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Volume 83 ◆ Number 8

The Secret of Jehovah

The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.

Psalm 25:14

Psalm 25 is a Psalm of David. We do not know what occasioned the writing of this Psalm, except that David was being threatened by his enemies.

In this Psalm David prays for deliverance from these enemies. This is the theme of the Psalm—a prayer for deliverance from enemies.

In this Psalm David emphasizes the goodness and faithfulness of the LORD. (In the KJV the name LORD is really Jehovah.) In His goodness Jehovah forgives the sins of His people. In His goodness Jehovah also guides His people to

make right choices so that they walk in His ways. And in His goodness Jehovah blesses the upright walk of His people.

This is all in keeping with the fact that the secret of Jehovah is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant.



The secret of Jehovah!

The term “secret” is a word that originally referred to a couch on which a person reclines. From that it took on the meaning of friends sitting together in familiar conversation. Then it came to describe the conversation itself. And finally it came to mean something that one friend tells another in confidence as they sit together on a couch.

David speaks of the secret of Jehovah. This is the secret that Jehovah shares with His friends.

David connects that with the idea of the covenant. We have in this verse a classic instance of Hebrew parallelism, in which two

phrases are placed side by side and must be understood in light of each other. In this verse the secret of Jehovah and His covenant are parallel.

There are many views as to what the covenant of Jehovah is. Some say that the covenant is a promise God makes. Others say that the covenant is an agreement God makes with promises, conditions, and threats. Still others view the covenant in terms of a military alliance that God forms with us over against the devil.

More than once, however, Scripture compares God’s covenant to a marriage that He forms and maintains with His elect people. We maintain that God’s covenant is an intimate bond of friendship and fellowship that God graciously establishes and maintains with His elect church in Jesus Christ. In keeping with this, David speaks of the covenant as Jehovah God sitting down with His friends to share with them the secrets of His heart.

What are these covenant secrets

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of Jehovah? They are the secrets of His eternal counsel as they concern our salvation.

God's counsel is His eternal predetermination of all things that shall ever exist and take place in history.

The counsel of God is a counsel formed by friends. God is the triune God—three persons in one being. These three live eternally in most intimate friendship and fellowship. This means that Jehovah is the covenant God within Himself. It is Jehovah's delight to have a people with whom He can live in covenant friendship, patterned after the friendship He has within Himself. And so the triune Jehovah has eternally counseled within Himself as to how this will be accomplished.

In this counsel God has eternally decreed all that shall ever exist and take place. The general lines are creation, the fall, and salvation of an elect people in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is really first in this counsel. All that God has counseled focuses on the work of Jesus Christ to save a people so that God can enjoy them in the friendship of His covenant. All else that God has decreed serves as the necessary means to accomplish this greatest of all purposes.

This counsel is called the secret of Jehovah because it all exists in the eternal mind of God. Our thoughts and counsels are secret, known only to us. And they remain secret until such a time as we share them with others. The same is true with Jehovah's eternal thoughts and counsel. They are known only to God and are His secret. We come to know them only as Jehovah shares them with us.



The secret of Jehovah is with them that fear Him!

Those that fear Jehovah are

those that stand in awe of Him and reverence Him.

That God is Jehovah means that He is the great I AM. This emphasizes that He is the sovereign God who created, sustains, and governs all things. It also emphasizes that He is the God who sovereignly saves a people to Himself in Jesus Christ for His own pleasure and delight.

To fear Jehovah is to stand in awe of Him for what He is and what He does. This fear is not the fear of dread terror. It is a fear

that is rooted in a love for Jehovah and a delight in who He is and what He is doing. This fear results in an embracing of Jehovah as one's God and embracing Jesus Christ for one's salvation. It also results

in walking in Jehovah's ways. This latter is the emphasis of David in this Psalm. "What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose" (v. 12).

This fear is the work of God's grace in those with whom He has His covenant. By nature we do not fear Jehovah. On account of the fall we despise Jehovah and His work. We refuse to walk in His ways. Consequently, we are full of dread of God rather than loving awe. But God graciously changes the hearts of those whom He has ordained for His covenant. By the power of His Word and Spirit He transforms them into new creatures. The result is that they fear Him with loving adoration.

To them Jehovah reveals His secrets.

In a certain sense God uses the revelation of His covenant secrets to create this proper fear in our lives.

God's covenant secrets concerning salvation in Jesus Christ have been publicly revealed. They were revealed in the Old Testament by angels, the prophets, and various works of salvation in the his-

tory of God's covenant people. These secrets were more clearly revealed by Jesus Christ during His short ministry on the earth. And after Jesus' exaltation the full revelation of these secrets was made through the apostles. This revelation of Jehovah's covenant secrets has been infallibly preserved for us in the Bible by the miracle of divine inspiration. And these covenant secrets have been proclaimed ever since, through the preaching of the Word.

Jehovah uses these revealed secrets of His Word to bring His people to faith and salvation in Jesus Christ, so that they fear Him with loving awe and respect.

The point of David in this Psalm is that Jehovah reveals His secrets to those who fear Him with personal application. It is one thing for Jehovah to proclaim His secrets publicly for all to hear. This is a general declaration of Jehovah's covenant. It is another thing for Jehovah to share His secrets with personal application to His friends, so that He gives personal assurances to them of His love and purpose to save them. Since Jehovah's friends are those who fear Him in loving adoration, Jehovah shares His secrets with them.

Let's see how Jehovah does this.

In the Old Testament, Jehovah did this on occasion with personal appearances. To Noah He revealed His secret concerning the flood and Noah's salvation in the ark. To Abraham He revealed His secret concerning Abraham's place in the covenant. To David He revealed His secret about David's son who would build the house of Jehovah and sit on David's throne forever.

Also today Jehovah reveals His covenant secrets by personal application of the Word to the hearts of His God-fearing friends. The blessings of Jehovah's covenant secrets are promised to them in the public preaching of the Word. These blessings include forgiveness of

sins, eternal life with God, protection from all their enemies, and provision for all their needs. By the inner working of the Spirit, Jehovah applies this Word of His covenant personally to every God-fearing hearer, so that he is assured of these blessings personally. God as it were sits down with the God-fearing hearer and shares His secrets with him in a personal way.



Jehovah will show them His covenant!

The word “show,” as used here, means to cause one to know, and thus to show something to someone.

When you make a covenant with someone, you can show that covenant either by word or by deed. Certainly you can show your covenant by the words you speak. In that case you assure a person of your love and your loving intentions towards him. This is something that husbands and

wives should be doing in the covenant of marriage. But one shows his covenant also by his deeds. In that case the words and promises of love are translated into deeds of love. Then you have effectively shown your covenant.

This is the emphasis of David.

Jehovah had already shared His covenant secrets with the God-fearing David. He had done this by His Word. But as David was faced with many enemies, he expresses his confidence that Jehovah will also show him His covenant by deeds. And those deeds will be to deliver him from his enemies according to the secrets of the covenant.

This is all consistent with the fact that God is Jehovah. Jehovah is God’s covenant name, which emphasizes especially God’s faithfulness to His covenant. He will keep His covenant word. Clinging to the truth that God is Jehovah, David was confident of deliverance and salvation in the face of his enemies.

Also today Jehovah shows His covenant to His God-fearing friends.

He shares His secrets with them through His Word. He personally assures them that in Jesus Christ He will preserve them from the devil and all their spiritual foes. He assures them of everlasting life in heavenly glory. And He promises to care for them in all things, either averting all evil or turning it to their profit. What beautiful words of love!

Jehovah then proceeds to show them His covenant with deeds of deliverance and salvation. Many are the times when the future looks gloomy for the God-fearing. Yes, the devil as a roaring lion walks about, seeking whom he may devour. But their God is Jehovah. He will show them His covenant in many mighty works of salvation so that they are safe and secure.

In that confidence they pray to Him for deliverance, looking always for His blessings. 

Ministers and (Their) Mothers *

Ministers’ mothers have a keen interest in their minister sons. A minister’s believing mother has her son in her heart and a special interest in the ministry, its challenges, joys, sorrows. For that reason, you will often find ministers’ mothers in the audience of church functions, especially seminary functions: graduation exercises,

synodical examinations, even convocation exercises. I dare guess that there are ministers’ mothers here tonight, and mothers of the seminary students—who are able to attend—and not merely because they were intrigued by the announced title of the speech: “Ministers and (Their) Mothers.”

But a minister-son ought to have a keener interest in his mother than his mother has in his ministry. I refer, now, not to the filial duties that every son must be aware of and carry out. I refer to the special instruction he can re-

ceive as a minister from his mother, specifically from motherhood—Christian motherhood.

There is this relationship between the pastoral ministry and motherhood that the apostle points out in I Thessalonians 2.

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

* This is the text of the speech given at the convocation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Seminary, September 6, 2006.

Although it does not appear in the King James Version, these two verses (and those that follow) indicate a comparison between ministers and their mothers. For the apostle is not thinking of a nursemaid, but of a mother nursing her own dear children. The work of a minister is to be compared with a faithful mother of children. The faithful, Christian mother is an example for gospel ministers.

Indeed, the minister may serve faithfully who did not have the example of his own godly mother. Thus, the title of my convocation speech has *their* in parentheses: "Ministers and (Their) Mothers." Nevertheless, mothers are important.

Over against those who were undermining the gospel, Paul is explaining and justifying his ministry among the Thessalonians. His detractors were attacking his gospel by discrediting him. If they could bring the minister into disrepute, they could discredit the gospel itself. In answer to their charges that his was a mercenary spirit, and worse, Paul says that he was no spiritual charlatan. Rather, he had conducted himself as honorably as a Christian mother with her children.

At first glance, it might appear that the comparison Paul makes is limited to the mother's gentleness (v. 7: "we were gentle among you.") A closer examination shows more. Verse 8 begins with "so," that is, "in like manner," or "in a similar way," and then proceeds to show what else in a minister resembles Christian motherhood.

The Vital Importance of the Minister's Approach

In the pastor's work, most important is that he bring the Word in truth. Nothing is more important. The seminary impresses that importance in all its instruction.

At the same time, *how* a minister brings the truth is also crucial.

