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Volume 84 ◆ Number 17

According to That a Man Hath

And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

II Corinthians 8:10-12

The occasion for the writing of this passage by the apostle is a severe famine that had swept over Jerusalem. Help was needed at once. Under the preaching of Paul and the other apostles the saints understood that the “administration of this service” belonged to the ministry of Christ and His church.

Therefore, in their dire need, Paul was appointed (Gal. 2:10) to ask and gather alms for the distressed brethren at Jerusalem.

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

The need of the Jerusalem saints had to be supplied by the abundance of the saints elsewhere. That plainly was the rule according to which they went, and it is well for us to mark this rule as one of the principles that change not. Not from anywhere and everywhere might the need of the saints be supplied. It must needs go according to the rule of the priestly offering, in brief: “our abundance must be a supply for their want.”

In light of that, Paul sought that collection. However, before he as much as asked for the collection, the churches of Macedonia came forward with a gift. They in turn “prayed Paul with much beseeching” (v. 4) that he would take the gift to Jerusalem for them. That collection he had before him as he writes to the church at Corinth, for at Corinth it might be a different story. Paul had boasted of their readiness to the church at Macedonia, but it appeared that Corinth needed some special urging.

The collection bag still had to be passed in the Corinthian

church. With the Macedonian collection before him, he now urges the Corinthians to observe their duty of offering and to observe the rule that the need of the saints in one place must be supplied by the abundance of the saints at another place. To impress this upon their mind, Paul holds before them what a singularly glorious thing a hearty offering is (ch. 9:15). It is a gift that we can and may supply the needs of the poor.

It follows that for proper giving there must, first of all, be a willingness to give. There is this willingness in the hearts of God’s people. There is the desire to give of what is entrusted to our care, being stewards in God’s workshop. This willingness is based on the willingness of Christ to give Himself. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (v. 9).

That willingness was and is seen in concrete instances. There was that willingness in Corinth.

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While Titus was ministering in their midst, they resolved to take a collection for their beleaguered fellow saints. They were filled with holy zeal for this cause of the Lord.

There is our own expressed willingness to obey Scripture's mandate. We do this when the annual budget for the church is approved at the congregational meeting. Each Sabbath Day a collection for benevolence is taken. Many diaconates even report a surplus, which they are willing to share with churches who may be in need. Often we give sacrificially, giving up things for the sake of the kingdom of God. All recognize the need for school tuition and for the many other kingdom causes.

This willingness must be followed by appropriate action. Corinth needed encouragement to fulfill their promises. For some reason, what they intended to do was not fulfilled. They had to be reminded and encouraged to carry out what they had started. The gifts collected must meet the measure of the zeal that had been shown.

We also must have such encouragement. We too often have good intentions and are filled with zeal to accomplish it. But then Satan steps in and tries to rob us of that zeal, and we find all kinds of excuses as to why we cannot fulfill what we said we would and could. The Lord then comes with His Word, such as we have here, to remind us not only of our calling before Him and unto our fellow saints, but also of the blessing of obedience.

To fulfill this goal, God requires giving "according to that a man hath." A question could arise in this connection. If a man has nothing, is he deprived of the blessing of giving? No poor man who is eager to give should grieve because he has little, perhaps even nothing, to give. Such a man is not deprived of the

grace of God and the enrichment that his giving would be to him. His readiness to give (v. 12) is as fully acceptable to God as though he had much and gave accordingly, instead of not having and not being able to give.

One simply gives as the Lord has prospered him (I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 9:6, 7). This proper giving reveals a man's love for God and His kingdom. When Paul looks in the collection bag he sees the answer to this question: "Do they love God and the brethren?" and "Do they love in word only or also in deed?" Actions do speak louder than words. To love in words is easy, but we are exhorted to love in deed. The collection is the "proof of your love." In the bag Paul sees the evidence that they are saints of the God of love and mercy. By giving their gifts they also made a confession of "their subjection unto the gospel of Christ" (9:13), and their confession was that the law of the love of Christ was in their hearts.

Thus the question is: "Do you love self and the world?" If so, there is where your money will go. You and the world will always be first in your consideration. When the weekly salary comes, you and the world will always be first. In contrast, if the love of God be in your hearts, it is borne out by the gift and offering to them that are indigent. Thus the widow's mite is as important as the well-to-do's big check, for "it is accepted according to what a man hath and not according to what he hath not."

That scriptural mandate also must guide us in giving. One can find many reasons (read excuses) not to give or not to give much. I am retired, or a widow on a fixed income. Or I am a student living at a subsistence level. All I make just covers the rent, utilities, groceries, and other necessities. I should not have to sacrifice; I should be entitled

to some extras in life. There are others that could give more. The list goes on.

This Word identifies two guidelines. The first, "according to that a man hath." One's giving is not necessarily limited to what was decided at the congregational meeting. If one can give more, he should do so, for there may be others who cannot give as much as was decided (see Lev. 14:30; 27:8; Deut. 16:17; Ezra 2:69; Acts 11:29).

The second guideline is, "not according to that he hath not" (v. 12). A man cannot give more than he has. It is generally conceded that one must reckon with his immediate needs, even though the Macedonians really showed no regard for their own requirements, present or future.

Basically, we are to recognize our financial obligations. By this we mean our financial obligations toward the church. There is the budget, plus the many special causes, such as evangelism, the *Standard Bearer*, Christian schools, and many more. And, lest we forget, benevolence.

What we look for is acceptable giving. By this we do not mean what is acceptable in our sight, but what is acceptable to God. This is true both now and in the day of judgment. If we are abundant in the work of the Lord, He causes us to taste His blessing. The law of the kingdom is: as we sow, we reap. That is what Israel experienced materially and spiritually in the land of Canaan; and we also while on earth experience the rich blessings of our covenant God.


However, there is also the day of judgment. This work of which we speak is really God's work in and through us, which He acknowledges on that day. He sees us as renewed creatures in Christ who are doing the works that were before ordained that we should walk in them. We then

will hear the sweet words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." We hear these words because this giving is the evidence and proof of our love and God's grace. God's work in us produces fruit. It cannot do otherwise, for Christ is the tree of life, of which we are the branches.

Herein is the love of God revealed in us. That is why Paul sees more than money in the

bag. We often see no more than that, just dollars and cents. It is too bad when the sacred gift of the priestly offering degenerates into the mere business of money. Money is needed, but the poor need much more. The church must give mercy, love, grace, and peace. This can be had only among the saints. That is also what Paul sees. This is all the gift

of God's grace to us. In 9:14 this grace is spoken of as "the exceeding (flowing out of its bounds) grace of God which is in you."

Thus, thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift. First of all, Jesus Christ and the salvation merited for us by His death on the cross. And secondly, the gift to give, that we may experience this grace that flows out of its bounds. 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

The 2008 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches—A Preview

The Lord willing, the sixty-ninth synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches will commence on June 10, 2008. As decided by the 2007 synod, the calling church is Hope PRC in Walker, MI. Biblical direction and encouragement will be given in the pre-synodical service on June 9, in Hope Church. Rev. James Slopsema, president of the 2007 synod, is scheduled to preach.

The Protestant Reformed Churches count it a distinct and rich blessing from God to be able to hold broader ecclesiastical gatherings such as classis and synod. We are thankful to God for giving us this privilege—a privilege that begins with the freedom in North America to hold these crucial meetings. God grants us also the necessary peace and stability in the land. He provides the financial means to finance a gathering of twenty-four delegates and advisors—travel, meals, and all the related expenses. And He has given the churches to know what the Re-

formed churches have maintained all through their history, namely, that these assemblies are vital. The church of Christ is a body, not an independent church here, and another there, and another there.

In some parts of the world, and who does not think of Myanmar, the chaos and devastation caused by storms and "natural disasters" put an ecclesiastical gathering like this out of the question. The Lord comes in judgment, and believers suffer along with the ungodly. In other countries, communist and Muslim come to mind, an assembly of Christians is illegal. God sovereignly determines the rulers, and the believer lives in submission to each, and to the evident will of God that they have not the blessing of open ecclesiastical assemblies. In many other countries, the Reformed church finds herself so small and isolated, that not one other Reformed church can be found in the whole country that could send a representative, much less a

delegation of twenty-four elders and ministers. Believers there yearn for Christian fellowship with believing countrymen, but rest in the good pleasure of God, who gathers where He wills. No doubt, prayers at the synod will reflect gratitude to God for the blessing of yearly synods, and petitions will be raised for the church in tribulation and distress and isolation.

A synod "is not" until it is legally constituted at the opening meeting. Nonetheless, a tremendous amount of preparatory work is necessary to make the meetings profitable. A dozen standing committees report to synod on the work assigned them by synod and make recommendations for the coming year. Likewise the stated clerk, treasurer, and seminary rector report on their respective areas. Concise and informative reports, anywhere from a half a page to forty, inform the delegates and prepare them to discuss a wide range of ecclesiastical business—everything from catechism books, to missions, to

finances. It is a mark of our synodical committees that they give open disclosures of their work. Obviously, the better the reports, the better equipped the delegates will be to make wise decisions.

The delegates need to study the agenda thoroughly to be prepared. It helps the rest of us pray with meaning when we know something of the agenda. With a view to that, we give a preview of synod's agenda.

One of our lesser known committees, the Catechism Book Committee, is responsible for maintaining and improving the catechism books used in the churches. The last major project has turned out to be a real gem—*The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*. As valuable as it is, the committee realizes that it can be improved. Having discovered some references that seem to be in error, they report to synod their intent "to review the Scripture references in the creeds." This is a good work, which, if done well, will help the churches. It has come to light that the Synod of Dordt (1618-19), when it officially adopted the Belgic Confession, adopted the Confession with no Scripture texts. Some of the texts currently cited in the Confessions book of the PRC are not correct. The committee takes on a heavy load of work and responsibility. The texts cited are interpreted in light of the respective Article or Lord's Day where it is cited. The committee must do solid exegesis of texts, not easily cite texts because they seem to support the confessions. Clearly such work ought to be approved by a future synod only after a careful review.

