

The Standard Bearer

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Godliness for Young Women

“That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”

Titus 2:4, 5

Titus was laboring among the new Christians on the island of Crete. He was to preach and teach God’s Word with a view to God’s elect acknowledging the truth and living in godliness (1:1). False doctrine and an ungodly lifestyle are to be condemned with words—spoken and printed. But they are also condemned by the godly life of the Christian. Godliness adorns the truth, giving evidence of the correctness of the truths of sovereign, particular grace.

Paul begins the second chapter: “speak the things which become [are consistent with, harmonize with] sound doctrine.” He then becomes specific, showing what godliness is for the various members of the Christian churches on Crete. In this article we consider Paul’s presentation of godliness for young Christian

women. This godliness is what the older Christian women are to teach them.

The Chief Calling of Christian Young Women

The young Christian wife/mother is to be a “keeper at home.”

Some simplistically say that this means that she must stay in the home and may not work outside her house. That would make us lose much of what God is teaching through the use of this Greek word. This inspired word describes her from the viewpoint of her duties toward the home: “caring for the home.” She is to make the house a home. It is implied that this young woman is married and has been given children. This Christian young woman is to care for the home by taking care of household affairs, by watching over the home, and by guarding it. There is no doubt that in order to care for the home in this way, the wife/mother is to be in it. It would be very difficult to do so when not in the house.

Older Christian women are to teach the young married mothers that the lifestyle that is consistent with her faith in Jesus Christ is one of caring for, keeping, or guarding the home. The Christian home is surrounded by a most ungodly world. That this was the case for

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the Christian homes on Crete is clear from what Paul has to say about Cretians in the first chapter. And it certainly is true today! The Christian young woman must be aware of the spiritual enemies that are attacking the Christian home. She is also to be aware of the enemies of godliness that arise from within the home. The sinful natures of all the residents of the home are a most powerful force against which the young Christian wife and mother has to be on guard. It is these enemies that make so difficult her calling to care for the home.

The young Christian woman's responsibility is to make the home a safe and secure place. She is to do all the things necessary to create and maintain an atmosphere of a safe and comfortable haven for her husband and for her children. She does this by making everyone in the home aware of the standard of God's law (over against all self-centeredness) and of the presence of Jesus, the loving and forgiving Savior. Specifically, in light of the presence of sin, she demonstrates this by confessing her sins and by quickly and sincerely forgiving those who sin against her. Also she makes it obvious that prayer is an essential element of home life. She prays fervently to Him who alone can keep a home spiritually safe (Ps. 127:1, 2). She constantly reminds herself, her husband, and her children of the duty to resist the devil and to draw nigh to God. She wants faith to be evident in her home.

How Christian Young Women Are to Exhibit Their Godliness

How does the young Christian wife and mother keep her home? Our text gives five ways.

First, she keeps her home by loving her husband and loving her children as God loves her. This duty to love is taught her by older Christian women. This means that love for husband or wife and children is something to be taught and learned. It is not only an emotion one falls into. Salvation teaches about a love that is much more than emotions and feelings. The feeling of love for someone, while legitimately called "love," is not taught, nor is it commanded. When God commands love, He is not commanding a feeling, but a knowledge that can be taught and learned. This is the meaning and significance of the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* (love) is emphatically, first of all, knowledge. It is com-

manded by God (John 13:23; 15:12) and it is learned from God (I Thess. 4:9). It is a knowledge of God's love for us. When the knowledge of faith experiences God's love, then it wants to reflect God's love. And then we know ourselves and others as God knows us. We know that God's love is to be reflected as sacrificial, selfless, and giving (not demanding or possessive). We know that God's love is unconditional (not dependent on the object being nice or good). *Agape* is a knowledge of someone that finds its energy source in the one loving, not in the one loved.

The second way the younger Christian women are to care for their homes is by being "sober" (4) and "discreet" (5). Note that this attribute is also to be a part of the godliness of both the older and the younger Christian men (2, 6). Both words (sober and discreet) are derived from the same Greek word, which conveys the idea of "wisdom." To be sober is to be in control, to be moderate and self-disciplined. To be discreet is to exercise wisdom by being of sound mind and self-controlled. The idea of these words is that she is to hold herself to her duties in the home. Sobriety and discretion enable her to realize that this is the time of her life when her focus must be on the home.

Faith in Jesus Christ brings balance and perspective to the life of a wife and mother. The faith that holds for truth what God has revealed in His Word frees her from romanticism and unreal dreams. By faith she knows herself to be a horrible sinner who must confess her sins, deny herself, and control her desires. She resists the natural desire to make something of herself in the world, because faith tells her that God places highest value on the woman who cares for her home. It is faith that makes her realize that the all-wise and loving Father gave her the husband and children she has—and it is He that she is to obey. She is to be sober and discreet.

Third, the godliness of young Christian women is manifested in their being "obedient to their own husbands" in all lawful things. The Greek word used speaks of a voluntary submission, a subjecting of oneself. This voluntary subjecting of herself flows only from obedience to her Savior and Lord. Her faith in Jesus gives her this willingness to strive to live in the consciousness of what He has done for her and of what He wants her to

do. Faith gives her to know that her husband is God's gift to her, given by Him to be her head.

This submission does not make her personally inferior. She is equally saved in the same blood of the Lamb, and she is equally a spiritual heir. Her faith teaches her that God will judge her husband for any failures on his part to do his duty, and He will judge her too for any failures on her part to do what He commands her to do.

Fourth, her godliness is evidenced in her being "chaste." Chastity refers to moral purity and cleanliness, modesty. It is not to be without sin. Rather, it stands over against a flaunting of oneself, a putting of oneself ahead of others, a striving to get attention for oneself by words, actions, or clothing. The young Christian woman strives to be faithful to God and to her husband in thought, word, and deed.

Fifth, the young Christian woman is to be "good," that is, useful, striving to fit her purpose by being beneficial to those around her. Every wife/mother is naturally selfish and self-centered. She is concerned about herself, as if the world centers around her. The good Christian wife, on the other hand, realizes that salvation in Jesus Christ puts her into His body, so that she is one member of the large body, the church. When any member of the *physical* body calls attention to itself, we think of it as a pain! Likewise, every member of the church is not to call attention to himself, but be busy in

service to the other members. God calls the Christian wife to submit herself and her desires to God by being useful to the others in her home.

The Purpose of the Godliness of Christian Young Women

The purpose of this godliness flowing from the Christian faith in young Christian women is that "the word of God is not blasphemed." Something is "blasphemed" when it is spoken against, reviled, slandered, or insulted.

A professing Christian who is selfish and self-serving makes a mockery of her professed Christianity. This, in turn, makes a mockery of God and His Word. It gives occasion for unbelievers to mock Him. The truth of God's Word is to have the effect of self-denial and humility on those who confess it.

Humble confession of sins and sinfulness, along with a striving to be obedient to God and to His Word, occasions the glorifying of our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). The wicked always want to mock and blaspheme. But the godly actions of God's people show that their mockery is only lies. Let the quiet lives of young Christian wives and mothers contradict and silence these lies! Honor is given to God and to the teachings of His Word by the godly conduct of the Christian wife. 

EDITORIAL

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

Polemics: Fighting Words

In our position as seminary professors, it is our responsibility to read as many of the church magazines and seminary journals as possible. We take that responsibility seriously, subscribing to (or having exchange relationships with) nearly one hundred different publications. The churches

have mandated us to "expound to (the students) the mysteries of the faith; caution them in regard to the errors and heresies of the old, but *especially of the new day...*" (Form for the Installation of Professor of Theology; emphasis mine). So we read as much as we can.

The lack of militancy—fighting

words—in these publications, generally, is sad. Then, there are the conferences, springing up by the dozens from this and that independent ministry or academy, which are notable if only for their general lack of willingness to engage false teachings. It is a generalization, to be sure, but the church today does

not want to “contend [earnestly!] for the faith,” as Jude urged the church in his day to do.

A few happy exceptions I find, but mostly in Calvinistic Baptist circles. Men like John F. McArthur and Albert Mohler often have the courage to take on false teaching. And last month the worthwhile *TableTalk* magazine had a special issue on “Controversy.” But very few Reformed have such mettle. Even in the Protestant Reformed Churches, where most have been taught the urgency of using the sword of the Spirit, there are some who express what one man said to me early in my ministry: “If you take care of the positive, you won’t need to be negative.”

He did not want fighting words in the pulpit.

The unwillingness of a man, or a church, to fight is a fatal weakness. To fight is to survive. Not to fight is to surrender to an enemy intending to destroy the church. The antichristian forces will quickly swallow up a denomination unwilling to wage war. What is true for us personally is also true for churches: the devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking which one he may devour. But very few are willing to battle. Many will battle certain kinds of immorality—homosexuality or abortion—realizing that to allow these will quickly lead to ruin. But few are willing to contend against sins of false gods, false worship, false doctrine, and Sabbath desecration—sins against the *first* table of the law. Churches must always be willing to fight if they would survive.

