

# The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • February 1, 2014

## CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	If Perhaps the Thought of Thine Heart May Be Forgiven <b>REV. JAMES SLOPSEMA</b>	194
<i>Editorial</i>	Pray For Us (2) <b>PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA</b>	197
<i>Things Which Must Shortly Come To Pass</i>	Postmillennialism (27) <b>PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA</b>	199
<i>O Come Let Us Worship</i>	And God Spake All These Words (7a) <b>REV. CORY GRIESS</b>	201
<i>All Around Us</i>	Biblical Patriarchy Not Biblical <b>REV. NATHAN LANGERAK</b>	205
<i>Special Article</i>	The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving <b>REV. CARL HAAK</b>	208
<i>God's Wonderful Works</i>	Does Man Have a Free Will? <b>REV. JAMES LANING</b>	211
<i>Bring the Books...</i>	Book Reviews <b>REV. STUART BROGDEN/ MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA</b>	213
<i>News From Our Churches</i>	Activities <b>MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER</b>	215

# If Perhaps the Thought of Thine Heart May Be Forgiven

But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Acts 8:20-23

Simon the sorcerer was, supposedly, converted. Philip the evangelist went to the city of Samaria to preach the gospel and to heal, which brought great joy to the city. In this city was Simon the sorcerer. When many in the city believed, Simon also confessed faith and was baptized, all the while scrutinizing Philip's miracles of healing.

*Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

The Jerusalem church then sent Peter and John. This gave the work in Samaria the blessing of the apostles. By the prayers of Peter and John and by the laying on of their hands the Holy Spirit was also poured out upon the Samaritans, as it had been on the disciples in Jerusalem on Pentecost. This was important for the Jewish church in Jerusalem, to encourage them to accept the Samaritan converts.

Foolishly, Simon sought to purchase with money the power of dispensing the Holy Spirit.

In this meditation we have Peter's response.

How wicked Simon was that he thought the gifts of God could be purchased.

Simon must repent that he may be forgiven.

Yet Peter is doubtful that Simon would ever find forgiveness! How horrible!



A heart of wicked thoughts!

Simon thought to purchase the gift of God with money.

*The Standard Bearer* (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

#### Reprint Policy

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

#### Editorial Policy

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for the Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed. All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

#### Editorial Office

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra  
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW  
Wyoming, MI 49418  
dykstra@prca.org

#### Business Office

Standard Bearer  
Mr. Timothy Pipe  
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.  
Jenison, MI 49428-7137  
PH: 616-457-5970  
tim@rfpa.org

#### Church News Editor

Mr. Ben Wigger  
6597 40th Ave  
Hudsonville, MI 49426  
benjwig@juno.com

#### United Kingdom Office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham  
27 Woodside Road  
Ballymena, BT42 4HX  
Northern Ireland  
alisongraham2006@  
hotmail.co.uk

#### Rep. of Ireland Office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown  
Apartment 10, Block D  
Ballycummin Village  
Limerick, Ireland

#### Subscription Price

\$21.00 per year in the US, \$35.00 elsewhere  
New eSubscription: \$21  
eSubscription for current hardcopy subscribers: \$10.50.

#### Advertising Policy

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (e-mail: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org  
Website for PRC: www.prca.org

Through prayer and the laying on of hands by Peter and John, some of the Samaritan converts received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was not the ordinary gift of the Holy Spirit that works faith and sanctification in the life of every believer. This the Samaritans already had by the power of the preaching. We are talking about the extraordinary gift of the Spirit that enabled those who received it to speak in tongues and to prophesy. These special gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer present in the church. They died out with the office of apostle. They served the purpose of assisting the church in the transition from the Old to the New covenant and have been replaced with the complete revelation of God in Scripture.

Simon sought to purchase from Peter and John the power of bestowing the special gifts of the Spirit on others. Through his sorcery Simon had risen to prominence in Samaria. He used sorcery (practiced magic) and bewitched (astonished) the people (v. 9). In what his sorcery consisted is not clear. The term suggests invoking supernatural powers to accomplish the unusual, e.g., casting a spell, healing, fortune-telling, etc. It is not always clear whether these sorcerers actually received power from the evil one or simply manipulated the minds of people with the power of suggestion and sleight of hand. Whatever the case, the sorcery of Simon led people to esteem him as great, even claiming that he was the great power of God.

Evidently Simon put these things aside at the time of his “conversion.” That he kept a close eye on all that Philip did, however, suggests that he was more interested in Philip’s miracles than in the gospel of salvation.

And then, when he saw the Holy Spirit come upon some through Peter and John, Simon sought to purchase from them the ability to do the same.

Peter rebuked Simon for his wickedness.

What was the wickedness of Simon?

First, he thought he could purchase the gift of God with money. The gift of God’s Spirit is of such great value that it can be purchased only by the atoning blood of the cross. God must give His only begotten Son to the horrors of the cross. This is the ultimate price! What little value Simon placed on God’s gift by thinking that he could purchase it with money. Those who think they can purchase (earn) the gift of God’s salvation by their own works are really no different than Simon.

But the wickedness of Simon is also seen in how he

intended to use the power of the Holy Spirit. It was not to promote the church and the gospel, as was true of the apostles. It was to retain his place of prominence in the community. He had been received as one who was the very power of God. He no doubt used this perception to promote himself in the community. The power that the apostles displayed was far greater than any power he had possessed. This power he wanted for himself, so that he could retain his prominence in the community. Concluding that Peter and John were sorcerers of a higher class than he, and not wanting to be outdone by them, he sought to purchase from them the power to bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit.

How wicked were the thoughts of Simon’s heart. Wicked thoughts arising from a wicked heart! Simon had confessed his faith in Jesus Christ. Yet his actions showed that before God his heart was not right.



A necessary forgiveness!

What a chilling rebuke Peter gave to Simon.

“Thy money perish with thee.” May you perish in hell on account of this terrible deed. And may the money that you have defiled perish with you.

“Thou has neither part nor lot in this matter.” “This matter” refers to the gift of God that Simon sought to purchase. This includes not just the special gifts of the Holy Spirit but the gift of faith and salvation worked by the Holy Spirit. Simon had neither part nor lot in this. The terms “part” and “lot” speak of the part of an inheritance that falls to one by the casting of the lot. By this expression Peter was emphasizing that the gift of the Holy Spirit and salvation is God’s inheritance for His children. However, Simon’s terrible sin demonstrates that he had no part in it. He was not a believing child of God but a wicked unbeliever who has no inheritance.

And so Peter called upon Simon to pray to God for forgiveness. There is forgiveness with God. This stands at the heart of the gospel. We are all sinners worthy of eternal ruin under the terrible wrath of God’s punishment. But God has provided forgiveness in Jesus Christ. He punished Jesus for the sins of His elect people. In the perfect sacrifice of the cross, the lost sinner is able to find forgiveness—a forgiveness that will rescue him from hell and exalt him to eternal life.

For that forgiveness Simon must pray. The word “pray”

means to beg for something. It teaches us that no one has the right to God's forgiveness. In asking for forgiveness we must come to God as poor beggars, pleading for something to which we have no right in ourselves. Simon is called to beg for forgiveness for his great wickedness. Notice, not just for his outward deed of seeking to purchase the power to dispense the Holy Spirit but for all the wicked thoughts of his heart out of which it arose.

In this connection Peter commanded Simon to repent. To repent means to have a change of mind about sin. True repentance arises out of a true faith in Jesus Christ. True repentance includes a godly sorrow for one's sins that leads one to turn from his sin. It also leads one to seek reconciliation, in the cross of Jesus Christ, with the God whom he has offended. And it is a desire to walk in all godliness in the service of God.

This must be distinguished from a mere remorse that still loves sin but grieves over the bad consequences of sin.

This repentance of faith is the only way to obtain the forgiveness of God. Forgiveness (like all the other blessings of salvation) is found only by faith in Jesus Christ. To be forgiven and received by God, we must come to Him in repentance, begging Him for forgiveness.



A troubling uncertainty!

"Pray God, if perhaps the thought on thine heart may be forgiven."

How doubtful Peter was that Simon would ever find forgiveness with God.

His doubt was not because he considered Simon's sin to be so grievous that no matter how repentant he was and how much he begged forgiveness, God might not forgive. The Bible proclaims forgiveness to all that are truly repentant.

Peter's doubts arose, rather, out of his perception that Simon was so caught in sin that he would not truly repent.

This is evident from Peter's closing remark to Simon: "For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and

in the bond of iniquity." To be in the gall of bitterness means to be filled with bitterness. How bitter Simon had become because of the attention Peter and John were receiving. He who had been reputed to be the very power of God was losing his standing in the community. This terrible bitterness arose because Simon was in the bond (chain) of iniquity (lawlessness). Simon was a lawless man who had no regard for the law either of God or of man. This spirit of lawlessness served as a chain to keep him from overcoming his bitterness by true repentance, thus finding forgiveness. This is what Peter perceived in light of all the circumstances. The gospel had been preached to Simon, leading him to an outward but obviously false confession. In spite of knowing the truth

of the gospel, Simon was led by the spirit of lawlessness and bitterness to attempt to purchase with money that which only Christ can purchase. Peter held out very little hope for Simon's true repentance and forgiveness.


There is something very important for us to learn here.