We pass by the report on the Domestic Mission Committee, since an account of its work is given elsewhere in this issue.

The Foreign Mission Committee has devoted most of its attention to the one active field, name-

ly, the Philippines and the Berean Protestant Reformed Church. Doon, the calling church, has extended six calls and received five declines. Attempts to obtain temporary supply have yielded nothing, although some ministers are lined up for this summer. The Berean PR church is coping, but earnestly desires a man to be their missionary/pastor. The FMC also recommends that their committee continue to deal with the Berean PRC in the Philippines for the time being, rather than to have the Contact Committee take on that work.

The FMC comes to synod with a strong defense of their request that synod "adopt the normative practice in foreign missions of calling two missionaries to labor together." The proposal does not indicate what will happen when one man accepts the call to be a missionary in a given place. Will he be sent out while the churches continue to seek a second missionary? Or will he remain home until a second minister accepts the call for the other position on that field?

The report of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches indicates that they have maintained contact with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. A delegation was finally sent in May, and a supplemental report will be forthcoming on their visit.

The Contact Committee reports on the good relation enjoyed with the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland and asks that synod continue to give financial assistance to this vibrant congregation.

A thorough report is given on the trip made by a CC delegation in 2007 to both Germany and Russia. The CC proposes sending two men to Russia later this year to continue the contacts in Russia and Uzbekistan by means of a teaching conference.

The contact with the Confessing Evangelical-Reformed Congregation in Giessen, Germany is judged to be profitable for both the CC and the congregation in Giessen. The CC requests approval for continued contact.

The bulk of the Contact Committee's report is a proposal to establish an official relationship with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. Having discussed differences and agreements for decades, both churches understand that a full sister church relationship is currently not possible. Accordingly, the CC proposes a "corresponding relationship" with the EPC, and spells out the stipulation of the relationship. This being a relationship less than a sister relationship, full exchange of members and ministers is not included. However, training of students from the EPC is included. In connection with that training, the CC is proposing that EPC students be allowed to speak a word of edification in the Protestant Reformed Churches, using the sermons approved by the seminary professors. If synod adopts the recommendation for a "corresponding relation," it will be a realization of the prediction and desire of Prof. H. C. Hoeksema and Rev. C. Hanks. Thirty-three years ago they reported to synod re the EPC: "In due course we expect that an official relation can be established between our denominations."

The Theological School Committee conveys the happy news that the seminary faculty recommends that synod examine Mr. Heath Bleyenbergh with a view to declaring him a candidate for the gospel ministry. The Lord willing, the process should begin on Tuesday with the sermon; and most of Wednesday and Thursday will be devoted to the oral examination. Mr. Bleyenbergh, facing this daunting exam, may

take some encouragement from the TSC recommendation that his graduation ceremony be scheduled for Thursday, June 12.

Emeritation for Prof. David Engelsma was approved by the TSC. This comes at the end of a diligent and fruitful labor of twenty short years as professor of Old Testament and Dogmatics. Prof. Ronald Cammenga is preparing to take the full load of Prof. Engelsma in the 2008-2009 school year.

We should say, *almost* the full load. The exception will be the Theological Dutch Reading course, if synod adopts the TSC proposal to drop the Dutch/German pre-seminary requirement.

The synod of 2007 appointed a special study committee to deal with two overtures asking synod to establish uniform procedures for erasure of baptized members. The study committee recommends that synod reject both overtures and gives its reasons. This committee also points out that the Christian Reformed Church faced this issue in 1896, 1918, and 1926. That raises an interesting question: Are the decisions of the CRC prior to 1924 binding in the PRC? In the minutes of the PRC going back to her beginning, no record can be found that the PRC ever took a decision on this. Nonetheless, consistories often find good advice and precedent from the Acts of the CRC, particularly those decisions made in the first seventy years of the CRC.

Loveland PRC, anticipating an examination of a son of the congregation at the 2009 synod (D.V.), invites synod to their church next year.

Appeals

The right of appeal to a broader assembly is also a blessing for the church in many ways. It provides a court of appeal to those who believe they have been wronged, rather than allowing a problem to fester in a congrega-

tion without hope of resolution. It enables other wise counselors to examine the issue. It helps safeguard the church from abuse of power. In dealing with appeals, synods must by all means give a fair hearing to the appellants and seek to make wise judgments. Appellants must come with a willingness to listen, and then to abide by the decisions.

This year, six appeals re decisions of Classis East fill 175 pages of the agenda. Much of this is supplementary material. However, excessively long protests and appeals are not helpful to the assembly or to the cause of the appellant. Concise appeals are. An appellant submitting a long document should expect that an assembly will deal with the central issues, not with every jot and tittle of his appeal.

All the appeals are related to Article 21 of the Church Order and the obligation resting on consistories concerning Christian schools. This controversy would dumbfound the men who laid the foundations for Protestant Reformed schools, and who laid the bricks and mortar of the buildings some sixty years ago. May God grant wisdom to the delegates, and grant that Satan not be able to use this to divide the members of the PRC. Rather, may it be the occasion that leads to a better understanding of the consistory's calling as expressed in Article 21, and a recommitment to Protestant Reformed schools.

An observation

I took notice of the fact that Classis West could muster only four ministers for the *secundi* delegates to synod. That led me to look at the number of ministers there, and then to the other statistics of both classes in the 2007 Acts. I was surprised to discover that, in terms of members, Classis East is almost twice the size of Classis West! Notice:

Classis West	Classis East
Families..... 648.....	1214
Communicant members.....
..... 1478.....	2820
Total membership	
..... 2670.....	4787


The churches ought to look at this imbalance. Is it wise to have two classes with such a disparity?

It is not feasible to move churches from western Michigan into Classis West. A possible solution would be to divide the churches into three classes. This was proposed almost twenty years ago. It was studied and debated, but eventually rejected by the synod of 1991. However, at that time an imbalance in the number of members was not a factor. Notice the statistics from the 1991 Acts:

Classis West	Classis East
Families..... 559.....	826
Communicant members	
..... 1264.....	1867
Total membership	
..... 2414.....	3325

It is possible to divide the churches into three groups of nine or ten churches where the difference in total membership would be under one thousand as it was in 1991. It would require a classis of churches of the Chicago area combined with some churches from Michigan. But it is workable, and would provide a balance that the current division does not.



Visitors to synod are most welcome, although some personal material is necessarily treated in closed session. Visitors are especially urged to come to the pre-synodical service and the examination of the seminarian. Those who do will not only be edified, they will witness concretely some of the good benefits to the churches. May God hear our prayers on behalf of synod, and grant much good fruit upon the blessing of this ecclesiastical assembly. 

Dispensational Eschatology (4)

Dividing God's People and Dividing God's Word

Central to dispensationalism is their distinction between Israel and the church. God is said to promise one thing to Israel, and another thing to the church. And He does this, they say, because He has one goal with Israel, and another goal with the church. Two different goals for two different groups of people who receive two different promises. This idea is at the heart of dispensationalism.

By making this unbiblical distinction, they wrongly divide not only God's people, but also the Scriptures. The one Word of God we have in Scripture is divided by them into two – with one larger part being primarily for Israel, and the other much smaller part being primarily for the church. When a believer in the church comes across God's promise that His people will inherit the land forever, the dispensationalist would have him believe that this promise is not for him, but for a different group of people. Thus they divide God's one Word to His one people.

As we turn now to examine some of the specific teachings of dispensationalism, let us begin by considering the distinctions they make between Israel and the church, and some of the serious implications of this doctrinal error.

Rev. Laning is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: April 15, 2008, p. 325.

Dividing God's People

The centrality of their distinction between Israel and the church has been openly confessed by dispensationalists. Charles C. Ryrie, who served for many years as professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, the well-known fountainhead of dispensationalism, gave the following summary of dispensationalism:

The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the Church.¹

Dispensationalists make multitudes of erroneous distinctions, which make it quite difficult to bring them out of their error into the light of truth. The chart below shows some of the more significant distinctions between Israel and the church upon which many dispensationalists would agree:

Israel	Church
Abraham is the head; God is the Husband	Christ is the Head and Bridegroom
Entered by physical birth (in the line of Jacob)	Entered by spiritual birth
Inheritance transmitted by human generation	Inheritance received immediately from God
Promised primarily earthly things	Promised primarily heavenly things
The nation in this world destined to be above the others	Not a nation of this world but strangers in it
Will be the subjects of Christ in His earthly kingdom	Will reign with Christ in His earthly kingdom
God elected them as a nation	God elects the members of the church as individuals
God is the Father of Israel as a nation	God is the Father of believers as individuals
God deals with and saves them as a nation	God deals with and saves them as individuals
Will come into God's judgment	Will not come into God's judgment

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 47.

To the Reformed believer who rightly holds that there is one God, one Christ, and one people of God who are united spiritually in one faith by Christ's one Spirit, this all seems very strange.

Why do they make such a distinction? Why is it so important to them?

Some Dangers Related to This Distinction

To answer these questions we must recognize that this movement as a whole is ultimately rooted in unbelief, and this central distinction between Israel and the church is an attempt of the forces of evil to ensnare people. That is not to say that everyone who holds to dispensationalism is an unbeliever. Undoubtedly a child of God could fall into this error. In fact,

it would be quite easy to fall into it, seeing as the dispensationalists repeatedly claim that they are merely teaching what Scripture literally says. Seeing as there are so many who view Scripture to be a collection of ancient myths, one can well understand how some would think it to be safe to side with those who constantly boast of being the only people to hold to what Scripture literally teaches. Be that as it may, it is still the case that the movement as a whole is rooted in unbelief. False theological systems always are.

Furthermore, we must always remember that behind the promotion of false doctrines, including false systems of eschatology, is the unseen work of the devil and his host. Our Father has warned us that we fight not with flesh and blood, but with spiritual, demonic wickedness in high places. These invisible enemies work through false teachers to ensnare people, and do so while claiming to be defending the truth of Scripture.

The following are some of the more obvious dispensational traps—a number of which are clearly related to the distinction they make between Israel and the church.