I understand someone’s disgust for war if the only war he has seen is ungodly fighting. I will address that also—improper motives, methods, goals, attitudes. These tempt even the most spiritual church members to shrink from battle—even important battles. But we will resist such a temptation, with the keen—albeit sometimes painful—realization that the church must fight if she will survive. Abhorrence of war, an aversion to fight, even an unenthusiastic response to a call to arms—these will bring a church into the lion’s mouth.

A Call to Arms

Polemics is the activity of exposing, opposing, resisting, and ultimately (by the power and grace of God) destroying error—error of teaching or error of conduct. Polemics does battle with God’s enemies in the world, against the antichristian forces that are hell-bent on destroying God’s cause in the world. Polemics takes aim at antichristian propaganda that lures confessing Christians out of the true church into the false. Polemics is the activity of real combat with false gospels that dishonor Christ the King.

Positively, polemics has as its purpose the defense of the precious truth of God, the “faith once delivered to the saints.” Contend earnestly *for* the faith, Jude says. Of course, *against* the lie is implied. But Jude makes clear that the beautiful, comforting, God-honoring, true faith is the object to be kept in view. *For* the faith. More on that, later, too.

God has always called His people

to engage in battle. One almost gets the impression that Adam’s first day of married life was hardly ended before the enemy came to ruin them. As a result, God indicated the proper stance for the church when He “put enmity” (where “put” literally, is *set, appointed, even constituted*) between the two spiritually opposite branches of the human race—descendants of Eve and descendants of the Serpent. The stance is warfare. The official declaration of war was God’s. From that point the church embarked on an age-long campaign against what challenges God and His cause. No armistice has been signed.

If the Old Testament teaches anything it teaches the militancy of the church. Israel was organized, upon leaving Egypt, in a *military* structure. Their lives were defined by battle. The weary saints did get a little glimpse of the *final goal* of battle when Solomon reigned in *peace* over the subdued nations. But even that *typical peace* lasted hardly a generation. The Old Testament prophets’ commission was to lift up their voices like trumpets (Is. 58:1) and warn the people from their vantage as “lookouts.” Fight, fight, fight.

To deny that the *New Testament* church likewise is to be militant is to deny the unity of the testaments—which makes it a happy inconsistency (to us Reformed) that it is the Calvinistic *Baptists* whose militancy is often exemplary.

But the *New Testament* Scripture itself is clear regarding our call to be polemical in writing and preaching. It is always surprising

to me that modern scholars can appeal to Jesus' peace-making statements but overlook His strongly militant actions and words. Others have said it before me, but if Jesus returned today and engaged in the same kind of ministry He had in His first coming, the church world would crucify Him again—not only for His steadfast refusal to feed the masses and heal all the sick, but for His refusal to make earthly peace, on their terms.

Jesus' disciples understood Him. So each New Testament writer makes clear Jesus' call to engage in hostilities. None better than Paul: "I have fought the good fight." But Jude was not a whit behind: "Earnestly contend for the faith!" John, the "apostle of love," warned: Some are "liars" (I John 1:4, 22, etc.); others are "blind" (v. 11); and there are many "antichrists" (v. 18). Some "deceive" (3:7); others are "children of the devil" (3:11); and "many false prophets have gone out into the world." At issue for John in these warnings was not only *morality* ("committing sin" 3:4) but also *doctrine* ("denying the Father and the Son" 2:22), or "truth" (2:27). At the end of the New Testament canon, Jesus commended the congregation at Ephesus for deposing "apostles" who taught lies (Rev. 2:1); and then rebuked Pergamos who, even though they "held fast Jesus' name," tolerated false teachers (2:13, 14).

Now, Reformed churches have always followed this instruction by demanding, officially, of their leaders that they be militant. Which means that if a believer today does not want a militant pastor, he does

not belong in a Reformed church. Yes, he *belongs* in a Reformed church. But if he does not want polemics from his pastor and seminary, he does not fully understand the Reformed faith. And because this article about polemics must be *properly* polemical, this paragraph does not intend to belittle or drive him away, but beseeches him in the spirit of Jesus Christ to learn Christ's way of *proper militancy*, or *balanced polemics*.

What makes the fight worth fighting?

Most helpful may be to see what we sometimes are inclined to overlook—the *third* commandment of the ten, and the *first* petition of the Lord's Prayer, both of which deal with God's *name*. Taking God's name in vain is so much more comprehensive than we might realize, if only we remember what God's name is! Follow carefully, here. Go deeply into this truth for a moment. Let the explanation of the *Heidelberg Catechism* sink in as to the meaning of God's *name*, and its connection to *doctrine* and *truth*:

Which is the first petition? Answer. "Hallowed be thy name"; that is, grant us, first, rightly to know Thee, and to sanctify, glorify, and praise Thee in all Thy works, in which Thy power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy, and truth are clearly displayed; and further also, that we may so order and direct our whole lives, our thoughts, words, and actions, that Thy name may never be blasphemed, but rather honored and praised on our account.

Hallowing God's name involves first that we *know* Him in all His works, in which works very specific attributes of God are revealed: "power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy, and truth." This is doctrine, sound doctrine. Thus, when false teachers, for example, deny God's *power* in creation according to Genesis, contradict His *wisdom* in sovereignly governing the worlds, challenge His *goodness* in putting a crook in my lot, or gainsay His *justice* in punishing sin in Jesus Christ, they are taking His *name* in vain. God's precious name is not only the titles He gave Himself, like Jehovah, Elohim, and Lord, but all His works and attributes that *reveal to us who and what He is*. His works in creation, providence, and salvation, and all His attributes—are His name. His precious name is to be defended by the church! God's name (His reputation!) is at stake.

Take a concordance, just with the book of Psalms, to see the significance of God's *name*. Begin with thinking deeply about Psalm 8, God's name, and *creation*.

This also explains what the prophet Malachi meant in chapter two. A faithful area pastor gave two fine chapel speeches here at seminary the last two weeks and reminded us of this truth in Malachi. The calling of the priests and Levites—teachers all—was to "give glory to his *name*," to "be afraid before his *name*" (Mal. 2:2, 5). How did the priests and Levites honor God's *name*? By having "the law of truth...in [their] mouth." "Iniquity" was not to be found in their lips. "For the priest's lips should keep

knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth” (6, 7). God’s name is knowledge of Him, it is His truth.

Battling for the truth, with fighting words, is battling for the name of God. Love for God’s name motivates us to engage in polemics.

Knowing this about God’s name also helps us to see why our Reformed fathers taught that profaning God’s name is “so heinous a sin” that “there is no sin greater or more provoking to God than” that (Lord’s Day 36).

Who will join us in fighting for God’s name? The faith once delivered to the saints! Who is willing

to take up the sword against false teachings that “get His name wrong,” against an ungodly life, against everything antagonistic to the Christian (Reformed) faith? Who will be “earnest” in this battle? Who is willing to “endure hardness” as a good soldier of Jesus Christ for the sake of God’s name and truth?

Words—God’s words—overthrow error. Words—fighting words—put the devil to flight. Words—militant words, sharp as swords—destroy the false teacher who would devour our sons and daughters in the university. Words—fighting words.

Who wants to go to battle? That question truly requires pondering.

Really, who asks to be put in the fray? Something in my *sinful* nature resists battle, but something of God’s *new* creation in me resists it, too, because it longs for Solomon’s peace, when “my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occur” (I Kings 5:4). Even King David—most valiant warrior for God’s name—said, “I am for peace.”

Until that day when God gives us peace in the new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness lives and rules, we will fight for God’s name.

Prince of Peace, come quickly!

... to be continued. 

The Incarnation

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 14

Question 35. What is the meaning of these words—“He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary”?

Answer. That God’s eternal Son, who is, and continueth true and eternal God, took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost; that He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted.

Question 36. What profit dost thou receive by Christ’s holy conception and nativity?

Answer. That He is our Mediator; and with His innocence and perfect holiness, covers in the sight of God, my sins, wherein I was conceived and brought forth.

The object of our faith is the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the previous Lord’s Days, by looking at the Savior’s names, we have looked at His person. Now we begin to look at His

work by studying the five stages of His humiliation: 1) His birth; 2) His lifelong suffering; 3) His death; 4) His burial, and 5) His descension into hell.

In His state of humiliation, Jesus stands before God, guilty for the sins of His people. This explains the intense suffering of His earthly life. He Himself was never guilty of any sin, but, voluntarily taking our guilt

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on Himself, He condescends from the glory of heaven down to the depths of the wrath of God in hell (Phil. 2:6-8).

