

# The Standard Bearer

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# Godliness for Officebearers

“...exhort...shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.”

Titus 2: 7,8

Paul has noted frequently in his instructions to Titus that the acknowledging of the truth is to be accompanied with godliness. Faith and acknowledging of the truth “is after (accords with, is in harmony with) godliness” (1:1). He commands Titus to speak “the things which become sound doctrine” (2:1). This must be the case because Jesus Christ gave Himself not only to redeem from all iniquity, but also to purify unto Himself a people zealous of good works (2:14).

Paul then shows what “things” are consistent with sound doctrine in aged men, aged women, young women, and young men. Now in this text Paul applies this admonition specifically to Titus as an officebearer. Thus this passage identifies for all officebearers the godliness that gives evidence of their grasp of the truth.

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Another thought that frequently receives Paul’s inspired attention in this brief letter is the reality that the godly lifestyle of Christians is a necessary and very good answer to the enemies of the Christian faith. The godliness of the Christians on the island of Crete is what prevents the Word of God from being blasphemed. In fact, a righteous and godly life in this present world (2:12) adorns the doctrines of salvation and thus silences all critics of the gospel. Just a quick reading of this small letter shows this: 1:9-11; 2:5b, 8b, 10b.

Finally by way of introduction, notice that Paul will state that Titus, and all officebearers with him, have a God-given authority, and thus they may not allow any to despise them (2:15). Respect must be given to officebearers. Nevertheless, the officebearers must conduct themselves in such a way that they show themselves to be worthy of the respect. They are worthy of honor. In fact, they that rule well are worthy of *double* honor (I Tim. 5:17). Titus 2:7, 8 identifies the conduct of officebearers that makes them worthy of double honor.



Paul instructs Titus to “exhort.” The word “exhort” is very interesting. This word is translated in a variety of ways: instruct, or encourage and console, or rebuke

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and admonish, or beg and beseech, with its precise use determined by the context. Its literal translation is to “call alongside,” and thus it describes the manner in which this activity of exhorting someone is to be done. The idea is that regardless of what Titus must say in his exhorting, he must realize that he stands next to the new elders and deacons in the churches on Crete. One who exhorts stands side by side, not toe to toe, or nose to nose. The reason for calling them alongside is that the content of the exhortation applies equally to the one speaking and to those spoken to.

Titus must instruct others as one who shows that he also needs the instruction. He must command them to believe and obey the teachings, and he must do so as one who shows that he also must receive the commands. He must encourage them to live a life that is consistent with the pure doctrines of salvation, as one who also needs encouragement to live such a life. He must rebuke and admonish those who fail to believe and to live as they ought, as one who also needs such admonition.

Though He did become like us in all things, sin excepted, the Good Shepherd was not a sheep. But every officebearer is also a sheep. And he must exhort convinced that whatever the Lord would have him say to others, the Lord would have him hear, for it applies also to him. Whenever he exhorts his fellow-sheep, then he is calling them alongside himself!

All of our exhorting must be accompanied with an exemplary attitude and conduct. Titus must be “a pattern of good works.” He must teach, but he must also show himself a worthy example. As he speaks the things that become sound doctrine, he must himself be a pattern, an example to be imitated. His own life must be one that exemplifies the great doctrines of salvation! Officebearers must be able to say: Do as I do. Follow my example. This is what Paul did: I Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philip- pians 3:17; 4:9; II Thessalonians 3:7; II Timothy 1:13. To lead the sheep of Christ effectively, the officeholders must walk in, and be zealous unto, good works.

These good works are those that are beneficial and useful to others. They promote and advance the cause of God’s kingdom. The “things” that are consistent with sound doctrine (2:1) are beneficial to the cause of God and His church. When the elderly saints teach the younger saints, there is great benefit to the cause of the church. When young men and young women learn to love, this serves the cause of good in the home and church. So officebearers are to seek the benefit and good of the believers they are called to serve.