1. The danger of believing false prophets who function as fortune tellers. If one takes the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel's returning to the promised land and makes them refer to natural Israel instead of the church, then the fulfillment of these promises becomes something carnal, which one can first predict and then strive to bring about, as we have seen. Furthermore, the same tactic can be applied to other nations mentioned by the prophets, so that a large portion of the Scriptures can be turned into a record of carnal predictions about world events. For those selling books and movies that make such predictions, this

practice becomes a great way to make a fortune. But also, this is a very effective way of getting a large following—a following that will attract the interest of politicians.

2. The danger of hoping for a carnal delusion. In addition to what has been already mentioned, there are a number of other ways in which this movement leads people to hope for something carnal. As with other false eschatological systems, the people are led to believe that the coming Messianic kingdom will be a carnal, earthly kingdom. Even though they say the Israelites are the ones who are going to be in this earthly kingdom, they place the church with Christ as reigning in it. They actually teach that Israelites are going to be in the millennial kingdom as subjects of King Jesus, while the members of the church are not going to be the subjects of the King, but instead are going to be reigning with the King. I do not intend to get into that subject at this point, save to say that this amounts to a carnal hope not only for the natural seed of Abraham, but also for the church.

3. The danger of being unprepared for the dangerous times ahead. Dispensationalism promises many things that are never going to happen. They promise not only a carnal reign, but also a carnal deliverance from the great tribulation. God's people are warned in Scripture to be ready for the last days, in which the persecution of God's people will be great and the delusion will be strong. But dispensationalists falsely prophesy that the church will be raptured out of this world before the great tribulation begins. Furthermore, since they teach that the church will be gone from this earth when the antichrist sets himself up as God, when we actually enter the great tribulation period, dispensationalists (if the movement still

exists at that time) would deny that we are actually in it. They would look at the final antichrist, for example, and deny that he really is the antichrist. Insisting that the antichrist's reign of terror will not take place until after the church has been taken from this earth, they would refuse to acknowledge what is actually happening.

4. The danger of supporting and fellowshiping with unbelieving Israelis. If Israel is God's people, then obviously we should be fellowshiping with them, and supporting them in their cause. Christians are commanded to use their gifts and to lay down their lives for the advantage of God's people. So, if the unbelieving Israelis are God's people, then undoubtedly we are to be using our gifts, our money, and all our efforts to support them in any way we can. That this is indeed the folly to which this erroneous distinction between Israel and the church leads is evident from what has been written previously.

Only One People in One Lord

There are passages that speak of the unity of God, the unity of Christ, the unity of Christ's Spirit, and the unity of Christ's body. These will be helpful to us as we seek not only to refute dispensationalism, but also to understand the significance of the truth that dispensationalists are denying.

Let us begin by considering the relationship between Christ's Spirit and Christ's body. This relationship is brought out in I Corinthians 12:12, 13, which reads:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Here we see that all those who partake of Christ's one Spirit are part of His one body, the church. And now consider the fact that dispensationalists deny that Israel is the body of Christ. They speak of Israel as God's people, but not as Christ's body. If Israelites are not members of Christ's body, then they do not receive Christ's Spirit, for the passage quoted above says that all those who receive Christ's Spirit are in Christ's body.

Furthermore, all those joined to Christ are spiritually one.

But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit (I Cor. 6:17).

Two different peoples would not be spiritually one, but spiritually two. Yet all those united to the one Lord Jesus Christ are spiritually one, being all united by Christ's one Spirit. Thus, if Israel and the church are two separate peoples, then only one of them can be joined unto the Lord. Such is the seriousness of the dispensational error.

Two peoples of God would actually require two different Spirits—one Spirit in the first people and another Spirit in the second people. But there cannot be two Spirits of one Christ. Two

Spirits would require two Christs, and two Christs would require two Gods.

But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him (I Cor. 8:6).

There can be only one Lord who possesses and rules over all things. And this is rooted in the fact that there is but one God who governs and directs all things through His one Christ. And the one Christ of the one God has one Spirit in His one body. This is all put together in Ephesians 4:4-6:

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Dividing God's Word

To deny the unity of God's people is to deny the unity of Christ. But since Christ is the Word of God, to deny the unity of Christ is to deny the unity of the Word. And this denial of the unity of God's Word manifests itself in a denial of the unity of Scripture.

Some dispensationalists have

made the point that almost four-fifths of the text of the Bible is primarily for Israel, and slightly more than one-fifth is for the church. Even though they put the word "primarily" in there, and say that passages that are primarily for Israel are still of some significance for the church, the idea is clear that the majority of Scripture is not really for us believers in the church. By making a distinction between Israel and the church, and then claiming that many promises of the Old Testament are for Israel and not the church, the forces of darkness attempt to strip the church of many of the promises God has made to her.

Thus we see that two peoples would mean two hopes and two faiths. The passage from Ephesians 4 quoted above speaks of the one body of Christ having one hope and one faith. But two separate peoples would have different hopes and different faiths. If God promises one thing to Israel and another thing to the church, then Israel believes and hopes for one group of promised blessings, and the church believes and hopes for a different group of promised blessings. Such is the confusion that results from this unbiblical distinction.



All Around Us

Rev. Audred Spriensma

■ The Pope Comes to Town

By the time that you read this, this visit will be a past event. What was its significance? Why should we as Reformed Protestants take notice?

Pope Benedict XVI was chosen as Pope at the age 78. Now, after

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being in office for three years, he is making his first visit to the United States. He says that the theme for his visit will be three words, "Christ our hope." This will be the seventh official visit of a pope to the States, one by Pope Paul VI in 1965, five visits by Pope John Paul II, and now Pope Benedict XVI.

The *New York Times* (Mar. 31) reports that Benedict plans to visit from April 15-20, holding a mass at the National Park in

Washington and at Yankee Stadium in New York, speaking to Catholic educators at the Catholic University of America in Washington, praying at Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan, visiting the White House, and addressing the United Nations General Assembly. His visit was intended to coincide with the commemoration of the 200th Anniversary of the dioceses of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Bardstown, Ky.

There is the hope, as is evident in the *New York Times* article, that the visit will present this pope in a softer and more personal image. John Allen (in the *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, "The Pope comes to America") writes that the pope will be stressing "affirmative orthodoxy." By this word is meant a strong defense of traditional Catholic faith and practice, calling people back to those traditional markers of Catholic thought, speech, and practice, but doing so positively! "People are far too familiar with what the Catholic Church is against rather than what it is for." While the issue of liberal teaching at Catholic schools and seminaries has been on the back burner lately because of the sex-abuse crisis, Benedict is expected to address the distinctiveness of what should be taught in Catholic schools. A hot-button topic will be the sex-abuse crisis. Five dioceses have gone bankrupt. More than \$2 billion has been paid out in lawsuits. Benedict is expected to say that he has regret for what has happened and to show his determination to ensure that it does not happen again. But there are no plans to go to Boston, which was a sort of center of the crisis, nor to go to meet with some of the victims of this horrible crime.

Besides this American Catholic Church audience, there is a second and third audience. The Pope is coming to the United States, and to them he brings a social, cultural, and political message. Benedict is said to appreciate the United States. John Allen writes in the *Pew Forum* that a dominant note in Benedict's message to America will be his "appreciation for the religious vitality of American society." Religious vitality in America? That is, of course, in comparison with contemporary Europe. It is not that anything has changed in the United States. Rather it is what

has happened in Europe. Allen writes that Europe is in the grip of a kind of exaggerated secularism, which is eroding traditional religious faith and practice. "For all of their problems, yet American society is an intensely religious culture." Benedict is expected, among other things, to urge a defense of human life, to promote marriage based on union between a man and woman, and to speak regarding the carnage in Iraq (an invasion that the Vatican opposed). John Allen, as Vatican analyst for CNN and NPR, says that he expects at least veiled references to the Vatican's desire to see the Holy See operate in a somewhat more multilateral function in its approach to global policy and foreign affairs.

Benedict's third audience will be the world, as he addresses the United Nations on the morning of April 18 and goes to "Ground Zero" in Manhattan. This will be the fourth time that a Pope is to address the UN. Pope Paul VI did in 1965, and Pope John Paul II was invited in 1979 and in 1995. Things to be expected are standard Vatican diplomatic concerns such as peace in the Middle East, a responsible transition in Iraq, religious freedom around the world, the need to combat terrorism, economic development, and peace building. What some expect is especially an emphasis on the need for a global moral consensus, and on moral truths that are universal and unchanging, such as protecting human rights and dignity.

Why so many visits to the United States, which is tied with Poland for most number of visits by the pope to a foreign country? The United States is not a nation that has a majority of Roman Catholics. John Allen, who is also a senior correspondent for the National Catholic Reporter, suggests that it is because of the political and cultural role of the United States on the global stage.

Oh, the Roman Catholic Church is important in this country. It is the home of 70 million Catholics, nearly one fourth of the national population. The United States has the third largest Catholic population in the world, after Brazil and Mexico, and just ahead of the Philippines. But the United States wields the most power and influence!

Rome has not changed from the Middle Ages. Power, influence, and money are important. Do we not see here the beast that is come out of the earth (Rev. 13:11)? This beast has the appearance of a lamb with two horns, but he speaks as a dragon. Because of his appearing as a lamb, we would expect that he is affiliated with Christ and that he brings the words of Christ. But he speaks like the dragon, bringing not God's Word but word from the devil and from hell. He is a false prophet!


In Revelation 17:1, the angel speaks to the apostle John and says, "Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters." The waters upon which the whore sits are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. Rome and her papacy (and for that matter, any apostate church) are pictured as a woman, being rich and powerful, surrounded with glory. The woman is the nominal church as she appears on earth. Here she is a woman married but unfaithful to her husband, forsaking him for fornication and adultery. She lives in an intimate, but illegitimate, relationship with strangers, who are not her husband. She is a filthy harlot, giving herself to be used by the beast. She has power and influence through her fornication—fornication with what are indeed legitimate, instituted, God-ordained governments. But the church has her proper sphere, and governments have their proper spheres, and now these

two are in a most intimate union, which makes the woman a harlot, carried about as a whore of the kings of the earth. And she is the mother of all abominations. Great and glorious she seems for a time. Many victories she scores, for she sits on many waters. But her end is that she will be hated and loathed by the beast that she rides, and ultimately destroyed by him.