On the one hand, all things are possible with God. He is able to take the most despicable sinner and bring

him to the repentance of faith in Christ to find forgiveness. He had done that with the thief on the cross. He also would do this with Saul, the great persecutor of the church who would later acknowledge that he was the chief of sinners. He even made Saul the great apostle to the Gentiles. And so we must never conclude that someone is beyond the possibility of salvation—with the exception of those who have obviously committed the unpardonable sin.

On the other hand, it is possible for someone to give himself over so completely to the power of lawlessness that it holds him in chains that are extremely difficult to break, even in the power of grace. God's grace alone can free us from the power of sin to turn us to Christ. But by giving oneself over to and even cultivating in one's life the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity, the way to the cross becomes especially difficult.

Harden not your heart at the Word of God.

Be quick to repent of all your sins in order to find the gracious forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ. 

*Forgiveness  
(like all the other  
blessings of salvation)  
is found only by faith  
in Jesus Christ.*

## Pray For Us (2)

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

II Thessalonians 3:1, 2

[Note: This editorial is the second part of the convocation speech given publicly for the current school year, held in September of 2013. The first installment demonstrated the biblical basis for requesting fellow saints to “pray for us.” The reasons for praying for the seminary are the three sections of the speech. The first is the spiritual nature of the work. The second is the difficulties faced. And the third is the importance of the work.

In the first section, we pointed out that the work of seminary training is an aspect of the work of the ministry of the gospel. The instruction is authoritative instruction from ordained ministers that God uses to qualify men for the work of the gospel ministry. Thus prayer is necessary for the professors, that God will maintain them as faithful teachers and preachers of His Word. The students need our prayers that God will give them receptive hearts and minds, apply the word to their souls, and thus prepare them for the work. We turn now to the second part, namely, the difficulties faced.]

---

Previous article in this series: January 15, 2014, p. 171.

The difficulties faced in connection with the work of the seminary demand that prayers be raised for it. Pray for us because of the difficulties, first of all in the present time, but also for the difficulties as we look ahead.

The first difficulties that we encounter are caused by sin, particularly that found in our sinful natures as professors and students. These are sins present in the natures of all God’s people, sins that threaten to destroy any good work of every minister and elder, mother in the home, father, and teacher in school. These sins threaten to pollute every good work, vitiate it, and make it void. Into these very sins Satan will strive to lead us.

Pray that God’s grace preserve us from falling into gross sin that would disqualify a student from pursuing the gospel ministry, or that would require a professor to be removed from his office. Do not underestimate the power of sin or the power of our adversary the Devil. We who are in the seminary must never think that because we are “on the hill” we are impervious to temptation. We must not imagine that because we open up the Word every single day the Spirit will, necessarily, almost automatically, protect us so that there will

be no major sins in our lives. We in the seminary must never ever think that.

Neither may you (readers) think that of us. Pray for us that God may keep us from great sin, that we repent of our sins, turn away from them daily, and more and more hate and flee from them. Satan, the roaring lion, attacks the seminarians and professors as fiercely (or more so) as he does all the church.

Of the many temptations that Satan *might* use, there is one that I know he *will* use, namely, the sin of pride. The apostle John wrote his brief epistle (the third epistle) to faithful Gaius, the well-beloved Gaius, who walked in the truth. For his conduct in the church, John commended Gaius. In that same brief epistle, he warned Gaius about another leader in the church, namely Diotrephes, who “loveth to have the preeminence among them” (v. 9). He loveth to have the preeminence. That love of the preeminence resulted in a refusal even to allow John entrance into his home. He would not receive John! He spoke against John with malicious words. He cast people out of the church if they did not agree with him.

Pride is the sin that leads one to love the preeminence. This is one of the most destructive forces in

the church of Jesus Christ. And it is a deadly sin in a seminary. A professor who loves to have the preeminence will seek his own glory in the churches. He will speak ill of his colleagues, both those in the ministry and those on the faculty, in order to make himself look better. He will want the students to like him better than they do the other professors. And he will want the people in the pews to prefer him over their own minister or over the other professors in the seminary. That is a deadly and wicked sin.

Students who love the preeminence will seek the limelight or try to outdo their fellows, their classmates, and impress the professors in order to gain the highest honors. In a class of nine (our incoming class), Satan will work hard to have each of them want the preeminence. The student who wants the preeminence will want the churches to recognize his gifts and to stand out above the rest of the students in the seminary. He will want them to see that he has superior gifts for preaching. With that proud, evil heart, he will desire to “be noticed” at synod, and long for the first (most, best?) call from the churches after he graduates.

Few things are more destructive to young men preparing themselves to be slaves of Jesus Christ than the love for preeminence. In pride, such a student will lift himself up to the level or above the level of a professor. That is to say, he will no longer need to heed the instruction of the professors. He may consider himself a gift of God to the churches. And that takes two

forms. On the one hand, when such a student enters the ministry he is determined that he will change the churches. He will give this stuffy Protestant Reformed denomination a breath of fresh air. He will change things. Or, on the other hand, he will say (paraphrasing the apostle Peter): “Lord, though all men will compromise with the truth, yet will not I.” A proud student will chafe

*Of the  
many temptations  
that Satan might use,  
there is one that  
I know he will use, namely,  
the sin of pride.*

under the instruction, admonition, and rebuke of the professors. Soon the thought forms: “I cannot wait until I am out of here and I can do it my way.”

Such a proud young man becomes a proud minister. He considers himself better than all the other ministers (or at least most of them) in the denomination, more gifted, more knowledgeable, more Reformed perhaps, and more enlightened. He knows more than his elders. And he does not have to listen to anyone in the congregation. He knows.

Such a man is of no use to Jesus Christ. The Lord calls us to be His slaves. And He demands that all glory go to God alone. A minister cannot seek preeminence and give God all glory, for that man secretly desires the glory for himself.

In light of such spiritual dangers and difficulties, you understand why we plead with you: Pray for us! Pray that God give us the grace to fight whatever is our own particular sin, whether it is laziness, sexual lust, or love of money. But especially pray that God may give us the grace to root out the sin that is in the nature of every one of us: pride. Pray that we might have the mind of Christ, that we might rejoice when we see others have more and different gifts than we do. May God grant that we rejoice and give thanks to God for the sake of His church when we see members, ministers, and prospective ministers who have notable gifts. This is the proper, humble response of all ministers, professors, and seminary students.

Your prayers are needed for these men for difficulties, not only in the coming year, but also in the future, as these young men go out into the ministry, the Lord willing. If God will be pleased to give them a place in the church, we need to pray that God is now preparing them for the difficulties—the difficulties of being a faithful minister in a congregation, even a solid Protestant Reformed congregation. Difficult issues arise in working with the sheep, caring for lambs and for aged saints, and dealing with stubborn members. The ministers face the heavy workload of preparing two edifying sermons every single week, teaching catechism, leading societies, visiting, visiting, visiting—the sick, the widows, and the shut-ins. Our congregations expect much from their ministers. The work is physically, emotionally, and spiritu-

ally taxing and exhausting. Pray that God will equip the students for such work. It is a *good* work. But it is also a *strenuous* work.

Pray for them that they have the strength to stand adamantly for the truth in the face of opposition. This opposition may arise right within their own congregations—when they preach against specific sins and that offends some in the congregation who love that sin; and when they preach antithetically and expose and condemn the lie and it offends friends and relatives of the one who holds to that lie. Opposition comes also from the outside.

The world hates Christ, the world hates the truth, and the world hates the faithful messengers of the truth. And, closer to home, there is opposition even within the Reformed camp. There are those who would speak malicious words against us because we hold up the truth of sovereign, particular grace and reject every compromise thereto. Pray for these men, considering what they must be prepared to endure.

Pray for us as you remember the fact that we live in the last times. Evil abounds. The unmistakable clouds of persecution gather. Ministers stand in the front line of the

conflict. These young men may well be some of the first who give up their lives for the sake of the gospel in the final, great persecution under the Antichrist.

Thus it is incumbent on you that you pray for us that we may have the courage to stand for the cause of Christ; to preach sovereign, particular grace and the glorious unconditional covenant of grace; and to preach the antithetical life. Courage will be necessary as we approach the end, to be faithful preachers, even if the whole world rises up to snuff out the witness.

... to be concluded. 

THINGS WHICH MUST SHORTLY COME TO PASS

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA

## Chapter Four

### Postmillennialism (27)

# The Reformed (Amillennial) Critique of Postmillennialism

## Introduction

The preceding article in this series demonstrated that the Reformed confessions not only have not a word of support for postmillennialism but also repudiate this false doctrine. These confessions know only the hope of the second coming of Christ. They also present the kingdom of God as a spiritual, heavenly reign of God in the hearts and lives of elect believers, taking institutional form in the true church. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) explicitly condemns postmillennialism as “Jewish dreams.”

*Prof. Engelsma is professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*

*Previous article in this series: December 15, 2013, p. 127.*

The Westminster Standards, the creeds of Presbyterianism, are no more supportive of postmillennialism.

## Westminster Standards

The Westminster Confession of Faith calls “the visible Church” “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Postmillennialism, in contrast, tends to disparage viewing the church as the kingdom of God, preferring to regard a future “Christianized” world, or the dominion of the saints over governments and nations, as the kingdom of Christ.