This humiliation begins with the incarnation, which means His coming into flesh (*carna* = flesh).

Modernists deny the incarnation of Jesus Christ. They teach that the idea of God coming as a man is an adaptation from pagan religions. They say that Jesus did have an earthly father, and that the word “virgin” in Scripture simply refers to a young woman. This denial is antichristian. “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist” (I John 4:3). It is antichristian because the truth of the incarnation is essential to the gospel. Without it, we have no gospel.

The Scriptures, especially the gospels, teach very clearly the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The gospels emphasize especially two things about the incarnation: 1) the virgin birth and 2) Jesus’ lowly birth.

The Virgin Birth

When Jesus was born, His mother Mary was still a virgin. Jesus’ conception was not the result of human intercourse, and Mary remained a virgin till after the birth of Jesus.

Luke tells us that when the angel told Mary she would be the mother of the Savior, she asked, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” In response, the angel explained, in this way, what would happen: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:34-35). The Christ child was conceived in the womb of Mary by a wonder.

Matthew tells us that when Joseph heard that Mary was with child, he was of a mind to break off their relationship, assuming she had been unfaithful. He was obviously not the father of this child, and he was ready to end their marriage plans right then, except God intervened. An angel of God came and told Joseph that it was God Himself who had created the life in Mary’s womb: “that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 1:20).

The virgin birth points to the divinity of Jesus. He did not begin to exist at the moment of His conception

and birth, but the eternal Word was made flesh (John 1:18; 8:58). At the same time, Jesus did not cease to be God. The Heidelberg Catechism explains this very carefully by saying that He “took upon Him the very nature of man.” God remained God, but added to His existence, in the Second Person, a human nature.

Because of the incarnation, our Savior could be both human and divine—sharing the very nature of God and at the same time being in every way a human like us, except for sin. If Jesus were born of two earthly parents, then He would have shared in Adam’s fallen nature. But, because He did not have an earthly father, He did not personally share in the guilt or depravity of the human race.

All this qualified Him perfectly to be our Mediator (see Lord’s Day 6), and shows to us why the incarnation is essential to the gospel.

His Lowly Birth

The whole gospel story is one of condescension, God coming down to sinful man. It is a story of grace, of undeserved loving attention from God to sinners. We didn’t climb to Him, but He condescended to us. Immediately after the first sin, God comes to Adam and Eve, as they trembling fled from His presence, with a word of grace and gospel. In Egypt, God remembered His people and sent Moses to deliver them. In the promised land, God came and dwelt among them in the tabernacle. So, in Jesus Christ, God condescends to us, not only to be with us, but to be like us.

“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” (II Cor. 8:9).

The gospel accounts tell, in detail, the story of Jesus’ birth, emphasizing the lowliness, poverty, and rejection of the Savior. He was born in a stable, wrapped in rags, and laid in a manger. There was no room for Him in the inn, because He was despised and rejected of men. The gospels give these details, not to arouse sympathy in our hearts for Him, as though He had it worse than any other baby ever born, but rather to emphasize for us the depths of His condescension. All the lowliness of Jesus’ birth is a sign of His humiliation. In it, we see the weight of sin upon Him, and God dealing with Him

as guilty. This is where our sin took the one who was made sin for us. And this lowliness of His birth would lead, inevitably, to the death of the cross and the pains of hell. The cross cast its shadow, already, over the manger.

The birth of Jesus Christ differed from every other birth in this, that He was born by a choice of His own will. He chose the time, place, and circumstances of His own birth. We have no say in our conception and birth, but He voluntarily came into our flesh. It did not *happen to Him*, but rather He *did it*. In this we see Him busy for us, from the very beginning of His life. As He lay in the manger, He was already laying down His life for us.

The incarnation of Christ is more than a doctrine! It is more than a precise theological understanding and statement! Here, the voice of the self-sacrificing love of God speaks. Here the grace of God is revealed.

What Benefit!

The benefit of Christ's birth comes to me only when I understand the judgment of His becoming man. When He chose to become man, what He chose was the wrath and judgment of God.

For what?

For my original guilt. For my actual sins. For my sinfulness of nature.

By the holy birth of Jesus we are condemned. By His birth Christ shows that there are not just a few blemishes in us that need repair. Rather, we need replacement. Our birth is not good. Our nature is corrupt. We are born guilty. We are sinful in our lives. We deserve death for this.

The benefit comes to me as I personally see why Jesus had to be born.

Because Jesus was conceived and brought forth without sin, I am forgiven and covered of the sins in which I was conceived and brought forth. Generally, our minds are not troubled by our original guilt. Instead, we use it as an excuse for the sins we commit. If I understand original guilt, I see how wretched I truly am in God's eyes. Jesus, because He had no sin, is able to, and does, take on Himself the guilt and corruption with which I am born.

Not only this, but His life of perfection, His active

obedience to the law of God, is also provided as a covering for all the sins of my life. I need redemption not only from human corruption, but from the guilt of all my committed sins. God looks at me in Christ as though I had never had nor committed any sin. He views Christ's perfect obedience and righteousness as mine.

Another benefit is that I have a Mediator. Having a Mediator means there is peace between me and God. As a man, He suffered as my substitute, removing the curse of God from me. Now I am righteous. Now I know God's love. Now there is peace in my soul as regards God's attitude toward me.

One further benefit is that, having a Savior who was made in all points like us, yet without sin, we have a merciful and sympathetic Savior and God. In our lives we will know suffering, we will face strong temptation, we will experience the heavy hand of God on us. Jesus knows all these sorrows, and so we should turn to Him as the One who can help us in our time of need.

What a wonderful, perfectly suited, Savior we have! All as a result of God's grace to us poor sinners. 

Questions for Discussion

1. What is meant by Jesus' humiliation? What belongs to His humiliation?
2. What does the Bible say about those who deny that Jesus is God who came in the flesh?
3. Prove from the Bible that the one who is our Savior had an eternal existence as God?
4. Why is the virgin birth essential to the gospel?
5. How was it that Jesus by His human birth did not participate in the guilt and corruption of humanity? Why is this important?
6. What was unique about the birth of Jesus?
7. Describe the poverty and rejection of Jesus' birth. To what do these point us?
8. Contrast our nature at birth with that of Jesus. What does the sinless birth of Jesus tell us about ourselves?
9. What benefits are ours as a result of Christ's incarnation?
10. How do we by faith personally embrace, not only the fact, but the significance of Jesus' birth?

Life Is Cheap

Killing Newborns...

The London Daily *Telegraph* (March 4, 2012) ran the headline: “Killing babies no different from abortion, experts say.” In Britain, two “medical ethicists,” Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva, associated with Oxford University, have published an article in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* contending that, “Parents should be allowed to have their newborn babies killed because they are ‘morally irrelevant’ and ending their lives is no different to abortion.”

Mariette Ulrich comments in an article on mercator-net.com, “Killing babies is no different from abortion.” Never were truer words spoken: groups seeking legal protection for prenatal life have been saying it (though with the syntax reversed) for decades. The real scary part is that now ‘experts’ are using the argument, not to curb or stop abortion, but to *normalize infanticide*.”

The journal article’s authors maintain that newborn babies are not actual “persons” and do not have a “moral right to life.” The authors maintain that “killing a newborn should be permissible in all the cases where abortion is, including cases where the newborn is not disabled.” Understandably they preferred to use the phrase “after-birth abortion” rather than “infanticide” to “emphasize that the moral status of the individual killed is comparable with that of a fetus.”

The *Telegraph* story quotes Giubilini and Minerva: “The moral status of an infant is equivalent to that of a fetus in the sense that both lack those properties that justify the attribution of a right to life to an individual. Rather than being ‘actual persons,’ newborns were ‘potential persons.’” They explained, “Both a fetus and a newborn certainly are human beings and potential persons, but neither is a ‘person’ in the sense of ‘subject of a moral right to life.’” As to what constitutes personhood, they answer; “We take ‘person’ to mean an individual who is capable of attributing to her own existence some

(at least) basic value such that being deprived of this existence represents a loss to her.”

What gobbledygook! Mariette Ulrich responds in her article: “There’s a significant percentage of the adult population walking around right now that could not tell you (on first reading) what that sentence even means—including me, before I’ve had my morning coffee. Does that make us insufficiently cogent to merit existence?” She adds, “I am at loss to explain why Oxford-linked medical ethicists are any more ‘morally relevant’ than the average newborn baby. My motto is: ‘Every ethicist a wanted ethicist,’ and with ethicists like this, who needs Nazis? But very much like our former fascist foes, these fellows believe that if you repeat a lie often enough, the gullible will buy it.”