So important is this that the apostle takes an oath. Twice. "God is witness" (v. 5). And, "Ye are witnesses, and God also..." (v. 10). Why is the manner of the minister's preaching significant? In the minds of God's people, it is impossible to separate the word that a man brings from the man who brings the word.

Because this is vital, the people of God—all of us—must know what is required of their ministers. More is required than that they be theologically sound. The people of God must know what qualities to pray for in seminary students.

The churches want ministers who are like faithful mothers.

Faithful Christian Mothers

The life and labor of a Christian mother is a lovely pattern for gospel ministers. The mother does not talk about how busy she is,

In the minds of God's people, it is impossible to separate the word that a man brings from the man who brings the word.

complain about how hard, how heavy is her load. Perhaps when her own mother asks, and then only briefly, but not to her husband and never to her chil-

dren. For the faithful Christian mother, there is no labor too low to which she stoops, no indignity so shameful she is unwilling to endure it. It is a thing of grace when Christ's Spirit so works in mothers. This woman is beautiful, no matter how earthly standards may judge her. This woman is valuable, far above rubies, no matter how little (if at all) she adds to the household's take-home-pay.

Scripture says or implies much about the work of a mother as that becomes a model for a minister's labors.

You think of a mother when Paul speaks of "labor and travail" (v. 9). *Labor* is more than just work. It refers to the mother's fatigue at day's end. *Travail* is the sorrows,

hardships, disappointments, distresses.

The mother is also a servant. Though she carries an awesome weight of authority, she's no "lord" in her home. Her spirit is a servant-spirit, her work a work of ministering. That is her "office."

A Christian mother certainly labors with a gentle spirit (v. 7). With meekness and quietness she tenderly serves her household. Though she labors in great strength—spiritual and physical—her strength is the strength of gentleness.

However, what most especially characterizes the Christian mother (as *pattern* for the minister) is that, for her household, she gives away her life. This climaxes the apostle's description of the mother's calling as he compares it with the gospel minister. Calvin's description is fitting:

...a mother nursing her children manifests a certain rare and wonderful affection, inasmuch as she spares no labor and trouble, shuns no anxiety, is wearied out by no assiduity [BG: hard work, perseverance], and even with cheerfulness gives her own blood to be sucked.

Ministers Learning from Mothers

A minister may learn much from his believing mother: to labor, to serve, to be gentle, patient. But one thing he learns (must learn) more than all the others. Like a mother, he gives away (must give away) his life!

we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only but also our own souls (II Thess. 2:8).

This is not Paul's expression of willingness to become a martyr for the sake of the Thessalonians, as if standing for the cause of God and truth, he would die at the hands of Christ's enemies. Though he would. Nor is he referring to his willingness to give

up his soul (if he were permitted to will so), as if he would be willing to go to hell, to perish everlastingly, for them. Though he would. And every minister, with his own eye on Paul's amazing sentiments in Romans 9 and 10, so loves his family and flock that he could wish himself accused for their sakes. But Paul is not referring to these when he says, "we were willing to have imparted unto you ... our own souls."

"Imparting his soul" to the church meant this: the life

he could live he gives up and gives away for the sake of God's gospel and church. What a Christian mother might be able to do and be she forgoes for the sake of her children. She imparts her own soul to the family.

What is true for all Christians is true emphatically (and severely) for the gospel minister. He gives up his life for the ministry. Like a mother. A Christian mother.

Laying down the life he might be able to live, he takes up the life of a laborer in the gospel. Giving up his life as does a faithful mother, he becomes a servant. The focus of his attention is not himself, but others. He labors and travails—works to the point of fatigue, performs his duties in sorrow as well as joy. Although very gladly, he spends himself and is

The life and labor of a Christian mother is a lovely pattern for gospel ministers.

spent (II Cor. 12:15) for the people of God. To use Calvin's expression, he allows his own life to be sucked out of him.

As a faithful mother, an upright minister does not want, nor does he ask for, his own time (it's the church's); attention (because he's the "friend of the bridegroom," attention belongs to Christ); pity (don't pity ministers any more than you do mothers); pleasure; or applause. And he is certainly not interested in the people's money. Paul made a special point of that—

his own example showed his steadfast determination not to have a reputation as a man interested in money. The faithful preacher does not care about money, does not talk about money, does not ask for it. Fifty years ago, perhaps, he had to. Not today. Not in the PRC.

Mothers' Fundamental Place in the Church

Something fundamental about the work of a minister is to be learned from (their) mothers.

Thus, because "principles work through," if the church loses the important teaching of motherhood, she will also lose the important teaching of the life-giving labor of the minister.

That is, there is more to be learned from this than what to ex-

pect of our ministers, what to pray for in ministers. There is also this: to maintain the truth and importance of Christian motherhood.

Suppose, once, that the churches lose the good doctrine of the proper place and conduct of mothers—that they lay down their lives for their families as "keepers at home," gentle servants who sacrifice all for the sake of others. Suppose that mothers in Israel become career oriented, determined to have an occupation and a paycheck. Suppose that the churches' children grow up observing the mothers who are determined to "get" and "succeed" and "be fulfilled."

The churches will also lose the faithful ministry. The ministers, who learn from (their) mothers, will follow suit. And they will not devote themselves single-mindedly to the one cause that is important. They will not forget about themselves. They will not allow their lives to be sucked out of them for the sake of others.

There is more at stake in the battle regarding the place of women than we realize. For the sake of the gospel ministry, we maintain the call for wives and mothers to be faithful to their calling to lay down their lives, selflessly, for their families.

We are thankful for faithful mothers. Thankful to God.

Ministers, take note.

... to be continued. 

Letters

■ Was John Calvin a Pacifist? and William of Orange a Revolutionary?

Prof. Hanko in the *Standard Bearer* of October 15, 2006, page 40, leaves a question mark where both God's Word and history reveal that the above-mentioned men were law-abiding citizens both of

God's kingdom and of this world, and walked, by God's grace, the narrow path of faithfulness and obedience. It is true that Calvin wanted to avoid the use of weapons. But when war was pressed upon them, Calvin ordered the churches to raise the pay for the mercenaries.

And in the footsteps of Calvin followed William of Orange. One has to understand that also kings are to abide by the law, first the law of God, and then the laws of the land. King Philip II of Spain was lord (not king) of the Netherlands. But he was treading underfoot the laws and privileges of the

free citizens of the country. William of Orange had not only the right to defend his subjects but also the duty.

I spent several hours putting together a response, with quotes from books on Calvin and William of Orange by Lawrence Penning and Deborah Alcock. Since it was too long for a letter to the editor, I have listed it on the Internet. I will find it very sad if your readers are being misled about the integrity of some of the world's greatest leaders.

Please check <http://www.telusplanet.net/public/inhpubl/webip/calvin.htm>

In a time when Reformation and Revolution seem to become synonyms, it is important to preserve a faithful account of history. If one studies the means God used to bring William of Orange to the Reformed faith, he will meet William's brother Lodewyk of Nassau, who also studied in Geneva, and gave his life for the freedom that we enjoy today in the western world. These godly sons of Juliana of Stolberg are among the best of role models for our children today and should not be covered by a cloud of suspicion, as if they gave their life for a revolutionary cause.

Roelof A. Janssen
Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada

REPLY:

It is true that the aspect of the Reformation in the Lowlands that involved war with Spain is somewhat complicated. The Spanish forces were not sent into the Lowlands because of rebellion on the part of the Lowlanders. They were sent to exterminate Protestantism. That fact clears the Dutch of rebellion against constituted authority. Nevertheless, the Lowlanders took up arms against the Spanish forces. Such armed resistance was not only in defense of religious freedom, it was also an effort to secure complete inde-

pendence from Spain's rule. It thus became a political war as well as a religious war. In my judgment, neither a religious war nor a political war is according to God's will for His church.

Calvin not only "wanted to avoid the use of weapons"; he was flatly opposed to the use of weapons. Only when lesser magistrates resorted to arms and called the citizens to fight did Calvin approve of battle. The cause of Christ is never defended and advanced at the point of the sword.

It seems that the issue finally comes down to this question: Is the child of God bound in every circumstance of life to be in submission to those in authority over him? It will not do to appeal to the Old Testament, for the nation of Israel was a type of the church and the kingdom of heaven and cannot be, in her wars, a pattern for the life of the church in the new dispensation. I will abide by Paul's clear word in Romans 13. May God's people do the same.

To call into question one aspect of the Reformation in the Lowlands does not mean that I am ungrateful to God for the marvelous faith and courage of my ancestors who loved not their lives unto death. The heritage of the Reformed faith, given with the cost of blood, still stirs my soul to thanksgiving to our gracious God.

Prof. H. Hanko ■

■ Psalm Singing

In his article in the November 1, 2006 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, an article entitled "Congregational Singing," the Rev. Daniel Kleyn advocates the use of psalms, and of psalms *only*, in the congregational singing in public worship. "In our public worship of God," our brother writes, "we ought to sing only the Psalms."

If I may, I would like to ask several questions of the brother.

Does the brother mean to say, by his defense of exclusive psalmody, that the Reformed Church Order, Article 69 (the Church Order that regulates our singing in the worship services, and the article that allows for the singing of the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Twelve Articles of Faith, and other hymns) is in error?

Is the brother meaning to say, by his defense of exclusive psalmody, and by his citing as a ground for this the so-called "regulative principle of worship," that when we sing the hymn-doxology "Praise God from whom all blessings flow..." we are doing something that is contrary to God's revealed will, and therefore sinful?

If, as the brother contends, psalms and not hymns are to be sung in public worship, and this because psalms and not hymns are *inspired*, how is the use of our un-inspired Psalter justified?

About the Rev. Kleyn's interpretation of Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19:

Where is the proof that the passages refer only to the singing of congregations in (official) public worship? And, if proof cannot be found (and a good case might be made that it cannot), what prevents those who advocate exclusive psalmody in public worship from seeking to ban any and all other songs besides the 150 Psalms from private worship, singspirations, and the like?

What in these passages proves that the apostle is commanding that *only* the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs of the Old Testament Book of Psalms be sung in the New Testament worship?

