addiction? Why do we have such a hard time saying no to certain sins? Why do we crave things

that are so bad for us? It is because we want to be like God in the sense that we want control of our lives. Sin promises control—do what you want. Sin promises that it will satisfy—this will feel good. When you have a difficult time, this (alcohol, drugs, shopping, etc.) will help. This is all the deception of sin. Do not believe the lie.

How do I go from inside the fishbowl to outside the fishbowl in habitual sin? It is usually a slow, gradual process. It is a slow process from experimentation to addiction. The first steps begin without a lot of fanfare, like the first steps into the Grand Canyon. The first steps of spiritual indifference and apathy do not attract a lot of attention, until one day we find ourselves struggling to say no to a particular sin because the ruts of this sin are so deeply imbedded in our hearts and lives. We are out of the fishbowl.

This happens with sexual sins. It begins by watching the beer commercials that sell sex, or watching TV programs like “The Bachelor” with sexual innuendo and immodest dress. Maybe you find some pictures on the Internet of women in their bikinis, and you reason that at least they are not naked. Maybe a friend has a magazine or a video he shows you. Then during an innocent search on Google the porn site pops up and you click and there you are. After a quick look, you are disgusted and close the window. But then over time you follow your curiosity and find that webpage again. You pray for forgiveness and vow not to do this again, but you are surfing the web again and you return to it. Soon you return without giving much thought to it. Afterward you feel awful, but still you return like a dog to its vomit. The sin has a hold on you. You are captive.

This happens with drinking and partying. You find yourself at a party not knowing ahead of time there would be alcohol. Someone offers a drink, but you decline. Then there is another party, and you convince yourself you will not drink. But others pressure you, and it looks like they are having a good time. Just one won’t be so bad. Over time, one drink leads to another. You feel guilty, but you convince yourself that it is not so bad because at least you do not drink every weekend. Then you start drinking every weekend, but you convince yourself that this is okay because you are not doing drugs. Now you live for the next opportunity to drink. When there is reason to celebrate, you want

a drink. When you are upset and hurting, you want a drink to dull the pain. You are outside the fishbowl.

This happens with lying and disobedience to parents and so many other sins.

These are just a few examples. I hope none of you responds by saying, “Oh, that is not me. This could not happen to me.” Be suspicious of your own hearts and desires because of sin. The reality is that when we begin in the direction of sin, sin never stays the same—sin always wants more. The temporary gratification satisfies the desire of the heart. It gives power, pleasure, and popularity, which we may crave. We think we can stop if we want to. I can control this. But the reality is that sin dominates.

Beware of the power of sin! Sin is powerful! Sin is not content to take a backseat in your life. Sin wants the driver’s seat. Sin wants to control and dominate your life. Not only is sin powerful, but you have a sinful nature that desires to be outside the fishbowl. This is why the spiritual choices you make now will impact the rest of your life. If you set your heart upon sin and choose this way, there is the strong possibility of its continuing into adulthood.

The effects of habitual sin are awful. What happens to the fish outside of the fishbowl? It cannot breathe! Soon it dies! There is great danger outside the fishbowl. We saw this at the convention. I dropped poor Sidney and by the end of the speech he was floating sideways in the bowl. I did not plan that, but it powerfully illustrated the point. What does this illustrate in

our lives? First, habitual sin affects all your relationships with the people who truly care for your souls. It affects your relationship with your parents and with your good friends. Your sin is a barrier to having good, healthy relationships because you are trying to live a dual life. Sin leads to fighting and tension in these relationships.

More importantly, habitual sin affects your relationship with God. Such habitual sin brings shame and guilt. You commit the sin and feel bad about it afterward. Maybe you confess the sin to God and vow not to do it again. But then it happens again. You know that a child of God should not live like this. Satan uses this to attack the assurance of your salvation. You will begin to doubt your salvation. You will think you might as well continue in the sin because you have done this before. This is right where Satan wants you.

Habitual sin affects our relationship with God because such sin is incompatible with spiritual growth. You will not grow spiritually while holding on to sin. It affects how you hear the preaching of the gospel. Such a life results in spiritual weakening and not spiritual growth.

