

The Standard Bearer

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Grace Teaches Godliness for All

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

Titus 2:11, 12

The teachings concerning gracious salvation are to be believed! And they are to be lived (Tit. 1:1; 2:1; 3:8)! The previous verses have shown how Christians are to live those teachings (2:2-10). Now (in vv. 11-14) the apostle gives the reason why Christians are to live these teachings, why they are to live in a way that harmonizes with what they believe.

Let us note how the instruction of our text makes a lie of the charge that salvation by grace without works makes one careless and profane and “is a cause of indolence and is injurious to godliness, good morals, prayers, and other holy exercises” (Canons V, B, 6). To the contrary, divine grace teaches the godly life, and it enables one to live godly.

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.

What is the life of this present world?

How the Christian lives is important because he lives in the midst of great ungodliness. In the first chapter Paul gave a brief description of the godlessness of the Cretans of that day. In his letter to the Galatians Paul used similar language. He wrote, “our Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal. 1:3, 4). The Greek words imply an ever-increasingly evil world. Our present world is also evil.

Those who have been graciously saved from their sins still live in this world. Grace does not take them out of it. They are in it, but not of it. Briefly, we note that, while they are not to live in harmony with the present world, neither are they to live isolated physically from it. They are to live out the teachings of sovereign grace while in this world. And the reason why they are to do so is that the nature of the grace that saves them teaches a specific lifestyle of godliness.

The “present world” (literally, the “now age”) is that which has been since Adam’s fall into sin. When he uses the word “age,” Paul is looking at the world from the viewpoint of the history that characterizes it. Further, by calling it the “present” age he implies that there is an-

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other to come. Of that which is to come, Paul speaks in the next verse. In fact, he shows that God's grace gives us an anticipation and a blessed hope for the appearing of glory in Jesus.

That which characterizes the present world is "ungodliness and worldly lusts." "Ungodliness" is just that—no awareness of God. The absence of an awareness of God means that there is no consideration of His honor, of His law, and of His justice. Concern for God is replaced with a great concern for self—self-centeredness. What I feel and what I think become controlling elements in my life. It may be expressed as a thinking about what other people might think, but it is ultimately a great concern for self. There is no concern about what God thinks of me and of my actions.

Where there is ungodliness (no awe or reverence for God), "worldly lusts" express themselves freely. The lack of the fear of God results in unbridled lust and excess. This is what Scripture calls licentiousness and lasciviousness. It is any excess that dominates and controls our thinking. Whereas a desire may not be wrong in itself, *worldly* desires and cravings are always for the things of this world as ends in themselves. Such desires are to be controlled and are not to control us. Desires will control and rule us when there is no fear of God.

The present age is characterized (and increasingly so) by man's unrestrained desire for what God has forbidden. Natural man seeks to satisfy the evil desires of his flesh.

What does divine grace teach?

There are certain things that will characterize the life of all those who are the object of God's grace.

First, they will deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. They see the tremendous importance of self-denial. If anyone will come after Jesus, one of the first things he must do is "deny himself" (Matt. 16:24). The reason this is necessary is because the sinful nature we have as those represented by Adam is ever present with us. It is a nature against which we have to struggle all our life long and it is a depravity that always cleaves to us (Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 56 and 126). Out of this nature comes no good thing. All of its desires are sinful. Hence, all those who are born again realize that they have to deny themselves.

Second, God's grace teaches the Christian to be "godly." This is a most wonderful concept. It means that one lives aware of God's presence, so that he lives as before the face of God. It is not to be afraid or scared of Him, but to be awed by the knowledge of His love. Amazed that such divine love would be given to me, I am moved to render grateful returns of ardent love to Him who first manifested so great a love to me. This is what it means to live piously and reverentially, to serve Him dutifully, to be devoted to Him and His honor and to His Word and service.

Also, divine grace causes me to live "righteously." This means to be observant of God's commands, following God's law rather than being influenced by the ungodly world or doing what I want to do. It means that I strive to conform my thoughts and desires, my words and actions, to loving service of God. Instead of being self-centered, those who live righteously are those who are governed by what God requires.

Finally, grace leads one to live "soberly." Spiritual sobriety is to be in control of self, self-disciplined. The sober Christian is well aware of his sinful desires, but he finds in the knowledge of God's undeserved love the power to live soberly, holding his sinful desires in check. To paraphrase Martin Luther, "We cannot stop birds flying over our heads, but we can stop them from nesting in our hair."

The power to live godly in this present world is the grace of God

The "grace of God" is God's undeserved love for sinners. Grace is a great power, a power that saves the recipients from their sin and makes them beautiful as He is. Grace brings salvation—always; it saves. There is no non-saving grace of God! Divine grace effects full and free salvation in Jesus Christ.


Grace brings salvation "to all men." This cannot mean that every human is saved, for then there would not be a hell. Rather, it means that all kinds of men are saved (the various kinds of people he had referenced in the previous verses): old and young, male and female, free and slave, rich and poor. Salvation is not limited to one nationality, nor to one social class.

This grace that brings salvation to all kinds of men has "appeared." In the old dispensation God's grace was

limited to the Jews, the physical seed of Abraham. But in Jesus Christ's pouring out of His Spirit, the gospel of sovereign grace saves men out of every nation, tribe, and tongue.

The appearance of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ teaches us to live godly in this world. This is true because the salvation that God gives puts us into union with Jesus. That is why salvation by grace consists of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of righteousness, along with the right to eternal life in glory. Salvation by

grace is also the power of sanctification, enabling us to do good works. Gracious salvation transforms, enabling us to live a transformed life. The cross of Christ is the power that changes hearts and lives. We are born again; we are made new creatures.

Do you know this grace of God that saves in Christ Jesus? This salvation is for everyone who believes, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free. This great salvation effects changes already in this present age. It enables us to deny ourselves and to live godly. 

Bavinck? Yes. Hoeksema? No. (1)

As stated in two previous articles, we intend, eventually, to offer a brief analysis of an article found in the *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, volume 22, 2011 (*MAJT* 22) entitled "Calvin's Treatment of the Offer of the Gospel and Divine Grace," by J. Mark Beach, a professor of Mid-America Seminary.

But before we do that, we wish to draw your attention to a couple of other articles in recent issues of this *Journal*.

The first is "Not Subtle Enough: An Assessment of Modern Scholarship on Herman Bavinck's Reformulation of the Pactum Salutis Contra 'Scholastic Subtlety'" (*MAJT* 22, 2011), by Dr. L. R. O'Donnell III. The other is "Covenant and Election in the Theology of Herman

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2013, p. 220.

Bavinck" (*MAJT* 19, 2008), by Dr. C. Venema (a professor of Mid-America Seminary).

It is not our intention to write in-depth critiques of either of these carefully-crafted articles. Not that it might not be profitable to do so, but such a critique would be of a more academic nature and fit better in our own *Theological Journal*.

Our purpose in calling attention to these two articles is simple. Both have to do with Bavinck and his view of the covenant. And in both it becomes plain that neither writer wants to allow this fellow named H. Hoeksema, nor for that matter his theological disciples, to be counted in the line of the covenant perspective of the honored and esteemed H. Bavinck.

Bavinck's covenant view? To be honored.

Hoeksema's? No, never.

This is not so difficult to demonstrate from the articles, as we shall see.

But before we do so, let me say that I had begun to wonder whether I was not becoming a bit paranoid.

Two years ago we picked up a volume of selected writings by a certain Dr. W. Young entitled *Reformed Thought*. It proved a stimulating read. Young is of vintage Presbyterian convictions. What especially caught our attention was a chapter entitled "Historic Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism" (cf. *SB*, vol. 88, Feb. 1–March 15). There, and again in later chapters, we came across the same interesting (and, I must admit, disappointing) perspective we now come across in the *MAJT*.

Though Young did not have much to say about Bavinck and his covenantal view, when Bavinck was mentioned, he was put in the best

of lights. A theologian whose covenant view was to be distinguished from Abraham Kuyper's. Let's focus on the differences! But when it came to Hoeksema, sharpest of criticism directed towards his views. Let's focus on the similarities!

This second fellow to be put not only in the camp of the neo-Calvinists, but also banished to the camp of the hyper-covenantists.

Do not misunderstand me.

We are not complaining that theologians speak critically of Hoeksema and his views. Dr. Young and others have the perfect right to take sharp issue with Hoeksema on whatever doctrine they wish, especially if they are convinced that Hoeksema's views are somehow unscriptural or go contrary to the creeds and historic Reformed doctrine. Just as I reserve for myself the right, and even the calling, to take sharp issue with Young, or even the venerable Luther himself, if I am honestly convinced of the same concerning them on a doctrine.