As does brother Kleyn, so do I love to sing the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs of the covenant salvation! In addition to songs that prophesy, promise,

and picture that salvation (as do the songs of the Old Testament), may we not also sing, now in the Great Light of the New Testament, of that covenant salvation *now established* in the blood of Jesus, and as the church lavished with and guided by the Spirit of our risen Savior, and with songs that are new covenant celebrations and the foretaste of that blessed heaven?

Would not *this* singing truly be an expression of our being filled with the Spirit (of the risen Lord, Eph. 5:18), of our letting the Word of Christ dwell in us *richly* (Col. 3:16), and of our doing all (including singing!) in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him (Col. 3:17)?

This singing, why not ours, like heavens:

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.

...Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever (Rev. 5:12, 13)?

Rev. M. Dick
Grace PRC

RESPONSE:

In spite of the many questions raised above, I maintain that we ought to sing only the Psalms in the public worship of God. The Psalms are the inspired songs of the Word of God. They are God's gift to His church for singing. They contain all that the child of God needs to express to God in worship. And by singing them we heed the regulative principle of worship, for then we are singing the words that God Himself gave the church to sing in her public worship.

With regard to Article 69 of the Church Order, what must be taken

into account is the historical circumstances under which it was written by the Synod of Dordt. At that time, the hymns mentioned in Article 69 were part of the songbook in the Dutch churches. With that in mind, Dordt made allowances for these few hymns. But even so, the principle set forth by Article 69 is that "in the churches only the 150 Psalms of David ... shall be sung."

Following these guidelines, we are, by God's grace, Psalm-singing churches. We are such when we sing from the Psalter, for although it is not itself inspired, the Psalter is nevertheless a faithful versification of the inspired Psalms of Scripture. We are also Psalm-singing churches when we sing the doxology "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow ...," for we are singing the Word of God as found in many of the Psalms of praise, such as Psalms 103, 113, and 150.

With regard to Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19, there are good reasons, I believe, to view these texts as referring to singing in the public worship of the church. One is that the letters are written to churches, thus the church as a whole is being commanded to sing. Another is that the word "you" in these passages is not singular but plural, thus the reference is to the whole congregation. In keeping with this, all the members together are to admonish "one another" by means of singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

The proof that these texts refer to the "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" of the Old Testament is as follows. It lies first of all in the meaning of the words: "hymns" are Psalms of praise; and "spiritual songs" are Psalms that deal with the believer's life and experience. Secondly, the word "spiritual" signifies that these are songs "of the Spirit," thus songs that are inspired by the Spirit and found in the Scrip-

tures. Thirdly, it is understood that the churches of Paul's day had no other songs than the Psalms of the Old Testament Scriptures. Fourthly, the Septuagint, which was the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was used by the apostles, specifically referred to the Psalms as "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." And finally, in Colossians 3 the admonition to sing these "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" is introduced by the command to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." This is done by singing the 150 Psalms, which are very definitely Christ's words.

In my judgment, we do not need any manmade hymns in our worship services, for we have all that we need in the Psalms. They are sufficient, and have been for the New Testament church for over 2,000 years. The reason for their sufficiency is that they are God's Word and were given by Him specifically for the church to sing in worship. The Psalms express all the truths of the Christian faith as set forth in the Scriptures. The Psalms describe all the unique experiences of the child of God in this life. The Psalms adequately set forth all that the believer needs to express in worship concerning his sins, his deliverance in Christ, and his gratitude to God for that deliverance—that is, concerning his only comfort in life and death of belonging to his faithful Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I trust that we appreciate the Psalms as God's gift, are content with them in our public worship of God, and will never replace these inspired and theocentric songs of God's Word with the uninspired and often shallow and man-centered words of men. What better way to sing in worship than through the 150 Psalms of the Word of God!

Rev. Daniel Kleyn 

The Covenant of Sovereign Grace (4)

or the Decisive Influence of the Reformation Gospel upon the Orthodox Doctrine of the Covenant in the Netherlands

There is another objection to the interpretation of the phrase “sanctified in Christ” in the Reformed baptism form, that explains the phrase as describing God’s regeneration of the elect children of believers in their infancy. This objection too arises from a distinct doctrinal position regarding the covenant promise to the children of believers and regarding the covenant itself. This doctrinal position abominates the truth that God governs His covenant by His eternal decree of election. Particularly, it rejects the truth that God’s covenant promise to be the God of the children of believers refers to the elect children.

All the Children Sanctified Conditionally

This covenant doctrine vehemently denies that “sanctified in Christ” in the Reformed baptism form describes the elect infants of believers. Rather, the phrase refers to all the children without exception. But the explanation of the phrase by this covenant doctrine differs from that of those who refuse to see anything more in it than an outward and formal “holiness.” This covenant doctrine recognizes that the first question of the baptism form speaks of a saving work of God in Christ with re-

gard to infants who are, after all, the objects of the promise of the covenant. The covenant promise has the cross of Christ as its basis, the Spirit of Christ as its power, the spiritual blessings of salvation as its content, and eternal life as its goal. Its sign and seal is infant baptism—the sacrament of the atoning blood of Christ applied to the infant children of believers.

Accordingly, this covenant doctrine teaches that “sanctified in Christ” refers to a gracious covenantal attitude of God towards the infants and to a gracious covenantal work of God with regard to them. This attitude and work are saving in nature, even as the covenant has to do with salvation. This covenant doctrine does not like to speak of an inward, “subjective,” saving work of the Spirit in the infants. Infant regeneration is anathema to it, in spite of the fact that the opening lines of the baptism form teach that our infant children are “born again.” But this doctrine of the covenant prefers to speak of an “objective” covenantal act of God with regard to the children of believers: He justifies all the offspring of believers and adopts them as His children.

In keeping with its determined opposition to the truth that election governs the covenant, this covenant doctrine applies its understanding

of “sanctified in Christ” to all the children without exception. The first question of the baptism form is explained as teaching that all the children without exception are sanctified in Christ in the sense that all alike are covenantally justified and covenantally adopted by God. All alike are covenantally “in Christ.”

But all are alike “sanctified in Christ” *conditionally*.

The covenant with the children is *conditional*. Whether the children

remain in the covenant and are saved depends upon a work the children must perform, namely, faith. If a child refuses to believe, as many children of believers do refuse, he perishes outside of Christ, regardless that once he was “in Christ.” He is condemned, regardless

that once God justified him. He becomes a child of the devil, regardless that once God adopted him.

This is the covenant doctrine and corresponding explanation of the phrase “sanctified in Christ,” of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”) and of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

This covenant doctrine too I have examined and criticized in my book *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*, so that I can be brief here. As little as the explanation of an outward and for-

The covenant promise has the cross of Christ as its basis, the Spirit of Christ as its power, the spiritual blessings of salvation as its content, and eternal life as its goal.

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mal “holiness” does this explanation do justice to the phrase “sanctified in Christ.” As I have already demonstrated, “sanctified in Christ” describes an inner work of the Spirit within infants who are united to Christ by the bond of a true faith. This work makes them living members of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church of Christ.

It is impossible that an infant (or anyone else) who has been sanctified in Christ and made a member of the body of Christ shall ever perish. The mighty grace of God that began the work of salvation in the infant will maintain and perfect the work. “God is faithful, who, having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them [all those whom He has regenerated] therein, even to the end” (Canons of Dordt, V/3). The Canons explicitly deny that anyone can lose his adoption and justification, something the covenant doctrine we are presently examining affirms by its explanation of the phrase “sanctified in Christ.” According to this covenant doctrine, all the children of believers without exception are justified and adopted by God. This is supposed to be the meaning of “sanctified in Christ.” However, since these covenant works of God are conditional, many of the children eventually lose this justification and adoption. But the Canons deny that God ever permits any of His people “to lose the grace of adoption and forfeit the state of justification” (V/6).

The explanation of “sanctified in Christ” that applies the phrase to all the offspring of believers alike, while acknowledging that the phrase refers to a work of God’s grace in the covenant, is a denial of the sovereignty of grace and, therefore, of the gospel of grace itself. Regardless that God’s gracious work in the covenant is described as “objective,” taking form in a justification and adoption of the children, rather than in a “subjective” regeneration of the children, the covenant work of God

that consists of sanctifying children in Christ is not effectual. It does not assure the salvation of any. It is resisted by many, who then perish forever outside of Christ.

Denial of the sovereignty of grace is always, necessarily, the affirmation of the dependency of grace on the work of the sinner. God’s covenant work of sanctifying all the offspring of believers, according to the explanation of “sanctified in Christ” by the “liberated” Reformed, fails in the case of many children, because His covenant work is conditional. It depends on the work of the children. The clear and necessary implication is that the reason why some continue in the covenant and are finally saved is their performing of the condition.

It is this conditional covenant doctrine regarding baptized children that the men of the federal vision are now developing into a bold attack on every one of the doctrines of grace confessed in the Canons of Dordt.

At bottom, the heresy of the federal vision, like the conditional covenant doctrine it is developing, is opposition to the truth that election governs the covenant.

“Sanctified in Christ” in Light of the Prayer of Thanksgiving

What makes it indisputably plain that by “sanctified in Christ” the baptism form means the actual saving work of God upon and within the elect infants of believers is the prayer of thanksgiving immediately following the baptism of the infants. Just moments earlier, the Reformed church had asked the believing parents whether they acknowledged that their children are “sanctified in Christ and, therefore, as members of His church ought to be baptized.” Then the baptism of the infants took place. At once,

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with the words “sanctified in Christ” still ringing in the ears of the congregation and with the visible word of the sprinkling of the infants with the water of baptism vivid in their minds, the church thanks the God of the covenant in prayer.

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise Thee that Thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins through the blood of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through Thy Holy Spirit as members of Thine only begotten Son, and adopted us to be Thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism.

The Reformed church thanks God for the actual salvation of the children of believing parents: the forgiveness of their sins through the blood of Christ; the shedding of Christ’s blood for them on the cross; and the uniting of them by the Holy Spirit to Christ by the mystical union of the bond of faith and regeneration, so that they are living members of Christ as adopted children of God.