There is a reason for this kind of exhorting and for being a pattern or example. This reason is expressed in the words “in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech.” Titus must not only teach them how they are to live, but he must also show them why they are to live this way. Sadly, it is not uncommon in the church

world today to find preachers and officebearers emphasizing how God’s people are to live without informing them why. When the reason is missing, then something extremely important is missing. If we are only told that we must do something, then we will neglect that which is crucial to God: the heart.

The “why” for a godly life is “doctrine,” or literally “teachings.” The pure doc-

trines of salvation are the only solid basis for a godly life. Paul’s letters of Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians all begin with several chapters of solid teachings. The teachings are the truths that reveal God, His unspeakable gift, His eternal plan to save totally depraved sinners by grace alone through faith alone, without any works of men, and all to the glory of God. These teachings are given in Romans 1-11 and in Ephesians 1-3. But after presenting these teachings Paul did not stop writing and send these letters. He continued to write and he showed the various ways these truths are to be manifested in the lives of those who believe these truths. In brief, the truth of God’s electing and saving love in Christ is to be shown in a life of rendering grateful returns of ardent love to Him who

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Do as I do.  
Follow my example.*

first manifested so great a love to us. Therefore believers must be instructed in all the truths of Scripture, which serve as the foundation for a godly life.

The word “uncorruptness” refers to the content of the instruction of Titus. His teaching must not be corrupted with the lie of false doctrine, nor be mixed with the folly of Jewish fables (cf. 1:14), nor adulterated with his own personal opinions. Titus is to teach faithfully, that is, according to God’s revelation in Scripture. Only then will the teaching serve as a beautiful and solid base for a godly walk by the saints in all good works.

“Gravity” and “sincerity” describe the manner in which Titus is to exhort and teach. “Gravity” is reverence. Titus’ reverence for the great doctrines of salvation should be evidenced in the manner in which he communicates them. The use of gimmicks, slang, or humor cheapens the truths. The eternal truths about God and Christ must be conveyed with dignity—in such a manner that causes believers to respect and honor them. The attitude of the officebearers toward these truths must be one of greatest reverence. Hence, Reformed worship services should be characterized by a solemnity that arises, not out of mere tradition, but out of respect for the teachings themselves, and especially for the God and Savior revealed in the teachings.

“Sincerity” speaks to the motive for the instruction and exhortation. The precious teachings of Scripture are to live within Titus’ heart. The motive of a teacher cannot often be hid from godly hearers. Self-centeredness is soon observed. The desire to gain the attention and praise or respect of men is as vain and ruinous as the desire for filthy lucre. The proper motive for bringing the gospel, whether by instruction, encouragement, or admonition, is grateful love for God, for Jesus, for the members of His body, for the gospel. When one loves the truth because it is his salvation, then he loves to proclaim it, and he fervently desires others to know the same joy

he knows. Then he earnestly desires God to be glorified and praised.

“Sound speech” is a speech that is in good health, able to make one whole. This can mean that the teaching itself is wholesome and fit and does not deviate from the truth. This idea has already been taught in the word “uncorruptness.” So the emphasis here is that the teachings are conveyed with the spiritual health of the hearers in mind—to make them whole. The concern of the one exhorting is for the spiritual well-being and the health of the hearers. There must be not only a concern that Scripture’s truths be conveyed accurately, but also that the teaching of the truth be with an earnest concern for the faith of God’s elect (cf. 1:1).



This kind of teaching and exhorting “cannot be condemned.”

The Christian believers on the island of Crete lived in the midst of those “of the contrary part.” These were and are enemies of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such are always planted by the devil to discredit the gospel by discrediting and slandering Titus and any gospel preacher. The instruction that Paul gives to Titus (and to every officebearer) presents the way to preach and teach so that he cannot be condemned. Preach and teach in such a way that all the charges of the enemy will be seen to be obviously false. When an officebearer’s teaching and life are as Paul instructed Titus, then the enemies will be put to shame and will have no evil thing to say. They might continue their assault, but God and honest observers will see that their charges are a lie.