“Morally irrelevant”? “No moral right to life”? Only “potential persons”? The Lord Jesus “took them (also infants! MDV) up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:16). Jesus says, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones...” (Matt. 18:10a). What blatant rebellion against God’s holy law: “Thou shalt not kill.” It is not a matter of ignorance, but a matter of willful contempt for God’s holy law! What’s next? Life is cheap!

Killing Patients...

A brief article entitled “Death Knocking,” by Daniel James Devine (*World*, April 21, 2012, p. 66), reports on special medical teams in the Netherlands that make fatal house calls:

If the patients can’t find death, just take death to the patients: That’s the thinking behind the End of Life Clinic that opened in the Netherlands in March. The clinic will send out mobile “Life End” teams at the request of patients who wish to die under the country’s decade-old euthanasia law. The teams will cater to terminally ill patients whose primary care doctors have refused to provide euthanasia for religious, moral, or other reasons.

A patient requesting a visit from a Life End unit—

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consisting of a doctor, nurse, and equipment—can choose between a two-dose lethal injection or a drinkable drug mixture. At least 70 patients contacted the clinic's office within its first month of operation, and its services are free for now, although it hopes insurance companies will eventually pick up the tab.

There are 2,500 to 3,000 cases of euthanasia in the Netherlands annually, representing 2 percent of all deaths in the country, and 1,500 suicides. Petra de Jong, the director of Right to Die—NL, the organization running the clinic, said her workers don't try to change the minds of people who call for advice on committing suicide: "It would be paternalistic." Instead they suggest a list of lethal drugs that people can obtain over the counter in neighboring Belgium.

Here too we see a deliberate trampling upon God's holy law. There is little regard for life, or for God who is the giver of life. That which God calls murder, evil men call compassion and virtue. Life is cheap!

Killing Christians...

A News Brief in *Christian Renewal* (February 29, 2012) reports on a rather surprising article in *Newsweek* by columnist Ayaar Hirsi Ali. The *Newsweek* article contends that a largely unrecognized global war on Christians is underway. "Christians are being killed in the Islamic world because of their religion," Ali states. The News Brief continues:

"It is a rising genocide that ought to provoke global alarm." Ali says that despite the media's reticence to report on the subject, the fate of Christians—and all religious minorities—in the Muslim world is at stake. In Nigeria, the radical Islamist group Boko Haram aims to establish sharia (Islamic law) and has stated it will kill all Christians in the country. In Sudan, tens of thousands of Christians have been displaced from their homes, subjected to targeted killings, kidnapping and bomb attacks. In Egypt, Iraq and Pakistan, Christians face "incipient genocide or ethnic cleansing," and in Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and other formerly "tolerant" countries, Christian persecution has only increased. "It should be clear...that anti-Christian violence is a major and underreported problem," Ali writes. "Instead of falling for overblown tales of Western Islamophobia, let's take a real stand against Christophobia infecting the Muslim world."

Another example of this is to be found in Syria, though you wouldn't know it from most of the media. It seems most of the world, including the U.S. and Canada, is demanding that Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad step down and avoid all-out civil war. Certainly there have been grievous abuses of power in Assad's regime. But Syria has been a refuge for Christians in the Middle East for many years because of President Assad's enforced policy of religious freedom. There are about a million and a half Christian believers—many or most of them refugees from persecution in other Middle Eastern countries—that are living in Syria. And the Islamic militants who are directing the current uprising have already perpetrated atrocities against them.

The Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) recently posted this urgent appeal from Syrian Pastor Serop Megerditchian:

To God's people everywhere: The armed Islamist Opposition in Syria have murdered more than 200 Christians in the city of Homs, including entire families with young children. These Islamic gangs also kidnapped Christians demanding high ransoms. In two cases, after the ransoms were paid, the men's murdered bodies were found. Christians are being forced to flee the city to the safety of government controlled areas. Muslim rebel fighters and their families are taking over their homes. We need your prayers and we need them urgently.

Yes, this is to be expected as the end of all things is at hand. Christ repeatedly warned that His people would be persecuted. The times in which we live are very similar to the days of Noah: "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6:11). Life is cheap!

The supposedly enlightened world comes up with many labels, euphemisms, for this culture of death in which we live: after-birth abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, death with dignity, compassionate exit, ethnic cleansing, family balancing, pregnancy termination. Life is cheap!

Thanks be to God that He has given us new life, everlasting life, through our Lord Jesus Christ! As Jesus spoke to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26). 

An Evaluation of Six Trends in Present-Day Missions (1)

There are trends and errors that affect modern church missions today of which we should be aware. Some of these trends are mentioned, for example, in the writings of prominent church theologians about current and future church missions. One such writer is the late Prof. David J. Bosch, a South African missiologist who became a professor at the University of South Africa in 1971. He has written helpful summaries about the history of missions by the church in the New Testament till the present, but his influential books (*Transforming Missions, Witness to the World*, and *Believing in the Future*) demonstrate in certain places the emphasis and direction that present-day missions has taken and may continue to take. His writings seem to be a good example of what some in the church world would like modern missions to become in order for it to be more numerically successful in both western and eastern regions of the world.

What are these trends and what is our response to them?



First, one of the trends is that modern missions must be “counter-cultural.” Prof. Bosch, in his book *Believing in the Future*, writes in his conclusion that “...a mission... must be counter-cultural...”¹ We agree that proper missions must oppose and be “counter” to the evils and wickedness of culture. The light of the Word of God must expose the wickedness of man as it comes to expression in the cultures of the world and, in the light of that, issue the command to repent and believe in Christ.

¹ David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), Chapter 6, “Conclusion,” pp. 55-62.

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Perhaps a better way to describe the relationship of missions to culture is antithetical. For one thing, this term reminds us that missions is the work of Christ ultimately over against the kingdom of darkness and sin. Moreover, antithetical missions is rooted in the truth of the Word of God, especially the truth that the triune God is the holy and righteous God. Antithetical missions stands for the glory of God over against man’s unrighteousness and ungodliness that come to expression in the cultures of this world. Antithetical missions declares the promise of salvation for believers and their seed in the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom alone is all our righteousness and godliness.

Being antithetical, missions will have its focus, purpose, motivation, and starting point in the glory of God revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ, rather than in the culture whose specific evils a given missionary may be opposing.

In this regard, this antithetical nature of missions may not be allowed to be diluted by the theory of common grace. Common grace establishes a dangerous bridge between the church and the world, and it allows the church in many cases not to be “counter-cultural.” For example, the culture of man has produced drama and the opportunity of man to play sin, another’s sinful nature, and even Christ. Man’s culture has produced democracy and the exaltation of the sovereignty of the individual. The church may not accommodate in its preaching such fundamental errors of man’s culture, but be truly counter-cultural or antithetical. Every step of the way, missions must battle against the world’s culture of man’s supposed sovereignty, righteousness, goodness, and wisdom, and it must battle for the glory of the absolutely sovereign, righteous, wise, and good God in Jesus Christ for His church alone.



Second, it has been taught that modern missions must be “contextual.” Prof. Bosch wrote that “we have, at long last, come to the conviction that missions in the Third World must be *contextual*.”² This is often explained to mean that missions must follow the “incarnational model” of Jesus. Just as the Word of God came into our flesh among the Jewish culture, so the missionary must bring the Word of God into the culture in which he will labor. The missionary must embody the incarnational model of Jesus in his work by living among the people and “just like them” at their level. This push for “contextual” missions even affects the work of Bible translation. It is argued that the translation of the Bible by the church into a native language must be contextual, so that, for example, if a particular culture and language does not have words for bread, sheep, snow, or a patriarchal family structure, then the translation must use terms that are relatively the same and familiar in the native language. As a result, the Word of God must adjust to the context or culture in which the Word is brought and preached. Moreover, “contextual” missions would even determine whether it would be necessary to introduce and teach the Reformed confessions in a particular foreign culture.

The problem with this trend in modern missions is that the focal point of missions is lost. Is the focal point of missions really the context and the people to whom the missionary goes? Although a missionary must obviously understand the culture into which he will bring God’s Word and must live with the people of God in that culture and language, yet must that dictate the content of his preaching? Is not the focal point of missions God and His authoritative Word? Rather than those spoken to, ought not the God who spoke His infallibly inspired Word be the focal and starting point?

A Reformed theologian warned in regards to Bible translation (but which statement also applies to missions) that “the Bible, therefore, should not be reinterpreted so as to make its message suitable to modern culture.”³ We agree that contextualism, with its ideas, must neither govern Bible translation nor govern the missionary’s sermons and instruction. Faithful mis-

sions must not adjust its content to the culture, especially its weaknesses and evils, by changing the message of the Word of God. Rather, let God’s reliable, accurate, authoritative, and necessary Word speak to the people of God in their particular culture and call them to repentance and faith. Thereby and by His Spirit, God will gather out His chosen church from the culturally diverse nations of the earth.