If you cannot stand the heat of theological give and take, then you best get out of the theological kitchen.

But that Hoeksema, for his view of the covenant and of how believers are to view their children (as having spiritual life from little on) should be banished to the camp of the hyper-covenantists, whereas Bavinck, when it comes to his covenant view, is spared such an 'endorsement' is another matter.

As if, when it comes to the covenant of grace, there is some great disparity between Hoeksema's view and that of Bavinck.

Really? Truthfully?

On the issue of common grace—disparity, and in the most fundamental way. Or, again, on the issue of the covenant of works—little in common.

But when it comes to the main lines of Bavinck's and Hoeksema's covenantal doctrine as it pertains to the life of God-triune Himself and then as it governs God's relationship with believers? The view of the one to be acknowledged as "solidly Reformed," and that of the other not? The one to be banished to the camp of the "hypers," the other not?

Come now.

To be sure, Hoeksema did not simply regurgitate Bavinck's covenant view, taking it over 'lock, stock, and barrel.' He offered his own refinement of the *pactum salutis* notion. True enough. But as to the main lines of the doctrine of God's everlasting covenant as it finds its source in God-triune's intra-personal life as a life of fellowship first of all, and then the covenant of grace flowing out of, being a revelation of, that inner, personal, Trinitarian bond and tying in closely with the elect and their election, who can miss the striking similarities between the two?

And, in addition, an emphasis on the covenant's unconditional character both as to its establishment and its maintenance.

Two Hermans of the same convictions.

As one of them stated, "The covenant of grace is the channel by which the stream of election flows towards eternity."

Which Herman was it?

It could have come from the pen

of the one as well as the other. This was Hoeksema's language as well as Bavinck's.

There can be little doubt where Hoeksema found the main lines of his covenant view, namely, in Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*.

That should not be so hard to see.

Unless, of course, one does not *want* to see that.

And it is in that direction that the evidence in the *MAJT* points.

Relying on subtleties and nuances that would make the scholastics of old proud, Reformed writers are doing their best (worst?) to drive a wedge between Hoeksema's covenantal views and those of Bavinck.

One wonders, in the name of 'nuance,' why?

Later we intend to come back to further comments made by Dr. Young relating to the issue of "hyper-covenantism." Our reason is, he lays at its door a large measure of the guilt of the great apostasy that devoured Abraham Kuyper's denomination (the GKN) in the century past.

No small charge.

And he may be right.

'Father Abraham' Kuyper's covenant view largely to blame for the deadness that came to infect and kill the life and witness of the GKN in the twentieth century—that is the assessment of many.

To which we respond: Maybe it was. Maybe it wasn't.

Or maybe it was something else also? Maybe it was largely due to his...?

But this is the more immediate question: What about Bavinck's

covenant view? Is it to be put into the same camp as Kuyper's view? And is Bavinck's view to be charged then with the same evil, the same faith-stifling, life-killing virus?

If not, why not?

And if Bavinck's view is exempt from such a charge, why isn't Hoeksema's?

Questions that certain Drs. of Divinity should consider!

Something to which we intend to return.

But first, as we stated, there are a couple of articles in recent *MAJTs* that we want to comment on, articles that make plain there are those who are interested in driving as large a wedge between Bavinck's covenantal doctrine and that of Hoeksema as they can.

Apparently they do not want any to conclude that when it comes to the doctrine of God's covenant of grace, Bavinck's and Hoeksema's are closely related.

One such theologian is Dr. O'Donnell III, as becomes plain in his article "Not Subtle Enough" (*MAJT* 2011).

O'Donnell's article is in the main occasioned by a dissertation written in 1990 by a certain Bertus Loonstra on the *pactum salutis*, in which dissertation Loonstra summarizes Bavinck's formulation and then "...criticizes Bavinck for allegedly opening the door to extreme formulations of the doctrine" (*MAJT* 2011, p. 89).

Note the phrase "extreme formulation." When Reformed theologians use that phrase these days, we need not guess who might be one of those identified with the adjective

"extreme." Yes, per usual, this Hoeksema fellow, though Loonstra lists Schilder and Heyns as well. Loonstra charges Bavinck with "ontologizing" the covenant, that is, grounding it in God's nature and triune-being, which Loonstra considers to be grave error.

What is significant is that O'Donnell is not happy with Loonstra's conclusion. Not because he is not convinced that Hoeksema (along with Schilder and some others) are "guilty" of this "ontologizing" of God's covenant—he is, thoroughly. And not because he is not convinced that to "ontologize" God's covenant is grave, even fatal, theological error—he is, just like Loonstra.

But because O'Donnell will not have this unflattering label attached to Bavinck's covenantal description of God triune, and as a result, being charged with being the father of this 'grievous' view taught by others down the road.

Hoeksema's view and that of others so labeled? Oh, yes. But not Bavinck. Bavinck was too 'nuanced' to have been 'guilty' of this view.

Wherever it was that Hoeksema might have gotten his covenant view, it was not from Bavinck.

This is O'Donnell's thesis. He seeks to distance Bavinck's 'well-nuanced' covenant view (due to his 'subtle' covenantal distinctions) as far from the covenant views of Hoeksema and these others as possible.

According to O'Donnell, the trouble with Loonstra and some others (who obviously see this undeniable connection between Bavinck's and Hoeksema's view) is

that they were *not subtle enough* (hence, the title of the article) in discerning the distinctions between Bavinck's 'well-nuanced' view and those of these later Reformed theologians. If they had, Loonstra and others would never have made the blunder of charging Bavinck with being the theological predecessor of Hoeksema, Schilder, and others when it comes to the covenant.

Such is O'Donnell's contention.

Why does O'Donnell consider this "ontologizing" of the covenant, grounding it in God's own nature and triune being, so serious an error? What dangerous leaven is he convinced it contains?

In O'Donnell's own words, such a view "...when pressed to its logical conclusion, would deny the contingency [!] of creation and the pure grace [!] of the re-creation [the salvation of the world through the redemption of man]." In other words, he views it as being an impingement on the sovereign freedom of God.

If the essence of the covenant is God's own inner-trinitarian life, then He is compelled of inner necessity to work the covenant of grace in a certain way, along certain lines. It is all logically pre-determined. Scholasticism rules again. And then what choice does God have in the matter? It all flows inevitably, necessarily, from His inner essence. Then where is Divine freedom and free grace?

Personally I am of the opinion that what's behind O'Donnell's great grievance with Hoeksema's covenantal view in the name of protecting the freedom of God really has to do with seeking to protect a notion

of God and covenant that would allow for paradoxes when it comes to God's decrees and works. As if the only notion (theology) about God that is to be countenanced is one that preserves this precious Van Tilian paradox mentality that has so captured Reformed "theologizing" these days.

This 'ontologizing' of the covenant would rule out justifying paradoxes in the name of Divine freedom.

But that is another matter.

Some may charge us with being too suspicious these days.


And yet, on this issue, we don't think so.

Regardless, O'Donnell, we are convinced, is wrong. Not because he and others apply to Hoeksema's covenantal view the word 'ontological' (though we have little fondness for this philosophic word with its implied charge of scholasticism,

which is undoubtedly why it was chosen), but because they charge Hoeksema's view (and *Bavinck's as well*, whether O'Donnell wants to acknowledge it or not) with impinging on the freedom, the *sovereign* freedom, of God.

A valid charge?

Hardly.

Next article we will explain why not and then make some remarks on Venema's article as well. 

LETTERS

Polytheism...or Pluralism?

I have a question pertaining to Rev. Spronk's article on "The President's Polytheism" (Feb. 1, 2013). Wouldn't it be more accurate to identify President Obama's religious perspective as pluralistic rather than polytheistic? Religious pluralism is the view that all religions are equally valid. According to religious pluralists, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism, et. al., are all equally worthy, even equally true religions. In President Obama's "New Beginning" speech in Cairo, he said:

People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind and the heart and the soul. This tolerance is essential for religion to thrive, but it's being challenged in many different ways. (Remarks by the President on A New Beginning: Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt, June 4, 2009.)

President Obama identifies himself as a Christian (monotheistic), but embraces religious tolerance. Wouldn't this perspective be religious pluralism? Are polytheism and pluralism distinctively different? I fear that religious pluralism might be the greater threat to Christianity today.

Jane Woudenberg
Hudsonville, MI


Response:

It would indeed be accurate to characterize President Obama's religious perspective as pluralistic. And it is indeed true that religious pluralism is a serious threat to Christianity today. My intention in the article to which you refer, however, was to address the matter from a little different perspective. I pointed out that there are "different forms of polytheism" and that Obama's is "the more subtle form in which he does not personally believe in other gods, but he tolerates the religions of others...even worships with them."