Officebearers are to exhort and live also with an eye on the Lord. This instruction concerning how they are to perform their calling is given them from the Lord Himself. They must do their work as before His face. They are to focus on doing the will of the Father in heaven (as taught them in this passage). Then they will not hear the dreaded words, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:21-23). Rather they may expect to hear Him say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” ☺

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The April 1, 2014 issue of the *Standard Bearer* will be a special issue on the Reformed tradition of singing the Psalms. The issue will include a history of Psalm-singing and will present various Reformed traditions of Psalm-singing. One article is devoted to singing

the imprecatory Psalms. And we will examine how the 1912 Psalter might be improved. All this and more, coming in the next issue, D.V.

—RJD

## Financing Our Christian Schools (2)

Churches of the Reformation have been zealous for Christian schools, endorsing, promoting, preaching, supporting them in any way possible. Those churches also steadfastly insisted that Christian schools are the responsibility of parents. This was the oft repeated teaching of Luther, Calvin, Knox, and the churches in the Netherlands. However, circumstances necessitated that the state be heavily involved in financing the schools, and that the churches supervise the teachers and their instruction. That was the pattern established in Luther's Germany, in Calvin's Geneva, in Scotland, and in the Netherlands.

History demonstrated that these relationships of the Christian school to the church and the state were improper. Over time in the Netherlands, the church apostatized from the Reformed faith and injected corrupt doctrines in the schools. And the government, no

longer friendly to the Reformed faith, imposed its antichristian philosophies on the instruction. Led by Abraham Kuyper, among others, Reformed parents came to understand that *they* needed to provide the support of the Christian schools as well as oversee them. This was accomplished through the establishment of Christian school societies. This movement spread to the Christian Reformed Church in America and her schools.

This is a fundamental principle of covenantal, Christian schools, namely, that God lays upon the parents the responsibility to raise their children. The Christian school follows directly from that responsibility. If believing parents today do not see their Christian school as their responsibility, they will not have these schools for long.

This principle of parental responsibility includes various aspects. It demands involvement in the schools from all the parents. Fathers lead the way with attendance at society meetings; willingness to serve on the board if asked; willingness to

volunteer in fix-up/clean-up activities; and even attendance at parent-teacher conferences.

This editorial focuses upon one particular aspect, namely, the parental responsibility to support the school *financially*. Parents who understand their responsibility in this regard will make tuition payments a top priority in their budget. They will see to it that they have money set aside for the deficit collections and building drives. These monies for financing the Christian school will come before vacations, restaurants, cars, new furniture, or smart phones.

The fruit of exactly that priority rating has been the establishing and maintaining of Protestant Reformed Christian schools for well over sixty years.

I know that from personal experience that extends to my childhood. Our family did not go on many vacations, and they were largely the one-day trip variety. Eating in a restaurant was a rare treat indeed. That did not bother me, partly because most of my friends and relatives

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*Previous article in this series: March 1, 2014, p. 245.*

lived the same way. School tuition (as well as the church budget) came before vacations and “eating out.”

Today, it seems, it is a different story. These days a sizable number of families have the wherewithal to take lengthy trips to faraway places. Christmas vacation and spring break produce a steady stream of Protestant Reformed families heading to warmer climes. Nowadays, many fathers seem to believe that a spendy vacation is their right, and their responsibility is to insure that their children get a top-notch vacation, like “everyone” else.

But the focus must not be merely on vacations. How easily we convince ourselves that we “need” cable television, “need” cell phones, perhaps even with Internet connection, “need” whatever can make our life easier or more enjoyable or our home more beautiful, without regard to the monthly drain on the bank account, or the rising credit-card debt.

Do we recognize that such spending contributes mightily to difficulties in paying tuition, or the inability to give generously to school collections? All this applies not only to parents, but to the older generation, whose support for the schools is crucial. Our lifestyle will determine much about whether the schools have the necessary funds to continue their significant work.

The history of the Christian schools is that there have always been parents who were behind in tuition, some due to poverty, others due to poor priorities. If we parents do not see financing our schools as our responsibility, and make

that a top priority, we will lose our schools.