When missions comes with the Word of God, it comes with the Word that is divinely authoritative and always applicable to the people of God in every age and in every culture, just exactly as God has inspired His Word. This is the Word of God that commands men to repent of their sin, including the weaknesses and sins of their own culture. This is the Word of God that applies to man in every age, that will speak to the sheep of Christ in any culture, and that by His grace and Spirit will draw them out of darkness into His marvellous light and under the enjoyment of His gracious care. Therefore, missions is powerful, not by becoming a chameleon to culture, but, in its own distinct colours of God’s sovereign, particular grace, calling men out of the culture of the world of wicked men into the holy life of the kingdom of Christ.



Third, there is now the idea that modern missions must be more and more “ecological.” We are told that “a missiology of Western culture must include an *ecological* dimension.”⁴ Missions must not only be concerned for men’s souls, but also for man’s body and for the home of his body, the earth. Missions must remember that man is body and soul, and so care for both. Being ecological, missions should not only be preaching, but missions *must* also feed the hungry, provide basic health care where it is not affordable or is non-existent, clothe the miserably naked, house the abandoned orphans, bury the dead, assist the reduction in pollution and disease in developing countries, and promote in developing countries greener, healthier, and sustainable living. It is argued that for missions to be successful it must fulfil this ecological dimension of serving man’s earthly needs in order to have any positive effect on his soul for his repentance. It seems that in an age of environmental

² Bosch, pp. 55-62.

³ Jakob van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1978), p. 83.

⁴ Bosch, pp. 55-62.

consciousness and various environmental fads, adopting this all-encompassing ecological dimension to missions seems irresistible.

However, the very fact that the deacons of a calling church also sign the call letter, thus participating in the sending of a missionary to his mission charge, illustrates clearly our conviction that the Bible does require that the church in missions concern herself with the earthly needs of those whom the Lord is pleased to gather by the gospel preaching. Nevertheless, the idea that missions must be more and more ecological seems to promote the idea that the church must consider it to be her calling to have an environmental voice in the world, in governments, and in society. It seems that there is a push to have missions take a lead in the making of this earth a greener place for an earthly kingdom of Christ.

The calling of the church is not social and ecological. Missions is an ecclesiastical work that does not ignore the daily bread that the genuinely poor need (which genuine need faithful diaconal work addresses), but it has as its goal and priority the hearts and spiritual care of God's people. In that way, the church in her work may echo faithfully what the apostle Peter said to the lame man who asked Peter for money at the temple shortly after Pentecost: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have I give to thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6).

This stands in harmony with the truth that the kingdom of Christ is not earthly. He is the head of His church, but Lord over the world. Christ does not call us to establish His kingdom in the world of the wicked, nor in this creation, since that earthly kingdom under the first Adam was lost long ago by the fall. We now pray and labor towards the new creation of the second Adam, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, when He returns bodily at the end of history soon. For that heavenly kingdom the church must do missions. Most certainly, in pursuit of that heavenly kingdom she must be a good steward of her money and resources, and she must use those good gifts of God's creation neither abusively nor wastefully, in keeping with the eighth commandment. However, her goal may not be to have a greener earth so that the kingdom of Christ can be established here and we can live here forever. Our goal is that we may serve the gathering of the church until the coming of Christ again soon.

If missions must have an "ecological" dimension to it, let it then be preached that we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13), sojourning and labouring vigorously in our present, daily callings, as Christ has commanded us, in the blessed hope of the new heavens and the new earth that shall be created after the final appearing of Christ and out of the fiery destruction of this present and old creation (II Pet. 3:10-14). 

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

REV. JAMES LANING

A Critique of "Reformational" Views on Revelation (3)

The God-Instructed Farmer

Where are we to look if we desire to find the laws of God for human culture and society? How does God teach us how to run a business, a government, or an educational institution?

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Previous article in this series: March 1, 2012, p. 248.

Those who embrace "Reformational" theology¹ would point us to the creation. Embedded in the creation itself, they say, is the word of God that teaches us how we are to do these things.

¹ *Reformational* theology is not *Reformed* theology. The former is based on the ideas of Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977), and is promoted by some of the professors at Calvin College, Dordt College, Trinity Christian College, and Redeemer University College.

But what about the Scriptures? The Scriptures, they say, do set forth for us some general information to point us in the right direction. But to discover the specific details as to how to develop human culture, we must turn to the creation, and listen attentively to the message that God tells us through this means.

So how does this instruction get from the creation to us? How do we know what the creation is saying? The Reformationalists maintain that we perceive this intuitively, as we work with the creation, laboring in the midst of human society. The creation speaks in sign language, they say. And we learn better how to interpret these signs the more we get out into society, and get busy working to build the grand structure of human civilization.

The church has historically confessed that God does indeed make Himself known by means of the creation. But this idea of discovering in creation laws for human conduct not found in Scripture is something different. Yet they believe they have found scriptural proof to support it. Let us turn now to consider one of the main passages they cite to prove their position.

Isaiah's reference to a wise farmer

In the twenty-eighth chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah, there is a passage that reformational theologians cite in an effort to prove that God would have us look to the creation to discover the details concerning the will of God for human civilization:

Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rie in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen. This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working (Is. 28:23–29).

This passage, they claim, proves that from the creation we can understand God's word that is telling us things that we cannot know from the Scriptures. Commenting on this section of Scripture, Wolters says:

The Lord teaches the farmer his business. There is a right way to plow, to sow, and to thresh, depending on the kind of grain he is growing. Dill, cummin, wheat, and spelt must all be treated differently. A good farmer knows that, and this knowledge too is from the Lord, for the Lord teaches him. This is not a teaching through the revelation of Moses and the Prophets, but a teaching through the revelation of creation—the soil, the seeds, and the tools of his daily experience. It is by listening to *the voice of God in the work of his hands that the farmer finds the way of agricultural wisdom.*²

Other Reformational theologians have said something similar. Gordon Spykman, who was a professor of religion and theology at Calvin College, wrote a dogmatics, rather late in his life, in which he summarized his views. Commenting on this passage in Isaiah, Spykman has this to say:

Think of Isaiah's parable of the God-instructed farmer (28:23–29). His good insight into plowing and threshing, sowing and harvesting, "comes from the LORD of hosts" who is "wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." We may assume that this farmer works diligently by the light of whatever Scripture he has. But his instruction in agrarian practices is not derived directly from the inscripturated Word. It comes rather from the wisdom of God embedded in seed and soil, which the farmer attains through years of hands-on learning experience.³

This argument is similar to one made by Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), a Dutch theologian who served as a professor first at Kampen Theological Seminary and then later at the Free University in Amsterdam.

² Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 32–33. Wolters is a professor at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario.

³ Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 82.

The following is the explanation Bavinck gives of this passage in Isaiah:

In a sense we can say that also all knowledge of nature and history as we acquire and apply it in our occupation and business, in commerce and industry, in the arts and sciences, is due to the revelation of God. For all these elements of culture exist only because God has implanted in his creation thoughts and forces that human beings gradually learn to understand under his guidance. Scripture itself testifies of this when it says that it is God who teaches the farmer about the way he has to work the fields (Is. 28:24–29).⁴

So is this really what God is teaching in these verses from Isaiah? What does this passage mean, when taken in its context?

A reference to spiritual farming

This text in Isaiah is a parable, as Spykman rightly pointed out. Parables are found not only in the New Testament, but also in the Old. When we come across such a parable, we are to recognize that something earthly is being pointed to as an illustration of some truth concerning the kingdom of heaven. It is this truth about Christ's heavenly kingdom that we are called to take note of and to believe.

The earthly picture speaks of a farmer who learns how to farm. First of all, he learns that he needs to plow the field before he plants the seeds. He does not need to plow forever, but just long enough to prepare the soil. Secondly, he comes to recognize that different plants do better when planted in different ways. Thirdly, when it comes to harvesting the plants, different plants are harvested best with different tools, since some plants require harsher treatment to bring about the necessary separation of the chaff from the grain. These are facts that man has come to know through experience with farming.

The Reformationalists maintain that God in this passage is telling us that His word is embedded in the creation itself, and that by working in the creation we will discover by intuition what this word is saying to us about how to farm, how to run a busi-

⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 341.

ness, and, in short, how to build a glorious city upon this earth.

That, however, is not what this passage is saying. When one reads the entire chapter, he sees that God is not speaking about some supposed calling of man "to develop culture." One whose mind is on carnal things will be inclined to forget that this passage is a parable, and will interpret the text in a carnal way. If, however, we come to this passage with our heart set on heavenly things, we will recognize that the farming that God is speaking of here is of a spiritual nature. The parable mentions an earthly activity to get us to think about a heavenly one.