Marvel not then when many

are in awe of Pope Benedict when he comes to our country. Rather, behold Christ's hand as He directs the history and destiny of the world. And look up, for your redemption draws nigh! Indeed, Christ is our hope, not this false prophet called Benedict. People need to be called back not to 'traditional markers of Catholic thought,' but to the very Word of Christ.

While Benedict might express regret for the sexual abuse

practiced by Rome's priests, what about the abuse of Rome's spiritual harlotry? What about regret for the millions whose blood cries out from the ground, slain by Rome because these Reformed saints loved Christ more than their lives? Watch Benedict as he rides around in his pope-mobile, and be warned. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech.4:6). 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Shari Bosveld

Training Our Children to Be Stewards of Christ

What is a *steward*? In times past, a steward was one who was in charge of the running of a household. He was responsible for the earthly possessions entrusted to him by his master. In short, a steward was someone who watched over the property of another as if it were his own.

In the world today, it is rare for someone to speak of having a steward. It is even more uncommon to hear a worldly person refer to *himself* as a steward. The ungodly look at all they possess and consider it to be their own. Whether they have great wealth or only just enough with which to get by, they view their property and possessions as theirs by right.

Unlike the ungodly, the children of God are familiar with the idea of *stewardship*. From an early age we are taught that all we have in this life is a gift

from God. Our homes, schools, businesses, wealth, and even our families are not our own; they are entrusted to us by God. We are *stewards* of all that God has given to us! And, like the stewards of old, we must watch over these things, knowing that we are accountable to our heavenly Father for our use of them.

A vital aspect of stewardship is the training of our children. Our children must be taught to be fellow stewards of Christ. There are two chief means by which we instruct our children in this practice: the principles found in God's Word, and our godly example. Many passages in the Bible speak of the importance of being faithful stewards. Proverbs 3, however, clearly illustrates the truth that it is the parents' responsibility to teach their children to be stewards of Christ. In Proverbs 3:7-10, we read of a father's admonition to his son to honor the Lord with his substance or his earthly possessions.

navel, and marrow to thy bones. Honor the LORD with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

Without doubt, we, like this Old Testament father, must instruct our children that it is their calling to use all that they have wisely and to God's glory.

Instructing our children to be faithful stewards is a difficult task for several reasons. First of all, because we are sinful creatures, our example of stewardship is imperfect at best. How often don't we urge our children to use their time wisely, and yet are guilty of wasting our own time in pursuit of selfish interests? It is a struggle to use our possessions, money, time, and abilities to the honor of God. Our inclination is to satisfy our own interests and desires rather than to seek those things that are God glorifying. For example, it is far easier to pick up one of Jan Karon's books than to sit down with Herman Hoeksema's *Behold He Cometh*. Or

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Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy

to spend that unexpected bonus on “something for the house,” rather than giving a bit extra to the school drive. Seeking to be a *steward of Christ* is hard work. It requires great effort as well as subjection of our will to that which glorifies God.

Besides having our own sinful nature to contend with, we live in a society that is obsessed with materialism and selfish pleasures. The idea that life is short and must be enjoyed to the fullest is all around us—from radio/TV ads for vacation hotspots, to junk-mail flyers promoting retirement savings plans. The unregenerate man has a natural desire to save and to store up earthly riches. His intent, however, is not to use these things in the service of God, but rather to gain more and more possessions for his own enjoyment. A direct parallel can be made here between the ungodly men of our time and the rich fool Jesus speaks of in the New Testament parable. In Luke 12, we read of a man so wealthy that he had to build bigger and bigger barns in which to store his accumulated riches.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shalt be required of thee: then who shall these things be, which thou has provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:19-21).

Obviously, the storing up of earthly riches for our own pleasure will bring God’s wrath, rather than His blessing, upon us.

Finally, our children, like us, have a sinful nature and are inclined to view what they have as their own. Often one of the first words a small child will speak after he has mastered “Momma” is the word “MINE!” As he grows older, this desire for ownership

will manifest itself in other ways, from possession of a favorite Lego toy to that of owning his own car. As covenant parents, we are required to teach our children that all that they have, from their toys to their savings account, is from the Lord. And, as stewards of Christ, they must honor Him with all that they have been given.

There are several areas of life that we can focus on in the instruction of our children: money, possessions, time, ability, and opportunity.

Money and Possessions

The idea that our children work and earn a wage is not a new concept. Dating as far back as the Old Testament, children and young adults worked for the good of the family. Whether this involved working in the home or in a paying position, the primary reason for working was the support and welfare of the family and the church. It seems that in more recent years, the goals have changed. Most of our children do work outside of the home, but often the money that they earn is considered their own, to do with as they choose.

Our teenagers can so easily spend money on their own pleasures and entertainment. What teenage girl doesn’t like to spend time wandering through the mall or having lunch at Applebee’s with friends? And teenage boys are no less eager to spend their money, whether it is on clothes, sports equipment, or their own vehicle.

Certainly, there is nothing wrong with a young person who has worked hard, wisely spending some of what he has earned on himself. However, a child that is learning to be a steward of Christ will willingly agree to give some of what he has earned to the church, as well as to his parents. Our responsibility, then, is to remind him that what

he gives is not what he has left, but rather, the first fruits of all that he has.

One way in which our children can contribute to the good of the family is by giving some of the money they earn to pay a portion of their tuition. Obviously, each family must decide for itself how large or small that portion will be, based on the needs of the family. But it is reasonable to assume that a teenager who is working part-time during the school year and full-time in the summer can pay at least half of his high-school tuition.

In addition to paying a portion of their tuition, our sons and daughters should be encouraged to give freely to the Benevolent Fund and to the freewill offerings. Although tithing is no longer required, our young people should be willing to give generously, remembering that the Lord loves a cheerful giver.

As parents, we should also encourage our children to give money to the school drives. Most of our schools have deficit drives at least once a year. Our children who are employed full-time and are no longer in school should easily be able to meet the requested amount. By doing so, they greatly ease the burden for many of our families in the church, and they give evidence of Christian stewardship.

Having taught our children to spend their money carefully, we should also teach them the wisdom of saving a portion of their earnings for the future. Young adults who have set aside money while they were young have a great advantage when it comes time to marry, purchase a home, and eventually raise a family. In connection with this, we can help our sons and daughters to invest a part of their savings. This investment may take the more traditional form of an IRA, or it might be the purchase of land or perhaps a rental property that

will increase in value over time. Of course, there are other possible options, but the goal must always be preparation for a life of service in the kingdom.

Time

Along with the use of his money, the child of God must also seek to use his time for the things of God's kingdom. From little ones still at home to school-age children and those nearing adulthood, our children have a fair amount of "free" time. By free time, I refer to time that is unaccounted for, time not spent either in school or at work. All would agree that having time to relax and enjoy hobbies or personal interests is beneficial for the child of God. However, a balance must be sought between relaxation and proper use of our time.

An important dimension of the kingdom of God is the home and family. From a very young age, our children are able to help in the home with simple household tasks. As they mature, and their capabilities increase, so too should their responsibilities. Parents must see to it that their sons and daughters help as much as possible around the house. Unfortunately, because we are so very busy and often impatient to have things done quickly, we find it easier to do the job ourselves, rather than to show our children how to do it. When we do not require our children to help at home, we often create in them an ungrateful and selfish attitude, rather than instill in them a desire to deny themselves and cheerfully serve others.

There is great benefit for our daughters in learning how to organize and run a home: baking, laundry, cleaning, fixing meals, and caring for younger siblings are all important skills for a young girl to know. Our sons, future husbands and providers, must also be prepared for a life

of responsibility and work. Besides mastering household tasks, our sons can help to maintain the home by doing such things as shoveling snow, mowing the grass, or keeping the eaves troughs free from leaves and debris. By having our children help in these ways, we help them learn the valuable lesson that being part of a family carries with it responsibilities as well as rewards.

Children who spend time with one another and with their parents will reap the rewards now and in later years. We need to develop this desire for fellowship in our children from an early age so that when they become teenagers they are less likely to resist it. This can be done in many ways. A few examples are: spending time playing with our other children, whether it be a game of *Apples to Apples* or time spent shooting hoops on the driveway; involving our children in hobbies that we can participate in; taking trips together as a family; and even working side by side either in the kitchen baking cookies or out in the garage on the family vehicle. All of these things serve to develop a sense of fellowship with one another and are a good and proper use of our time.

It is important to teach our children to use their time properly in the home. We must also see to it that they put their time to good use while in school. Most of our covenant young people are given a wonderful opportunity for stewardship when they attend our Protestant Reformed schools. Here, they are prepared for their life's calling. It is our job as parents to make certain that our children use this time prudently by working diligently and always doing their best in their studies.

Abilities and Opportunities

In connection with the idea of being stewards of their abilities while in school, there are many young men and women to whom

God has given specific gifts in subjects such as math, science, or foreign languages. We should encourage these children not to hide their talents but to use them in the service of others. One way to do so would be by offering to help or tutor a fellow classmate who struggles in these areas.

Besides the opportunity to use their abilities in school, our children have other occasions to make good use of their talents. There are many of our young people who have musical gifts: some are able to sing beautifully, others play the piano or musical instruments, and a few are even proficient at writing music. What wonderful opportunities exist in the home, school, and church for such ability!

God has given to others the gift of leadership. Some of our children are natural leaders from the time they are small. With guidance and training, this ability to lead can be used profitably in God's kingdom. Whether in our homes, on the playground, or on the baseball field, our children need to be courageous and ready to stand for that which is right and honorable.

Some of our sons and daughters are given the gift of compassion and sensitivity towards those who have special needs. Here in the Grand Rapids area there is a group of young adults who have taken a particular interest in those in our churches with physical and mental challenges. These young men and women are an excellent example of *stewards of Christ*. They give of their time and gifts in the service of those who are most in need of friendship and of a sense of belonging to the body of Christ.