This actual salvation of the children consists of the (objective) work of Christ *for* them on the cross: “through the blood of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ.” It consists as well of the (subjective) work of Christ *in* them by His Spirit: “received us through thy Holy Spirit as members of thine only begotten Son.”

The Reformed church thanks God for this actual salvation of the children of believing parents *in the infancy of the children*, indeed, already at the time of the baptism of the infants. With regard to the infants who have just been baptized, the prayer thanks God that He “*has*” forgiven them on the basis of Christ’s death for them and that He

"has" received them by His Holy Spirit as members of Christ.

The prayer of thanksgiving makes plain beyond any shadow of doubt what the Reformed form meant by "sanctified in Christ and ... members of His [Christ's] church" a few minutes earlier in the service. "Sanctified in Christ and ... members of His church" meant, and means, that God has forgiven the infants all their sins through the blood of His beloved Son Jesus Christ and that God has received the infants through His Holy Spirit as members of His only begotten Son as adopted children.

And this is the meaning of infant baptism, for it is this actual salvation by the blood and Spirit of Christ that is "sealed and confirmed" to believing parents and their children by holy baptism.

As the meaning of infant baptism based on the covenant promise, "I will be the God of your children," this is also the meaning of the covenant promise. God promises to save the infant children of believers.

By no means does the prayer of thanksgiving after infant baptism describe, or intend to describe, a saving work of God upon and in all the offspring of believers without exception. The prayer refers to the elect infants of believers, because, with the entire form, it understands the elect children to be the true, spiritual "seed" of Abraham and of believing parents.

If the prayer refers to all the offspring of believers without exception, Esau as well as Jacob, it teaches universal, conditional election; a universal, inefficacious atonement; revocable justification; losable adoption; resistible grace; and the falling away of saints, in the sphere of the covenant, regarding the children of believers. Sanctified in Christ by

the covenant grace of God, so that one enjoys all the blessings of salvation, today! Outside of Christ, devoid of the blessings of salvation, and under God's damning wrath, tomorrow! In this case, James Arminius was right, and the men of the federal vision can appeal in support of their grievous heresy to

one of the foundational, most prominent, and most precious documents of Reformed Protestantism.

That the Reformed churches in the Netherlands did not teach this heresy and could not have taught this heresy in their baptism form is evident, first, from the fact that they adopted the form

in 1574, when they stood firm in the truth of sovereign grace (against which Arminius would soon remonstrate), and again in 1618/1619 at the Synod of Dort, where they would condemn the teaching of a universal, ineffectual grace.

Second, the prayer of thanksgiving itself shows that it speaks of the saving work of God in Christ with regard to elect infants, not of a saving work of God regarding all the offspring of believers without exception. The rest of the prayer, in which the church beseeches God on behalf of the children, affirms that all of the children who are the objects of the "fatherly goodness and mercy" of God will certainly persevere in righteousness "to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify" God. This is true only of the elect children.

Nowhere in the prayer of thanksgiving is there any mention of a condition that the children must perform in order either to enter the covenant or to remain in the covenant. Every notion of a conditional covenant promise to the children, of a conditional covenant with the children, of a conditional covenant salvation of the children, and of a

condition for abiding in the covenant and being saved is decisively ruled out. For the prayer thanks God for the salvation of our children *in their infancy*, when they are utterly incapable of fulfilling any condition. It thanks God for saving them with a salvation that cannot be lost: the forgiveness of their sins through the blood of Jesus Christ and incorporation into Christ by the Holy Spirit. It finds in their baptism a seal and confirmation of this salvation, that is, the divinely appointed ceremony that assures that our children are saved and that this salvation is everlasting. On the basis of this sure salvation of the infants, sealed by baptism, the prayer has the church confidently ask God for the continuing, developing, and perfecting of the salvation of the children.

Thus, the prayer of thanksgiving exposes as erroneous the covenant doctrine, and corresponding explanation of "sanctified in Christ," that views all the offspring of believers alike as objects of a certain covenantal grace and as taken into covenant union with Christ ("sanctified *in Christ*"), but as under the demand to perform a condition upon which depends their abiding in the covenant and their eternal salvation.

The prayer of thanksgiving also exposes as false the covenant doctrine that explains "sanctified in Christ" as merely a formal and outward "holiness" of the children of believers. Every time the officiating minister and congregation that hold this barren covenant doctrine use the Reformed baptism form, the prayer of thanksgiving rises up to condemn them and their doctrine:

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise Thee, that Thou *hast* forgiven [not: 'will forgive the infant children, if someday they have the conversion experience' – DJE] us, and our children [already in their infancy – DJE] all our sins through the blood

The Reformed church thanks God for this actual salvation of the children of believing parents in the infancy of the children, indeed, already at the time of the baptism of the infants.

of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and *received* us [past tense, with reference to believing parents and their infant children—DJE] through Thy Holy Spirit as members of Thine only begotten Son [so that we and our infants are living saints in Christ, not dead sinners—DJE], and adopted us [believing parents and infant children—DJE] to be Thy children [so that it is monstrous to view the infants as “little vipers”—DJE], and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism.

The latter part of the prayer is no less conclusive in exposing the notion of a mere formal, external “holiness” of covenant children as erroneous. Those who hold this view of the baptized children make the duty of parents, church, and even Christian school towards the children the evangelizing of them, so that they may be converted. What this means is that the children are regarded as unregenerated, spiritually dead, and outside of Christ. The evangelizing of them is a work of getting these dead sinners saved, long after their infancy, if God pleases.

But the concluding part of the prayer of thanksgiving does not beseech the “merciful Father” of believers and their children, that He will be pleased to govern these baptized children by the external supervision of parents, church, and Christian school, so that they may be zealously evangelized as spiritually dead sinners in Adam and one day perhaps have a conversion experience, which saves them.

Absolutely nothing of the sort!

On the contrary, the prayer beseeches God to “govern these baptized children by Thy Holy Spirit” (which is a work of the Spirit indwelling the just baptized infants), “that they may be piously and religiously educated” (which is not the evangelizing of unregenerated children, but the instruction of little children who are born again and alive in Christ, with the gospel, so that they can and will repent, be-

lieve, and obey from their earliest years), “increase and grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ” (which is not a dramatic conversion from death to life in youth or old age, but a gradual maturing in Christ of those who were alive in Christ from infancy: “*increase and grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ*”), and then “acknowledge thy fatherly goodness and mercy, which Thou hast shown to them” (from their infancy). The children will prove the work of covenant grace in themselves, both to themselves and to others, when they come to years, not by experiencing a dramatic, mystical conversion, but by living “in all righteousness, under [their] only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ.” They will also “manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion.”

Summary

The Reformed baptism form teaches that election governs the salvation of the offspring of believers in the covenant of grace. The form regards the elect children of believers as the true, spiritual children of believers, to whom the covenant promise is given, with whom the covenant is made, and in whom God begins the work of salvation as a rule when they are infants. Election determines the covenant children.

There are two ways to evade this doctrine of the baptism form, and both are pursued by Reformed churches and theologians. One is to extend the grace of the covenant to all the physical offspring of believers alike. This involves making covenant grace and salvation conditional, that is, dependent upon the work of the child. This is the denial of the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace, as the men of the federal vision are now demonstrating to the entire community of Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

The other way reduces the covenant work of God with the infants of believers to nothing more than the

church’s formally and externally setting the infants and small children apart from the children of unbelievers in the hope of the conversion of some of the children in later life. Also this evasion denies that in the baptism form election determines the covenant children of believers. Specifically, it denies that election determines the infants of believers who are “sanctified in Christ.”

Neither of the evasions does justice to the language of the form.

Inasmuch as the Reformed baptism form is a very early, official document of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands—a “minor creed”—the Reformed churches in the Netherlands early established the truth that election governs the covenant as binding doctrine. For hundreds of years after 1574 and 1618/1619, Reformed theologians and even denominations of churches in the Dutch Reformed tradition opposed this doctrine, arguing strenuously that the covenant is divorced from election, especially regarding the inclusion of children in the covenant, and their salvation. Today, the overwhelming majority of theologians and churches that stand in the Dutch Reformed tradition and that have and use the Reformed baptism form take the position that the covenant is, and ought to be, divorced from election.

But they have no right to take this position.

In all the history of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, or of the history of Reformed churches standing in that tradition, no one ever had a right to take that position.

The Reformed “Form for the Administration of Baptism” ruled out that position from the very beginning, at least as early as 1574, binding upon all theologians and churches that have the form as their official document that election governs the covenant.

In 1618/1619, the Canons of the Synod of Dordt did the same.

... to be continued. 

■ “The Absence of Morality”

What is moral? What is immoral? Who makes the determination? If one makes the determination, or some group decides, does it necessarily apply to all people? Or only to the people of a specific nation?

Each individual seems to have some idea of what it is for himself. The fact is that society today resembles all too much that in the days of the Judges of Israel of old. Judges 21:25 states, “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” Every man determined what was moral or immoral for himself. He would not be bound by the rule of any authority.

Some of these thoughts came to mind when I received an e-mail from an individual who spared no strong language to express what he thought about the teaching of the PRC on reprobation. I responded that I would discuss this with him provided we did it on the basis of the infallible Word of God. Specifically I referred him to Romans 9 on the subject.

His response was that he knew well the teaching of Romans 9 and had struggled with that much of his life. He agreed that if Scripture is infallible, then there could be no further debate on the subject of reprobation. But, he concluded, it was immoral on the part of God to reprobate any.

I reminded him of Romans 9:20: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” Further, there was the question: Who determines what is

moral? Is there an absolute standard? Is it decided by majority vote? Does a Supreme Court give the final decision? Does morality change over the passage of time?

I have not heard from this gentleman since.

One could ask many questions concerning morality and the standard for the same. Is God to be judged as immoral if He determines to reprobate some in the way of their sins? Is abortion, considered once to be a criminal act, now moral because the courts of the land declared this to be a “woman’s choice”? Is gambling, once illegal and declared immoral, now become moral because the State says so and is itself involved in sponsoring and encouraging it? Can marriage, once considered by the State to be dissolved only on the ground of proven adultery, now be dissolved “for any cause” because the State says so?