You are right, Obama claims to be a Christian. But the words of Elijah on Mt. Carmel come to mind: "How long halt ye between two opinions?" One who is committed to the one true God must reject both the existence of any other gods and the validity of worshipping them. With Obama were representatives of Presbyterian churches, Jews, Muslims, and Sikhs, and he stated that he would have welcomed others. His declared monotheism, I said, is "not the monotheism demanded by and defined by Scripture." Scripture "forbids the toleration of other gods and requires the rejection and condemnation of them."

At the interfaith prayer meeting, was Obama doing nothing more than practicing a pluralistic approach to the validity of other religions? My point was that it was more serious than that. Perhaps those who attended the prayer service were not at that point a whoring after

other gods, but “they did play footsy with those gods.” “By spiritually flirting with the gods of other religions, these professing Christians did not practice true monotheism as it is defined by God in Scripture. They did not break down the altars of the other gods by condemning those other gods and testifying plainly there is only one God.... I am not arguing that the President

needs to use his position as president to declare the gospel. But we do need to understand that his presence at the interfaith prayer meeting as a professing Christian was the horrible sin of spiritual unfaithfulness to the one true God.... We need to understand that tolerating other gods is a subtle but deadly form of polytheism”—a spiritual flirting with other gods. 

The Reformed Worldview: Truth and Its Consequences (2)

Introduction

We have seen that our own history as Protestant Reformed Churches demands the development of the Reformed worldview. That is necessary in light of the false accusation often brought against us that we hold to a world-flight mentality that would cause us to withdraw from any active engagement with the world in which we live.

Our own history demands development of the Reformed worldview, secondly, because the erroneous idea of common grace underlies much of what is purported to be a Reformed worldview.

There is one man who has been especially influential in this common grace mentality. Dr. Abraham Kuyper’s philosophical (not biblical and exegetical) development of his doctrine of common grace had a profound effect upon the thinking of many in Reformed churches.

Many in the nominally Reformed camp seem to think that the only alternative to a world-flight mentality is to embrace the idea of God’s common grace.

Because of the breadth of Kuyper’s influence, my

intention is to treat more carefully Kuyper’s view as I develop in future articles the history of the concept *worldview*.

In the words of Abraham Kuyper himself, “in the world we should realize the potencies of God’s common grace.”¹ He explains that, besides a particular grace that works salvation, there is “also a *common grace* by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rests upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator.”²

What governs our relationship to the world, therefore, is “the recognition that in the whole world the curse is restrained by grace, that the life of the world is to be honored in its independence, and that we must, in every domain, discover the treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and in human life.”³ Thus Calvinism is “to claim for itself the glory of possessing a well-defined principle and an all-embracing life-system.”⁴

Peter Heslam, in his examination of Abraham Kuyper’s *Lectures on Calvinism*, makes the consid-

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Previous article in this series: January 1, 2013, p. 163.

¹ Kuyper, Abraham, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1931), 31.

² *Ibid.*, 30.

³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

ered judgment that “Kuyper’s treatment of traditional Reformed doctrine amounted to a radical reinterpretation and reapplication of its central tenets.... Thus the doctrine of common grace, which is not a major element in traditional Calvinistic theology, became, under the influence of Kuyper’s objectives, a doctrine of overriding and central importance.”⁵

Heslam goes on to explain:

...Kuyper held to the radical distinction between God’s work in Christ and the work of human beings in culture. Together with his pietistic contemporaries, he held that the whole of creation, including human nature, are fallen and perverted, but he opposed their attempts to advocate cultural withdrawal, claiming that Christianity (particularly in its most advanced, Calvinistic form) was the very means by which culture could be transformed according to God’s ordinances. Common grace served as the theological justification for this argument, providing as it did the necessary bridge across the gap created by the antithesis between the world corrupted by sin and Christ’s work of re-creation.⁶

...The doctrine of common grace, which stood in close association with belief in the cosmic scope of creation, fall, and redemption, provided him with the only sound solution to the problem of Christianity and culture, and supplied an incentive and justification for active Christian pursuit of cultural renewal.⁷

Given the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, therefore, it belongs to our calling not only to point out the errors of common grace—which have colossal significance in one’s perspective of the world and how to live in relationship to the world—but also, as those who reject that unbiblical teaching, to develop positively a biblical and Reformed worldview.

But not only is it true that our own history demands development of the Reformed worldview; it is also important, especially in light of the continual development of sin in the world, that we understand our calling as God’s people.

The world is increasingly moved by the spirit of an-

⁵ Heslam, Peter S., *Creating a Christian Worldview, Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 259-260.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 268-269.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 270.

tichrist. The lives of God’s people are more and more challenged. As Scripture makes clear, we are involved in a spiritual warfare.

The question “How then shall we live?” becomes an increasingly urgent question for us to face. It is a question that demands an answer with application to every aspect of life. Because the simple fact is—as Arthur F. Holmes points out in his foreword to David K. Naugle’s book *Worldview: The History of a Concept*—“... Western civilization has become thoroughly secularized; Christianity is regarded as largely irrelevant (or ought to be) to culture and science and learning, reduced to a private and inward affair.”⁸

It is critically important that we understand the deeply anti-Christian nature of the world in which we live, lest we ourselves be swept away by the deceitfulness of the world. When John writes in I John 5:19 under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that “the whole world lieth in wickedness,” that has to affect the way in which we view that world. And when Paul writes (Col. 2:8), “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ,” he is warning us that there is a particular perspective that we must have, guided by the rudiments or the fundamental principles of Christ, lest we be consumed by the rudiments of the world.

Our God-rejecting and Christ-denying culture, led by the prince of this world, Satan, the great adversary of the church, would silence us. But our lives as Christians may not be brought to silence. Our faith must not be reduced to an inward “spirituality,” or a simple Sunday observance of religious practices. Because we are those who represent Christ and whose lives are *in* Him, His glory must be seen in us. We have been recreated to show forth His praise. That which marked the early New Testament church as standing out in stark contrast to the world out of which they had been called must also be seen in us.

What Is a Worldview?

As we approach this study of the Reformed world-

⁸ Naugle, David K., *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), xiv.

view, considering the truth and its consequences, defining our terms is important.

While I intend to include in future articles an overview of the historical development of the concept, I will define *worldview* simply as a comprehensive view of the world and how we ought to live in and relate to this world.

A worldview, therefore, is always guided by a particular *way of thinking*. Abraham Kuyper's worldview was guided by what I referred to as his "common grace mentality." The worldview of many unbelievers is guided by their exaltation of the human mind, even of science falsely so called (I Tim. 6:20). And in the evangelical church community, many would be guided by a very simplistic and less than comprehensive "what would Jesus do."

When we expand upon the term *worldview* and add the adjective *Reformed*, we are speaking about the worldview that is informed by the wisdom of Reformed theology—which is the truth of the Word of God—and therefore guided by and consistent with Reformed thought.

To the Protestant Reformed believer there is another important element we must not overlook.

The truth of God's covenant, and a proper understanding of covenant theology, is important to an informed and proper Reformed worldview. We regard the truth of the covenant as having a central place in Scripture and as basic to the Reformed faith as pertains to both doctrine and life. As the doctrine of election is the heart of the church, and the cross (the truth of Christ's atonement) is the heart of the gospel, so a proper understanding of the covenant is the heart of all true religion.

For that reason, when we consider the necessary foundation of the Reformed worldview, we have to understand the place of the doctrine of the covenant in that Reformed worldview.

Our Approach

The proliferation of books in the past 25 years treating a Christian worldview shows a wide diversity in approach and content. In taking up this subject for the *Standard Bearer*, probably the most difficult task

I face is trying to decide what to treat under this heading.

Although in the development of the Reformed worldview other views must be taken into account, it is not my purpose to critique in any depth other philosophical worldviews, whether those of post-modernism, secular humanism, naturalism, nihilism, or Islamic theism. There are other books that do so, even if not from a Reformed position, including David A. Noebel's *Understanding the Times* and James W. Siré's *The Universe Next Door*.

I will have enough just to develop positively the biblical perspective that must define our Christian calling. In our pluralistic culture it would take volumes to address all the various errors. We live in an age not unlike the period of the Judges, when every man did that which was right in his own eyes. The result is the moral confusion and even chaos seen today in every aspect of society, among both rich and poor.

We must face the question, standing before God, His Word, and our Reformed confessions, "How are *we* to live?"