Like the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confes-

<sup>1</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, 25.2, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 657.

sion, the Westminster Confession holds before Presbyterians the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the body on that day as their one, great hope. "Then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord.... Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."<sup>2</sup>

The explanation of the second petition of the model prayer by the Westminster Shorter Catechism gives not even a hint that the coming of the kingdom includes, much less features, the earthly triumph of this kingdom within history for a thousand years.

*What do we pray for in the second petition?*

In the second petition, which is, "*Thy kingdom come*," we pray that Satan's kingdom may be destroyed, and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it, and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the complete lack of support for postmillennialism in the Westminster Standards, the report of the study committee of illustrious Presbyterian theologians and churchmen to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of 1963 stated that "these Standards are not drawn up in terms that would exclude millennial expectation in the postmillennial form but they do not enunciate this belief." Expanding its scope to all the creeds of Protestantism, the committee declared that "the Protestant creeds were, with scarcely an exception, non-millennial in the sense that belief in a millennium was not set forth as a tenet of faith."<sup>4</sup>

The refusal of the Westminster Standards to include a statement of postmillennial expectations of the future is significant. At the time of the Westminster Assembly, and indeed at the Assembly itself, prominent Puritan theologians were strongly advocating postmillennialism. Many had convinced themselves that the uproar of the revolution against Charles I and the league among the three nations of Great Britain portended the beginning of the millennium.

<sup>2</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, 33.2, 3, in *ibid.*, 672, 673.

<sup>3</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 102, in *ibid.*, 699.

<sup>4</sup> Report of the study committee on "Eschatology," in "Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod 1963" (Grand Rapids: n. p., n. d.), 85.

But the Westminster Assembly did not incorporate these notions into its creeds.

English theologian Peter Toon observes:

William Twisse, the prolocutor of the Assembly in its first sessions, was himself a millenarian [that is, a postmillennialist] and so also were the majority of the Independent divines who attended. The influence of these millenarians was, however, insufficient to affect the final wording of the *Confession of Faith*, which gives the impression of following the Augustinian [that is, amillennial] teaching.<sup>5</sup>

The result was that the postmillennial theologians met separately in order to draw up their own confession, the Savoy Declaration (1658), which does confess postmillennial eschatology.

As the Lord is in care and love towards his Church, hath in his infinite wise providence exercised it with great variety in all ages, for the good of them that love him, and his own glory; so, according to his promise, we expect that in the latter days, Antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the kingdom of his dear Son broken, the churches of Christ being enlarged and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable, and glorious condition than they have enjoyed.<sup>6</sup>

All of the main elements of postmillennialism are included in this article: the destruction of the antichristian kingdom some, long time before the end; the extraordinary conversion and salvation of large numbers of Jews, if not the restoration of the nation of Israel in Palestine; the defeat of all the enemies of the church; the numerical growth of the church, perhaps a majority of the human race; and especially the church's earthly peace, prosperity, and glory "*in this world*."

But the Savoy Declaration is not a Reformed or Presbyterian creed. It is a Baptist, congregational creed.

By its separate meeting, apart from the Westminster Assembly, and by its deliberate addition of postmillennial eschatology to its emendation of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Savoy Declaration is a public

<sup>5</sup> Peter Toon, "Puritan Eschatology: 1600 to 1648," in *The Manifold Grace of God* (Cambridge, England: Burlington Press, 1968), 50.

<sup>6</sup> The Savoy Declaration, 26.5, in Schaff, *Creeds*, vol. 3, 723.



admission that Reformed Christianity does not have, and never has had, any place for the ungrounded, unbiblical optimism of postmillennialism. On the contrary, the Reformed faith has always disavowed this optimism. Instead, the Reformed faith confesses the lively hope of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

### **Purpose of the Critical Study**

Here, I end my lengthy, critical study of postmillennialism.

I judge such a long, thorough, critical study to be necessary for Reformed churches and Christians today.

Reformed believers must be warned against the doctrine that is being aggressively promoted, under the cloak of Reformed orthodoxy, by the Christian Reconstructionists; by the disciples of the Puritans, for instance, Iain Murray and the Banner of Truth movement; by the culture-Calvinists, that is, all those urging the redemption and transformation of society by a common grace of God; and, as is little recognized, by the men of the Federal Vision.

Against the seductions of postmillennialism, Reformed Christians must be convinced of the sober truth of amillennialism. They must engage in spiritual warfare with the apostasy of many churches and with the alternating allure and threat of an ungodly world. They must prepare for intensification of the warfare in the days before them. They may not be deceived by the peaceful, prosperous, powerful kingdom that is soon reared up in all the world over all nations.

Not the kingdom of Christ will enjoy carnal triumph at history's end, but the kingdom of the beast (Rev. 13).

The victory of the kingdom of Jesus Christ will be the *goal* of history, on the day of Christ's bodily and visible appearing.

Whereas the ardent desire of the Christian Reconstructionists, the Puritans, and the common grace culture-Calvinists is, "Come, millennial kingdom!" that is, a this-worldly desire, the ardent desire of confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian Christians is, "Come, Lord Jesus!" that is, an other-worldly desire. ☞

And God Spake All These Words:

## The Reading of the Law in Worship (7a)

And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Exodus 20:1-3

---

*Rev. Griess is pastor of the Calvary Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.*

*Previous article in this series: December 1, 2013, p. 104.*

### **Introduction**

In previous articles in this series we examined three great principles of public corporate worship. The first was that public corporate worship is a covenantal assembly. The second was that it is a covenantal assembly carried out in a holy dialogue between God and His people. The third was that it is an assembly the dialogue of which is regulated by God Himself. After setting forth these principles we began to look at the various elements God commands be a part of this assembly and how these elements fit in the dialogue of worship. We took up the main

element in which God speaks to His people, namely the reading and preaching of Scripture. We next examined one of the main elements that give our response, congregational singing.

Now, we embark upon a study of another aspect of the service in which God speaks to us, this time His rule over our lives in the covenant. This aspect of the service is the reading of the Law. The reading of the Law is not, strictly speaking, its own element. It is one part of a broader category, the reading of the Word of God. But it is good and profitable that part of that element of the reading of the Word be specifically the reading of the Law. This article and the next will explain why that is so, from the place of the Law in the life of the church throughout the New Testament age, and then from the place the reading of the Law has in the worship services of Reformed churches.

### **The Law and the New Testament**

The Law of God is centrally and foundationally given to us in the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20. There are other laws given in Holy Scripture, many given by Jesus Christ Himself. But centrally the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments, is the Law of God. The Ten Commandments are God's revealed moral will for every single man, woman, and child upon this earth. Though this Law was written in the Old Testament, the Moral Law does not fall away at the end of the Old Testament. It continues to be the Law of God for all of us now and to the second coming of Christ.

That is evident from the commandments themselves, which transcend time and change. The First Commandment speaks of worshiping God alone. No change could ever make this command fall away. The Sixth Commandment speaks of murder. When in history would it ever be right to murder? These are laws that are not bound to a particular time or culture, but are broad moral principles for all peoples at all times.

In fact, the Ten Commandments were in effect before God gave them in stone at Mt. Sinai. God's condemnation of the worship of idols is revealed not first at Mt. Sinai but at the very beginning of all things. The Bible makes it clear that it was wrong for Cain to kill his brother Abel long before the Sixth Commandment was written down. The gross sexual immorality of the men

of Sodom (Genesis 19) was wrong long before God appeared to Israel at Sinai. The Bible condemns Lot's wife for being covetous before the Tenth Commandment was given in stone.

The fact that the Ten Commandments are permanent is also proved from observing the way they were given by God in the book of Exodus. God spoke these commandments publicly to all in Exodus 20, something He did not do in the giving of the other laws at Mt. Sinai. In addition, later, in Exodus 31, God gave the Ten Commandments on tables of stone, and He wrote them with His own finger. Exodus 31:18: "And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God." No other commandments were written that way. The writing in stone indicates that they are permanent, and that God had etched them in stone Himself indicates their enduring authority.

In addition, the Ten Commandments are permanent because they are complete. Nothing can be added or taken away from them as far as moral principles for life before the face of God are concerned. The Bible says that God wrote the Law on two tables, front side and back. Exodus 32:15: "And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written." This indicates there was no room left for anything to be added. The Ten Commandments are divided into two sections, corresponding to the fact that they were written on two tables. As Q/A 93 of the Heidelberg Catechism points out, the first table speaks to us of how we are to relate to God, the second how we are to relate to our neighbor for God's sake. In other words, all relationships are governed by this Law. Nothing needs to be added.

The Moral Law is also complete in that its requirements penetrate into the depths of the human heart. Its requirements are essentially the requirements of love. The summary of the Law that Jesus gives in the New Testament and that we also read every Sunday morning shows this. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind, and strength and thy neighbor as thyself." Its requirements are not merely external and outward, but also internal and spiritual. There can be no

more totally-penetrating command than the law of love.

The Ten Commandments are for all time, then, even though there are other laws in the Old Testament that fall away in the New Testament. There were three types of laws that were given in the Old Testament. There were civil laws, ceremonial laws, and the Moral Law. The civil laws were the laws given for the governing of Israel as a nation. There were laws about how to wage war, what to do about someone who refused to pay his debt, etc. These laws were *applications* of the Moral Law to Israel as a society, so that Israel as nation could live in good order, justice, and holiness.