God's people are like a field with weeds that needs to be plowed (cf. Micah 3:12). Yet God's believing people are not to fear this plowing. God is a wise Farmer who knows how to plow just long enough to prepare the soil to receive seed. Furthermore, God knows how to sow and how to harvest the different kinds of plants. He will execute a righteous judgment in these matters, chastening sometimes more gently and sometimes more severely, precisely as is necessary to separate the chaff from the wheat.

Yet, someone may say, this text does not speak of what God does, but of what someone does who is being instructed by God. Referring to this farmer, the passage says that "his God doth instruct him to discretion." So who is this farmer? Who is this Man who faithfully receives instruction from His God, and farms precisely as His Father has told him to do?

The farmer spoken of here is the same as the sower in the parable of the sower. It is Jesus Christ, as the one sent by God to accomplish His work. Christ was spoken of earlier in the chapter as the precious corner stone, who would build the house of God, executing a righteous judgment against the ungodly in the church (Is. 28:14–17). This illustration then shifts, and the one who before was called the stone is now called the God-instructed plowman, who obeys His Father perfectly, and knows how to prepare the people to receive the word, so that they will bring forth more fruit to the glory of God.

This, in short, is what this text is about. It speaks of how God in and through Christ redeems His people through the executing of His righteous judgment. It

was centrally at the cross that this judgment was seen and that this redemption took place. But there are also judgments of God that come upon His people throughout this life. This text stresses the benefits of these judgments, as illustrated in the earthly activities of plowing and harvesting.

The passage, therefore, is about our bringing forth of spiritual fruit. That, after all, is the fruit that God desires. Recognizing this we can rejoice, even when it is God's will that we are afflicted. We must willingly submit to the plowing, and to being beaten with the rod, knowing that the farmer knows what He is doing. For, indeed, we must confess that "This also cometh forth

from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working" (Is. 28:29).

But is it not true that man, even without the Scriptures, can work with the creation and learn how to farm? Of course it is. But when the natural man knows about agriculture, what he has come to understand is not "God's word" in the creation. The two means by which God is made known must be distinguished from one another. God's word must be distinguished from His works. And, furthermore, God's word can be understood only by one who believes that word.

We are now getting to the heart of one of the central errors of the Reformational movement. That subject, however, will have to be continued next time. 

Rev. Stephen R. Riggs: Missionary to the Dakota Indians

As missionaries labored through the ages, they often faced difficulty convincing the established church to accept new converts as Christians. Differences in race and culture proved to be a stumbling block for churches whose congregations were homogenous in nationality and practice.

Acknowledging that foreign converts could not be expected to relate to the same traditions, missionaries nonetheless realized that they must avoid the temptation to lower the bar. Faithfulness to Scripture needed to be maintained as the standard under which these new churches were formed.

The apostolic church at Jerusalem already faced these struggles. The Jews, who viewed themselves as God's chosen, were sometimes unwilling to accept the

Gentile converts that God was bringing into the church. As recorded in Acts 15, a conference was required to address this matter and to receive reports from the mission field. The reports from Peter and Paul resulted in the church rejoicing in the great things God was doing. At the same time, decisions were made as to what must be taught to and expected of the new converts. We have seen that history repeated through the ages in connection with missionary enterprises.

Stephen Riggs was born just over two hundred years ago, on March 23, 1812. He grew up in Steubenville, Ohio, receiving his instruction from the Latin School of Ripley, Ohio and later at Jefferson College. Following a year at Western Theological Seminary, Riggs was licensed to preach as a Presbyterian minister. He met and married Mary Ann Longley in early 1837.

Soon afterward the young couple was sent by the American Board of Foreign Missions to labor among

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the Sioux Indians at Fort Snelling, Minnesota.¹ The assignment fell under the auspices of the Foreign Mission Board because of the considerable sacrifices required of the missionaries and the fact that little was known of these warring Indian tribes. The Sioux, at the time, were often referred to as “fierce savages.”

After an arduous three-month trip, Rev. Riggs arrived at Fort Snelling in June of 1837. He and his wife spent the summer learning the Dakota language.

In the fall, Rev. Riggs and his wife Mary went to Lac Qui Parle on the St Peter’s River to assist Dr. Thomas Williamson at a small church that had been established two years earlier. Williamson was so impressed with Rev. Riggs’ linguistic gifts that he was moved to recommend that Riggs prepare various translations for religious and educational purposes. Riggs, a faithful preacher and diligent scholar, occupied himself by transforming Dakota speech into a written language and translating some of the books of the New Testament for use by the natives. The church grew from seven to forty-nine members over the next five years.

The labors among the Indians involved tremendous sacrifice for Riggs and his wife. They lived in one room that served as kitchen, bedroom, and nursery. Rev. Riggs’ desk was the lid of the meal barrel. Mary, who had received training as a teacher, was instrumental in the development of schools for the Indian children.

Problems of Commitment

Perhaps more of a disappointment than the living conditions was the lack of support from the calling churches. Their enthusiasm for the work waned as they struggled with embracing the red man as a fellow saint in Christ. Some white settlers also opposed the work. Military men stationed in nearby forts treated the Indians poorly and took multiple Indian wives and mistresses. As a result, little fruit was evident for many years.

Within the calling churches, mission methods were disputed. Some argued that civilizing the tribes should come before the presentation of the gospel. Riggs disagreed. He insisted that the preaching of the gospel was

¹ Fort Snelling is still in existence today as a historical attraction on the Minnesota River in Minneapolis.

the only power unto salvation *and* civilization, writing, “That uncivilized heathen nations should first be civilized, and then Christianized, is a sentiment of the past. Now it is coming more and more to be acknowledged, that the Bible is the great civilizer of the nations.”

This idea was in contrast to the methods of Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries who were present twenty years earlier. Now, the Protestant missionaries were determined to preach to, educate, clothe, and civilize the tribes. Schools were established alongside the churches. The missionaries preached obedience to God’s commandments and insisted that the gospel would bring about a change of life. They refused to receive members into the churches without a godly walk to accompany their confession. This resulted in controversy, especially at one point when a prominent Indian Chief requested membership in the church but refused to give up his multiple wives.

In order to effect this change, Rev. Riggs spent much time trying to understand the religion of the Indians. The Dakotas were very superstitious, viewing every object known to them as having a spirit capable of helping or hurting them, and therefore worthy also of worship.

He listened to their legends and wrote down their stories, not only using them to determine sentence structure and syntax of the language, but, more importantly, to understand their principal gods. He found that their religious understanding involved a mythology very similar to that of the Greeks and Romans and even had corresponding gods. The similarities were so striking that Riggs became convinced that the Dakotas had their origins in Europe.

Yet, in spite of many years of labor, Riggs could not claim that his work was a success. The Dakotas killed his cows, stole his horses and other goods, and even threatened his life. Some were willing to admit that Christianity was true but were not willing to live according to God’s commands. Promises to live a Christian life were forsaken as soon as whiskey was made available at the nearest trading station. The killing, stealing, and polygamy that were part of their culture were more precious to them than the gospel. To his wife, Riggs said, “We have sown our seeds in toil and in tears, but where is the fruit?”

The missionary family realized that only the Spirit of God works true saving faith in the heart of man. Without this work there will be no true confession and no godly life. Salvation is a wonder of grace, truly all of God.

Military Intervention

It was not until the second generation of work with the Dakotas in the mid-1800s that Christian churches began to become accepted. This progress came to a swift halt and seeming end with the uprising of the Sioux and the bloody battles that ensued in the 1860s and 70s.

In 1862 the Dakota Conflict occurred. Indians were adjusting to reservation life and fast becoming an independent and self-supporting people. They were, however, impatient with the government since conditions of the treaties were not being met. Over 4,000 Indians gathered to demand payments that were owed them, without which they would be unable to purchase food. The money was on the way, but the Fort's Commander, unaware of that, dealt harshly with them. In addition, game was sparse, and a group of young Indians unsuccessful in hunting appeared at the home of some white settlers and demanded food. After not getting what they wanted, they killed men, women, and children.

Despite the attempts of some Sioux leaders to stress a peaceful response, other Indians were roused to excitement. It was the beginning of a great massacre, as hundreds of settlers were killed, forts were attacked, and missionaries were forced to flee for their lives. While some Indians came to the aid of the whites, many took to battle and the United States government responded with military action.

After being solicited by the government to serve as Military Chaplain to Indian prisoners, Rev. Riggs seized this opportunity to continue his work. As Indians were brought to trial, Riggs, though sympathetic, was required to find witnesses and translate for the military courts. Over 300 Indians out of the thousands who were imprisoned were sentenced to hang for their direct involvement in the war.