Especially important it is that we face that question when we realize that Satan himself seeks to seize the *minds* of men and women. The clash of worldviews is simply an expression of the ongoing historical and spiritual battle of Genesis 3:15.

It is my intention, after this introduction, to treat the following:

1. The historical development of the concept of a worldview.
2. The necessary foundation of the Reformed worldview, including the importance of Reformed doctrine, the doctrine of the covenant, the doctrine of the antithesis, and the development of sin.
3. Specific applications of the Reformed worldview, treating such topics as education, the Christian view of labor, the Christian view of personal finance (stewardship), the Christian view of government, the Christian view of war—to mention a sample.

All, God willing. 

Cross-Economic Giving (2)

A ready cheerfulness to give (II Cor. 9:7) and a giving according to how God has prospered us (I Cor. 16:1-2) are important elements in the believer's giving to needy causes, especially in the church. But are these the only elements in the good giving of benevolence or other gifts, especially to fellow saints who live on the poorer side of an economic gap? In connection especially with missions in developing countries, it should be understood that also the exercise of godly wisdom is an important part of proper cross-economic giving.

Wisdom is the virtue of knowing the true God. In that right knowledge of God, wisdom does things in the right way according to God's commandments. Wisdom works towards the best goal, which is the praise and glory of God.

God demonstrates His wisdom when He gives us the riches of His truth in Christ Jesus through the means of the preaching of the gospel. This shows that the best way for us to know and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ is under the preaching of His Word. Our wise God works our salvation in this way so that none of us "should glory in His presence" and so that, when we glory, we "glory in the Lord" (I Cor. 1:29, 31). Thus, God gives us poor sinners the wealth of His salvation in the best way for the best goal of His own glory and the praise of His glorious grace.

Similarly, our giving to the needy should be exercised in the best way to the goal of the glory of God. Rather than becoming a stumblingblock with regard to the preaching or a cause for problems, our giving should serve their life of thankfulness unto the Lord in all areas of their life. Wise giving must have as its first priority the spiritual well-being of the receiver unto the glory of God.

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Wise giving is emphasized in connection with the work of the deacons in the church. This is taught in the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons, which is used when elders and deacons are installed into church office. In the explanation of the work of the deacons, the Form points out, on the basis of Scripture, that the deacons must use "discretion and prudence" in the distribution of alms only on legitimate objects of benevolence. The exercise of discretion and prudence is necessary in order to prevent any misuse or abuse of benevolence and so that the distribution of the mercies of Christ may serve its good goal in the hearts and lives of the genuinely needy.

This exercise of wisdom applies not only to the work of a diaconate in its congregation and local region, but also to its work through its missionaries and its contact with diaconates of sister-congregations in cross-economic, cross-cultural, and international relationships. And just as the exercise of wisdom is necessary in the work of deacons in cross-cultural, cross-economic situations, so also is it necessary for the individual believer to exercise wisdom when he may have opportunity to give in various ways to fellow saints in a poorer country.

Cross-economic giving with wisdom will recognize and submit to God's providence that sets the reality in life that some of God's people do not have and will probably never have access to the level of health care that exists in wealthier, western nations. It is easy for those in wealthier countries to observe those in a poorer country and quickly to conclude that, since the people of that developing country have less wealth and prosperity, they are automatically and always genuine objects of benevolence. That would not be a correct conclusion, since we believe that God in His providence distributes daily bread according to His wisdom, so that some have more and some much less, according to their divinely-determined economic level of living. One whom we might judge to be an object of benevolence in

a wealthy nation with a need for daily bread might not be a benevolence case in a poorer nation.

Cross-economic giving with wisdom will reckon with the reality of wage differences, annual incomes, recessionary cycles, calamities, governments, persecution, class oppression, and other factors. We need to understand as best we can the providentially-determined economic disparity that might exist among God's people internationally. We need that information so that we can understand the impact that a well-intended \$50 gift might have on someone whose daily wage may be only \$5. This awareness of how massive a cross-economic gap can sometimes be will help the more wealthy givers to avoid a problem in which their cheerful generosity might easily far exceed the actual need and, as a result, cause some unintended harm.


Cross-economic giving with wisdom should also reckon with the fact that the saints in poorer nations have an obligation to keep the fourth commandment to their utmost to support the ministry of the Word of God and the seminary schools, as well as their own poor. This is their duty according to the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 38. Our giving cross-economically should not become an intruding wedge between the people of God and their sacred duty to give for the support of their own pastors and to their poor to the utmost of their ability and with cheerfulness. Cross-economic giving with *wisdom* will help the saints in their kingdom obligations, not become a hindrance to the work of the local church or the calling of the believer.

We may be thankful that the King of the church provides the gifts of deacons to His church in every nation where He gathers her. He provides to His faithful churches men of wisdom and understanding in the office of deacon. These men, whom the Holy Spirit endows with the gifts of compassion, diligence, and wisdom, know the cultural and economic times in which they live, know how human nature operates in those economic situations, and know what to do. Deacons are the great help that Christ has given to His church catholic so that believers may be guided, instructed, and encouraged to act wisely and orderly also in cross-economic giving.

Now, in cases where a missionary is sent to a poorer

nation and at first there is no diaconate, the Lord may raise up under his preaching and office men who have the gifts to become deacons. Their wise input about questions of benevolence and financial assistance will be needed by the missionary as he administers benevolence in behalf of and in consultation with the diaconate of his calling church. This illustrates the point that the exercise of wisdom in cross-economic giving, by an individual or a diaconate, to a church or individuals in a poorer country, will require some information and input from the local deacons, foreign missionaries, diaconates of calling churches, and mission committees. These men have the information, knowledge, and experience of the realities of the cross-cultural and cross-economic situation. These men will know and can tell you very quickly and accurately by e-mail or by a telephone call whether there is a need for benevolence or individual gifts as a result of a storm or some other physical disaster that has affected a developing country in which we have missionaries, mission contacts, or sister churches. The input and information from those 'eyes' and 'ears' in the cross-cultural and cross-economic situation will help to prevent misuse and abuse of the benevolence or love-gifts of God's people, and it will direct those gifts in the best way to the best goal.

There are encouraging examples of this wise, informed, wisely guided, cross-economic giving. In these examples, wisdom was exercised carefully by churches and by individual believers in their significant monetary gifts for the earthly support and, most importantly, the spiritual benefit of those on the poorer side of a cross-economic gap who needed benevolence or could truly benefit from some financial assistance. That kind of cheerful, generous, and wise cross-economic giving needs to be encouraged. That kind of giving will be of lasting and edifying help to the saints on the other side of a cross-economic gap for their work in the service of Christ and His truth in their land.

Our goal is that our giving may indeed reflect to fellow saints in need the mercy of the Lord, so that they glory never in man, but always in the Lord alone, whose mercy endures forever. Our aim in wise cross-economic giving is that the saints, in whatever economic situation they may be placed by God, may glory in Him alone for the glorious riches of salvation in Christ to His poor sinners. 

The History of the Office of Elder (5)

Restored During the Reformation Era

We are currently examining the history of the office of elder after the time of the apostles in light of this question: how closely to God's norm regarding the office of elder, which norm is given us in Scripture, did the church of Christ adhere after the time of the apostles?

In our last article we saw that the office disappeared in the New Testament church after the first few centuries A.D. Now we see that God used the sixteenth century reformers, and particularly those who advocated what is today known as the Reformed or Presbyterian system of church government, to restore the office to its rightful place in the church.

Early Efforts to Restore the Office

According to Samuel Miller, the office of elder was present among the "Waldenses" (Waldensians), as well as Bohemian Brethren and Hussites, already in the 1400s.¹ Whether these *restored* the office earlier than the reformers, or whether among these groups the office was *never lost*, is a subject for further study. The latter is very likely true.

Already in the 1520s, in Zurich, Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli laid the background for restoring the

¹ Samuel Miller, *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature, and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church* (General Books [www.General-Books.net], 2009), 50-52. In their book *Paradigms in Polity: Classic Readings in Reformed and Presbyterian Church Government* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1994), 83-85, David and Joseph Hall quote from another work of Samuel Miller in which he makes similar arguments.