Although principles may be gained from these laws to help us apply the Moral Law to our life yet today, these laws themselves are no longer in effect.<sup>1</sup> The reason is because the church is no longer a state. In the Old Testament the church and state were one. Now in the New Testament the church is the kingdom of Christ, not the state. America is not God's kingdom; the church is God's kingdom. And the church is ruled directly by Jesus Christ and His own application of the Moral Law to the life of the church (especially in the Sermon on the Mount), and the apostles' inspired understanding of the Moral Law's application to the church found in the rest of the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> This is why we do not read the civil laws as a separate aspect of our weekly worship.

The second type of law in the Old Testament is ceremonial law. Ceremonial laws were laws given to the Israelites concerning all the feasts and sacrifices they were commanded to offer. There were laws regarding ritual cleansings, laws governing the clothing of the priests, laws about what the priests ate, etc. Although spiritual principles may be gained from these laws as well, they are also no longer in effect. This is true because all of these laws pointed forward to Jesus Christ, whose life and death was the one true and great ceremony. For instance, the

<sup>1</sup> In technical terms, the Ten Commandments are the apodictic law for all time, and the civil laws are the case laws applying the apodictic law to that particular time and circumstance.

<sup>2</sup> This points out the error of Christian Reconstructionism. Christian Reconstructionism teaches that all the civil laws that governed Old Testament Israel need eventually to be reinstated in America in some fashion. Then America will truly be Christian and we will establish Christ's kingdom on earth. This is erroneous. The church is Christ's kingdom, governed by the Moral Law in the hands of Christ and the apostles and enforced by the spiritual discipline of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

laws concerning the spotless sacrifices pointed ahead to Christ the perfect sacrifice, and the laws concerning the ritual cleansings pointed forward to the child of God washed from His sins in Christ's blood.<sup>3</sup> This is why we do not read the ceremonial laws as a separate aspect of our weekly worship.

### The Law Useful for the Christian

Only the Moral Law remains for all time. Because it remains for all time, the Moral Law is useful for our life in the covenant of grace still today. The Ten Commandments are for the church and were given to the church, though they apply to all men in every age and every place.

Notice in Exodus 20 that God addresses the Law to *His people*. In the heading of the Law, given in verse 2, God says, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." God is addressing His people as the covenant people of God. When He says, "I am the Lord Thy God," He is appealing to the covenant formula, using the phrase that is repeated all throughout the Bible to describe the covenant, "I will be your God and you will be my people." God is wrapping His arms around His people with those words, as if to say, "I am your God, who delivered you out of the bondage of Egypt and took you to Myself. This law is for you. You alone have the spiritual capacity to understand it, to be convicted by it, to be driven to the Messiah by it, and to seek to obey it from the heart. This law represents My sovereignty over you as My people. I am sovereign over all people, and the law says that too, but I rule over you in a special way. You are my peculiar possession. I have bought you, redeemed you, and now I assert my loving rule over you."

This means that the use of the Ten Commandments in the New Testament is not as a means for us to earn salvation. This is the gospel in Exodus 20:2. In Exodus 20 the gospel is given before the Law. There is always a danger that we look at the keeping of the Law as self-salvation, even as it is read in the service. There is a temptation to respond to the Law, "I do a pretty decent job of obeying the Law. After all, I am here in church, am I not? Other

<sup>3</sup> It is the error of dispensationalism to suppose that these ceremonial laws will come back in the nation of Israel at the end, and that the kingdom of God will be the nation of Israel restored to its Old Testament times.

people are not. That's why God will have me." This is the natural bent of our thinking, but it is a false gospel. God demands perfect obedience to His Law from the heart. God is so Holy He cannot demand anything other than perfect obedience, and anything less than that obedience brings one under judgment and the curse. We cannot be redeemed by this Law.

Instead, the first use of God's Law for us is as a means by which we see God's perfect holiness. If one makes a law, that law always reveals the character of the law-giver. In the U.S. we have a law that says that abortion is legal. That reveals the character of those who make the laws of this nation (including the populace). They do not have a regard for human life from conception. So too, the Law of God reveals God's character, and all of that Law cries out this about God's character: God is Holy! The whole context surrounding the giving of the Law in Exodus 20 lets us know that this is true as well. When the Lord descends upon the mount, the accompanying effects were not that butterflies and roses and confetti shot out everywhere. Rather, there was lightning and thunder and the sound of a loud trumpet. The mountain smoked with fire. It was a frightening sight, and the people trembled (19:16). God told Moses to hold the people back from the mount, for if they came too close, His holiness would break forth upon them and consume them (19:24). The holiness of God was on display to point us to the fact that this Law encapsulates His holiness. He is perfectly pure, and in order to approach Him and be His people, we must be perfectly pure as well.

Thus the law is also a means by which God's people see their sin and their need for Christ. The Law is a mirror in which the child of God sees his own depravity. He stands before the Law that requires perfect obedience, and he sees he cannot obey its demands. The Law is a mirror in which the child of God sees himself dirty and corrupt, which drives him to Jesus Christ for cleansing. The Law does not drive one to the Law for cleansing, but to Christ. If you look into a mirror at home and see

that you have dirt on your face, you don't use the mirror to try to clean yourself. The view you get of yourself in the mirror drives you to the water from the sink, to clean your face. So the Law reveals our sins and drives us to the rivers of Christ's perfect sacrifice for sin for cleansing. The Christian needs that. Every week he needs that. Every week he must be brought to the realization of his own unworthiness and be driven to the cross. The Law is God's gift to His children, so that they live in dependence upon Christ week by week.

But the Law is also the rule of gratitude for the child of God. It is the Law of perfect liberty. Even though the child of God sees His sin in the mirror of the Law, he must know also that that Law cannot curse Him anymore. He has been redeemed by Christ. The child of God must still see His sin and be driven to Christ, but he must not let the Law attempt to curse Him and damn him to hell. He is freed from the Law's condemnation in order to begin to obey it in freedom. Whereas before, the child of God cursed the Law, because He is free in Christ it is his desire now to obey that Law. He now can say with David, "O how love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day!"<sup>4</sup> And he can say to it, "Teach me the way that I should go."<sup>5</sup> He sees in the Law that it is part of the covenant of grace. God did not redeem Israel so that they could live like Egypt. But he delivered them so that they could serve Him in the true freedom of holiness. That is why God redeems me in Christ and then calls me to obey His Law out of gratitude. I must. This is my part in the covenant, to love Him and serve Him and honor Him in gratitude and love.

And since the covenantal assembly is where the covenant is primarily declared and maintained by God, how appropriate that this Law that convicts and drives to Christ so that we may be free to live out our part in that covenant is spoken to us in that covenantal assembly week after week. ☺

*The Law is a mirror  
in which the child of God  
sees himself dirty  
and corrupt,  
which drives him to  
Jesus Christ for cleansing.*

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 119:97.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 25:4.

### Biblical Patriarchy Not Biblical

In the news recently has been the revelation of the long-standing adultery of Douglas Phillips with a young nanny employed in his home. Douglas Phillips is the CEO of Vision Forum, Inc., a for-profit business that sells a catalog of expensive trinkets in the name of biblical patriarchy, and president of Vision Forum Ministries, a nonprofit ministry that promotes the ideas of Christian reconstructionism, homeschooling, and biblical patriarchy.

This article is not interested in the longstanding and adulterous relationship of Douglas Phillips. The scandal has exposed a movement in which Douglas Phillips is a key figure. Since he has not resigned from Vision Forum, Inc., the business side of the movement, he will continue to be a key figure in what is called the biblical patriarchy movement, the quiver full movement, patriocentrism, or the Christian patriarchy movement.

I am not interested in all the variants of this movement, which allow its adherents to dodge criticism by claiming they do not teach or believe this or that extreme teaching. For example, Karen Campbell, a Spurgeonite Baptist and longtime strident critic of Phillips, exposes some of the stranger teachings of biblical patriarchy, such as that daughters are “helpmeets for their fathers,” an insistence on courting, and even redefinitions of the Trinity.<sup>1</sup>

My criticism of the biblical patriarchy movement is not the criticism of many. Most criticism is like that of the feminist Julie Ingersoll from Huffington Post: a spitting contempt for God’s creation of male headship in marriage, the biblical teaching that the sphere of the married woman is the home, and the will of the Spirit that the women bear children, even many children.

<sup>1</sup> A full-length treatment can be found at <http://www.thatmom.com/articles/pros-and-cons-of-the-family-integrated-church/>. Those interested in a book-length treatment of the movement can consult Kathryn Joyce, *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).

*Rev. Langerak is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois.*

My criticism aims at the root of the movement: sheer earthly-mindedness parading as spirituality. Biblical patriarchy promotes supposedly biblical male headship in the family as the pious cover for an earthly agenda.

Its origin is the thinking of the radical Christian reconstructionism of Rousas J. Rushdoony, a postmillennialist intent on capturing America and the world for an earthly Christian kingdom firmly ensconced in the Old Testament shadow. Publicly shying away from the radical Christian reconstructionism of Rushdoony’s magnum opus, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, today’s reconstructionism, called dominionism, carries on the culture wars in his name and in the name of his earthly, postmillennial kingdom. Out of this root came biblical patriarchy.<sup>2</sup>

The kingdom of Rushdoony’s Christian reconstructionism is thoroughly earthly, a kingdom of earthly power and wealth—hoarding gold and silver. It is earthly dominion gained by earthly means, preferably victories at the ballot box. The earthly kingdom is the theological root of biblical patriarchy.