Obviously, these are only a few examples of the multitude of abilities that God has graciously given to His people. The point that must be made is this: we must not squander these gifts, as did the unfaithful servant in the

Lord's parable, who buried his talent in the ground. Instead, we must use the opportunities presented to us to the fullest. Then, and only then, will we receive the blessing, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Training our children to be *stewards of Christ*—what a difficult and overwhelming task! How can we as weak and sinful parents hope to achieve such a

lofty goal? We are hindered by our own failings and shortcomings, the influence and pressure of the materialistic age in which we live, and by the depraved natures that we and our children share. Clearly, we can only do so by the grace of God. When we call upon Him for assistance, God will give us that which we request. And the evidence of God's faithfulness will be seen as our children demonstrate the

beginnings of Christian stewardship.

In Proverbs 3:9-10, a reward of grace is promised to those who have striven to give of their firstfruits. "Barns filled with plenty" and "presses bursting out with new wine" are earthly pictures of the spiritual blessings that we and our children will receive as we seek to be stewards to the glory of God. 

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

The Congregation's Support of Her Diaconate (1)

The Calling of the Whole Congregation

Regarding the duties of the deacons toward the congregation, and especially toward her needy members, we have written much. Now we must examine the congregation's duty toward her deacons—that of supporting her diaconate.

The support to which we refer is the congregation's sincere, heartfelt, and grateful giving to the deacons for the care of the poor and needy. Primarily this is done by giving to the benevolent fund, but it can also be done by helping the deacons in any concrete way in which they ask for help with any needy member of the congregation.

To support the deacons in this way is the congregation's *calling*. God calls her to do this, and will judge her accordingly.



Specifically whose is this calling, and why?

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It is certainly the calling of the congregation as a whole.

Reformed churches have always understood it so. Article 25 of the Church Order requires the deacons "diligently to collect alms and other contributions of charity." To fulfill this calling, the deacons must turn to the congregation. And in the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons currently used in the Protestant Reformed Churches, and approved by the Synod of Dordt 1618-1619, the exhortation to the whole congregation after the new officebearers are installed includes these words: "Provide the deacons with good means to assist the indigent."

One does not find in the Scriptures a command so explicit as this: "Church of Jesus Christ, supply your deacons with that which they need to do their work." Yet Scripture does teach that this is the congregation's duty, for it makes clear that the church as a whole must care for the poor. When the saints in Jerusalem experienced great poverty, the apostle Paul arranged for the churches in Galatia, Macedonia,

and Achaia (in other words, the churches in Asia Minor and in Greece) to take a collection for the saints in Jerusalem. To the church of Corinth (in Achaia), the apostle wrote,

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay in store as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come (I Cor. 16:1-2).

One reason why the church must support her deacons, then, is that God instituted the office of deacon to be the means by which the whole congregation cares for the poor. The diaconate is not merely a society of the church, whose members give of their own time to show their special regard for the poor. Rather, as an office in the church, the diaconate has a divine mandate to care for the poor, and divine authority to carry out that mandate. In giving the office of deacon to the church, God lays upon the whole congregation the duty to care for

her poor, in the way of supporting her deacons.

There is more to the reason.

The church must support her deacons in gratitude to God for the great spiritual riches and grace He has bestowed on her in Jesus Christ our Lord. To earn these riches and bestow them upon us, Christ, who was rich (that is, who enjoyed the glory of the Godhead and fellowship with the Father in heaven) became poor (that is, became man, suffered, and died), as we read in II Corinthians 8:9:

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

If the spiritual riches of the whole congregation required the poverty of our Lord, we must give of our riches for the relief of the poor. Gratitude demands it.

Also love demands it. Dwelling in His church by His Word and Spirit, Jesus works in her true love for God and the neighbor, including the poor neighbor. This love motivates the church to give to her deacons, to support the poor in her midst. So the apostle said to the Corinthians, as he reminded them of their obligation: "I speak...to prove the sincerity of your love" (II Cor. 8:8).

The church must always remember this to be her calling, lest she forget it or simply ignore it. That she is in danger of forgetting and ignoring it, the situation in the church in Corinth underscores. In his first epistle, the apostle had told her to take these collections (16:1); in his second epistle, he states that he had told others of the zeal of the Corinthian church for this cause (9:2); yet he sends a delegation with his epistle, personally to see to it that the Corinthians were doing so. We read in II Corinthians 9:3-4:

Yet have I sent the brethren, lest

our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting.

Apparently the apostle had reason to think that the saints in Corinth were not fulfilling their pledge.

The church always faces this danger. We think of other ways in which the poor can get support, so that we need not support them; or we think of other things we can do with our money than support the poor—such as build bigger buildings. (Nothing wrong with this in itself, of course—but *not* at the expense of the poor).

God requires the church to care for her own poor, by supporting her diaconate.



If the support of the diaconate is the duty of the church as a whole, it is certainly the responsibility of every member of the congregation.

This too is confessional. Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism explains the fourth commandment as requiring the individual child of God

especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently [to] frequent the church of God, to hear His word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian.

And this is explicitly biblical. Not only is Lord's Day 38 an explanation of the fourth commandment, which clearly regulates the life of every member of Christ's church, but the Scriptures also make clear that every child of God must care for the poor.

In the Old Testament, Israel (the church of that day) was commanded to care for the poor; but

because no diaconate existed to facilitate the work, God's command was that every individual Israelite show his care for the poor in his area, or the poor who came to him (Lev. 23:22; Deut. 15:7-11; and Deut. 24:12-15). So we read of godly men such as Boaz (Ruth 2), Job (Job 31:16-22 and other places), and David (Ps. 41:1) showing a genuine concern for the poor.

In the New Testament, the responsibility to care for the poor still falls to every member of the church. God's Word through Paul to the Corinthians underscores this, for he said in I Corinthians 16:2: "Upon the first day of the week let *every one of you* lay by him in store..."; and in II Corinthians 9:7, speaking of the same giving for the poor, he says to the church as a whole, "*Every man* according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give." The italicized words clearly indicate that no member of the congregation may consider himself exempt from this duty.

The reasons why every member of the congregation is obligated to care for the poor are the same as those given above, why the whole church must care for her poor. Salvation, the gratitude that flows from it, and the love that it works in us, are given to every individual child of God!

But how necessary that each of us be reminded of this obligation.

How easy for me to suppose that, because my congregation has enough others who will give to that cause, I personally need not do so! Or, how quickly I might even suppose that, because I do not have so much disposable income myself, I am exempt from this obligation!

I must be reminded that it is not so.

God does know that some are unable to give much for this cause because they themselves are poor. So every one is directed

to lay in store “as God hath prospered him” (I Cor. 16:2). But to contribute in some way, each is called of God.



Not to be overlooked is the command that comes to the rich in the congregation, to care for the poor.

Paul tells Timothy, “Charge them that are rich in this world... that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate” (I Tim. 6:17-18). The last two phrases, “ready to distribute” and “willing to communicate” particularly refer to the calling of the rich to share their wealth with the poor. The exhortation to the congregation in our Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons includes this charge: “Be charitable, ye rich, give liberally, and contribute willingly.” And the prayer at the end of the form includes this petition: “give also unto the rich liberal hearts toward the poor.”

Obedying this command, the rich follow the example of the rich Zacchaeus, who said—not boasting in what he did, but expressing his love for God’s law—“Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor” (Luke 19:8).

Why are the rich particularly addressed?

Not because the support of the poor falls to them only, as we have seen. But, first, because the rich have been prospered much, and so must give in abundance.

Second, because the rich are the more prone to despise the poor and *not* share their wealth. In other words, just as the congregation as a whole needed the admonition, and just as every individual needs the reminder, so the rich must be enjoined to care for their poor brethren.

That the rich are least likely to care for the poor might seem ironic. Yet it is not only the expe-

rience of many, but the teaching of Scripture too.

When the rich young ruler, having kept the whole law from his youth up, was told that he should sell all his goods, give to the poor, and follow Jesus, “he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich” (Luke 18:23). He loved his riches.

James writes of the rich who oppress the poor, bring the poor before judgment seats (referring to the rich bringing the poor to the judge, because the poor owe the rich money), and blaspheme the worthy name of Christ by which the poor are called (2:6-7). James tells them that in the last days the wages of their laborers will testify against them—for the rich kept back part of the wages of their employees by fraud (5:4).

The explanation for this treatment of the poor by the rich is the deceitfulness of riches—riches promise to give true happiness. Believing this lie, the rich become selfish, and turn their eyes from the plight of the poor, as the rich man did to Lazarus in Jesus’ parable (Luke 16:19ff.). They love their money, and are snared and drowned in destruction and perdition, as the apostle said would happen (I Tim. 6:9-10).

We have been speaking, however, of the rich as they are by nature. By grace, the rich are far different. God does save some—many—who are rich. The wonder of grace that God works in the rich when He saves them has this effect, that they become mindful of the poor! Whereas by nature they despised the poor and treated them ill, loving their own riches, by grace the rich love the poor and seek their good, realizing that the riches of this world are gifts from God to be used in His service, and that the true riches are heavenly and spiritual.

That congregation is blessed, whose rich think and act this

way. The poor of that congregation will not suffer lack. The deacons of that congregation will have the means they need to do their work.

Therefore, ye rich, “be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.” This is your calling from God!



I am convinced that this calling to the rich comes to each mature member of the church of Jesus Christ in North America in the year 2008. Each member, anyway, who has a job, who is able to provide his family with the necessities of life, must consider himself rich.

I realize that even among us some have a difficult time “making ends meet,” and so are called “poor.” By putting the word in quotation marks, I do not mean to scoff at the fact, minimize it, or suggest that I don’t believe such people have real financial struggles. Rather, my point is that, according to the standards of society, some of us are poor. This is why the deacons in our affluent society still have work to do among our own members!

And yet, we are all rich. Society’s affluence, the abundance of our own possessions, our relative ease in supplying the necessities of life (especially when compared with ages past), and the fact that our financial struggles are usually due to our attempt to have as many of life’s luxuries as we want—all testify to us that we are, in fact, rich.