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office of elder by asserting, over against the teaching of Rome, that Christ is the head of the church. This position was expressed creedally in "The Ten Theses of Bern" (1528), the first of which began: "The holy catholic church, whose sole head is Christ..."² He and other early reformers also taught that the church must be ruled by a plurality of men. In practice, this body of elders often consisted of several members of the civil government. Philip Schaff says that

Zwingli was the first among the Reformers who organized a regular synodical Church government. He provided for a synod composed of all ministers of the city and canton, two lay delegates of every parish, four members of the small and four members of the great council. This mixed body represented alike Church and state, the clergy and the laity. It was to meet twice a year....³

In addition to Zwingli, such men as Johann Oecolampadius in Basel, Switzerland and Martin Bucer in Strassburg, Germany (both in the 1520s-1530s) laid groundwork for restoring the office of elder. Like Zwingli, these men taught that Christ is the only head of the church and that God requires the church to be governed by a body of elders. They also worked to establish a biblical form of church discipline.⁴

Significantly, these three men—Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and Bucer—lived and labored before John Calvin began his work in Geneva in 1536. In the area of the

² "The Ten Theses of Bern (1528)", *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, compiled by James T. Dennison, Jr (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), vol. 1, 41.

³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989 reprint), vol. 8, 68.

⁴ See Miller, *Essay*, 58.

office of elder, as well as in other areas, Calvin was not the first reformer.

Calvin's Efforts to Restore the Office

Although John Calvin was not the first to work at restoring the office of elder to its rightful place in the church, his contribution to this effort was monumental, and it set the pattern for Reformed churches elsewhere.

During Calvin's first term in Geneva (1536 to 1538), he emphasized the spiritual authority of the ministers of the Word to preach the gospel and exercise Christian discipline. Both the Genevan Confession and Calvin's Catechism, written during this first stay in Geneva, have articles devoted to excommunication. That Calvin taught that this authority belonged to "ministers" does not mean he overlooked the need for elders to supervise the preaching and administer discipline; rather, he was arguing that neither the pope, nor the Romish clergy, nor any civil authority, had the right to interfere with this work of the church of Jesus Christ. Calvin and others were expelled from Geneva in 1538 as a consequence of opposition to their teaching, "and especially to the purity of discipline which they struggled hard to establish."⁵

On the 13th of September, 1541, Calvin returned to Geneva. On the 20th of November—just two months later—the General Council of Geneva adopted the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, which was essentially the Church Order and local regulations of the Reformed church in Geneva. This document begins by teaching the need for four offices in the church: pastor, teacher (theological professor), elder, and deacon. Then it states that which belongs to the office of elder:

Their office is to watch over the life of each person, to admonish in a friendly manner those whom they see to be at fault and leading a disorderly life, and when necessary to report them to the Company, who will be authorized to administer fraternal discipline and to do so in association with the elders.⁶

The "Company" to which this paragraph refers is the

⁵ Miller, *Essay*, 55.

⁶ Philip E. Hughes, ed, *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), 35, 41.

company of pastors, of which the church in Geneva had several. Evidently, then, the pastors were very involved in the work of discipline—but only after sinners were "reported" to them by the elders, and "in association with the elders."

These elders did not act individually, but as a body. From 1541 on, the consistory—the body of elders—was prominent in the Genevan church.

Not only was Calvin instrumental in visibly restoring the office to the church, but he taught the people regarding its rightful place, and helped the church develop in her understanding of the office.

Calvin taught that the terms "bishops" and "presbyters" (elders) both refer to the office of the minister.⁷ Yet, in the early church there were "two kinds of elders.... There were chosen from among the people men of worth and good character, who, united with the pastors in a common council and authority, administered the discipline of the Church, and were a kind of censors for the correction of morals."⁸ Calvin also judged that I Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:8 refer to this latter kind of elder—the ruling elder, as opposed to the teaching elder. He writes that the church had "elders chosen from among the people, who were charged with the censure of morals and the exercise of discipline along with the bishops."⁹ That this work involved both spiritual oversight and the administration of discipline, he stressed throughout his life.

Regarding his view of the office of elder, Calvin's influence on the thinking of the reformers who followed, and on all Reformed Christianity, cannot be overstated.

Not only the thought, but even the wording of the Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons, which was adopted by the Synod of the Hague in 1586 and is still used by the Protestant Reformed Churches in America today, owes its debt to Calvin. Having quoted I Timothy 5:17, the Form says:

Hence it is evident that there were two sorts of elders in the apostolic church, the former whereof did labor in the Word and doctrine, and the latter did not. The first were the min-

⁷ See his commentary on I Timothy 3:1, and *Institutes* 4.3.8.

⁸ Commentary on I Timothy 5:17.

⁹ *Institutes*, 4.3.8.

isters of the Word and pastors,...but the others...bore a particular office, namely, they had the oversight of the church and ruled the same with the ministers of the Word.¹⁰

The Form then cites Romans 12:8c and I Corinthians 12:28 (“governments”) as referring to the office of elder.

Later Efforts to Restore the Office

Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Bucer, and Calvin all worked within about 200 miles of each other. Of course, 200 miles was quite a distance in their day. Still, the fact remains that the area in which they labored was a relatively small part of the European continent.

Over time, men in other countries came to share Calvin’s understanding of the place of the elder in the church, and they worked to restore the office to its rightful place in their own localities: “Peter Martyr, in Italy; [John] á Lasco, in Hungary; Junius, and others, in Holland; Knox, in Scotland”—with the effect that “all the Reformed Churches in France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Geneva, and Scotland, were thorough Presbyterians, not only by principle, but also in practice.”¹¹ The reader must understand that the word “Presbyterians” refers here to church government, and so includes the Reformed system of church government.

John á Lasco did not stay in Hungary; he moved to London, where he pastored a congregation made up of Reformed believers who had moved from continental Europe to London. There too, surrounded by the Church of England with the episcopal system of church government, á Lasco and his congregation practiced the presbyterian form of church government.

Restoration in Reformed and Presbyterian Churches Particularly

The office of elder was not restored to its rightful place in every branch of churches that separated from the Romish papacy as a fruit of the great Protestant

Reformation. Full restoration of this office took place in those churches that are specifically Reformed and Presbyterian in church government.

The Church of England retained Rome’s form of church government—a hierarchy—but appointed the Archbishop of Canterbury as the head of the church, in place of the pope. There is in Anglicanism no autonomous rule of each instituted church by a body of elders.

Other churches permitted themselves to be ruled by the civil government. This was particularly true of Lutheranism in Germany. But even in the Netherlands, where Reformed churches did have their body of elders, the state tried to interfere with the work of the elders. Consequently, Reformed churches there either struggled to free themselves from the state’s intrusion into church government, or caved in to the pressure of the civil magistrates, so that the body of elders became redundant.

Some congregational and independent churches (including many Baptist churches) come closer to implementing the biblical form of church government, in that every congregation has its elder(s). However, in such churches the office of elder is usually found in the pastor only, while a board of deacons takes over much of the work that we believe a body of elders must perform.

That the full restoration of the office of elder took place particularly in Reformed and Presbyterian churches is evident from several considerations. First, such churches require not only that each congregation have an elder, but a *body* of elders, chosen from within the congregation, to care for that particular congregation. Second, such churches view this body of elders as those through whom God, in Christ, rules His church. These elders have the oversight of all the members of the congregation, as well as of the offices of pastor and deacon. And third, such churches permit these elders to carry out the work of church discipline, as prescribed by Christ.

May God give us to appreciate the gift of such elders in our churches. ☞

¹⁰ *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 290. See also page 256 for the history of the Form.

¹¹ Miller, as quoted in Hall and Hall, 85.

Expanded Mission Labor in Pittsburgh

It was the year 1965. The synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches met in session on June 2 at the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Was this a monumental meeting of synod? Probably not. But at this synod an eleven-page “new policy” for domestic missions and church extension work was adopted (see *Acts of Synod, 1965*, pp. 105-115). In years following, this policy faded away into oblivion for one reason or another. But it was a good policy. This now forty-eight-year-old policy stated (p. 112):

It is not merely the labor of a missionary to sit back and wait for an assignment to a specific field. The day of fields spontaneously presenting themselves is largely over. Besides, even in the past fields did not arise spontaneously, but through propaganda labors. The missionary must, in a sense, create his own field of labor. Not only should much propaganda effort be put forth with a view to uncovering potential fields of labor; but once a potential field arises, investigative and preparatory work should be carefully planned and patiently executed. This work of investigation should not be hastily and generally carried out in a week or two without any preparation and planning. Plans should be laid, ample time should be given to the work, specific aspects and goals should be set for investigation, and patient labor should be bestowed.