Marriage has been affected by changing morality. The divorce and remarriage rates seem to climb ever higher. But living in fornication and adultery also becomes an acceptable alternative to marriage—often condoned within churches as well. A report in the *Grand Rapids Press*, October 15, 2006 stated:

Married couples, whose numbers have been declining for decades as a proportion of American households, finally have slipped into a minority, according to an analysis of new census figures by The New York Times.

The American Community Survey, released this month by the Census Bureau, found 49.7 percent, or 55.2 million, of the nation’s 111.1 million households in 2005 were made up of married couples—with and without children—just shy of a majority and down from more than 52 percent five years earlier.

...While the numbers of single young adults and elderly widows are growing, Coontz said, “We have an anachronistic view as to what extent you can use marriage to organize the distribution and redistribution of benefits.”

And the numbers of unmarried couples are growing. Since 2000, those identifying themselves as unmarried opposite-sex couples rose by about 14 percent, male couples by 24 percent and female couples by 12 percent.

The question must be raised: is morality involved in any way? It appears that today the morality of marriage or alternative lifestyles has come down to the choice of each individual. Whatever is right for him is right. The consequences are inevitable. Those who ignore the morality set forth in God’s Word must expect that.

The consequences of lack of a standard of morality are evident in our “culture of violence.” Many deplore the violence in the schools and in society in general. Articles giving advice concerning solutions are regularly written. But seldom is there raised the question of a standard of morality. The Ten Commandments have been removed from many public institutions. Almost anything is considered acceptable because we have “freedom of speech” and “freedom of choice.” But, as the saying goes, “the chickens have come home to roost.” Cal Thomas, a noted commentator, reflected on this “morality” of our day in the *Grand Rapids Press*, October 14, 2006:

...We read and hear about kids being shot and killed for a leather jacket or a pair of high-priced sneakers. Why has human life become so cheap and why has moral conduct eroded to the point that many commit murder without a second thought?

Sociologists and culture crit-

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ics have spent years studying this question and have produced mountains of paperwork analyzing violence and its causes. They have also proposed solutions, none of which appear to be working to stem school shootings.

Elizabeth Thoman, founder of the Center for Media Literacy, contributes one answer. She writes, defensively at first, “for years, like other communicators, I believed that tolerating some things I didn’t like, including depictions of violence, was the price we paid for a free and open public discourse. ...The issue, I believe, is no longer one of protecting free speech but protecting human life; it is not a question of censoring ideas but of changing behaviors that are endangering the health and safety of every citizen, young and old.”

The media won’t change and government isn’t about to make them change, other than imposing fines for broadcasting certain vulgar words. So the task falls upon the parents. Get rid of the TV or at least prohibit children from watching violent shows. Don’t allow violent and crude music in your home. Don’t divorce, which causes children to feel abandoned and become angry. Stop aborting babies, because if human life is seen as cheap and disposable at its early stages, we lose a moral argument for preserving it at later stages.

Talking about school violence is not a bad thing. Doing the tough things that will reduce it is better. Abandoning the notion that parents should be “friends” with their children would help, along with the investment of quality time in their lives. But it would require major changes in many households that now put building wealth ahead of building character.

Thomas is correct in many of the things he states. Often in his commentaries he reminds his readers of the requirements of Scripture. Where morality is not based on the testimony of God’s Word, the sad consequences inevitably follow.

The solution, however, is not simply to post the Ten Commandments again on the walls of all of the public schools. One can hold outwardly to all of these commandments—but obedience to the Law of God must be a matter of the heart. All of the proposals to change society to make it more “Christian” will not finally succeed—except there be regeneration and conversion. The signs of this day point rather to the closeness of the end of this age, when man does “what is right in his own eyes” with a vengeance.

■ 150-Year History of the CRC

An interesting review of a book recounting the history of the Christian Reformed Church during the past 150 years appeared in the *Grand Rapids Press*, September 2, 2006. It was written by Charles Honey, the religion editor of that newspaper. A part of his summary of the book follows:

A CRC vacationer in 1957 could count on attending a church in California or Canada, where everyone sang from the Psalter Hymnal, followed the same order of worship and heard a sermon from a white, male pastor.

Today, a Korean or female pastor might be preaching from a platform rigged with drums and a song-lyrics screen, in a church not even identified as Christian Reformed.

“By and large, the Christian Reformed Church of 1957 was pretty uniform,” Hoezee said. “Now, it’s all over the place.”

Scholarship, service and noisy theological disputes are other recurring themes in Hoezee’s 126-page book.

From divisive dust-ups over the extent of God’s grace and love to the stormy women-in-office debates of recent decades, the CRC tended to be “scrappy,” Hoezee said.

“The first 40 years of Christian Reformed history—it’s amazing we stayed together at all,” he said.

The CRC was born in turmoil, when five West Michigan congregations broke from the Reformed Church in America over theological disagreements. But, from the outset, the CRC contained tensions between pious traditionalists suspicious of the outside culture and more outgoing reformers “willing to engage the world,” Hoezee writes.

“Even today at Synod, if you know what to listen for ... those voices are still out there,” he says, referring to the CRC’s top governing body.

The trend toward engaging culture, or “leavening the whole loaf,” has increased during the past 50 years, as has the influence of CRC scholars and affiliated colleges, Hoezee says.

He foresees increasingly diverse worship and worshippers plus increasing challenges to embrace newcomers and keep CRC-raised youth from following other spiritual paths....

Hoezee’s book appears to present accurately the history of the CRC. The great question remains: is this truly a spiritual development of the faithful church of Jesus Christ? Does this represent the proper development of the doctrines of Holy Scripture? There is also the question whether the vacillating character of the youth can be explained by this development in the church. Surely one must not be fixated upon the old ways of conducting services simply because we “always have done it this way”—but there is a real danger that in making changes, one adopts standards and practices of the liberal churches of the day. The youth then see no difference between one denomination and another. Rather, the church must follow the requirements of Scripture and preach Christ crucified—not to provide entertainment to attract the unbeliever and keep their youth. This is what the child of God must expect and demand in the church of Christ. 

The Prophetic Aspect of the Deacons' Work (2)

Implementing This Aspect

In our last article we demonstrated that, inasmuch as deacons are required to handle the Word of God, their work has a prophetic aspect to it. That is, deacons may and must teach. In so doing, they do not become pastors, or substitutes for pastors. The deacons are to teach to the extent that their teaching serves their fundamental work, the gathering and disbursing of alms.

We now examine in more detail just how the deacons might perform this aspect of their work.



Perhaps the most obvious way is that of teaching the Scriptures to the poor and distressed whom the deacons are to comfort. As we noted in the last article, the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons requires deacons "not only [to] administer relief to the poor and indigent with external gifts, but also with comfortable words from Scripture."¹ By opening up the Scriptures to the people of God in their needs, the deacons implement the prophetic aspect of their work.

These poor and distressed are almost always members of the church in which the deacons hold office. They are children of God, Reformed believers, who themselves know the Scriptures. The deacons open up the Scriptures to them, not to teach them the fundamentals of the Christian and Re-

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formed faith, but to point them to God as their only hope, who promises to supply His people with daily bread and with grace sufficient for our every need. This reassurance and comfort is the greatest need of the poor and distressed of God's people.

The deacon who is diligently preparing for such a visit will face this question: which Bible passage should I use? The question will arise, not from the scarcity of appropriate passages in Scripture, but from their vast number. While many passages in the gospels and epistles suggest themselves for this use, the deacon ought not overlook the many pertinent passages in the Old Testament. Already in the Mosaic law God spoke of His care for the poor. As to its letter, the Mosaic law is not in force today; but the use of such passages to illustrate that God's people can depend on Him, and have always done so, can be rewarding both to the deacon and the poor. The book of Ruth gives an instance of God's care of poor believers, whose sins make them unworthy of such care. The Psalms and prophetic books are full of cries to God for help, and confessions of trust in God. Peter Y. DeJong gives an extensive list of appropriate passages, which list he prefaces with these remarks: "This is by no means exhaustive. It serves only to suggest the rich variety which God has provided for the consolation of those in distress."²

Less frequently, the poor whom the deacons visit might be those who are not members of the church in which the deacons hold office,

and probably not members of a church at all. In such instances, the prophetic aspect of the deacons' work involves instructing such in the basic tenets of the gospel and calling them to faith and repentance. Because their great need is to hear the gospel, the deacon may consider appropriate any Scripture passage that sets forth clearly the wonder of salvation in Jesus Christ. Not to be overlooked is II Corinthians 8, in which Christ's incarnation is described in terms of a rich Christ becoming poor, that we who are poor might become rich. This wonder is set forth as a reason for the church to give material gifts to others in need.

In either case—that of the poor within or outside of the congregation's membership—the deacons function as prophets by providing for the true need of mankind. This true need is not for earthly bread, but spiritual; it is not for gifts of money, but for the news of the gospel of the free and gracious gift of God in Jesus Christ for unworthy sinners.

A second way in which deacons implement the prophetic aspect of their work is by giving scriptural instruction and counsel to those whose financial woes are

1. *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and Added Chorale Section* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1927; revised edition [PRC], December 2002), p. 106.

2. Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1963), page 178. The list is found on pp. 179-182.

the fruit of their own poor stewardship.

This instruction and counsel is also usually directed to those who are members of the congregation that the deacons serve. However, the purpose of the work is not so much to comfort, as it is to rebuke, admonish, instruct, and correct. Such work is still considered prophetic, because the only basis for these rebukes, admonitions, instructions, and corrections is the Word of God.

This aspect of the work the deacons ought not be reluctant to perform. God's people will not always receive such admonition and instruction in a proper spirit. But when it is clear to the deacons that such admonition is needed, the deacons must be ready to give it. And the fruit will be, by God's grace, that some are turned to repent of their poor stewardship.

Again, a host of Scripture passages suggest themselves. The eighth commandment, which forbids stealing, by implication regulates all our use of our possessions; Lord's Day 42 of our Heidelberg Catechism shows this by explaining the eighth commandment to forbid "all covetousness, and all useless waste of his gifts," and to require of us that we "labor faithfully that [we] may be able to help the poor in their need."³ Jesus reminded His disciples of the need first to seek the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33), and not to be concerned so much about earthly matters. The book of Proverbs is replete with suitable passages in this connection.