And all of us are members of Christ’s church.

So all of us are called to be mindful of the poor. All of us are to give, as we have been prospered.

Support your deacons, then! Be a Boaz, a Job, a David, a Zacchaeus, in the year 2008!

And God will note your gratitude and obedience in His book of remembrance!



Who Is on the Lord's Side

On whose side are you? There are only two camps, the Word of God declares. Who are either on the side of God...or darkness; Christ...or the world; holiness...or sin. There is no compromise possible between these two. Any attempt to have both is to declare oneself an enemy of God.

This was the question that Moses asked the people of Israel. We read in Exodus 32:26,

Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.

Moses asked that question after he descended from the mountain, where he had received the Ten Commandments. As he descended he saw that the people, in his absence, had made a golden calf, had worshiped the golden calf, and had committed sin all around it. In anger he broke the two tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments, came down into the camp, ground up the golden calf and sprinkled it on the water, and then issued the challenge: "Who is on the Lord's side?"

People of the world, the Bible tells us, lie in darkness. By their life and pursuits they declare that they want no part of God, of the church. They set themselves

Rev. Haak is pastor of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan and radio pastor for the Reformed Witness Hour, on which this message was aired.

against Him (Ps. 2). They are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them (Eph. 4).

But you—you who would take your stand among the people of God—on whose side are *you*? This is a question that forces us to examine ourselves and our lives. It is a question that, by God's grace, renews us and shakes us out of lethargy. It is a question that tears the mask of hypocrisy away from the heart of anyone who does not have the reality of Christ, even though outwardly he may say that he does. It is a question that calls to repentance, to conviction of faith, to courage, to identify ourselves as His in this world.

This question confronts us every moment of every day. It calls us to identify ourselves as the people of God by a life of faith and holiness in the midst of the world, to identify ourselves as those who belong to the party of the living God.

Notice, first of all, the man who asked the question and the circumstances in which it was asked. It was Moses, and he put the question to Israel when sin was rampant in their camp. Their sin was that of making a god after their own thoughts, making a golden calf that led immediately to gross immorality, naked dancing, and shameless flaunting of the law of God.

First, I want us to understand that Moses stood there alone and summoned the whole nation of Israel to repentance. His own brother, Aaron, was the one who had made the golden

Reformed Witness Hour
A distinctively Reformed
radio ministry,
proclaiming the truth of the
sovereignty of God.

calf. Aaron had deserted him and had become the means for the people to play out their sins. The seventy elders who had been left in charge of Israel, who should have put a stop to it long ago, were also milling around in the crowd silent. The only one who stands by Moses' side is his lieutenant, Joshua. Otherwise he stood alone amidst a riot, a multitude of people swept along, intoxicated with the sinful pleasures connected with their self-made worship. Moses is bold and smashes their idol, grinds it into small pieces, casts it into the water, and makes the people drink of it. He upbraids Aaron before them and he calls the people to repentance.

We admire Moses' courage. And we ask the question: Where did he receive this courage, this holy majesty to stand for the cause of God? The answer is plain. He had been forty days alone with God on the top of the mountain. He had spoken with God face to face as a man speaks unto his friend. He had spent himself in prayer over God's promise to His people in Christ. Moses gained his power by being alone with God on his knees. The power of a holy life in the middle of the world, of gross, shameless ungodliness, is gained in the same way: through prayer.

In your class at school or college, when there are perverted jokes told; when you are in the grocery store and there is profanity expressed; when you are mocked for modesty in your dress and holiness in your speech—spiritual courage to respond is

found out of the source of our own walk with God in prayer. Moses had seen God. When he came down from the mountain and saw men and women daring to liken the glory of God unto an ox, he was consumed with a zeal for God.

Do you lose sensitivity to God's law? Do you become loose in your tongue? Do you entertain in your thoughts lust? The waves of sin — when once you said "never," now do they not bother you? How much time do you spend with God in prayer? When everywhere shameless defiance of God dances around us and Satan whispers compromise and carelessness into the ears of men, the secret of holiness is found in prayer. Strength to resist the frown of the world for being a child of God is still found in the same place: prayer. Strength is not found in numbers. The strength of the child of God, his steadfastness in his faith, that he is not influenced by the world around us, not even influenced, if need be, by his own family or spouse — that strength is to be found on his knees in prayer. Coming forth from the light of God's presence in prayer, we are emboldened, we are strengthened to face a wicked world and our own temptations.

Moses' question: "Who is on the Lord's side?" is a suitable question to be placed before us. What was involved in that question? First of all, the worship of the golden calf. The worship of a golden calf is pretty general in our day. Briefly, Israel, in making the golden calf, was saying that they would determine their own religion. They would decide what God is like. They would decide what is pleasing to God. They would decide how God should be worshiped and what God will allow and what God would disallow.

So the worship of the golden calf is whenever men take their

thoughts of God from themselves, base their worship of God in their own ideas, and base their walk of life upon what they think is appropriate, rather than bowing before the Word of God, rather than consulting the word of revelation and walking in obedience to that word.

The sin of the golden calf is simply pride — proud self. It is saying, "The religion that is revealed of God is just too poor for me. It just doesn't do it. The tabernacle that God revealed to Moses and the law that God gave to Moses — that is simply not enough. It is too bare. There is no luster to it. We want something with more decoration, more movement, more embellishments."

So with the golden calf we read that their worship included eating and drinking and rising up to play. Having decided to make God the way they wanted to, they went on to decide what was permissible in their lives. They did what came natural — they became naked, bold, shameless. They lost respect for the body, the sanctity and dignity of the body. They viewed the body simply as an instrument of lust and satisfaction. A sinful orgy followed.

And the speed at which all of this happened — it was as if a dam had burst! First they conceived of God the way they wanted to. Then anything was permissible in their life. Hear the Word of God: If you depart from this principle, namely, that all of our thoughts of God and what pleases Him are a matter of revelation in the Word, and you begin to conceive of God as *you* wish, and to serve Him the way you think best, then down you go — away from all truth and holiness.

In the midst of such a situation, Moses stood up and said, "Who is on the Lord's side?"

Do you have that courage? A day when tampering with the

truth is considered allowable, when apparently nothing is to be firmly believed, when the only thing worth believing is that there is absolutely no final truth and everybody can express himself the way he wants, do you stand up and say, "Who is on the Lord's side?"

In that situation Moses made a courageous stand and brought forth the challenging question, "Who is on the Lord's side?" For here are two camps. The two camps are these: the camp of living as you decide, or the camp of fearing God and keeping His commandments; the camp of serving your own self as your master, or the camp of grace and bowing to the Savior and following Him in obedience; the camp of following your own natural way of the flesh and finding a way out of the pinch if you fear that being faithful to the Word of God is going to bring problems, or the camp of looking to heaven and answering in wisdom, humility, and courage: "I am of the Lord." On which side are you?

There is no compromise. There is no way to merge these two camps. It is only by grace worked in us moment by moment, not anything of ourselves, that we answer: "We are on the Lord's side. We desire to serve Him."

Who is on the Lord's side? This question confronts us. There is a danger of trifling with that question, of putting it aside, of wanting to ignore it. There is the danger of the folly of the flesh that says, "The Lord knows my heart and He knows that I mean nothing by this sin." Faith must learn, rather, to act decisively. I like the story of the warrior who, facing a swollen river in the path of duty as he led his men, first threw his sword over the river, then said to his followers: "Now we have to go across." Delay can be

dangerous. Thinking about it may prove fatal. Are you on the Lord's side? Then the first thing you say is: "I am of the Lord."

At the first hint of dishonesty expected of you on the job, at the first suspicion that the activities of your friends are heading where your conscience will be burdened—at the first hint and first suspicion, you must act decisively!

Do not halt. Do not sit down and think about it. Do not procrastinate. Do not begin to ask, "What's the best side for me? What way is going to bring the most esteem and favor? What way is going to avoid, perhaps, some unpleasant situation?" You must ask the question: "Where is the Lord? That is where I must be! I must be His servant."

Really when, by the grace of God, we see the love and the glory, the grace and the splendor of the Lord, then the question poses no difficulty. That is the way to make it decisive. That is the way to make it very clear-cut for yourself. The Lord, Jehovah, the I AM THAT I AM, the One who has redeemed us in the blood of His own Son, the One who is faithful to preserve us, the One whose goodness none can measure, the One who is mighty Savior, almighty Creator, true Friend—on His side, by grace? Then I'm on the side of truth. Then I'm on the side of wonder and glory. I am a friend, then, of the living God. Remember that!

Moses called for faith to declare itself that day. He said, "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come to me." The Hebrew language there became very sharp. It literally reads like this: "Who is on the Lord's side? To me! to me!" It was a command. Our text places us on a battlefield. On a battlefield you must identify yourself. With war raging all around you, you cannot be indecisive. In the battle of faith

and unbelief, you cannot camouflage yourself. You cannot wait in a neutral corner. Grace calls you to come forth—"To me," says Moses, "Gather to me."

That was a coming out. Those sons of Levi who came out from among the idolaters identified themselves. They came out of a sinful crowd. Perhaps they had retreated and gone to the farthest limits of

the camp, away from all of the noise and uproar, and decided that they simply were not going to involve themselves in all of this. But Moses says, "That's not sufficient. To me! Show yourself." None may hide his color. None in the Lord's army may retire. None may say, "It's not my fight." Come out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing, saith the Lord (II Cor. 6). Come out of her, my people (Rev. 18). There must be a separation of the child of God from the follies of this world. Stand out from this world. So often we are reticent. We are like Lot, who needed an angel to take him by the hand and say, "Up, get you out of this place."

We must identify ourselves as the people of God, the people of grace.


But the call is not simply "Come out." The call is "Come unto me." There Moses stood as God's representative. He stood as the one who represented the cause of God on earth. And he said, "To me!" Remember that Moses stands here as a type of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the call is: "To Me." To the Lord Jesus Christ. Identify yourself as His disciple, as one in whom the grace of God has worked powerfully. Identify yourself as one who, by grace, has been purchased to belong to Jesus Christ in life and in death.

To Me, come out! To me and to the church.