The calling of God’s Word is to repent! Where you are walking in habitual sin, repent of that sin. Confess your sin to God and cry out for forgiveness in Christ’s blood. By the grace of God walk and live in the fishbowl of the truth. The answer of Jesus to being outside the fishbowl in the bondage of sin is, “The truth shall make you free.” Time cannot set you free. Your will power cannot set you free. Only Jesus Christ sets you free! 

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

REV. THOMAS MIERSMA

Discerning the Good in the Activity of Life

(Ecclesiastes 2 - Part I)

The second chapter of Ecclesiastes embraces one central thought, which is well represented by the

Rev. Miersma is pastor of the Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2011, p. 231.

preacher’s initial comment in connection with wine, that by wisdom the preacher sought to see or discern, “what was good for the sons of men, which they should do under heaven all the days of their life” (Eccl. 2:3). This issue, which may be stated as a question, is the concern that the preacher would bring before us. It is this that he would prove in his heart. He would discern the place of the natural joys of man’s earthly life. In taking up the daily ac-

tivities of life and man's labor, he sought to understand the joy and pleasure found therein, but also its place or purpose, and that from a spiritual point of view as a child of God. This is also the conclusion to which he would lead us in the chapter, as stated in verses 24-26: "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God" (Eccl. 2:24).

To lead us to that conclusion, the preacher sets before us his labor and industry in this life. He first passes it and its joy in review. Then, second, he sets it in perspective in the light of the vanity of this world. The first element we consider in this article. The second, which also comes by way of a wrestling with the vanity of life, is one we will return to in the next article.

The Word of God here looks at the life of man organically. A child of God stands in the world as a part of it by creation and by nature. Man is a creature of flesh and blood tied to this world. He eats and drinks, being created to do so and to find pleasure therein. He also labors and toils to plant and build. God, our Creator, set the man and the woman in Paradise to dress and keep the Garden of Eden. The trees of the garden and the green herb were given them for food. Man is therefore a creature of this world, organically bound to the life of the creation. Sin has corrupted that relationship and brought upon man spiritual and moral depravity of nature. The world has been subjected to the curse. Yet man remains man, bound to the organic life of the creation.

Man was made to work and to find delight in his activities as a means to serve God. He still finds delight and pleasure in his activity and strength of life, and this is not in itself wrong. It is the fact that he subjects it to the moral principle of his depravity in the service of sin that works the pollution of sin in all that he does. This organic connection is true for a child of God also, though now in Christ he begins to live a new life.

What is the profit of all these activities, of mirth, of the pleasures of life, wine and the other refinements of life? In speaking of these things, the text is not speaking of them as being sinful. It is certainly the case that wicked men use all of the activities of life in the service of sin, but evil is not in things nor in the activities

themselves. When therefore he speaks of wine, he is, "yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom," that is, he is not speaking of drunkenness, but of the place of wine, which God made to gladden the heart, and of food also, as well as the activities of eating and drinking (Eccl. 2:24, 25).

As mirth and laughter and food and drink are inherently the most transitory, yea momentary, pleasures, he would prove them, or test and try them. What is their value? "I said of laughter, it is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?" Certainly, the man who makes them an end in themselves, the goal of his life, is a fool. Yet many a child of this world does exactly that to his own ruin. He spends his life for that which does not profit. His laughter is that of a fool. His entertainment is often devoted as much to laughter as it is to uncleanness and violence. He often keeps his evening vigil over it in front of his wide-screen idol. His life is an empty one. For that which is a momentary joy becomes, in the bondage of sin, a chain that holds man enslaved to seek after it as if it were the goal of life instead of God.

But the scope of the preacher's inquiry goes beyond those things that are manifestly transitory: "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts" (Eccl. 2:4-8.)

Solomon, beside his official work in building the temple under God's direction, also labored in this life in every aspect of the science and culture of his day. He wrought great works. He did so, not only as king in his office, but also, as God gave him the means, in every aspect of life in his day. He sets these works before us here, primarily from the viewpoint of his personal interests and labors, that we may see in them our own labors and activities, our work and calling. They are the labor of our hands under the sun.

They included not only his building and planting, but the interest he took in gardens and pools of water. He speaks of the pleasure he found in music and the delights of life that are lawful pastimes and served the needs of the royal court. They belong to the wonder and splendor of his kingdom, as well as to its typical significance. They belonged to the expression of the wisdom God gave him, so that the Queen of Sheba stood in awe even of the details of the life of the court (see I Kings 10:4, 5).