From this root, too, the miserable treatment of women should not be surprising. It was well known, and ironic, that Rushdoony, who wanted to make America Christian, himself violated one of its central tenets by divorcing his wife and the mother of all his children and then worked hard with his followers to cover it up by purging her out of his biography and perpetuating the charade that the second, adulterous wife was his only wife.<sup>3</sup>

So also the goal of the biblical patriarchy movement is earthly. One of its critics characterizes the whole movement as intent “to win the religion and culture wars through demographic means.” In its *Declaration of Life*, Vision Forum Ministries says:

God’s Holy Word declares that the children of faithful Christians are a means of spreading the influence of the Church in society, of global discipleship and cultural

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/julie-ingersoll/doug-phillips-the-big-scandal\\_b\\_4195155.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/julie-ingersoll/doug-phillips-the-big-scandal_b_4195155.html).

<sup>3</sup> <http://alumni.berkeley.edu/california-magazine/fall-2012-politics-issue/his-truth-marching>.

dominion, and that the larger the population growth of Christians, the more effective will be our warfare.<sup>4</sup>

Cultural dominion, which is earthly dominion, is the dominion at which biblical patriarchy aims. The goal of biblical patriarchy is an earthly goal, an earthly kingdom of earthly power with earthly riches. It is uninterested in the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ with its cross and marked absence of earthly power and riches.

This blatant emphasis on earthly power comes out as well in the teachings directed toward the males, in particular the impressionable young boys. Power, spiritual power, is equated with physical prowess, physical strength, and economic success. That is the power of their earthly kingdom.

Having the earthly-minded theology of Rushdoony as its origin and an earthly kingdom as its goal, it also seeks to reach that goal by earthly means. The means that biblical patriarchy has chosen for establishing the postmillennial kingdom is numbers: “the larger the population growth of Christians the more effective will be our warfare.” Numbers is simply another form of earthly power. The weapons of their warfare are earthly in contrast to what the apostle Paul says in II Corinthians 10:4 about the weapons of his warfare—and of the spiritual kingdom of Christ: “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty.”

This “demographic” approach of biblical patriarchy is also not much different than the *lebensborn* of the Nazis, which intended to increase the population for warfare and to breed leaders for the expanded Nazi state, a point some critics have not missed.

Right along with the earthly weapon of numbers is the earthly sphere of its battle: at the ballot box in the political and cultural realm. Its warfare is not for the truth, for the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ, but its warfare is the cultural wars and its battleground is society. The *Declaration of Life* proclaims that the “defining crime” of our generation is “abortion,” and states the goals of the members of the movement as not putting into power those who disagree with their condemnation of abortion and their political agenda of overturning abortion laws. That a believing Christian stands against

<sup>4</sup> [www.visionforumministries.org/home/about/a\\_declaration\\_of\\_life\\_1.aspx](http://www.visionforumministries.org/home/about/a_declaration_of_life_1.aspx).

the wicked cruelty of abortion should be a given, but to repeal abortion laws is hardly the victorious renewal of all things in a new heaven and new earth that Christ promised His church.

Under the guise of promoting the biblical family, the movement takes dead aim at the institutions of the Christian church and Christian school. In its list of human institutions, *The Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy*, a kind of manifesto for biblical patriarchy authored by Phillips along with R. C. Sproul Jr. and Phil Lancaster, does not mention the school, but “family, church, and state.”<sup>5</sup> The movement is heavily invested in the home education movement, the virtual single-handed creation of its theological father, Rousas J. Rushdoony, and a movement in which Vision Forum has played a large part.<sup>6</sup> When Karen Campbell, an avid home educator, speaks of Phillips’ resignation as “rocking” that community, she indicates the depth of Vision Forum’s and biblical patriarchy’s influence among home educators. Vision Forum creates, promotes, and sells home education material that is used by hundreds of thousands of home educators in this country and is intended to promote biblical patriarchy.

Biblical patriarchy’s manifesto, speaking of the approved educational methodology, says, “Since the educational mandate belongs to parents and they are commanded personally to walk beside and train their children, they ought not to transfer responsibility for the educational process to others.”

The document says further, “The modern preference for grouping children exclusively with their age mates for educational and social purposes is contrary to scriptural wisdom and example,” and it calls “God-ordained” for education “the age-integrated communities of family and church.” The authors relate this vision of education to the “progress of God’s kingdom in the world,” and they exhort that “church shepherds need to promote this outlook in their flocks.”

This interpretation of the father’s calling to educate his children by walking beside them, prohibiting the so-called “transfer” of “responsibility for the educational process,” and making the grouping of children by grades

<sup>5</sup> [www.visionforumministries.org/home/about/biblical\\_patriarchy.aspx](http://www.visionforumministries.org/home/about/biblical_patriarchy.aspx).

<sup>6</sup> <http://alumni.berkeley.edu/california-magazine/fall-2012-politics-issue/his-truth-marching>.

against scriptural wisdom, defines the Christian school out of existence and speaks only of making limited, discretionary use of the gifts of others in the community, such as, I might hire a piano teacher for my children.

This is also the practice of the biblical patriarchy movement. Its promotion of the supposedly biblical family excludes the promotion of the Christian school as a work of covenant families educating their children together, not by transferring responsibility, but by delegating it to teachers who stand *in loco parentis*.

Biblical patriarchy is also a movement that is intent on remaking the institution of the church in its image. Douglas Phillips is cofounder with Scott Brown of the family integrated church movement. The family integrated church movement is a wing of biblical patriarchy, which is committed to remaking the church in the image of biblical patriarchy, that is, into churches that “operate like a family.”<sup>7</sup> While officially against house churches, the family integrated church movement associates with and promotes the writings of house church enthusiast Kevin Reed, making their claims hollow at best. They allow for the possibility that churches may take years to develop, by implication disparaging current denominations. They promote a network of disparate individuals spread over the country who are waiting for these developments, but all the while remain disconnected from any true church institute. They also maintain a list of churches and individuals that promote family integration but are of widely divergent doctrinal teachings, from Presbyterian to Pentecostal and beyond.<sup>8</sup> They disparage creeds and proper, biblical church order, and promote a false standard of what makes a church healthy. What is the chief criterion for whether a church makes their list? If it has caught the vision of home education and biblical patriarchy!

Taking aim at the Christian school and the Christian church, the movement abuses the Christian family as the instrument of earthly dominion in society and the world. It abuses the “godly seed” as the instruments of cultural dominion. Closely related to this is biblical patriarchy’s view of the woman as primarily a “helper,” but with little or no mention of her as her husband’s

<sup>7</sup> [www.visionforumministries.org/issues/uniting\\_church\\_and\\_family/wisdom\\_cries.aspx](http://www.visionforumministries.org/issues/uniting_church_and_family/wisdom_cries.aspx).

<sup>8</sup> The network can be found here: <https://ncfic.org/>

friend, and implying that the primary relationship between husband and wife is that of authority instead of love. The Bible tells the husband not only to rule his wife, but also to love her, and tells the wife to submit, which is the form of her love. God’s word about her in the beginning is, first, that it was not good for man to be alone. His aloneness—not that he needed someone to rule—was the problem for which God created not merely a help, but also a help who was *meet* for him, and to whom he was commanded to *cleave*. This contrasts with the statement in *The Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy* that the “woman was created as a helper to her husband, as the bearer of children, and as a keeper at home.” She was also created to be his “companion,” as God clearly states in Malachi 2:14–15, biblical patriarchy’s vaunted passage on the “godly seed.”

The movement parades earthly goals and methods under a thin veil of biblical texts and biblical sounding ideas. In reality it has more in common with the world-conquering *paterfamilias* of the Roman Cato, than with the biblical patriarch Abraham. Its earthly-mindedness springs from its theological root, the earthly thinking and striving of the postmillennialism of Rushdoony.

For these reasons it is also tyrannical and an abuse of power. It seizes the authority that God gives to the husband and abuses it for earthly and personal ends for which God never intended that power to be used. It seizes the institution of the family—the wife and companion of the marriage and the children born in that family—and abuses it as the instruments for cultural dominion. It is intent on seizing the institution of the church. It condemns to an agonizing death the institution of the Christian school.<sup>9</sup>

So, too, it is also wicked. Earthly-mindedness, tyranny, and abuse of the authority and institutions of God are wicked. So is the movement that promotes this. It more than justifies the description of its teachings as “abhorrent,” even if the more scandalous are left out of view.<sup>10</sup>



<sup>9</sup> [www.visionforumministries.org/home/about/biblical\\_patriarchy.aspx](http://www.visionforumministries.org/home/about/biblical_patriarchy.aspx).

<sup>10</sup> [http://theaquilareport.com/thinking-thoughtfully-about-doug-phillips-resignation/?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=thinking-thoughtfully-about-doug-phillips-resignation](http://theaquilareport.com/thinking-thoughtfully-about-doug-phillips-resignation/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=thinking-thoughtfully-about-doug-phillips-resignation).

# The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

**“I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.”**

Psalm 116

In Psalm 116, the psalmist David gives his personal testimony of how he came to experience salvation, of how he came to say, “I love the Lord.” David’s experience had three distinct parts to it; Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude. Do not think of them as three steps so that when he arrived at gratitude, he forgot his guilt, and the memory of grace was no longer part of his life. The experience of his salvation was to know all of these things working together all the time! Guilt, grace, and gratitude led him to say, “I love the Lord.”