Forty-eight years ago it was stated: “the day of fields spontaneously presenting themselves is largely over.” A half a century ago our churches were already faced with the reality: “the missionary must, in a sense, create his own field of labor.” It can be granted that this was written at a time in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches when there was a noticeable lull in her work of domestic missions. But that fact does not change

the reality: the day of fields spontaneously presenting themselves is largely over. If that was true forty-eight years ago, how much more is it true now. The nation in which we live has as a whole rejected the gospel and the truth of God’s Word. There are few groups of people that are interested in the Reformed faith, much less what the Protestant Reformed Churches have to offer. There is an individual or two here and there, but the day of groups of Reformed believers asking for help to develop into a church is past. Domestic missions requires that we find and develop fields of labor.

The question is: how? That seems to be quite a daunting task! Where do we go to find a place to work? And if we find a place, then how do we discover individuals in that place and develop them into a viable group of believers that desire to be an organized church? These are questions that the Domestic Mission Committee and I have been struggling with for some time already.

Here is a method we believe is biblical—and simply makes sense. On his first missionary journey the apostle Paul traveled to a region in Asia Minor known as Galatia. In this area Paul established, not one, but a group of churches: Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul was not content to establish only one isolated church. On his second missionary journey Paul labored in Macedonia and there established, not one, but three churches: Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. On his third missionary journey Paul labored for a number of years in a region of Asia Minor known then as Asia. Using Ephesus as his base he (and others) established a large group of churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Pergamos, Sardis, Laodicea, etc. We use Paul in his mission work to establish principles in doing our own work in missions. We would like to try to follow this model of Paul in establishing groups of churches in various places. (We are already doing it in our foreign work in the Philippines.) We would

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like to pursue domestic mission work in the areas of our isolated congregations. That is a task, of course, left up to the Domestic Mission Committee and our individual congregations to work out. Personally, I am interested in pursuing this method of labor in my own mission work in the Pittsburgh area.

We have an established work in the city of Pittsburgh. But Pittsburgh is a large metropolitan area with its many boroughs and suburbs. In this large metropolis our tiny church plant in one small borough is but a speck of dust on the window of this city. We advertise on the radio, we have a presence on the Internet, we send out mailers, and put ads in papers, but how many people in this city even know we exist? Ninety-eight percent of the population of this city does not even know of our presence here. Instead of concentrating all our efforts into our Fellowship, therefore, we intend to be much broader in our outreach. We must go out into the highways and hedges and, as many as we find, bid to come to hear the gospel (Matt. 22:9, 10). To focus all our attention on one location in Pittsburgh and the majority of our labors on one small group of people is not fulfilling the mandate to preach the gospel indiscriminately to as many as possible. Using, then, the model of the apostle Paul we are presently trying something a little different in our mission work in our city.

Those who keep up a little on the labors in Pittsburgh have probably wondered why several ministers were sent here to labor with me at the end of 2012. I needed some help. It is not that there has been some sudden breakthrough in a new area. There has been no new request for help from a group of people. But for some time now I have wanted to expand our labors into another area of Pittsburgh. Because of the work in the Fellowship, however, I was tied down and unable to do this. Southwest Protestant Reformed Church and the Domestic Mission Committee decided to lend me some help to give me time to explore outside of the immediate vicinity of the Fellowship. These men have now come and gone. Their labors were greatly appreciated for a number of reasons. The main reason was their willingness to help out in the Fellowship while I explored elsewhere. They also took an active interest in my exploration and helped out with their advice.

There are three different locations just outside of Pittsburgh proper that are of interest to our Fellowship. Each one is a thriving, vibrant community. They are centers of commerce and are growing (much like the cities in which Paul labored). Although it is the desire of the saints in our Fellowship to try to begin a work in all three of these places at one time, we recognize our limitations. A second missionary would be needed for this kind of work. So we had to choose one place. With the assistance of the visiting ministers, Cranberry Township, about a forty-minute drive north of our present location, was chosen.

Now, the question: how can contacts be found if there are not already some serious contacts in a particular area? How can the missionary create his own mission field? It would be valuable to evaluate what lies behind that question. But let's assume it is simply this: how does one develop something out of nothing? Southwest Church, the Domestic Mission Committee, and I are trying to discover an answer to that question with our new labor in Cranberry Township. Obviously, as the Policy of 1965 pointed out, ample time must be spent there and patient labor must be bestowed. The missionary must become part of the community as much as possible. I now have spent some time in the community center there. It is a booming place with the hustle and bustle of people old and young alike. The library, the chamber of commerce, the senior and teen center, a preschool, a number of rooms to rent for meetings—all located under the same roof. I have spent time in the library, even taking a class there. I have spent time with seniors, joining in on a Bible study with a number of them. I am now renting a room there for a class that has begun mid-January. I also have frequented the community college in Cranberry, taking a class there on Power Point presentation. This all may seem peripheral, but it is needed in order to become acquainted with the community and to have people become acquainted with me. Now I am looking for various opportunities to speak to people as well.

The most recent development is that of a community class on Old Testament history. Mailers were sent out to almost every address in Cranberry inviting the public to this class. We had 22 people register for the class. We are planning on more than 30 in attendance,

including the members of our Fellowship who are taking an active interest in this work. This class does not constitute a core group with which I am working in Cranberry. It is merely a community class. Most of these people are not looking for a new church home, but are simply interested in learning Old Testament history. But we deem this an excellent opportunity first of all to teach others this history from a Reformed, biblical perspective. It is also our hope that maybe a few

might be interested in pursuing a study of Reformed doctrine. We wait on the Lord's leading.

It is our prayer that perhaps by means of expanded labors to various areas around Pittsburgh we might be able to develop a number of mission groups and possibly churches in the area. Perhaps this will determine how we carry on our mission work in the future. May God bless our efforts. ☺

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

Disciplining Our Covenant Children (2)

God has given the high calling to parents to discipline their covenant children. The discipline of these precious children is necessary for the salvation of their souls. The discipline of our covenant children is necessary for establishing the truth of God in their lives and to train them to live for His glory. It must establish order and direction and purpose in their lives from earliest childhood on. Discipline is necessary to prepare our sons and daughters to be fit members of the church. Of this glorious church our children are members from their birth. Discipline must train our children in every area of their life for their citizenship in the everlasting kingdom of righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. They must be trained and disciplined for the service of the King. If we do not discipline our children they will grow up to be unruly, wicked, and rebellious, and without direction and purpose. Often they will leave the true church in the days of their youth, preferring instead a life of worldliness and ungodliness that will lead them to their destruction. Ours is indeed a high calling as parents, requiring great wisdom and much prayer and diligent effort and ongoing personal involvement with our children.

The proper disciplining of our children must flow

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out of our own fear and love for God. The natural bond that God has created between us and our children is very strong. Because of this bond our children are very dear to us. It is important for our children to know and experience the reality of the love of their parents. This will greatly help them in accepting the God-given authority of their parents in their lives. The love that we have for our covenant children must, however, be greater than mere physical humanistic affection. We must discipline our covenant children out of genuine spiritual concern for their welfare and not out of sinful anger and disappointment in them. The love of God in our hearts as parents must keep us from being harsh and cruel and tyrannical in the disciplining of our children. This evil spirit on the part of parents will discourage children and provoke them to anger and make them bitter. Our love for God and for His glory must make us serious, firm, steadfast, and uncompromising in our discipline. There may be no sinful permissiveness. But our love must be tempered by sincere compassion.

We will divide our consideration of this subject into several parts in this and future articles. Instruction in the truth of God must lay the foundation for the necessary discipline of our children. There must be preventive discipline through serious warnings about sins and disobedience. Correction and chastisement are necessary to drive sin and foolishness from the hearts of our

children. If this is not given, our children will become accustomed to sinful patterns in their lives and will be hardened in their hearts. When our children repent of their sins, we need to know how to lead our children to the cross of Jesus Christ. This must be followed by a showing of the comfort and joy in the forgiveness and mercy of the Lord. After discipline has brought about the necessary correction, there must also be help with restoration and encouragement to go on in a life of joy and thankfulness. Our children must learn the positive benefit of discipline in their lives.

Instruction in the absolute truth of God Himself and of His Word is the foundation of Christian discipline in the home. The foundation for discipline in the lives of our children lies in the truth of God's sovereignty, righteousness, and holiness. Their lives must be rooted and grounded in these truths of God. There is one only absolutely true and living God who must be served and obeyed. There is one only redeemer who has saved us. Before Him must all repent, and in Him alone we must trust. And we owe to Him a life of thankfulness.

Living as children of God in the world will involve sacrifices, self-denial, and trials. Christian living is antithetic to self-centeredness, pride, and demanding immediate gratification for every desire and lust of man's sinful nature. We and our children must be ready to stand against the enemy and to endure hardships and persecution in the world. Our children must be trained to resist the temptations and evil influences of the world. Godly discipline must train our children for a life of self denial and suffering.