President Lincoln, as Commander-in-Chief, was required to approve these executions. Although busy with the Civil War, he took time carefully to examine

the evidence. At the pleas of a number of missionaries, Lincoln requested a list of names of the prisoners who were directly involved in the murder or abuse of white women. Thirty-nine names were submitted to President Lincoln, and to the surprise and disgust of many of the people of Minnesota, only these executions were approved and all the others commuted. Later, one of the thirty-nine was exonerated, leaving thirty-eight men condemned to death by hanging.

Rev. Riggs and Dr. Williamson took care of the prisoners, translating for them and informing them of what was about to transpire. Fear took hold of those who were facing death.

The missionaries talked with the prisoners about death and sin and the message of salvation through Christ. On December 26, 1862, the largest execution in American history, the mass hanging of 38 Indian men, took place in Mankato, MN, where there remains today a memorial of this event.

Rev. Riggs and three other Presbyterian pastors continued to work with the remaining hundreds of prisoners after the hangings. As the days passed, some of the men became softened by the grace of God. They asked for copies of the Bible. They began to pray and sing hymns. They confessed that their gods had failed them, and they wanted to hear more about the God of Scripture, the only One who could provide comfort in the face of death. After a time, 300 adult Indians who were housed in the prisons made a public confession of their faith in Christ. The missionaries were amazed to see their growth in grace and were impressed with their prayers. They "prayed with such copiousness and fervency as to make it manifest that they are taught of God's Spirit. They pray not only for themselves and absent families but also...for the soldiers who guard them, the officers, the President of the U.S. and also for those who are angry at them and seek their destruction." When they were pardoned by the President, they returned to their homes and reservations and took their new faith with them.

The circumstances at the end of the war, providentially ordained by God, resulted in tremendous fruit. Little did Rev. Riggs realize that the tragedy that forced his family to flee the mission field would be the event that God would use to bring the greatest fruit to his

labors. Churches and schools were established among all the Sioux tribes, and more missionaries were called to assist in the training of native pastors and teachers.

Riggs' wife Mary died in 1869 at the age of 56 after raising eight children. One married a missionary to China, but the majority of the others continued to work among the Indians. Riggs continued to labor among various tribes, side by side with his ordained sons, until his death in 1883. He was 71.

He rejoiced to have been able to confess, "Thus God has been showing us, by His providence, and His grace, that the red men too, may come into the Kingdom."



For Further Reading:

Riggs, Stephen R.; Mary and I: *Forty Years with the Sioux*; 1880; W. G. Holmes. <http://archive.org/stream/maryifortyyearsw00riggrich#page/104/mode/2up>

Woolworth, Alan R. ed.; *Santee Dakota Indian Legends*; 2003; Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe.

<http://stephenriggs.wordpress.com/biography/>

Robinson, Doane; *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*; 1967; Ross & Haines, Inc.

Lambert, John C. ed.; *The Adventure of Missionary Heroism*; 2005; The Vision Forum

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

Living As a Single Christian (1)

With all the important emphasis on marriage and the family in the church we should not neglect those who are single among us. As much as it is true that most of us have the calling of God and in-created need to marry, not all are married. There are several situations in which Christians are single, either by their own choice or by providential circumstances of their life. There are those who are not able to marry because of the special way the Lord made them. There are those who are single because the Lord does not lead someone into their life who is interested in marrying them. There are those who are single in life after the treachery of a spouse divorcing them. Many are left alone after the Lord takes a beloved spouse from them to glory. We must also recognize that there are those who are single by their own choice. These simply do not have the strong desire to be married and are quite content with being single.

Some of the above-mentioned circumstances in life can be the cause of pain and anguish for those in them. For some young people who never experience the excitement and joy of dating, there can be a feeling

of being left out and rejected. They can develop very negative feelings about themselves. They can descend into the depths of despair and even become bitter and angry with God. They see their friends one after another getting married. After these friends are married, even long-time friendships tend to change, and times for fellowship and enjoyment of these friendships become less and less. Those who are not married feel even more alone. In some families younger siblings marry and older ones who remain unmarried might even feel ashamed and bitter and envious. Parents are sometimes greatly concerned about children who are not married, and they may put undue pressure on them to marry at all costs.

More and more divorces are taking place, even within the church. Divorce is often a life-shattering experience. Divorce sometimes takes place among the young who still have much of their lives before them. Some of these enjoyed what seemed at first to be such a happy and exciting marriage, only to have it come to a tragic end in the deep sorrow and anguish of divorce. They may strongly desire to find another partner to fill the void and overcome the pain and rejection of divorce. Often children have to be cared for in a one-parent household, and this can be very difficult and

Rev. denHartog is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

discouraging. Divorced singles often long to find a good father or mother for their children. The world, in most cases, strongly encourages remarriage after the dust settles from a divorce. There are churches that preach very loudly that God does not want any of His people to live for a long time in sorrow. Everyone has the right to be happy, and certainly God wants His children to be happy in life. Our churches believe that remarriage after divorce, as long as the original spouse is still living, is contrary to the Word of God. For divorced Christians, to remain single can be very difficult and attended by many great temptations.

In the church there are also those who must live alone for a long time after the death of a spouse. These are faced with tremendous changes in their life. It is not easy to come home to an empty house. It is not easy to be left with no partner with whom to have fellowship and friendship, with none to serve as a sounding board for discussions of the great issues of life or to give advice, counsel, and support in trials and hardships. The depths of sorrow for some Christians in such circumstances are the evidence of the great joys and blessings experienced in good and faithful marriages.

To be left suddenly alone can be almost unbearable to endure. For some there may be opportunity still to enjoy years of life with another special person that the Lord brings into their life. Others, either because of advanced age or for other reasons, do not, or ought not, consider establishing another marriage.

Some of the above scenarios can lead to sinful responses and courses of action. Young people can become desperate, and in their desperation establish a relationship with someone who just happens to come along in life, even though such a person may be a very poor prospective life partner. These can end up very soon in a situation of trouble and anguish because they are married to the wrong kind of person. It is better not to marry at all than to be married to a worldly and

wicked and irresponsible person. An unequal yoke in marriage is not only forbidden by God but also can be the reason for continual strife and division in marriage and the family.

Being single is not something to be discouraged or ashamed about. The Lord has His good and wise purpose for it in the church. The inspired apostle of the Lord teaches us to honor marriage highly, even teaching in Ephesians 5 that it is a beautiful picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. But this same apostle, in I Corinthians 7, teaches us that “it is good for a man not to touch a woman.” In this chapter of the Word of God the apostle evidently responds to a question posed to him that asked whether it was legitimate

and holy to remain single in life. The apostle of the Lord teaches us that, for some, life without marriage can be good. Paul asserted his own right to “lead about a sister, a wife” (see I Cor. 9:5), but, by a conscious choice and in God-given wisdom, he decided to remain single all of his life. He even says that he wished that all could be as he was. He considered being single to be an advantage because of the special calling of God and the unusual circumstances he would have to face as a missionary.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was unmarried during all of His earthly ministry. There were of course reasons for this. The deepest reasons were related to His work to be the Redeemer of His people. On the other hand, Jesus was made like unto us in all things. May we assume that He had the same human nature concerning which God said at the time of the creation of man, “it is not good for a man to be alone”? Whatever might be the answer to this question, those who find living as single persons difficult have a sympathetic high priest to go to in prayer, one who can be touched with all the feelings of our infirmities and who was tempted in all points even as we are and yet without sin.

It is important to maintain in the church that it can be and is holy for a person to remain single either for part of his or her life or even for all of life. God gives

*...those who find
living as single persons
difficult have a
sympathetic high priest
to go to in prayer,
one who can be touched
with all the feelings
of our infirmities....*

grace to those who are called to live the single life. This grace makes living as a single Christian possible. None who find themselves in this circumstance of life have any reason to despair or to be discouraged. They must not imagine that they have no calling and significance in the church or in life simply because they are not married.

Members of the church must treat single Christians with honor and respect and love. They must be deeply sympathetic to the unique problems and trials of those who are single.

There is no reason for someone to go about in the church attempting to arrange marriages for every single person in the church. Though this can be motivated by good intentions, it can also be very distressing to some

who simply do not have the strong desire even to be married and who are quite content with being single even all their life long.

The whole of the above discussion indicates the need for the church and every pastor of the church to address occasionally issues facing single Christian living.

For some of life's circumstances, living as a single person can be the occasion even for more single-hearted devoted service in the kingdom of Christ. All of us, whether married or single, must make the kingdom central in our lives.