He confesses his guilt in the opening verses of the Psalm, confessing that he is a sinner and that he believes that he is on the way to hell. “The pains of hell gat hold upon me, I found trouble and sorrow.” He discovered that, of himself, he was a depraved man and was worthy of just judgment.

The grace of his deliverance was in the second part of the Psalm, when he experienced something that was unexpected and absolutely abundant, a bountiful grace and deliverance. “For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.” Thankfulness had to follow. He had known guilt, he had known grace, and then as a sure consequence he comes to experience an overwhelming gratitude of heart, a spontaneous, irrepressible gratitude of heart.

Compare the ending of the Psalm to a geyser in Yellowstone National Park. Due to the pressure of heat under the soil, suddenly the waters are released in a mighty

---

*Rev. Haak is pastor of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, MI. This article is the text of one of the six speeches given at the PR Seminary-sponsored conference, in October of last year, commemorating the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism. The other five were printed in the November 1, 2013 issue of the SB.*

fountain! They erupt, there is no holding it back. So David’s heart has been filled with the experience of saving grace. He felt his guilt, experienced God’s abundant grace, and as a result his gratitude, as a geyser under the pressures of tasting the wonder of grace, had to burst forth in confession of his lips: “I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.” He was burdened with the question, “How will I show forth gratitude to God for all of His benefits toward me?” He resolves that he will take up his place among God’s people. He will go to the courts of God so that he can begin to express his gratitude to God for his deliverance.

Now, as you look carefully at Psalm 116, you will recognize the outline that the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism have chosen. The Catechism is precious to us because of its theme: My only comfort of belonging to Jesus Christ. To have that comfort, I need to know how the Catechism began already in Lord’s Day One: my guilt, God’s grace, and gratitude. We find this repeated through all of the Scriptures. This is the experience of salvation.

Ask yourself, Is this my experience? Do I know these three truths personally? How great my sins and miseries are? How graciously I have received deliverance through Jesus Christ? If you truly know these things, then must you not also erupt in thankfulness to God for His grace?

We come then to the third part: gratitude. The Christian lives a life of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving captures the heart of the Christian who has been redeemed by God’s grace. It will be seen in all of his conduct and in all of his life, as if it were oil soaked down into his soul. It is the best measure that he truly is living as a child of God. Gratitude will warm our soul as a glowing coal, so that “We may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us” (L.D. 32). This testimony in the Catechism encapsulates the Christian life.



## The Holy Impulse

The Catechism is putting us before the most significant question: Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works? The Catechism is saying, “Give me one good reason why I ought to live the Christian life? Why ought I do good works? Why ought I obey God and keep His law? Why should I walk in holiness? Why must I be sexually pure? Why be honest and clean in my speech? Why should I strive to live a Christian life?”

But these are only surface questions. Let’s go deeper. “Why will you give up the pleasure of a sinful world? Why will you fight temptations and endure reproach in the name of Jesus Christ? Why would you endure the loss of all things for the sake of the gospel of grace? Give me one good reason for doing these things!”

Only one reason compels us, and the reason is *gratitude to God*. The Holy Spirit has worked an inward compulsion that we must show forth our gratitude to God in the whole of our conduct. That’s the Christian. That’s the power behind a life of good works.

The Catechism enquires as to the necessity of doing good works. We certainly must not do them out of an ambition to merit salvation with God. We do not do them to chip away at the mountain of our debt. We must not do them out of pride—to call attention to ourselves and win the praise of others. If this is the motivation for our Christian life, then all of our good works are an abomination to God. We confess there is only one reason for good works: gratitude for so great a salvation.

Let’s understand that. We do not deserve salvation from the misery of our sins or to be embraced by God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Only the eternal grace of God saves us. Christ’s cross and resurrection are the only rock upon which salvation stands. All that we have received of God was without any deserving on our part.

Yet there is still the word “*must*” in Lord’s Day 32: “Why *must* we still do good works?” That “*must*” is not the external must of constraint. It is not, “Oh, do I have to?” This “*must*” is the Holy Spirit creating a new impulse to express thankfulness to God. It says, “I desire to do Thy will!” Hear the testimony of II Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become

new.” And Titus 2:14: “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

In India, yoked oxen pull carts filled with sand. Either the whip drives them to pull, or a carrot on a string before their eyes entices them to pull. Neither of these is the compulsion for the child of God to serve his Lord. We do not do good works because of the whip of God’s judgment or because of the carrot of future merit. A heavenly, other-worldly motive constrains us to perform good works. It is the new, graciously implanted, inward impulse of gratitude.

Think about the power of steam. God has created the molecular structure of water such that, when it is heated, the elements expand and the molecules begin to interact, producing steam. If you put water in a two-inch-thick steel barrel without a release valve and then put fire under it, the water will break the barrel and burst forth! You cannot keep the lid on it. So also you cannot keep the lid on the thanks to God in a redeemed heart.

Our Catechism is teaching us that there is a divine chemistry at work in the life of a believer. The elect sinner, faced with the reality of his own depravity, is placed over the warm coals of the finished work of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is infused into his heart so that his praise to God must break out unto good works.

Now, how shall we give thanks? David says, “I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord; I will pay my vows.” Gratitude now swells within and becomes the one motive for living. As youth we will, we will want to, make confession of faith. As married we will keep our vows in marriage. As believers we will keep our vows to the church in all that it involves. We’re going to pay all our vows—out of the “*must*” of thankfulness.

Remember what the apostle Paul said in II Corinthians 5:14: “For the love of Christ constraineth us.” Divine love constrains us, so that we will not live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died and rose for us. In the context, the apostle Paul is accused of fanaticism, “You are crazy, Paul! You are beside yourself in all that you are doing for the cause of the Kingdom of God.” Paul says, “A fanatic doesn’t know why he is doing what he is doing. He’s just carried away with emotions. I’m not fanatical. I am constrained by my love for Christ who has loved me.”

The Christian’s life does not begin with the question,

“Well, tell me how much I have to do. Give me the bottom line. What can I get by with in my life?” To God, this attitude is repulsive, dishonorable, and displeasing. Consider the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The elder brother said to his father, “All these years have I served you, and you never gave me a kid that I may celebrate with my friends. Now when my younger brother comes back, who wasted his living with harlots, you give him a party.” The younger brother had said in the pig trough, “I will arise and go to my father and I will say, Father I have sinned, and I am not worthy. Make me as one of thy servants.” The elder brother believed that living with God was all about a contract, conditions, and fulfilling those conditions. The younger brother believed that living with God was all about free grace, amazing grace, and abounding gratitude.

### The Pleasing Sacrifice

So we see that the “must” of a Christian for doing good works is the renewed impulse of the Spirit. He makes our works a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord. David says, “I will offer to thee a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord.” In this verse, “sacrifice” is not a reference to making an atonement for sin. This word in the Scriptures often refers to an expression of worship. The heart of sacrifice is simply “to bring.” What will David bring to his worship? His answer? Thanksgiving! Worship is to speak of God *as He is*. This cannot be done without thanks.

Thanksgiving to God is to be personally aware of all His virtues. He is the Author of all that is good. He is excellent in His being and gracious in His deeds. So God says to His people, “I do not want the blood of bulls and goats! The cattle on a thousand hills are all Mine. I do not need that! I seek the expression in your worship of a heart of thanks for all that I am and have done for you!”

God is not worshiped with a long face. He is not worshiped with mere outward prayer. He is not worshiped in mere outward acts and rituals. How is God worshiped in His sanctuary? Do you say, “Oh, I gotta be at church, my parents are checking up on me.” God is not pleased with that. Do you say, “Well, God can’t put a finger on me. He can’t see anything outwardly wrong with my life.” Is God worshiped with mere outward form? No, God is praised with a humble and sincere heart of thankfulness.

This makes worship pleasing to God. Without thanks, our worship is like stinking fish to His nostrils.

Thanksgiving is the power of a godly life. Would we live holy lives? The answer is: Live a thankful life. Gratitude pushes evil away from our hearts. We could walk with grudges and harbor unforgiving spirits, but gratitude before God melts our hearts; it melts away bitterness and resentment.

Thanksgiving pleases God because it confesses Him to be the source of all good. This makes our giving of thanks an infinite task. We will never come to the end of it! We will never come to the last gift of praise. We will never come to the last doxology. We will never express the final word of thanks. Even when we die and go to heaven, we will perform acts of thanks...forever and ever! The Catechism says it beautifully: “That we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God.”

How great is your thankfulness? How much space is reserved in your life to store up all your gratitude? We reserve space in our lives for our hobbies. We build barns and sheds to fill with all our treasures. What sized room would you need to contain your thanks to God for His grace and faithfulness? Could you keep your gratitude in the back of your closet? Could you store it in a little drawer in the kitchen? Or do you say, “Tear down my rooms for greed and my spaces for grudges and lust! The whole world does not contain the space to express my praise and the thanks of my soul for what God has done for me!”

Birds spend the night in a tree with one eye open for a hawk, but they sing in the morning. They just can’t help it. We sleep in soft beds, get up in the morning, and growl, “Don’t talk to me, I’m crabby this morning!” Do we hear the birds singing outside? How can we keep from singing when we know what God has done for us?