We live in a time that has been called the "post-modern age." Characteristic of this age is the total rejection of all absolutes and final authority. According to this foolish and evil teaching there is not only one absolutely true God, but many gods that are all equally worthy. Advocates of this ungodly worldly philosophy maintain that we should perhaps teach our children about all different kinds of gods and then leave them the freedom in their later years to choose one for themselves. It matters not what god they choose, for all are equal. Morality and truth in our lives and the lives of our children are possible only when the absolute standard of the Word of God is maintained in our lives. Obedience to this

truth is possible only through the redemption of Jesus Christ and His grace and Holy Spirit in our lives.

The disciplining of our children must not produce in them any legalistic understanding of God's law or any thought of works righteousness. Pharisaism is not true Christianity. True Christian living involves thankfulness to God through our humble obedience as His servants.

The foundation of discipline in our covenant homes must be instruction in the law of God as the absolute standard of right and holy living in the fear of God. The youth of the world grow up without an absolute standard and guide for truth in their lives. Everyone has a right to live as he pleases as long as he does not interfere with or condemn others. No wonder that the children of the world grow up to be lawless and defiant and rebellious. This is the case even of the children of well-educated parents who send them to the best schools in the land and are able to give them all kinds of earthly advantages.

God-fearing parents must teach their children that the law of God must be the absolute standard for judging between right and wrong and good and evil in their lives. The way of keeping the law of God is the way of God's favor and blessing. In the keeping of God's commandments there is great reward. Laying the foundation for godly discipline in the lives of our children, we as parents must teach our children the great spiritual principles of the law of God and seek to establish these principles deeply in their hearts and consciences. And of course this can be accomplished by godly parents only if they themselves are at the same time an example and pattern in their own lives and in their own godly and spiritual perspective in life.

We lay the foundation for discipline in the lives of our covenant children by bringing them to church with us. Children must join their parents in the worship of the covenant God of their salvation. The gospel is for them as well as adults. They too, in the context of the worship service, must be built up in the faith. This takes place according to Reformed truth through the chief means of grace, the preaching of God's Word. In the Reformed church children are not separated from the adults and led to a separate classroom where they receive shallow and superficial instruction and little

moralisms for their lives. This kind of thing will not train our covenant children and make them strong for disciplined living and for confessing and defending the truth of God in their lives.

Good Reformed tradition maintains the importance of solid catechism classes for the instruction of the children of the covenant. Children in such catechism classes are instructed in the glorious history of the covenant full of lessons and spiritual examples. In these catechism classes children learn the wonders of the incarnation of the Son of God, the true meaning of the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross, the power of His resurrection, and the blessed hope of His return as they are taught in the infallible Scriptures. Good catechism instruction will teach our children to think doctrinally. Such instruction is necessary to understand Scripture rightly as a whole. It will equip our children and make them strong to discern and

condemn false teaching, which would otherwise in their later life lead them astray. Our covenant children in the catechism class must be instructed in the Reformed creeds. This will ensure that these creeds in later life will not be a dead letter or mere museum pieces for them, but their own living confession, guiding them in knowing and maintaining the truth in their lives. This is the disciplined instruction necessary for covenant children in order for them to grow up to be good and strong members of the Reformed church. Parents must diligently support this catechism instruction by being sure that their covenant children are well prepared for the lessons and behave well in the class. All these things help lay the necessary foundation for discipline in the lives of our children.

Disciplining our children is a broad subject with many aspects to it. Good instruction is its foundation.



○ COME LET US WORSHIP

REV. CORY GRIESS

Hear Ye Him! The Reading and Preaching of Scripture in Worship (3)

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

Nehemiah 8:5, 8, 12

Introduction

We are engaged in a study of the elements of a Reformed worship service, as those elements are carried out according to the three great principles of Reformed

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worship. Recall that last time we finished an exposition of the “opening service.” We saw that God ushers us into His presence through these first aspects of the service, opening the way for the main elements of our covenantal assembly with Him. In this article and the next we go straight to the heart of this meeting between God and His people. We do that by examining the related elements of the reading and preaching of Scripture. These elements of worship have God speaking most extensively and freely to us in this covenantal assembly.

The Elements

The reading and preaching of sacred Scripture are two separate elements of worship that normally go together in the service. We see that in Nehemiah 8. In verses 3-4 Ezra first reads the law. And then Nehemiah 8:7-8 says that he and the Levites preached that word of God. Since these elements go together they are often

lumped together under one heading, as they are in the Heidelberg Catechism when Lord's Day 38 calls them simply "the hearing of His Word."

There is liberty in how often the Word is read in the service of course. The Protestant Reformed Churches generally read the Word twice in the morning—in the reading of the law and in the reading of the Scripture that the sermon expounds. We generally read God's Word once in the evening in the passage the sermon expounds. Some churches have an Old Testament and New Testament reading each service, and that is a good practice too.

There is liberty also in length and form of the sermons, although justice must be done to the exposition and application of the text. And the clamor for shorter and simpler sermons is often indicative of spiritual weakness in the church.

Necessary Elements for Corporate Worship

As for the elements themselves, there is no liberty. Both the reading and preaching of Scripture must be part of public corporate worship. The regulative principle demands the reading and preaching of Scripture in worship. This is made explicit in II Timothy 4:1-2, where the apostle Paul commands Timothy and all preachers to preach: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." And if the minister is called to preach the Word, then it is implied that that Word must be read as well. Nonetheless, an explicit call to read Scripture in worship may be found in Colossians 4:16.

Besides these texts, the *example* of the church has always been a church that reads and preaches the Word of God in worship. When the Christian church began to spread and establish itself, it took over the worship of the Jewish synagogue, only making some changes due to the fact that the Messiah had now come. The apostle Paul's mission method was to start working in the synagogue of whatever city he was in, and if the Jews believed in Christ, that synagogue would become a Christian church. If that happened, the same basic

elements of worship in that synagogue also rolled over into Christian worship, only now the content reflected the worship of the name of Jesus and His victory over the curse of the law. If the Jewish synagogue did not wholly believe, then those who did believe would break off and start a Christian church that looked very much like the synagogue, again with basically the same elements of worship. Therefore, in the main, the elements of worship in the synagogue were taken into the apostolic church.

When the Reformation restored biblical worship to the church, the Reformers went back to the New Testament example and saw what the New Testament church did and what elements were used in their worship. They then established the church's worship essentially after that New Testament example. As churches explicitly carrying on the Reformed tradition, we therefore have the same elements in our worship today that Acts 2:42 says were in the worship of the New Testament church. In fact, the elements we have in Reformed worship are basically the same elements that have been in the worship services of God's people since the time of the Babylonian captivity, when the Jewish synagogue arose.

The chief element of synagogue worship, going all the way back to the start, was the reading and preaching of Scripture. Indeed, one authority on the subject states that "the primary purpose of the synagogue was to enable men to hear the law read and expounded."¹ The ministry of the Word was at the heart of the Jewish worship service, and this remained true in New Testament worship as well. The reading and preaching of Scripture was the primary, central element of worship and the heart of the covenantal assembly.

Where did the Jews learn to have the reading and preaching of Scripture primary in their synagogue worship? Besides the fact that it was logical to do so (their whole history revolved around their response to the revelation of God), the answer is, in Nehemiah chapter 8. Nehemiah records the history of God's people shortly after the Babylonian captivity, when synagogue worship had recently begun. In Nehemiah 8 the people of God held

¹ Maxwell, William D., *A History of Christian Worship, An Outline of Its Development and Forms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982), 3. See also, Bavinck, Herman, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, 393. Ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 4 vols.

a worship service in which the entire law was read and expounded. Ezra stood up upon a wooden pulpit (8:4) and proclaimed the Word of the Lord to the people. This, of course, is very similar to the way we preach our modern sermons. This practice in which Ezra read and preached to the people was carried on in the Jewish synagogue after this. Thus, we here in 2013 can trace our element of the preaching and its primary place in worship at least all the way back to Nehemiah 8, the day Ezra got into his pulpit in the re-settled city of Jerusalem.²

The Importance of These Elements

The reading and preaching of Scripture are the heart-beat of the church. Without them there is no church and there is no worship. If there is to be any commitment to God and understanding of His will, there must be the ministry of the Word amongst His people. All throughout the Old Testament one sees the truth of this.