We read that the sons of Levi gathered themselves together onto Moses. Levi was a tribe of priests. They were those whom God had set aside for His service. In this God is telling us that those who are on His side are, first of all, those whom He has separated for Himself. In other words, as we read in I John, we love Him because He first loved us. We are separated by the grace of God. The mighty grace of God calls us out of the world, shows us the folly of our sin and the folly of a sinful world, and gives us to see the beauties of Christ and the beauties of belonging to Him.

First, God's grace separates us. But then that grace also works powerfully in us so that as the sons of Levi we come out and identify ourselves as members of the company of God. We are called to consecrate ourselves unto our Savior. How do we do that? By consecrating ourselves unto the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures that are the life of the church. We do that in prayer. We do that by serving the Lord from our hearts.

May the Captain of the Lord's host, Jesus Christ Himself, ever stand before us. And He will. May we ever hear His voice as the mighty conqueror: "Who is on the Lord's side? To Me, come to Me!"

Now, in whatever position God has placed you in this world—perhaps, tomorrow, as a lawyer in the courts of the land; perhaps, tomorrow, before the board of executives; perhaps in what you think is only a lowly station: home, office, classroom, train station, wherever—the leader of God's hosts, this risen Savior Jesus Christ, comes and says: "Who is on the Lord's side? To me." Be ready. Be ready always to consecrate yourself to Him on whose side you are. 

"Who is on the Lord's side?"

News from the DMC

Each year the Domestic Mission Committee submits to synod a report of its activities, and at about the same time writes also a news article on domestic missions for readers of the *Standard Bearer*. As it seemed to us, the nature of the report for synod this year was such that it could well serve both purposes. What follows, therefore, has been excerpted from that report, for the benefit of a wider readership.

Eastern Home Missions

Perhaps the highlight of 2007 for the Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Pittsburgh was their settling into new facilities. The members of the Fellowship, and their missionary, were happy for the identity it gave them in the neighborhood. They were convinced that the church building would prove to be an asset to their work. But there can be no doubt that their being able to worship in this building has been, besides, a morale-booster for the members of the Fellowship. They had been truly grateful for the facilities that had been made available to them in Trinity Christian School, and they would have been content to stay there as long as it met their needs. But having a church building that they could call their own, where they could both worship and hold all their meetings, gave them a sense of 'belonging' that was very evidently a thrill for them. That came out, even, in a letter that one of the members (a young mother of four small

boys) wrote recently to Southwest Church. She said, "I cannot express the gratitude in this small card for obtaining our building. To have a place of our own is a precious gift to our family."

Significantly, however, that line came very close to the end of the letter of appreciation. Though genuinely appreciative for the building, she had it in proper perspective. The letter began with reference to *baptism*—the baptism of her fourth son. "I cannot express the joy and amazement that comes to my heart," she said, "when I think how far our group has come to get to this point. The Lord has been very gracious to us and brought us a long way." The mere building is a plus. The spiritual journey is what it's really all about. This mother in Israel had it exactly right.

The church building has also served to give some focus to the work of outreach. Rev. Bruinsma mentions that in his annual report to synod: "Now that our church building has provided a specific location from which to work, we have targeted the borough of Forest Hills. On a couple of occasions we have had opportunity to walk the streets of Forest Hills delivering invitations to special events."

One of the "special events" to which the neighbors were invited was the Open House for the church....

Notice, too, how they did it: Ads on WORD FM. Photo opportunities in local newspapers. Packets of information delivered personally to a thousand houses in the neighborhood. Especially that. Fourteen members of the Fellowship accomplished that feat in a couple of hours. Every one

of them found it possible to talk to some people who happened to be in their yards. And then, a few days before the event, seven of their number hit the streets again—this time to 500 of the same houses—with a reminder of the event and a short brochure entitled "Is the Christian Faith Easy?" We were pleased, too, to learn that about 25 young people from Southwest and Georgetown had come to participate, and that some of them helped by going door to door on the morning of the Open House to invite neighbors to attend. This is healthy, and bodes well for the cause of missions in our churches.

The result of it all was that 20 to 25 people from the neighborhood came to the Open House. Maybe some of them came just for the free hamburgers and hotdogs cooked up by chief chef Keith Bauman. But they got, besides, some food for thought: two short meditations, one by Rev. Bruinsma and the other by Cory Griess, who was there on a summer-assignment from the seminary. And in the basement of the church there were displays, focusing prominently on the RFPA and the Reformed Witness Hour, but also an advertisement for participation in a Bible study.

Happily, that isn't all. Rev. Bruinsma could report to us in November that the Fellowship enjoyed a "steady stream of visitors from the neighborhood and elsewhere in Pittsburgh" during the summer months. And he attributed it to their hanging flyers on doors of houses in the neighborhood, a "blitz of ads" on radio, and his being on the Reformed Witness Hour. The "blitz" refers to: a couple of interviews aired on WORD FM's "BibleBurgh"; a

Mr. Doezema is an elder in Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan and secretary of the Domestic Mission Committee.

live interview on WORD's "Jon and Stephanie in the Afternoon" talk show; and a number of ads on the station, some with Rev. Bruinsma's voice and others with the voice of the radio announcer. "If a reputable station such as WORD not only airs our ads but also recommends us to its listeners," writes Rev. Bruinsma, "it will bring (and has brought) visitors to our worship services."

As far as numbers are concerned, Rev. Bruinsma writes in his annual report that the Fellowship will very likely soon number nine committed families (including the missionary family). Numerical growth since last year, therefore, is modest. But we heartily endorse our missionary's conviction, as expressed in that same report, that the two most important criteria on the basis of which we should assess our work are 1) spiritual growth, and 2) open doors. With those in mind, Rev. Bruinsma's enthusiastic assessment of the work in Pittsburgh is that "the Lord is truly blessing our labors." We concur.

Western Home Missions

Reflecting on the real growth in the Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Spokane in his annual report to synod, Rev. Thomas Miersma acknowledges that, in comparison "to a large congregation," they are still small, "but then," he adds, "we are not to despise the day of small things, in an apostate world where we are plucking branches out of the burning in North America." Good advice.

That, really, is what we are about in Spokane. Plucking those branches, out of the burning, and establishing them in the Reformed faith. From that perspective, our evaluation of the work in Spokane can be expressed no better than it was by our delegation that visited the field last year. They wrote:

Our overall impression of the 'state of the Fellowship' is that

the members of the Fellowship are a people being wonderfully gathered and established. As follows:

Through solid, systematic, antithetical, personalized instruction in the essentials of the Faith. Our missionary has a gift for this. He takes the time to do work with each couple and individual through the Essentials of Reformed Doctrine, and to 'tailor-make' this instruction for the various folks. This has borne and is bearing fruit: the members of the Mission are discerning of the various errors and evils not only of our secular society, but also of the apostate church from which they have been called out; the people are appreciative of, thankful for, and truly comforted by the gospel of sovereign grace; the people are beginning to live by this truth; the people are standing up for, speaking out for, and seeking to spread this truth wherever they can....

It is our conviction that there is a good work being done in Spokane, and that God is blessing the work and the people there. We discussed with the missionary and members of the group various ways evangelism and the witness of the Fellowship might be improved....

The first item of interest of which Rev. Miersma writes in his annual report is the "New Location." The reference is to the location of the facilities that the Fellowship had used as a worship/office center for the past few years. The old storefront location had served them well, but there were several limitations— inadequate classroom areas and absence of a kitchen being among them. Besides, it was not centrally located with respect to the homes of the core group. But what decided the matter was that the landlord decided to open his business on Sundays. Parking space and noise were not minor problems. So the search began for a different building.

As explained in the missionary's report, they found one due north of downtown Spokane. It's

readily accessible from the whole city. It's in a more visible location than the storefront. It has about 50% more usable space. And the building is detached and has its own parking lot, lending to the Fellowship a greater appearance of permanence.

It has been gratifying to see that the Fellowship 'hit the ground running' in their new location. As Rev. Miersma explains, they have "to some extent a new mission field, as far as the city of Spokane is concerned, since we are now in a totally different part of town." They began immediately, therefore, to make a determined effort to make their presence known in their new surroundings. Shortly after the move, the Fellowship sponsored a lecture series, held on four consecutive Friday evenings. One of the members of the Fellowship designed a flyer to advertise the event. Another sent out e-mail promotions to previous contacts. Another developed two billboards advertising the lectures and the worship location. Another prepared radio advertising—to air during the Rush Limbaugh program. And still another arranged for advertising on community and Christian community event and calendar websites. Rev. Miersma wrote two brief articles for the website reflecting the theme of the conference.

As it turned out, therefore, the lecture series provided an occasion for getting their name out there for a month. And the results were also gratifying. The conference went well, with visitors at each one. And, better still, visitors appear also at the worship services. One found the Fellowship in the phone book, another on the website, another from the sign on the building, and still others were brought by members of the Fellowship. It's interesting to note, concerning the latter, that one member brought a Roman Catholic woman and a Russian immigrant who is Pentecostal.

Again, numbers are modest.

Regular attendance is from 26 to 29. Six families. "...branches out of the burning in North America." A good work is being done in Spokane, and we are content with the fruit that the Lord is pleased to give to His work.

Sioux Falls

The first order of business for newly-appointed calling churches is usually the matter of making some kind of provision for the field while they await the acceptance of a call for missionary. As it turned out, Edgerton Consistory had to concern itself very little with 'pulpit supply' after being appointed calling church for a third domestic missionary by Synod 2007. Candidate Clayton Spronk was already working in Sioux Falls. And his acceptance of the call in July 2007 to serve as the pastor of Peace Church in Lansing, IL, did not leave the pulpit in Sioux Falls long unattended. There was but one Sunday between the time that Candidate Spronk and his family left Sioux Falls and the time that Rev. and Mrs. Kortering arrived, having agreed to supply the pulpit there until December 16, if need be. Then, already on October 7, Rev. Allen Brummel accepted the call to serve as missionary in Sioux Falls.