His activity was with wisdom from God and he prospered in his labor. He says, "So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour."

The labor itself, the design, anticipation, planning, and execution, as well as the sense of accomplishment, was a matter of joy, so that his heart "rejoiced in all my labour." This momentary joy was, in fact, the true part or portion of his labor. Though fleeting, as with food and drink, it is this that is its true value from the viewpoint of this present life. The joy he found was in the doing of it. To use the figure of the joy of "our daily bread," so likewise our daily labor and industry has a certain joy given us by means of it, and that from the hand of God.

It is at the same time a joy that only a child of God can truly experience in a wholesome way. The reason is that in all that labor, gathering, heaping together, and activity, its very transitory character testifies that that joy is not the goal of our life. Our treasure is not to be

found in it. Our heart may rejoice in our labor, but we do not set our heart upon it.

For the child of this world, that very ordinary joy is one that he pursues to his own destruction. His god becomes his belly. He is occupied in fretful care, with what shall we eat and what shall we drink. He builds his houses that they might stand forever. He seeks to plant his name in the earth that it may endure. He heaps gold and silver, not for mere delight, but as the treasures of his heart. He is in bondage to the things of this world, to the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye.

Hence the preacher leads us to the conclusion in verse 26: that God gives to the sinner "travail, to gather and to heap up" (Eccl. 2:26). It is of God's judgment that the rich fool of this world lays up treasure on earth. To this folly of sin the preacher will return and vividly illustrate in coming chapters. We have an old man of sin who is inclined by nature to this same spiritual folly. It is grace alone that gives us to eat and drink with joy.

It is because of that folly that he turns from the passing joy that God gave him in his labors to the vanity or transitory character of it, to put this joy in perspective. "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." That same labor of his hands is vanity. It is transitory. It is not an end in itself. It does not endure or abide.

The good is to enjoy the daily blessings of our labor with thanksgiving and contentment in our portion for the day, our daily bread. This is the gift of God. Ecclesiastes 2:26.

... to be continued. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Young People's Activities

When reading your church bulletins each week, we at the "News" are always on the lookout for

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

variations on a theme. The theme in this instance is the fund-raisers by the young people's societies of our churches for the annual Young People's Convention in the summer. One such instance we saw just this week. It was a different look on the time-tested "pancake breakfast." The

Young People's Society of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA hosted a French-toast breakfast on Saturday, February 19, for their congregation, proceeds going toward their convention expenses.

The Young People's Society of the Lynden, WA PRC had the op-

portunity back on February 20 to discuss the topic, “The Christian and Facebook.” Quoting now, “If it isn’t on Facebook, it hasn’t really happened,’ someone once said. Would you agree with that, young people? That popular social networking site that ‘everybody is using,’ Facebook, will be the topic of our discussion. To help you prepare for our discussion there are two short articles for you to read. One is entitled, ‘Should a Christian Be On Facebook?’ by RC Sproul, a well-known Reformed radio teacher and pastor in Florida. He presents the use of Facebook in a negative light. The other article is by Rev. G. Van Baren, a retired pastor in our denomination. It is entitled, ‘Facebook,’ and presents the site in a more positive light—with some warnings.” The young people of Lynden were asked to read these two articles and to be prepared to discuss the use and abuse of Facebook, and how Scripture principles can be applied even to this “modern” form of communication. Lynden’s bulletin announcement ends with this question, “OK, and by the way, do you REALLY think you have 150-200 friends?”

The Young People’s Society of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada invited their congregation to a Black-Tie Dinner on the evening of February 18. My dictionary defines Black-Tie as “tuxedo and the proper accessories,” so we may assume that this was a formal evening. Maybe no tuxedos, but we also assume no jeans either.

The young people and young adults of the First PRC in Edmon-

ton, AB, Canada spent Saturday afternoon, February 19, sledding at Rundle Park. In addition to sledding, they also enjoyed hot dogs roasted over an open fire and hot chocolate.

The young people of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI enjoyed a Saturday afternoon together on February 12 with a sleigh ride, followed by ice-skating at a nearby home. Although we do not know for certain, we can almost assume that ice-skating may have led to a good hockey game. After all, what’s the point of skating if it does not involve hockey?