Thirdly, deacons implement this aspect of their work by instructing the rich in the congregation regarding giving, when such instruction is necessary. Especially deacons might do this when the congregation is blessed with many poor, and when the deacons have evidence that certain members of the congregation who have the means are reluctant to help. Passages such as I Timo-

thy 6:17-19, in which Timothy is told to instruct the rich to be "ready to distribute," or James 2:5-6, in which the rich are rebuked for despising the poor, are appropriate here.

Finally, this aspect of their work deacons implement by instructing the congregation as a whole concerning the subject of giving and receiving. This instruction is also usually given when the need is great; but it may be given whenever the deacons consider it profitable for the congregation. Most likely deacons would do this by way of a letter, but they might also do so in other ways—for example, by hosting a conference aimed at teaching the congregation about financial principles of stewardship.



The last two ways just mentioned raise again the question: is not this the work of the pastor? Is not Timothy *as pastor* told to charge the rich that they be ready to distribute? Is not the work of teaching the congregation as a whole the work of the pastor?

Of course, all public instruction of the congregation as a whole is the work of the office of pastor. The pastor must preach sermons regarding the care of the poor, the calling of the rich towards them, and the subject of stewardship in general. Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster make this point well: "The key to the congregation's practice of good stewardship is, of course, the pulpit." And later: "The deacon as teacher, then, concerns himself first of all with urging faithful preaching, and supporting it."⁴

Individual instruction to the rich is not a substitute for addressing such matters in the preaching. However, the deacons may supplement the preaching's charge to the rich by personal visits and individual instruction in the subject of giving.

Similarly, a conference hosted

by the deacons on the subject of stewardship must be viewed, not as replacing, but as supplementing, the work of the pulpit. Perhaps the deacons would even ask the minister to lead the conference. But it would not be wrong for a deacon to lead such a conference, inasmuch as the content of the instruction bears directly on the work of gathering and distributing alms.

For at least two practical reasons, deacons must be ready to supplement the work of the pastor by taking seriously the prophetic aspect of their work.

The first is that at times, especially in a larger congregation, the pastor is so busy tending to all the needs of the congregation, that he needs such help. Elders and retired ministers help by teaching catechism and tending to the sick. Deacons can help by being ready to instruct and counsel both rich and poor regarding their calling and comfort.

The second is that every congregation is vacant from time to time. During these vacancies, the poor must still be cared for, and the congregation encouraged to do its part. The deacons must do the work.



Our development of this aspect of the work of the deacons underscores the need for deacons to be spiritual, godly men, who are "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (Acts 6:3) and who hold "the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (I Tim. 3:9).

This means that they must be men who know the Scriptures. "Every deacon must be well grounded in the teachings of the Bible especially as these apply to his ministry. He must be able to do far more than quote an appropriate text occasionally."⁵ De Jong's point is that the deacons must understand the whole teaching of Scripture as it bears on God's loving care of His people.

The deacon (and the same applies to pastors, elders, and all of God's children) must not think that his knowledge of the Scriptures is a means to an end—that is, he must not study the Scriptures just because his diaconal work requires it of him. Rather, he must study them as an end in itself. The Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (II Tim. 3:15). We must study the Scriptures for personal growth, and to apply them to our own lives as Christians. Doing so, the deacon will find himself growing in his ability to use the Scriptures also in his diaconal work.

That deacons must be spiritual, godly men also means that they must be men who pray without ceasing, and for whom true, sincere, heartfelt prayer is a regular activity. God promises to give us wisdom in the way of our asking

for it without doubting (James 1:5-6). As was true of his study of Scripture, so also with prayer, the deacon must pray not only in connection with his diaconal work, while making his visits, after opening up the Scriptures to God's people, but he must be a man familiar with prayer, so that by this means he grows spiritually as a person.

If the church wants such men as her deacons, the church has a responsibility as well. This responsibility is first to choose to office those men to whom God has given the necessary gifts. Remember that the Scriptures teach us little about how the deacons must go about their work, but much about what kind of man a deacon must be (I Tim. 3:8-13). Not only must the council give heed to these qualifications as it nominates deacons, but

the people of God must give heed as they choose their deacons.

The church's responsibility is also to pray to God on the deacons' behalf, that they be men who give their hearts to their work, men who experience God's blessing in their lives, in order that by them the church also might be blessed. 

3. Philip Schaff, ed, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, "The Evangelical Protestant Creeds" (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), pages 347, 348. The Protestant Reformed reader familiar with the Catechism as found in the back of our *Psalter* will notice a slight difference in the wording of the translation, but no difference in the meaning.

4. Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster, *The Deacons Handbook: A Manual of Stewardship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 1980), p. 143.

5. DeJong, p. 177.

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

As a Lamb in a Large Place

Going Out

Liberty" is the magic word of our age.

No tie, no limitation, no confining or encircling of your person or of your life.

Our self, our individual being, our own insight and our own will, presently our own inclination and desire, must be our only law.

And where one still continues

to be called "Christian," or even in a more serious sense still wants to be a confessor of Christ, and therefore does not say: "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast their cords from us" (Ps. 2:3), and far less in the "*ni Dieu ni maitre*" (no God and no master) takes up the cry of the revolution, yet as Christian one dares to demand *the large place* for the "lambs of Christ."

On conscience, more than on God's Word, one will depend. One's own insight and one's own inspiration is of higher validity than the confessional standards of the church. And not the spiritual *being-bound* in the Body of Christ but *liberty*, that moves itself about

the pivot of one's own conviction, must have the promise of eternal life.

Such is the fanaticism with respect to a false idea of liberty, which is devoid of all harmony and deprived of all counter-poise. And such is no less the fanaticism with respect to our own individual excellency, which from the circles of the revolution has gradually gained admittance also in the circle of confessors of the Christ.

By a talented writer like Vinet, unintentionally on his part, this untrue movement has found its seductive interpretation.

Without knowing it, and equally unintentionally, John

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Darby has given to this revolutionary Christendom a form and an expression of its own.

The thesis heralded even among us, that the age of confessional churches is past, and that henceforth Christendom will float upon *the mysticism of the heart*, has given admission to this unchristian purport in wide circles.

And if in these our times one would describe this critical phenomenon by a short word from Holy Scripture, there could ever yet no better expression be found than what we read in Hosea 4:16.

For insooth, what at this false viewpoint even a Christian desires to be is nothing else nor better than *a lamb in a large place*.



The lamb does not belong in a large place.

The place of the lamb is *in the sheepfold*, or, when it goes grazing, with the flock, under the eye of the shepherd.

The lamb must not go for pasture where it chooses, but must confine itself to the narrow range appointed by the shepherd.

Large places are for wild animals that wander from forest to forest and by night come forth from among the trees, that, according to the picturesque expression of Psalm 104, they may "seek their meat from God."

And when the lamb that belongs in the sheepfold and with the flock, but *not* in the large place, hankers after that large place and, possessed of longing, wanders off to that large place, it is exposed to a thousand dangers and feels itself pursued and restless and, unless the faithful shepherd finds and carries it back, it becomes a prey to the wolf that lies in waiting.

What Jesus says of the good shepherd, who for a moment leaves his ninety and nine to fetch back to the flock the one sheep that strayed, is precisely the same image that is drawn by Hosea of the "lamb in the large place."

The "lamb in the large place" is the image of man, of the youth, of the child of God, who cannot bear the bands, who before all things else wants to be free, and who deems in the large place to be able to watch over himself.

The "lamb in the large place" is the prodigal son who wandered off in the world, and in that wide, wide world ended with sitting down weeping in the midst of the husks of swine.



"In a large place" to walk about to one's heart's content, such is the sinful trait which at the awakened and awakening life naturally exhibits itself in our human nature.

Not in the house, but in the street.

Not under parental oversight, but free man in the world.

Not bound by ordinances and usages of life, but play with life after one's own inclination and whim.

Such and not otherwise is the trait that awakes in the heart of every youth when he approaches the stature of a man.

Out from the sheepfold, away from the flock, to a large place, begins with being the thirst of every heart.

The more one is out in a large place, the freer and the more unconstrained, the happier one is, and the more highly honored by his equals.

This is not everyone's good fortune. There are those who, by sheer necessity of life and by the arduous day-task or by a weak constitution, are held back from this vacuous, dangerous large place.

But there are others who persistently carried their point, who unarmed and unhindered entered into the large place and boasted that at length they were as free as fish in water or as birds in air.

And when in the end accounts are examined, what has become of all these young men, or young

women, who managed to get out into the large place?

Insooth, a few strong, vigorous natures have in the open field held themselves aloof from the wolf.

There are those whom God in His grace took hold of in the open field and brought them back to His sheepfold.

But who can count them, the perished ones and those forever lost, who have paid the price of their wanderings about in the large place, in the loss of honor and virtue, of the plenitude of their strength, and of the promise of their future?



Let no one deem that the evil trait, as lambs to wander off in the open spaces, mortifies with the years of youth.

Rather, be it in modified form, this evil trait continues to follow after us until our death. And every time again, even among God's best children, you meet with self-willed natures that love spiritual wanderings and deem that, when they have withdrawn themselves from the discipline of God's majesty, things will be better.

So to all appearances they live their spiritual life on their own responsibility. They have their own code of morals, which at one time arrests them at some point of law, and then again allows so much to pass by unheeded.

So they wander along in all sorts of paths of eccentric teachings or of excessive spiritual fanaticism.

No connection of the past, no tie of church or creed, has any more hold on them. They are they that have been *set at liberty*, and therefore *free* Christians, and without compunction surrender themselves to the lust of their spiritual eye.

So they wander round and about, pitching their tent now in the woods and again in the barren wilderness. And in the wolf they no longer see an enemy. But against the dog of the shepherd is concentrated all their hatred.

Or with them the spiritual is nothing but semblance, and under this pious mask they seek, worse yet, the lust of their heart, if not the evil lust of their flesh.

They still hear the voice of the shepherd calling: "Turn back!" but they will not turn back. They choose their own paths, and their heart beats faster within them, if they may but roam and wander about in large places according to their own caprice.