This is what the Catechism means by “the whole of our conduct.” Our conduct, taken as a whole, is testifying to something. Those who know us would judge our character by our conduct. Does the sum of your conduct spell for all to see, “Now thank we all our God”?

The whole of our conduct can also refer to our conduct at different times and circumstances of our life—work or home, blessing or trial, health or sickness. For example, on Friday afternoon, you receive a notice that after 25 years at your corporation you are being let go, and you can hand in your cell phone. On Tuesday morning, the

blood-work comes back and shows that the cancer is not subsiding. On Wednesday, you're in an accident and lose a hand. Yet the grateful soul in every moment and every event of life expresses thanks to God for His abundant grace through Jesus Christ the Savior.


### The Sweet Benefits

An ungrateful life will reap bitter fruits. The soul shrivels that will not return praise to God. We see the world experiencing the bitter fruit of a life void of thanks to God. Grief consumes and lusts dominate it. Why? The answer from Scripture is given in Romans 1: "because they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful." Without grace, there can be no thankfulness to God. The thankless soul turns in upon itself and becomes proud and shriveled.

Only a life of thanks brings forth sweet fruits. One fruit is the assurance of faith. This does not mean that the ground of our assurance is something of ourselves. The ground of our assurance is only the finished work of Jesus Christ. But it does mean that the tree is known by its fruits. When Christ has redeemed us and renewed us by the Holy Spirit, He will work in our hearts this impulse to give thanks to God. In this we find assurance of our salvation.

The Catechism describes another fruit of thankfulness: "that by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ." A thankful heart leads others to Jesus Christ. David said in Psalm 116, "I believe, therefore have I spoken." Out of his thankful heart he began to speak of what God had done for him. The thankful life becomes the witness of the power of God and of the gospel. This is displayed when we receive crushing news and yet speak well of God before others. Through the thankfulness of His people, the world takes note of our God.

Islam converts people to be Muslim by terror and fear. The cults convert by preying on insecurities. Atheism advances itself with cynicism and unbelief. Christianity is advanced by pure gratitude, overwhelming and unstoppable gratitude.

Watching the grateful lives of the children of God in a world of bitterness, hate, and resentment, all must see what God has done for His people. He has brought forth gratitude out of the unthankful by showering upon them the wonders of His grace. Those who are saved from guilt by grace have one good reason, and only one, to live a life of good works—gratitude to God. Is this the motivation of your life? 

## Does Man Have a Free Will?

When people hear us say that an unbeliever is spiritually dead and completely unable to do good works, they sometimes ask us whether we are denying that human beings have a free will. The answer to that question depends on which human beings you are referring to, and what you mean by *free*.

### How our Lord explained freedom

It is important that we speak of freedom and bondage

---

*Rev. Laning is pastor of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.*

*Previous article in this series: September 1, 2013, p. 471.*

the way that Scripture does. To be in bondage is to be a servant of sin and Satan. To be free is to be liberated from this, so that we are able to do that which is good in the eyes of God.

This, of course, is not the way that sinful man views freedom. He thinks he is free when he is able to do whatever he wants. But what sinful man wants is always evil. And for a man to pursue the evil that he wants is not to be free, but to be enslaved.

Jesus pointed this out when responding to some Jews who denied that they were in bondage. Jesus had just finished saying that those who continued in His word were truly His disciples, and that His disciples would know the truth, and that the truth would set them free. To this

these Jews responded, and said: "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" (John 8:33b).

Jesus then explained that the freedom He was talking about was a spiritual freedom. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34).

So if we are going to speak of freedom the way our Lord did, we will say that to have a free will is to have a will that is not enslaved to sin. It is to have a righteous and holy will that brings forth the fruit of good actions.

### How the will is freed

So how does the will of a person become freed? Scripture and our confessions teach that our will becomes freed when God "infuses new qualities into the will" (Canons 3/4, 11).

Our Canons go on to express what those new qualities are: "God infuses new qualities of faith, of obedience, and of the consciousness of His love into our hearts" (Canons 3/4, B, 6).

The first reference speaks of God infusing something into our *will*, and the second speaks of God infusing something into our heart. The two statements together teach that when God infuses something into our heart, He infuses it into our will.

To prove that this infusing really does take place, our fathers quoted a number of Scripture passages. The first one they refer to is a passage from Jeremiah that speaks of God putting His word in our hearts: "After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33b).

When God regenerates us, the word of God really does enter our heart. And it is because God's word is in our heart that we are now able to begin to do what that word says: "But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it" (Deut. 30:14).

It is in this way that God infuses new qualities of faith, obedience, and a consciousness of His love into our hearts. When God's word is in our heart, we believe in God. We know Him, love Him, and are free to do what His word says.

The unregenerate, however, do not have God's word in their heart. When Christ spoke to some unbelievers, He

said: "ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you" (John 8:37).

God's word was not in the heart of these people. That explains why they hated what God said to them. First God puts His word in our heart, and only then do we love Him, listen to Him, and strive to do what pleases Him.

### Only the "good trees" have a free will


It is when these new qualities have been infused into a person, that the individual becomes a good tree, able to produce good fruit. The Canons say that God "infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree it may bring forth the fruits of good actions" (Canons 3/4, 11).

Here we have yet another passage in our confessions that clearly speaks of how only those who have been regenerated can do good works. Something must be infused into us first, so that we go from being corrupt trees that produce only corrupt fruit, to being good trees that "bring forth the fruit of good actions."

So the regenerated or "good trees" are the only ones who have a free will. By nature they were dead trees that were in the bondage of corruption. But God has raised them from the dead, quickening their dead will, so that now they are freed from corruption, and are able to produce fruit that is truly good.

We believers confess that Christ, the Truth, really has set us free. And the more we come to hear the truth preached, and believe that truth preached, the more that we experience the joy of that freedom.

This is the true freedom. As our Lord Himself said: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

We are free indeed! Free to do what is pleasing to God, which is also what we genuinely desire to do in the new man. May we rejoice as those truly liberated, and show our love and thankfulness to our God by continuing in His word, that we might ever more so experience the liberating power of the truth, as it is applied to our heart by Christ's Spirit. 

*Blood Work: How the Blood of Christ Accomplishes Our Salvation*, by Anthony J. Carter. Reformation Trust, 2013. 150 pages. ISBN: 978-1-56769-314-0. [Reviewed by Stuart Brogden.]

**B**lood work—this is a common phrase used in the medical industry. Every critical medical procedure must be based on accurate blood work. The chemistry demanded by the body relies on the right delicate balance, and the blood work reveals what that chemistry mix is, so the doctors can proceed safely. The body depends on blood work.

In a recently released book, Anthony Carter documents in thirteen short but deep chapters how blood work is crucial to the health of the body of Christ. The book, *Blood Work—How the Blood of Christ Accomplishes our Salvation*, takes a refreshing and humbling look at the death of Christ and how His blood avails for us. The body of Christ depends on the blood work of the cross.

The Bible has more to say about the blood of Christ than the cross and the death of Christ. Though all three of these are intrinsically linked, it is the blood of Christ that is most often mentioned as being critical to our spiritual health, such as in Revelation 12:11: “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

The blood work of Jesus Christ reconciles sinners to the Holy God. Our eternal safety and security depend on His blood work.

Carter tells us that our religion is a bloody one—not because of the renegades who wrongly shed the blood of men in the Crusades, the Great Inquisition, and other sinful actions by professing Christians. Christianity is a bloody religion because the perfect Lamb of God was predestined to be slain to take away the sins of people throughout the world—those who were called and believed on Christ.

---

*Rev. Brogden is currently serving as a pastoral assistant in a Reformed Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, and has the desire to preach the gospel and shepherd the Lord's people.*

In his book Carter reminds us that we are purchased by the blood of Christ; cleansed by the blood of Christ; ransomed, justified, redeemed, sanctified—and more!—all by the blood of the Lord Jesus, who is the Christ. Rather than shrinking back from talking about the bloody cross of the Lord, we are encouraged to embrace and proclaim it! His blood avails for each of His chosen ones, and without it none of us can be reconciled or brought near to God. It is foolishness to the world and all who are perishing—but the cross of Christ is the power of salvation to those who are being saved.

This book reminds us of what is essential for the body of Christ—we need good blood work. And there is none better than that of Jesus Christ. It is a bloody cross to which we cling, it is that blood spilt on Calvary that cleanses us from sin. All other blood stains us. Proclaim the blood of Christ. Without His blood work none will be justified or reconciled to Holy God.

*O precious is the flow  
That makes us white as snow.  
No other fount I know,  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus. ☞*

*A Pilgrim's Manual: Commentary on I Peter*, by Herman Hanko. RFPA, Jenison, Michigan, 2012. 319 pp. (cloth). ISBN – 9781936054145. [Reviewed by Charles Terpstra.]

**E**meritus Protestant Reformed Seminary Professor Herman Hanko has done it again! He has penned another fine exposition of a portion of Holy Scripture, this time on the New Testament book of I Peter. As he did with *The Mysteries of the Kingdom* (on Jesus' parables) and *Justified Unto Liberty* (on Galatians), so now with *A Pilgrim's Manual* Hanko has given us a rich exegetical commentary on a precious New Testament

---

*Mr. Terpstra, Librarian/Registrar at the Protestant Reformed Seminary, is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.*

book of the Bible. And while providing us with a detailed commentary on I Peter, Hanks has not “lost the forest for the trees”; he has captured the heart of this epistle and woven its theme throughout this work. He will not have us forget that I Peter is indeed a “pilgrim’s manual,” inspired by the Holy Spirit and inscribed by Peter to guide God’s pilgrim-stranger people through this world on the way to their heavenly home.