The DMC is thankful to God for that beginning of the work in Sioux Falls. Mr. (now Rev.) Spronk, though fresh out of seminary, did a good work in Sioux Falls. We thank him for that. And Rev. Kortering obviously came to Sioux Falls to do the work of missions—the work that has, for so many years, been close to his heart. He even offered to teach a 'how-to' course for the members of the mission. The classes, he said, would be for the purpose

of assisting and encouraging the members to reach out to their neighbors, family, and others who cross their paths, to speak with them about matters of Christian faith and obedience." As he reported to Edgerton and the DMC, his intention was to "divide the classes into two parts, the first has to do with biblical instruction (theory) and the second with hands-on experience, assigning different ways to engage in this work [i.e., by actually going out and *doing* it], and then during the class period share what happened, what was the outcome, and consider suggestions for doing it in a different way. The purpose more than anything is to help us overcome our fear of speaking spiritually to others." Though unable to complete the intended course, Rev. Kortering did get a good start in it, and thus laid a helpful foundation for the beginning of Rev. Brummel's work there.

About the core group, Rev. Kortering had this to say: "I am very much impressed with the membership of the Fellowship. What a way to begin a mission outreach! We have the luxury of a well-founded and mature core group. They are a pleasure to know and to work with. Thankfully, they know it is their duty to put forth effort to reach out, and thus to participate in mission work."

That was our impression too, from the beginning. The Sioux Falls group intended to work. They would not be content to get 'pulpit supply' and then wait for 'internal growth' to get them to the point where they could organize and get on with the business of being a Protestant Reformed

Church. Fact is, they were planning an Evangelism Conference before Rev. Kortering arrived. Likewise: 'business cards' to give to casual contacts, a supply of appropriate literature, a tri-fold brochure introducing the Fellowship and the PRC to inquirers, an attractive web page, an attendance record and a guest book, advertisements in a local paper and in the Yellow Pages, and more. To assure that the work was attended to properly, they had formed committees: a Steering Committee and an Evangelism Committee, with three sub-committees dealing with Pamphlets, Web Page/Advertising, and Special Events. More importantly, they were talking to others, and inviting them to the worship services—and making visitors feel welcome. This, we say, was a core group ready to work. We are not surprised that Rev. Kortering found them a delight to work with.

The Brummels moved into the parsonage on October 31 and Rev. Brummel was installed as missionary on November 8. He, too, went right to work. Already we are favorably impressed by his energetic approach to the work of missions, his determination to learn as he goes, and his very evident willingness to cooperate fully with the two governing bodies. He acknowledges that "this is and will be a learning experience for me." And he encourages Edgerton and the DMC "to direct and lead me in any way you deem fit. Please help me be the best missionary I can be with the gifts that God has given me." We thank God for that spirit, which is the work of the Spirit. It gives us good hope for the future. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Minister Activities

Calvary PRC in Hull, Iowa has extended a call to Rev. Doug Kuiper, pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC, to serve as their first

pastor.

The consistory of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI gave approval to their pastor, Rev. William Langerak, to travel to the

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

Philippines in light of the call he has received to serve as foreign missionary there. He and Rev. Audred Spriensma left on May 12. Plans called for the men to preach, the Lord willing, in the Berean PRC in Manila, and visit the members and various contacts in Manila and Gabaldon. Mrs. Langerak hoped to join her husband for part of the trip and they anticipated returning on May 28. A reminder that pictures and a video presentation of this mission field can be seen on the PRC website.

Sister-Church Activities

A mention of our denomination's website reminds us of a comment recently received on the website of the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI.

I just found your website by looking up Scottish Psalter singing (www.cprc.co.uk). But then I made the mistake of clicking on your 'Audio link.' Now I'm going to spend the next couple of days downloading your sermons. Where am I going to find time to watch TV now?? Oh, great! I just saw and checked on your Books link. I'll be broke now! And now your Pamphlets link. I hate your website! I'm going to be here forever!!!!.... Thank you for making so much good material available. Alaska, USA

Denomination Activities

During the month of May, our denomination's Contact Committee sent a delegation to Singapore. Rev. Carl Haak and Rev. Kenneth Koole visited with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore to discuss with their consistory the possible restoration of sister-church relationships with our denomination. While there, the men also planned to preach the two Sundays, speak at a Family Conference, and lead the adult Sunday School class on the biblical truth of worship.

Evangelical Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Byron Center, MI PRC

sponsored a lecture on April 24 at their church. Rev. Ron VanOverloop, pastor at Byron Center, spoke on the topic, "The Christian and His Finances." It was advertised as a topic that was about more than just being Dutch, and also about being especially important for young married couples.

For some time now, the Evangelism Committee of First PRC of Holland, MI has directed chapel services at the Holland Rescue Mission. Over that time various men from First have led that service, but on Thursday, April 24, Seminarian Martyn McGeown, a member of the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland, led the service for what we believe was his first time.

Congregation Activities

The ladies of the Doon, Iowa PRC hosted the annual Spring Ladies League Meeting on April 24. Their pastor, Rev. David Overway, spoke on the topic, "Understanding and Loving our Husbands." All women, high school age and older, were welcomed and encouraged to attend. The collection taken was for the Reformed Witness Hour.

The congregation of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL hosted the annual combined Bible Study for the Chicago-land PR churches on April 22. Plans were for a study of the doctrine of Irresistible Grace, based on Titus 2:11-14. Rev. Jaikishin Mahtani, pastor of Bethel, led the study, with the elders of Bethel and other area churches leading the discussion groups that followed. The evening provided a lively discussion and a blessed time of fellowship between our four Chicago area churches.

Sunday School teachers of the Hudsonville PRC hosted this year's Sunday School Teachers Mass Meeting on April 24. Prof. Russell Dykstra presented a seminar on "interpreting types." Illustrations came from the Sunday School material and promised to provide the teachers with many

helpful insights for the coming season.

The Trinity Men Singers and the Ladies Chorus of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI presented their annual spring concert on Sunday evening, April 27.


School Activities

On April 22, the Society of Trinity Christian High School of Hull, Iowa approved a proposal to begin operations this coming fall by offering a ninth grade course of instruction, adding one grade in each of the three years following. The school is slated to start with thirteen students. Mr. Jim Regnerus is to serve as administrator, and the Board of Trinity will be seeking one additional teacher for this coming year, with some part-time assistants. Let us keep this fledgling cause in our prayers.

Members of the fund-raisers of Loveland PR Christian School in Loveland, CO sponsored a Men & Boy's Wildlife Night on April 25. Activities began at 6:00 P.M. with a delicious outdoor chuck-wagon-style dinner, followed by activities including an air-gun shooting competition, fish casting contest, guess-the-paw-print, a campfire, and more.

Mission Activities

Earlier this year members of the Pittsburgh, PA Mission met together and voted to form two new committees, involving both adults and young people of their Fellowship. These two committees, the Media Committee and the Neighborhood Outreach Committee, met for the first time in April with more meetings scheduled each month.

Catechism classes in Pittsburgh were cancelled in late April, not because of bad weather, or because Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma was ill, but because Rev. Bruinsma was serving on a jury and was in court that day. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Board of the RFPA expresses Christian sympathy to faithful employees Evelyn Langerak and Paula Kamps in the passing of their mother and grandmother, **DOROTHY KAMPS.**

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

Dave Harbach, President
John Buitert, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Grandville PRC extends its Christian sympathy to Rev. and Jean Kortering in the recent death of Jean's brother,

OSCAR FABER.

May the family find comfort in the words of Psalm 73:23-26, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

Rev. K. Koole, Pres.
H. DeVries, Asst. Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Peace PRC express Christian sympathy to fellow members Winifred Flikkema, the Bill and Pat DeJong family, the Michael and Beth Vermeer family, and the Matt and Stacy DeJong family in the passing of their husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather,

MR. GARRET FLIKKEMA.

May they find comfort in the words of our Lord, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

Rev. Clayton Spronk, President
Barry Warner, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Doon PRC expresses heartfelt Christian sympathy to fellow member Jeanette, and her family in the death of their beloved husband, father, and grandfather,

MR. HARLAN VAN ENGEN.

Our prayer for the bereaved family is that they may find their comfort in the promise of life eternal, and in the words of Psalm 16:8, 9: "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope."

Rev. David Overway, President
Geraldine Blankespoor, Secretary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With much thanksgiving to our faithful covenant God and Father, we celebrated 30 years of marriage with our parents,

BRET and DEBRA DYKSTRA

on May 19, 2008.

How thankful we are for their Christ-centered wisdom and guidance and godly home established by God's grace! Our Father is a faithful God in blessing from generation to generation. It is our prayer that God will continue to bless them with many years of marriage together.

"Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

- ✿ Nathan and Brenda Dykstra
Kaitlyn, Emmalie, Seth
- ✿ Jeremy and Amanda Venlet
Brendan, Jerod
- ✿ Bruce and Alisha Doezema
Ryan, Nicole
- ✿ Bret Dykstra

Hudsonville, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

ARTHUR and ANETTA SARAH DE JONG,

as they celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary on June 1, 2008, Lord willing. We are thankful for the many years God has given them, and pray that He will continue to bless and preserve them in the years to come.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart: and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5, 6).

✿ Arthur and Karen DeJong

Alison, Brooke, Nicholas, Andrew

- ✿ Elizabeth DeJong
- ✿ Eileen DeJong
- ✿ Steven and Sarah Kleyn
- ✿ Steve and Suzanne Reyenga
- ✿ Rebecca DeJong
- ✿ Rita DeJong
- ✿ Martin DeJong
- ✿ Edna DeJong

South Holland, Illinois

CALL TO SYNOD!!

The 2008 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 10, 2008 at 8:30 A.M. in the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 9, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. Slopsema, president of the 2007 synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Reformed Witness Hour

June 2008

Date	Topic	Text
June 1	"The Knowledge That Is Above All Things Precious"	I John 4:1-6
June 8	"And Who Is My Neighbor?"	Luke 10:25-37
June 15	"Confessing My Sin"	Psalm 32:5
June 22	"Presenting Our Bodies a Sacrifice"	Romans 12:1
June 29	"Plainly the Christ"	John 10:24-31