And so they get farther and farther away from God, they become more and more unused to Him, and the narrowness of the sheepfold begins more and more to offend them.

Till at length everything can pass, while at an evil hour something of the *wolf-nature* is entered into the nature of the wandering lamb that has altogether gone astray.



And worst of all is that God the Lord not merely allows such

wandering off, but sometimes lets it come upon us as a punishment, and brings it over us as a judgment under which we must succumb.

By Hosea the Lord of Israel says: "I will feed them as a lamb in a large place." That is: I will harden their heart. I will make them wander off from the flock. I will make them lose the path to the sheepfold. And it will be *My* holy judgment that at length they wander about and go astray as a lamb in a large place of the unprotected field.

When God's first child, Adam the father of us all, sins away his Eden, God drives him out from Paradise, and exiles him to the broad places of the world, where thorns and thistles are prepared for him.

And so the Lord still does.

When it concerns a child of God's grace, of course, it is always with the purpose, and unalterably with the result, that the lamb in the large place at length begins to

feel his need and death, and becomes conscious again of home-sickness after the sheepfold, and by the faithful Shepherd is brought back again to the flock, that God's angels might rejoice and God's grace in His child might triumph.

But woe to him who ever allowed himself to think: "Why should I not wander off? I am still God's child. In the end I will be all right," and under this deceitful pretense strangled reproach in his heart, stopped the ear to the voice of the Shepherd, and recklessly persevered in his roaming.

And therefore—since now again the lambs that wander about in large places are so many—by this brief word let the call go out to all who wandered off: "Abandon your false liberty-urge and turn back! The place for the lamb that has been purchased by the most precious blood is not in the large place, but in the arms and at the heart of his Savior." 

Wealth Gotten by Vanity

Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished, but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.

Proverbs 13:11

Lotteries here; lotteries there; lotteries seem to be everywhere.

Enter a raffle ticket for a turkey at the grocery store.

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

Buy a \$1 "scratch and win" ticket and maybe you can win a thousand or a million dollars.

Put your name on the little slip of paper, drop it in the box provided, and you might win a brand new car.

Buy a burger and some fries, scratch the side of the fry box, and you might win a free lunch or more money.

Buy a cup of coffee, roll up the paper rim, and you might win food, doughnuts, money, or maybe another brand-new car.

The Christian is told by the world that such lottery or lottery-like activities are just harmless games and are lots of fun. It does not cost much. And if you do not choose to participate, you may be passing by a large sum of money, fabulous prizes, or a tropical vacation to escape the bitter cold of winter.

"You might win! So, do it!" say the ungodly, and to that reasoning our flesh is attracted.

For that reason we, as the children of our heavenly Father, need

to hear the instruction and wisdom of God from Proverbs 13:11, which exposes the wickedness of the lottery and lottery-like activities.



Proverbs 13:11, quoted above, teaches that daily wealth gotten from vanity will come to scarcity. God speaks of those who would improperly look for the source of their daily bread from vanity. Vanity in Scripture can refer to sinful ways of man apart from God. Man often looks to his false gods for his daily bread. One specific god to which man looks is bound up in the sin of the lottery and gambling. Men look for the source of their daily bread to a false god as they participate in the vanity of the lottery. They set their hope upon that god and with uncertain expectation long to strike it rich. This is a life of vanity according to Proverbs 13:11.

Proverbs 13:11 shows that even if one would receive a massive jackpot, the wealth received by and from that vanity will be diminished. It will shrink quickly and vanish away. This is confirmed by statistics concerning those who win big lottery jackpots. It has been shown that over ninety percent of those who win million dollar jackpots spend the whole sum within a year. Literally, it seems to be true for most that their wealth, gotten through the vain practice of gambling, lotteries, and other such games of chance, and so from vanity, is quickly diminished to nothing.

Even more so is it true from a spiritual viewpoint. After all, what can a man do with a million dollars on his deathbed? Man cannot take his million dollars with him when he dies. He cannot use it as a ransom for his soul from condemnation and God's wrath. At that point, all that wealth gotten by vanity is worthless and nothing. Furthermore, at the end of time, with the return of Christ, all this world's earthly wealth will be

burned up anyway. Certainly, the divine prophecy of the text is true: man's wealth gotten from vanity will be diminished and come to nothing.



This verse in Proverbs leads us to consider the reasons why participating in the lottery and other such monetary games of chance are vain, and why we must refuse to participate in them.

First, the lottery promotes a belief in chance and luck. The child of God is bombarded by lottery advertisements that tempt him to think and live as though many things in his life happen by chance. He is tempted to think and speak about "good luck" or "feeling lucky." When standing in the gas station or grocery store, he is tempted by the world to buy a ticket because maybe it is his "lucky day." This is a clear denial of God's providence, which rules and governs all things in our life. According to the Belgic Confession, Article 13, we must "reject that damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God regards nothing, but leaves all things to chance." We must reject resolutely the damnable errors of the vanity of "Lady Luck." In that steadfast rejection, we may not look for our daily bread from "Lady Luck," but solely from our heavenly Father.

Secondly, participation in the lottery is sinful stewardship of our wealth. Some men might argue that for the million dollars that one could quickly and easily obtain, one is only spending a few dollars. However, statistically speaking, one would have to spend a lot of those "few dollars" ever to receive the return of a "jackpot." That means that to participate in the lottery is to throw away the good gift of money for nothing. Such a waste of the good gift of money violates the eighth commandment, which requires us to be good stewards

of our money and forbids that we waste it in the vain hope of receiving a "jackpot."

Thirdly, the lottery appeals to our covetous and foolish natures. In spite of the fact that participation in the lottery, or any gambling, is sinful stewardship, our covetous nature yet cries out, "BUT ... I *could* win!" A massive jackpot, and all that it can obtain, is alluring to our sinful flesh. We easily covet money. We covet all the conveniences and things of this earth that a jackpot could provide. Easily we can deceive ourselves to imagine that *this* time if we buy a lottery ticket, we will win.

How do we in wisdom deal with a situation in which a store or business would give us a lottery ticket as a benefit for shopping at their store? The ticket would be a gift from the store, so that none of our money is wasted to pay for it. Should we throw away the ticket, or should we keep it and wait for the lottery numbers to be published in the weekly newspaper? Should we continue shopping at that store to get more "free" lottery tickets? Although it is true in that situation that the ticket was not purchased, yet we must judge the situation from the viewpoint of our covetous nature. Are we seeking our daily bread from our heavenly Father ... or from the vanity of the lottery?

We are always prone to covet something for nothing. We love to get something for nothing. We covet a vast windfall of money for little or no effort. By nature we hate the God-ordained way in which we receive our daily bread and wealth through hard work and faithful stewardship. By nature, it is much more appealing to use the vanity of lottery, by which we could get a lot for nothing or next to nothing. Because participation in the lottery only feeds our sinful covetousness, we must not participate in the lottery, even if we are handed free lottery tickets.

Fourthly, the lottery would tempt us to believe that what is very uncertain, and really a lie, is true. The lottery tempts us to believe the lie that if we do not participate in the lottery, we will be throwing away \$1,000,000. The lottery would have us live by sight and upon the very shaky hope and the lie that we could possibly, despite the overwhelming “odds” to the contrary, receive some money or expensive prize from the lottery. The lottery tempts us to live by sight, by unbelief, and by a willing deception.

In contrast to that, we are called by God to live by faith. We are called by God to stand upon His sure and certain promises, which daily never fail. We are called to sojourn through our life seeking God’s kingdom and believing in the sure promise that God will supply our daily bread wisely and perfectly. Unlike the vain promises of the lottery, God has never failed to fulfill His promise to supply all our needs in Christ Jesus. Therefore we must not live a life of vain hopes and on the basis of lies. We are called to seek God’s kingdom and the riches of His kingdom in the obedience and trust that our daily bread will come faithfully from God through our daily work.

Finally, to show us His hatred of the vanity of the lottery, God reveals from heaven His judgment upon the lottery and those who participate. God judges the sin of participating in and winning the lottery with endless problems, instant “friends,” untold misery, and continuous grief to one’s grave. Marriages and friendships are torn apart because of the jealousies, greed, envy, the waste of money, and a host of other problems because of the instant wealth, which most have not the prudence to handle. Stories written about those who won a big jackpot detail a long trail of misery and, in many cases, poverty. God’s judgment is revealed from heaven upon the un-

godliness and vanity of the lottery, gambling, and all such games and practices of chance and covetousness.

The warning about this judgment is sounded out clearly later in Proverbs 28:20, 22:

A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.... He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.

Therefore, since God’s judgment rests upon the evil practice of the lottery, we should never participate in it—or, if we have foolishly done so, we should desire that we never *win* it. If our name would be selected as the winner, we must disclaim the prize for the good of our souls.

In other words, don’t scratch that free “scratch and win” ticket. Throw away the free lottery ticket. Don’t take the raffle ticket for a new car or a frozen turkey. Don’t become prey to the temptation of seeking your daily bread from vanity. Don’t even start to go down that road of seeking your daily bread by vanity.

Although such ideas and admonitions in the eyes of the world are spiritual lunacy, yet according to Proverbs 13:11, such is the wisdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Because Christ has redeemed and renewed us to be the children of our heavenly Father, we are called to seek and receive our daily bread in the way of Proverbs 13:11b. We must gather daily bread by the labor of our hands and the sweat of our brow. We must labor in thanksgiving for the daily bread that Christ has earned and purchased on the cross for us as a blessing. Having prayed to the Father for daily bread, we must work with our God-given abilities and gifts in

our lawful occupations to support the church, the home, the school, and the poor.

The child of God who so walks in the fear of Jehovah shall increase. That promise of the text does not mean that we will certainly receive a substantial increase in our earthly wealth because of obedience. Nevertheless, the promise of Proverbs 13:11 most certainly means that we shall increase in the spiritual wealth of experiencing the blessings of the Lord in the way of submitting in true wisdom to our heavenly Father’s ordinances. That wealth of the spiritual blessings and riches of His kingdom will never be diminished. Rather, we shall increase in them now and eternally for the sake of Jesus Christ, who did not earn our wealth and blessings by vanity, but only by the redemptive work of His submission and obedience to the Father.