In our next article we want to discuss some practical and spiritual questions related to living as a single Christian. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Congregation Activities

We are thankful to the Lord for the completion of another catechism season. As members of various congregations we appreciate the work of the students and the support of the parents in the past year. As in many of our churches, some of the students each year learn the whole of chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews. This year was no exception, and it should not go unnoticed that they join generations of Protestant Reformed children in our churches who over the years were up to the challenge of accomplishing this memory project. Let us all continue to encourage our children to memorize the Scriptures in the days of their youth, when they have such an amazing God-given ability to do this.

The choir of Grace PRC in Standale, MI invited the members of their congregation, and others

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

from nearby churches, to join them in praise to God in song for their annual Spring Concert on Sunday evening, April 29.

The Men's and Ladies' Societies of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI enjoyed their end-of-season dinner banquet on May 1. Following the dinner, Prof. D. Engelsma spoke to the societies on "The Significance of Herman Hoeksema for the Reformed Faith and the Christian Church."

The Senior and Junior Adult Bible Societies of Hope PRC in Walker, MI met for the last time this society season as a combined society on April 24 to listen to Prof. H. Hanko address them on the topic, "Personal Experiences during the Struggles and Controversy of the Schism of 1953."

On Sunday evening, April 22, the members of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI were invited to remain after their worship service to enjoy their choir's annual Spring Concert.

The ladies of the Doon, IA PRC served as this year's host for the annual Spring Ladies' League Meeting on April 24. Doon's pastor, Rev. D. Overway, addressed the ladies on "Our Psalter: 100 Years of Praise." A dessert social followed the speech.

The Annual Combined Bible Study for our churches in the Chicago, IL area was held at the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN on April 24. Bible study for that meeting centered on Esther 8.

All the men of the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD were encouraged to join their Men's Book Club for discussion on Saturday morning, May 5, at their church office. Plans called for continued discussion on *Resolved*, by Orrin Woodward. The men plan to look at the book *When People are Big and God is Small*, by Edward T. Welch, next.

The congregation of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI got together Saturday, April 28, for their annual outside Spring Cleanup. All

who were interested in helping were invited. Outside work included the areas around the church and the fellowship building, as well as the corner of the property where their parsonage used to stand. We say “used to stand” because the home was torn down a week or so earlier. We can report that by the time the parsonage finally did come down, there wasn’t much of value left in it. Trinity’s members had taken almost everything out, like windows for use in other construction, or doorknobs for a reminder of what used to be. Area fire departments also used the home for training purposes. For the present, the area will become green space, since Trinity has a parsonage a couple of blocks away for Rev. Decker and his family.

The Randolph, WI PRC sponsored a lecture on April 27 at their church. Rev. W. Langerak, pastor of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, made the trip to Randolph to speak on the subject “The Bible’s Identification of Anti-Christ.”

School Activities

The Junior High students of

Covenant Christian School in Lynnden, WA invited their parents, grandparents, and anyone else interested in the school to join them for their Geography Fair on Friday evening, May 4. If you went you would have enjoyed displays, ethnic food samples served by students dressed in (almost) authentic traditional clothing, an ethnic folk-song sing-along, and all kinds of fun and activities for all ages.

The Senior Class of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI invited supporters to join them for a Southern Breakfast treat on April 28 at Covenant. In addition to the standard breakfast items, there were some southern favorites.

The Hope Foundation of Hope PR Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI hosted their annual Skate/Hockey Night on April 28 at Walker Ice and Fitness Center. Open skating and races were from 5-7 P.M. The Junior High hockey game began at 7 P.M., followed by the adult hockey game at 8 P.M.

Young Adult/Young People Activities

The Young Adult Society of the

Hope PRC in Redlands, CA met together on April 20 at their church for a hot dog roast and a scavenger hunt.

The young people and their leaders of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI were invited to the home of Rev. and Mrs. A. Lanning on April 30 for pizza and games, including their annual backyard wiffle-ball game.

Minister Activities

The faculty of the PR Theological Seminary rejoices to inform our churches that they have licensed Mr. Joshua Engelsma to speak a word of edification in our churches. We echo the seminary when we add that we are thankful to the Lord that He has brought the brother to this point in his preparation for the ministry of the gospel.

Rev. G. Eriks, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, declined the call to serve as the next pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI.

And Rev. Doug Kuiper, currently pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC, accepted the call to serve as undershepherd in the PR congregation in Edgerton, MN. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ With praise and thanksgiving to God, we announce the anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

HAROLD and WINNIE TOLSMA,

as they celebrate 40 years of marriage on June 9, 2012.

We are thankful for the years God has given them together, and for the godly instruction they have given us. Our prayer is that our heavenly Father will continue to bless and keep them in His loving care and be with them in the years ahead.

“I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations” (Psalm 89:1).

✿ John and Lorinda Tolsma

Aliyah, Bailey, Silas

✿ Ed and Mandy Tolsma

Luke, Andrew, Michael, Jason, Allison

✿ David and Esther Hollema

Alexander, Zachary, Madison

✿ Frank

✿ Michael and Jenna Brands

Ian, James

Loveland, Colorado

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Crete PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Jozsef Postma and to Mr. Phillip Postma in the passing away of their mother and grandmother,

MRS. BERTHA DE YOUNG.

May the Lord give comfort through His Word: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Rev. Nathan Langerak, President
Bert Worries, Jr., Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thanksgiving and praise to God for His covenant faithfulness, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

JIM and BARB HUIZINGA,

as they celebrate 45 years of marriage on June 16, 2012. We are thankful for their godly example and the instruction that they have given to us over the years. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to bless them with many more years together. Psalm 36:5: "Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds."

- ✿ Michael and Shari Bosveld
Jared, Annica, Katelyn, Justin,
Joshua, Emma
- ✿ Brad and Julie Schwarz
Elyssa, Taylor, Zachary, Madison
- ✿ Joel and Barb Vink
Allyson, Meghan, Ethan
- ✿ Shon and Brenda Griess
Jesse, Amber, Quenton, Anthony,
Brodie
- ✿ Vance and Sue Grasman
- ✿ Tom and Kristin Huizinga
Colton, Brooklyn
- ✿ Brad and Sara Schipper
Caleb
- ✿ Laura Huizinga
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Crete PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. Henry Zandstra, Mr. Steve Zandstra, Mr. and Mrs. Ryan Zandstra, Mr. and Mrs. Brian Lenting, and their families in the passing away of their wife, mother, and grandmother,

MRS. JOANNE ZANDSTRA.

We pray that they may receive strength and comfort from Lord's Day I of the Heidelberg catechism: "What is thy only comfort in life and death? That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ....."

Rev. Nathan Langerak, President
Bert Worries, Jr., Clerk

Call to Synod!!

■ The consistory of Crete PRC hereby notifies our churches that the 2012 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 12, 2012 at 8:30 A.M.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 11, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. Slopsema, president of the 2011 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Wedding Anniversary

■ We praise God for His merciful care of our parents,

CORNELIUS and TRUDA JONKER.

By God's grace they celebrate 65 years of marriage on June 2. We are thankful for their loving care, godly example, and instruction. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless and keep them close in His care. "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).

- ✿ Don and Jacque Jonker
- ✿ Phil and Linda Jonker
- ✿ John and Darlene Graeser
- ✿ Eric and Marilyn Ophoff
- ✿ Bernie and Laurie Kamps
- ✿ Eugene and Sharon Kamps
23 grandchildren
41 great-grandchildren
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Crete PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Adrian Lenting and family, Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Lenting and family, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Lenting and family, Mr. and Mrs. James Lenting and family, and the Bill Lenting family in the passing away of their mother, grandmother, and great grandmother,

MRS. JACOBA LENTING.

May the family find comfort in the words of Scripture, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

Rev. Nathan Langerak, President
Bert Worries, Jr., Clerk

Classis West

■ Classis West of the PRC will convene on Wednesday, September 5, 2012, at the Calvary PRC of Hull, IA. All material for the agenda of this meeting must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than Monday, August 6, 2012. **PLEASE NOTE THE NEW CONTACT INFORMATION OF THE STATED CLERK**, effective July 1: email—doug.kuiper@prca.org. Telephone - (507) 442-4441. Address: 321 Maple St. W, P.O. Box 212, Edgerton, MN 56128. All delegates must inform Calvary's clerk, Mr. Ed Westra, of the details of their travel arrangements and lodging needs. Mr. Westra can be contacted at (712) 439-2235, or ewestra@hickorytech.net. Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

June 2012

Date	Topic	Text
	Nehemiah (5-8)	
June 3	"Building with Sword and Trowel"	Nehemiah 4
June 10	"Ought Ye Not to Walk in the Fear of God?"	Nehemiah 5
June 17	"O God, Strengthen My Hands."	Nehemiah 6
June 24	"Putting Things in Order"	Nehemiah 7