*A Pilgrim’s Manual* is rooted in exegetical integrity and is rich in doctrinal commentary, as Hanks takes us phrase by phrase through Peter’s first letter. In his “Preface” Hanks speaks of his debt to Herman Hoeksema, as he was privileged to sit under “H.H.’s” chapel talks on I Peter while in the early years of the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

As a preacher, professor, radio speaker, and author, Herman Hoeksema’s greatest gift was exegesis. ...As he took his students on an exegetical journey through I Peter, he held me spellbound. His exegetical ability and his sparkling explanations of the text created in me a fascination for the epistle that remains to this day (p. xix).

And, indeed, Hanks makes frequent reference to Hoeksema’s exegesis in his own commentary.


Yet I also know personally that Hanks is a skilled exegete in his own right (gifted by the Lord, of course), and this commentary reflects much of his own work. Having preached through the epistle in his early ministry, and having taught New Testament Greek for many years in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Hanks builds on the work of “H.H.” and other exegetes and develops the concepts and truths of this letter even further. In fact, Hanks is not afraid to differ with Hoeksema and others at points. The result is a commentary that is fresh, deep, and rich in doctrinal teaching.

Still more, because Hanks writes as a churchman who is bound by and faithful to the Reformed creeds, his work breathes the beautiful truths of the Reformed faith, especially the sovereignty of God and the sovereignty of His grace to His people in Christ Jesus. And because he writes as a Protestant Reformed churchman, he emphasizes especially God’s sovereign, particular grace and His unconditional covenant with His elect people in Christ. For the same reasons, throughout *A Pilgrim’s Manual*

Hanks exposes the heresies and errors of our time, with clarity and conviction.

Nor does Hanks avoid the “difficult” doctrines presented in this epistle, such as Christ being the chief Cornerstone of His church while also being the “stone of stumbling” and “rock of offence” to the wicked unbeliever—and both aspects being according to God’s sovereign predestination (election and reprobation, 2:4-9). Or the tough practical issues involving the true Christian’s persecution by this ungodly world (chaps. 2, 4) and the callings of the Christian wife and husband in marriage, even mixed ones (3:1-7). In the face of ecclesiastical “mushiness” on doctrine and outright “wimpiness” (compromise!) on morality, Hanks’s commentary issues a clear sound both with regard to doctrine and life. His is the clear sound of faithfulness to the text of Scripture, letting God’s Word speak plainly and powerfully for the instruction, correction, and guidance of God’s people (II Tim. 3:16).

Yet this new work is also more than rich in exegesis and doctrinal commentary. Warmly dedicated to his wife, “Wilma, my fellow pilgrim,” Hanks’s *A Pilgrim’s Manual* is also rich in devotion and practical application. Hanks writes this commentary, not as a detached, uninterested New Testament scholar, but as a redeemed and devoted Christian pilgrim, himself making the journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. And because he is a mature and experienced pilgrim, filled with the light of God’s Word, he is able to provide us, his fellow pilgrims, with wise counsel for our own journey. In reading this commentary you will not lack for comfort and hope as one of God’s pilgrims.

We sincerely welcome and heartily recommend *A Pilgrim’s Manual* to Christian readers everywhere, therefore. It will serve as a profitable addition to your personal or family library. It will feed your soul and strengthen your faith whether you use it for your group Bible study or for your personal devotions. Above all, this work will confirm you in the one hope we have as believers—the hope of our everlasting home with the Lord. By all means get this book, study the manual, and then press on, pilgrim! 

### Congregation Activities

The congregation of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL was invited to join their Young People and Young Adult Societies for an outing on Saturday, January 4. Plans called for the members of Bethel to visit the Strike Ten bowling alley at around three in the afternoon and then enjoy each other's company at the Penang Restaurant at 5:30 p.m. for a dinner of authentic Malaysian food.

At the end of December an important question was put to the members of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI: "Do you have a Bible reading plan for 2014?" To answer that question better, members were invited to join together in the lower level of their church after their evening worship service on December 29 to select a Bible reading plan for 2014 and to be encouraged in the important area of personal devotions. Various reading plans were presented and available for pickup. Members of First who participated in the reading and accountability groups in 2013 were encouraged to share their experiences, their struggles, joys, and the things they found helpful with reading and applying God's Word to their lives over the past year.

The choir of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA presented their annual Christmas program after their evening worship service on Sunday, December 22. All were welcomed

---

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

to come and join the choir in commemoration of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

For a number of years now, the members of the Hudsonville, MI PRC have had an active Helping Hands Committee. This committee's primary work is to help provide meals for those in their congregation who have recently had babies, are sick, or have had surgery. Recently the ladies on this committee encouraged their fellow church members to place small meals or small containers containing soup or left-over casseroles, etc., in a freezer near their church kitchen, for use by any elderly or sick members of the congregation. Family members could simply stop by during the week or after a worship service to choose what they needed.

The congregation of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL bid goodbye to Seminarian Josh and Courtney Engelsma and their family with a farewell coffee after their 2014 New Year's Day Service. Seminarian Engelsma finished his six-month internship at Peace on December 31, and plans had the Engelsmas returning to West Michigan and our Seminary on January 2. Seminarian Engelsma has one semester remaining before graduation in June, D.V.

We at the "News" are always on the lookout for something new in our churches. Please feel free to correct us if indeed the following has taken place in one of our churches before, but we noticed that in the December 22 bulletin of the Loveland, CO PRC there was an invitation to the congrega-

tion to witness a wedding ceremony. What caught our attention was that if you were unable to attend in person, you could see the ceremony live at [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com) with a search for Loveland PRC and then a click to the appropriate link.

### In Other "News"

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) in Australia, with which our denomination has a "corresponding relationship," sponsored a Youth Camp from December 28-January 3. This year the Launceston youth, under the oversight of the Launceston Session, hosted the camp at the Bridport Bayview Centre. This campsite is located on the northeast coast of Tasmania, approximately an hour's drive from Launceston, right on the beach. This year's camp speaker was Rev. Ron VanOverloop, pastor of our Grace PRC in Standale, MI. Rev. VanOverloop had intended to give five speeches on the subject, "Godly Virtues for Christian Youth," and preach one service on Sunday, December 29, but due to the death of his mother-in-law back in Michigan while gone, he was able to give only one speech and to preach on the 29th before leaving his notes for the four remaining speeches with Rev. David Torlach, a pastor in the EPC. By God's grace these speeches were used to accomplish the purpose of the camp, "To engage in the study of God's Word with respect to subjects particularly relevant to Christian young people..."

### Mission Activities

The Lord willing, Prof. Barry and Lori Gritters and Deane and Donna Wassink, from the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, were in Vellore, India from January 2 until January 18. They were to spend their time with the Reformed Christian Church of Vellore, with whom the Georgetown PRC has been working for many years. Prof. Gritters lectured on the doctrine of the church the first week. He gave five hours of lectures a day for three days the first week. These lectures were translated. The second week he gave lectures to the English-speaking church and a Bible study

on the doctrine of the covenant and its applications. In addition, Prof. Gritters preached both Sundays and spoke for evening Bible studies as well. The delegation also visited the Grace Foster Home, and the Village Outreach Churches.

The combined consistories of the Berean PRC and the First Reformed Church in the Philippines report that the desired name for their new denomination has been approved by the SEC after their second attempt at registration. "Federation of Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines, Inc" is the name that has been approved. As a result, the final step of the

registration process with the SEC can now be completed by the end of January, D.V. We give thanks to our heavenly Father for this good news, and seek His continued blessing upon the preparations for the organizational meeting on April 9, according to His will.

### Minister Activities

The Faith PRC in Jenison, MI voted to extend a call to Rev. C. Haak, pastor of the Georgetown PRC, to be their next pastor.

Rev. W. Bruinsma declined the call he was considering to serve as pastor of our Doon, IA PRC. ☺

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their sympathy to the Gerben and Carol DeJong family, Alden and Twyla DeJong family, and Helinda Weirsma family in the death of their mother and grandmother,

**MARTHA DE JONG.**

"The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower" (Psalm 18:2).

Rev. Laning, President  
Gerald Brummel, clerk of records

### Classis West

■ Classis West is scheduled to convene on Wednesday, March 5, 2014, at the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD. All material to be included in the agenda must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than Monday, February 3. Delegates who will need lodging or transportation to and from the Sioux Falls airport can inform Rev. Brummel, a.brummel@prca.org, of their need.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Stated Clerk

### Seminary

■ All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Bill VanOverloop (phone: 616-669-1504). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 20, 2014, D.V.

Student Aid Committee  
Bill VanOverloop, Secretary

### Reformed Witness Hour February 2014

Date	Topic	Text
February 2	"Why Do the Righteous Suffer?"	Job 1
February 9	"When Things Go from Bad to Worse"	Job 2:1-10
February 16	"Mournful Words from a Miserable Man"	Job 3
February 23	"Job's Miserable Comforters"	Job 16:2