For Christ’s sake, we already are heirs of the glorious wealth of the new heavens and earth. We are guaranteed by the blood and Spirit of Christ to be heirs of the riches in the kingdom of heaven that moth cannot corrupt, that thieves cannot steal, and that rust cannot ruin. Those treasures are secure in our Lord Jesus Christ at the Father’s right hand. Further, our full possession of them has been sealed by Christ in His blood and by His Spirit, whom He has poured upon our hearts.

Having all these riches in Christ, shall we then seek various means of vanity for our daily bread instead of our gracious and wise Father in heaven? God forbid. Let us gather our daily bread by our lawful labor and use it in good stewardship. Also, in the strength and wisdom of Christ, let us keep ourselves separated spiritually from this wicked world, which God has given over to a life of getting wealth by vanity. 

School Activities

Each year at Christmas time the students at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI contribute to a Christmas collection. This year the collection went to the Free Christian School of Edgerton, MN. After having closed two years ago due to a lack of students, the school reopened this year with nine students in grades K-6 and two full-time teachers. The money collected from the students at Heritage was to be put towards the purchase of much needed Math and Reading Enrichment and Activity Books for the lower grades and for Bible maps and geography/history map sets for the upper room.

Congregation Activities

The Building Committee of Hudsonville, MI PRC, under the direction of the Council, has formed a long-range study committee. This committee has been asked to look at the classrooms and activity areas of Hudsonville's church building to see if their size and location are best serving the needs of the congregation, or perhaps if expansion is necessary.

On Wednesday evening, December 13, the members of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada were invited to their annual Christmas program. The evening of praise in celebration of Christ's birth involved the entire congregation, with numbers provided by the children and adults as well, culminating, as it does every year, with the singing of *Ere Zig God* ("Glory to God" in Dutch) by the entire group to bring the evening to a close.

The Adult Bible Study of the Lynden, WA PRC invited everyone

in their congregation to another special meeting on December 14 to listen to a CD of Prof. D. Engelsma's lecture on Federal Vision.

At their annual congregational meeting on December 7, the members of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada approved, among other things, a proposal from their Council that their church building be used by several families of their congregation for parts of their combined home-school education twice a week for the 2006-2007 school year.

A special proposal presented by the Council of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI to hire a part-time secretary for their church was approved.

The congregation of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI approved adding six more lines to their phone system for use by shut-ins during worship services.

The congregation of Grace PRC in Standale, MI approved a proposal at their annual congregational meeting in December to add acoustical panels in their narthex.

The Bible Societies of the Hudsonville, MI PRC met together December 13 for their annual combined Society Meeting. Rev. G Eriks introduced the topic "History of the Wisemen," and discussion followed.

An informational meeting was held at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI Saturday afternoon, December 9, for anyone with questions about, or who was otherwise interested in details concerning beginning, the process of organizing a daughter congregation from Faith. Two main reasons for beginning this process now are that Faith's present sanctuary will be filled to capacity in the very near future and, second, to attempt to alleviate some of the workload that a large congregation places upon one pastor.

The Choral Society of the South Holland, IL PRC presented their annual Christmas program Sunday evening, December 10.

The congregation of the Loveland, CO PRC was invited to gather after their evening service on December 3 to enjoy their choir as they presented their Fall program of songs of praise to our glorious God.

Young Adult Activities

The Young Adults of the South Holland, IL PRC hosted an overnight retreat on December 8-9 at Eaglewood Resort and Spa in Itasca, IL. Rev. R. VanOverloop, pastor of the Byron Center, MI PRC, led the discussion on the subject of purity and dating on Friday evening, and organized activities were planned for Saturday.

Evangelism Activities

After a trial-run for several months, the Evangelism Committee of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI has installed a computer in their sound booth and hardwired an Internet connection to that computer for live broadcast of their services. Presently Trinity has up to fifteen listeners to their weekly services, and have established contact with at least four of them. You can check all this out and listen at www.trinityprc.org.

Mission Activities

The Council of the Doon, Iowa PRC, the calling church for our denominational mission work in the Philippines, has sent letters of request to all our denomination's pastors to consider spending a two-month period on the field while Doon seeks a full-time missionary.

We can also report that present plans call for the arrival of Rev. A. Spriensma and his family, the Lord willing, in the Kalamazoo, MI PRC March 1 or 2, with his installation

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

as their pastor to take place on March 11.

The Domestic Mission Committee has requested Candidate Clay Spronk to work with the group in Sioux Falls, SD. We are thankful with the Spronks that God has provided this opportunity for them.

The purchase of the church building in Pittsburgh was finalized on December 1, and the Fellowship there intended to begin meeting in their "new" building December 10.

Minister Activities

It is with thankfulness to God that the faculty of our seminary recently announced that they have licensed third-year seminarian Mr. Heath Bleyenbergh to speak a word of edification in the worship services of our churches. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Byron Center PRC extend their Christian sympathy to elder Mike Elzinga and his family in the passing of Mike's brother,

MR. CARL ELZINGA.

We pray that Mike, Ruth, and their loved ones may find comfort in the words of Deuteronomy 31:6: "Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."

Rev. Ron VanOverloop, Pres.
Bruce Lubbers, Assist. Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hull PRC extends heartfelt sympathy to Elder Don Hoksbergen and his wife Bonnie along with their children following the death of Bonnie's sister,

JANIS R. FINLEY.

May we find our comfort in Psalm 31:7: "I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble: thou hast known my soul in adversities."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Ike Uittenbogaard, Asst. Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoice with our parents, **JOHN and ELAINE FLIKKEMA**, who celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary on December 14. We give thanks to our heavenly Father for their many years together, for the faithful instruction we have received from them, and for the godly example they have set for us. We pray that God will continue to bless their marriage and that their joy will always be in Him. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:7).

- * John III and Ruthanne Flikkema
- * Steven and Karen Ophoff
- * Tom and Amy Flikkema
- * Don and Gail Kuiper
- * Steve and Pam Flikkema
20 grandchildren
2 great-grandchildren

Grand Rapids, Michigan

TEACHER NEEDED!

Hope Christian School of Walker, Michigan will be needing to fill the position of 9th grade homeroom teacher for 2007-2008. Those interested are asked to send application by February 1, 2007. An English/Literature background would be beneficial but not a requirement. Please contact Ron Koole (616-453-9717) or Neil Meyer (616-791-9643). E-mail correspondence hopeprcs@juno.com.

NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will need financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Jeff Kalsbeek [Phone: (616) 453-6455]. This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 26, 2007, D.V., at 7:30 P.M. in SW PRC.

Student Aid Committee
Jeff Kalsbeek, Secretary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On December 22, 2006,

DENNIS and BETH VAN UFFELEN

celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary. On this occasion we, their children and grandchildren, express our love to them. We give thanks to our heavenly Father for giving us to them to be raised and nurtured in a covenant home, and for abundantly providing them with grace, love, patience, and wisdom necessary for their calling. We ask for His continued blessing on their marriage so that they may continue to walk and work together in service of their Lord.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7, 8).

- * Dan and Dawn Howerzyl
Bethanne, David, Julia
- * Scott and Heidi VanUffelen
Alex, Arianne, Lydia
- * Kyle and Melissa TenBroeke

Oak Glen, California

THE STANDARD BEARER

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With great joy and thankfulness to God, our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents,

JAMES and CHARLOTTE SCHIPPER,

will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on January 16, 2007.

We are thankful to God for His covenant faithfulness to us in giving us godly parents to rule and guide us in our walk of life. May God continue to bless them as they continue down life's pathway together.

All men on earth that live,
To God all glory give,
Praise ye the Lord;
His loving-kindness bless,
His constant faithfulness
And changeless truth confess;
Praise ye the Lord.

Psalter 316

- * Gord and Nancy Schipper
Dale, Eric, Kevin, Ryan,
Alana
- * Randy and Lindy Looyenga
Brent and Brittany Looyenga
Calvin
Jared and Jeanine Looyenga
Kristin Looyenga
- * Dan and Julie Kaiser
Ross, Alex, Mitchell
- * Nathan and Jill Kamps
Sydney, Nicole, Grant,
Charlie
Grandville, Michigan

Have you checked
out the new books lately?

RFPA website:
www.rfpa.org

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

On November 19, 2006, the Lord in His sovereign good pleasure called home

MRS. ANNA PFAU.

The consistory and congregation of South Holland PRC convey our sympathy to her family.

"...I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die..."
John 11:25, 26.

Rev. Allen Brummel, President
Gysbert VanBaren, Clerk

NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will convene at the Doon PRC in Doon, Iowa, on Wednesday, March 7, 2007, at 8:30 A.M. All material for the agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, February 5, 2007. An officebearers conference will be held on Tuesday, March 6, 2007, the Lord willing, on the subject of "Pentecost and Pentecostalism." Delegates or visitors who will need lodging or transportation should notify Doon's clerk or pastor by phone (712-726-3382) or e-mail (doonprc @mtcnet.net).

Rev. Richard Smit, Stated Clerk

OFFICEBEARERS CONFERENCE

CLASSIS WEST OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES
Doon, IA - Tuesday, March 6, 2007

Pentecost and Pentecostalism

*But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;
And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God,
I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: . . .*

Acts 2:16-17

9:00 A.M.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The Outpouring of the Spirit: Pentecost and Its Effect on the Church
Rev. Martin VanderWal, Pastor of Hope PRC, Redlands, CA

10:30 A.M.-12:00 P.M.

Pentecostalism: An Overview

Rev. Dennis Lee, Pastor of First PRC, Edgerton, MN

12:00 P.M. - Lunch served in the basement

1:00 P.M.-2:30 P.M.

Signs of an Apostle: The Temporary Gifts of the Holy Spirit
Rev. Steven Key, Pastor of Hull PRC, Hull, IA

2:45 P.M. - 4:15 P.M.

Filled with the Spirit: The Evidence of the Spirit's Work in the Christian
Rev. John Marcus, Pastor of First PRC, Edmonton, AB

* All past and present officebearers, as well as all interested people, are invited to attend.

* After the noon meal, a freewill offering will be taken to defray expenses.