The Young People of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI invited their congregation, along with the members of all our nearby churches, to a “Night of Music” on Saturday, February 12, at Grace Church. The evening was advertised as a fun-filled night of music featuring many talented musicians. A freewill offering was taken to help defray the costs of the convention.

The Young People’s Society of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI joined with the members of the Byron Center Young People’s Society for a fun night of tubing at Pando Winter Sports Park on Saturday, February 5.

The young people of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL enjoyed a “Where’s Waldo Scavenger Hunt” on Saturday, February 12. The young people met at the food court in Southlake Mall at 5:00 P.M., followed with games in the gym of Heritage High School.

Congregation Activities

The congregation of the Byron Center, MI PRC presented their

pastor, Rev. A. Spriensma, with a gift to commemorate his 30 years in the ministry, on Sunday evening, February 6. This was followed with a light lunch in their fellowship room, where opportunity was given to extend a word of congratulations to Rev. and Mrs. Spriensma.

Rev. A. Spriensma and Elder L. Looyenga from the Byron Center, MI PRC left February 8 for a two-week visit with Rajastephen in Chennai, India. These men hoped to hold classes with Rajastephen on biblical interpretation and sermon-making, as well as assist in the work of missions in the area. Byron Center has been guiding this brother and assisting him in his orphanage since this work was relinquished by the churches in Singapore. May God have used this means to enrich spiritually the body of Christ in India.

The Georgetown PRC held their annual Winter Conference on February 11 and 12 at their church. This year’s featured speaker was Dr. Joseph Pipa. He addressed the gathering on the topic, “Getting Back to What Matters: Focusing on What is Truly Important,” based on Matthew 6:33: “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God...”

Members of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA were heartily invited and encouraged to attend the lectures given to the pre/post confession class back in February. Practical instruction on church membership was given and discussed, including subjects such as congregational unity, life, contributions, church government, and the process of Christian discipline.

The Council of the Grace PRC

Standard Bearer

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in Standale, MI received a request for a hearing loop to be placed in their church. At a recent meeting, the Council decided to go ahead and install the system as requested. This system has been installed in many of our other PR churches and has proved to be quite profitable for those with hearing loss.

School Activities

A father/son basketball game

was held on February 18 at Hull Christian School. The competition was between the 5th-8th grade boys and their fathers. Pizza, pop, and ice cream was provided. Grandfathers were also invited to come and watch and eat the food. Something we could do.

Minister Activities

Rev. R. Van Overloop declined the call he was considering to serve

as the next pastor of the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN.

The vacant Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI met together Sunday evening, February 13, and voted to extend a call to Rev. A. Lanning to serve as their next pastor.

The vacant PRC in Wingham, Ontario, Canada has extended a call to Rev. M. VanderWal. ∞

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Men's Society of Byron Center PRC expresses sympathy to John Chesebro in the passing of his mother, **MRS. JUDY CHESEBRO.**

"For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed: but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Isaiah 54:10).

Aric Bleyenbergh, President
Tim Block, Secretary

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Byron Center PRC express their Christian sympathy to the John Chesebro family in the death of John's mother, **JUDY CHESEBRO.**

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:3, 4).

Rev. A. Spriensma, President
Dale Bartelds, Clerk

Notice

■ In keeping with vows made at baptism, the Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School Society plans to begin providing Protestant Reformed high school education for their students in the 2011-2012 academic year. For a small community of supporters, this is a costly endeavor, involving, as it does, expansion of facilities and of teaching staff. 'Outside' support will therefore be much appreciated. Interested parties who would like further information about the project, and about how to contribute to it, are invited to contact Craig Poortinga, at craigtiffanyp@hotmail.com or (970) 593-1658. Heartfelt thanks for your generosity!

Notice

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Synod

■ All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2011, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Don Doezema
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Grandville, MI 49418

Reformed Witness Hour

March 2011

Date	Topic	Text
March 6	"Family Worship"	Joshua 24:15
March 13	"Jesus' Prayer for Glory Through the Cross"	John 17:1-5
March 20	"Jesus' Prayer for His Own"	John 17:6-10
March 27	"Jesus' Prayer for Our Preservation"	John 17:11-16