Whenever there was spiritual decline in Israel, it was because people refused to have the Word of God. Whenever there was reformation in Israel's history, it was because the Word was brought back to its place of central importance in the people's life and worship. The reformation at the time of King Josiah, for example, was a reformation produced by the Word. After years of the temple being boarded up under a time of great apostasy, Josiah tells the high priest Hilkiah to open the temple to get things ready for repair. When he did that, the high priest found the book of Deuteronomy in the temple and had it read to the king. When the king heard the Word of the Lord, he realized how Judah had forsaken God, and he brought God's people back to the worship of God prescribed in the Word. He put the Word back into its central place, and that caused reformation in Judah.

No surprise, then, that the Reformation of the sixteenth century was a reformation produced by this element of worship. In the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church had removed the Word from its central place. In place of the exposition of God's Word, the Roman Catholic Church put the altar and the mass, with the result that the darkness of ignorance and evil crept over the entire continent of Europe. The Word was brought back to its central place in the six-

² See Old, Hughes O., *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1984), 59.

teenth century, and over all of Europe the church was reformed according to that Word. The work of Luther and Calvin and the reformers was to push the altar out of the center of the church, and to replace it with the pulpit. It was the ministry of the Word that turned the world upside down.

The Reformed carry that conviction on, by God's grace, in their worship of God. The reading and preaching of Scripture is the heart of the service. That is seen even in the way we order the furniture in the church. The pulpit stands in the center, indicating that the essence of the covenantal meeting with Jehovah is God speaking to us in His Word. We must have Him speak His will to us, for we are His people.

We have said that the worship service is the covenantal meeting between God and His people, and that that meeting is carried out as a dialogue between God and us. There are other parts of the service where God speaks—the salutation, benedictions, etc. But it is here at this point in the service where God speaks to us fully and freely as the God of the covenant. In the opening service God ushers us into this meeting, but He does so for this purpose, that He might speak to us intimately and substantially in His Word.

Who would not want this to be the central and primary part of worship? It is sad when one sees the pulpit in churches today moved off to the side to make room for the band or the choir. That often is a sign of what is happening to the reading and preaching of Scripture. The ministry of the Word is being pushed to the side. It is losing its chief place, and God's voice is not favored in worship. This is why we come week to week, to meet with God, to hear Him apply His gospel to our souls and to give us marching orders for the week that lies ahead, and to praise Him and worship Him in response.

Here we receive the life of God. Here the Spirit works through the Word to fill our weary souls. In the preaching, as in the opening service, God speaks to us as our Friend-Sovereign. Here there is both the formality and familiarity of the covenant of grace. There is authority and there is love. With His Word He convicts us, He corrects us, He charges us. With His Word He also frees us in Christ, protects us, delights in us. He speaks as a king and a father speaks to his subjects and sons. ∞

Congregation Activities

Reflecting on the words of Psalm 84:1, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts," we call your attention to the anniversaries of the Georgetown PRC located in Hudsonville, MI, organized on March 2, 1994, and the Southwest PRC located in Grandville, MI, organized on March 7, 1944.

We thank Dr. Brian Decker, a member of the Faith congregation in Jenison, MI, for providing the "News" with the following information. About a year ago the Faith congregation started the practice of singing for their shut-ins. Faith has many shut-ins and members that attend infrequently due to age and health. About 12 or so families, primarily those with children under the age of 15, volunteered to help with this effort. Groups consisting of three or four families visit the shut-ins on Sundays, either immediately after the morning service or just before the evening service. This schedule works out such that each shut-in has visitors four or so times a year and each family sings probably 4-6 times a year. The groups sing for about 15 minutes, both Psalter numbers and some hymns, and someone reads a short passage of Scripture and closes in prayer. Then it's time for good-byes, which usually include hugs all around. Dr. Decker adds that he is not sure which is appreciated more, the hugs or the singing.

This has proved to be an excellent practice for all involved. The children especially realize that they

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

are participating in an activity that is very appreciated by the shut-ins. The children get to interact with members of the church whom they do not know well at all, and it makes nursing homes, wheelchairs, and frail old people less intimidating to them. The response from the shut-ins has been fantastic as well. It makes their Sunday a little different from the other days, allows them to enjoy the communion of the saints and the joy of music, and hopefully lifts their spirit for at least a little while. Mr. Matt Kortus, the member of Faith who organizes the singing, continues to receive positive feedback from the shut-ins, the families of the shut-ins, and the elders that visit the shut-ins, on how much they enjoy the practice. If you or someone in your church would like more details about how all this works, you can send Matt an e-mail at mkgortus@umich.edu for more information.

The Junior Adult Bible Study of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI began a study of the Essentials of Reformed Doctrine catechism book, Lesson 1, on "The Knowledge of God," in January. This new subject for study was promoted as a great way to be reminded of important biblical truths that we might have learned with much diligence when we were young.

Although we do not keep track of such things, it always seems to us that, each year when the Byron Center, MI PRC schedules an activity that needs snow to be successful, there is no snow. Well, not this year. Byron Center had an activity for their children scheduled for February 1 at a nearby ski resort. Plans called for a night of sledding for children and their parents, and this year there was plenty of snow. In fact,

area schools were closed that day because of too much snow!

Evangelism Activities

On Sunday, February 3, Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA, became the radio voice of the Reformed Witness Hour, a responsibility that will be his for several months. Covenant of Grace was also planning to begin a new radio advertising venture on the stations that carry the RWH in the Spokane area. Rev. Kleyn will record one-minute ads on different biblical subjects that will be played on those same radio stations.

The Evangelism Society of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI reported to their congregation that they continue to distribute about 200 pamphlets per month in ten area restaurants. The society spent some time assessing the effectiveness of this work and discussing also whether they should include cd's of recent sermons by their pastor, Rev. William Langerak.

Sister-Church Activities

On Sunday morning, January 27, the congregation of our sister church in Singapore, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, experienced in a very real sense the covenant faithfulness of our heavenly Father when they were privileged to witness the confession of faith of nine young people, two of which involved also adult baptism. Praise be to God (Gen. 17:7).

Young People's Activities

The young people of Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI invited their congregation, and any others inter-

ested, to join them Sunday evening, January 27, after their evening worship service, for a presentation on Singapore. Their pastor, Rev. Arie den Hartog, showed pictures of Singapore and Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church and talked about the work that is being done there.

The young people of the Doon, IA PRC invited their congregation to join them on January 28 for an

evening of fun with a variety of winter activities at Great Bear, a nearby winter sports park.

The young people of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI were encouraged to reserve Saturday night, February 2, for a night at Pando Winter Sports Park for some time on the slopes skiing or sliding.

Seminary Activities

Once again our Seminary invited those who were interested to attend select classes for the coming school year. Prof. Barrett Gritters invited auditors to his Church Polity and World Religions classes. Prof. Russell Dykstra invited auditors to his NT Isagogics class. And Prof. Ronald Cammenga invited guests to his Dogmatics and OT History classes. Classes began January 22. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to John and Cheryl Vlietstra and family in the death of Cheryl's grandmother,

NELLA J. STEENWYK.

May they be comforted by God's Word. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:17, 18).

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
Dan Kiel, Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ On February 23, 2013,

BEN and JUDY WIGGER

celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. We thank God for their continued example of a Christ-centered marriage and home. We pray that God will continue to bless them now and in the years to come. "Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128: 4- 6).

* Tim and Shealagh Wigger

Brendan

* Tom and Christy Wigger

Tessa, Ryan

Hudsonville, Michigan

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC express their Christian sympathy to Kevin and Carol Scholfield and daughter Mackenzie in the death of Carol's father,

PASTOR GEORGE ELLIOT.

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (II Corinthians 1:3, 4).

Rev. Steven Key, President
Robert Van Uffelen, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Men's and Ladies' Society at Southwest Church express condolences to fellow members Mr. and Mrs. Gerrit (Jeanette) Boverhof on the death January 13, 2013, of Gerrit's sister,

MRS. TRESSA PEPPER.

With Job, we say as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26).

Marvin Kamps, President
Natalie Jefferson, Secretary

Teacher Needed

■ Heritage Christian High School and Protestant Reformed Christian School in Dyer, Indiana have open positions. Heritage Christian High School is seeking applications from qualified Protestant Reformed individuals interested in teaching courses in the Social Studies, Business, Latin, English, or Religion Departments. Inquiries may be directed to the administrator, Ralph Medema, at 219.558.2660 or ralph.medema@heritagechs.org. Protestant Reformed Christian School is interesting in filling multiple positions. Applications are also being sought from qualified Protestant Reformed individuals interested in teaching in a lower elementary class or in the resource room (Discovery Center). Inquiries may be directed to our administrator, Ryan Van Overloop, at 219.558.2660 or ryan.vanoverloop@dyeprcs.org.