In that connection, another danger that looms is that parents become willing to accept government aid for our schools. Once again, the history of the church and the history of Christian schools provide guidance and a strong warning.

Let us return for a moment to the Netherlands. Dr. Abraham Kuyper led the fight for government funding of the Christian schools. His argument seemed airtight. It is unfair, he rightly insisted, that Christians through their taxes finance the government schools—buildings, books and supplies, teachers’ salaries, and then those same Christians must also spend large amounts of money to pay for their Christian schools. His solution was that the government set aside money for the Christian schools. His program prevailed in the Netherlands, so that by 1889 the government was paying one third of the expenses of the Christian schools. In 1917 the law granted 100% support for these schools.

There is a good deal of irony in this. First, Abraham Kuyper developed the concept of sphere sovereignty. He divided various areas of life on earth into different spheres. One central facet of this was that the school is a separate sphere from both the government and the church. Thus neither state nor church should govern schools, but parents must. On that basis he opened the Free University—a school free from government or church control. And yet he would bring the school back into the sphere of the state for the

sake of money, which led eventually to subordination of parental control to the government’s, as we will demonstrate.

Second, Kuyper was a strong proponent of the antithesis between faith and unbelief. He also insisted that Christian education be thoroughly biblical and thus Reformed. As he took on this political cause, he was joined by another political power who liked the idea of government money for their schools. That was the Roman Catholic Church. Abraham Kuyper welcomed this ally, and formed a coalition that led to his becoming the prime minister of the Netherlands. So much for the antithesis.

Perhaps Abraham Kuyper believed his concept of sphere sovereignty was able to hold off government control of the Christian schools. Of course, it was not. Writing in the 1940s on education in the Netherlands, a certain Bernard H.M. Vlekke notes that by his time the government had full control of the Christian schools. He adds very matter-of-factly, “It is reasonable enough that there should be government control of the educational structure, because almost all expenses of private and public schools are paid out of public funds.”<sup>1</sup>

Read that again, carefully. That is the conclusion of anyone who evaluates the matter objectively. If the government pays, it is “reasonable enough that there should be government control.” Accepting government money will lead to government demands on, and even-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Netherlands*, Bartholomew Landheer, editor. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943, p. 236.

tually full control of, the Christian schools.

But perhaps one imagines that the Christian school can take government funding as long as there are no strings attached—no restrictions on how to spend the money, or demands on curriculum changes. Not so. The history of the government's dealing in the US is that once a school has taken money from the government, it has placed itself under obligation to adhere to government policies.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, there is another issue, namely, that by accepting government money, parents have relinquished that full and complete responsibility that rests on them—they are willing to share it. And history demonstrates these parents will eventually surrender the whole financial load, and indeed the schools. A bit of relief from the heavy load of tuition in the form of government aid is addictive. It also saps the will to put the schools at the top of the list. Why give up vacation, a car, a new appliance, for the sake of tuition, if you need not do so?

This is the sad history of the Christian schools in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. These schools, built and maintained by Christian Reformed members under the conviction that the covenant gave them

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<sup>2</sup> At least two incidents of this have been documented in the *Standard Bearer*. See "Parental Schools—How Long Yet?" (vol. 52, pp. 896-7) and "The Revolt Grows" (vol. 54, pp. 330-1), both by Rev. G. VanBaren. Many more articles in the *SB* have warned against Christian schools accepting government aid. Some thirty-seven articles are listed in the *SB* index under "Government Aid to Education."

this responsibility, began to accept government aid. Eventually it came to the point that the parents gave their schools, lock, stock, and barrel, to the government. There are government schools in Edmonton where a form of Christianity is allowed, for now. But "it is reasonable enough that there should be government control of the educational structure, because almost all ex-

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penses of private and public schools are paid out of public funds."

What of the future of the Protestant Reformed schools, the schools that require over ten million dollars to maintain annually? We must consciously recommit ourselves to the calling to support these schools. We must, as parents, acknowledge our primary responsibility to pay for these schools.

There is more. We must recognize the tremendous privilege to finance the Christian schools. What a privilege to have a school that is an extension of our home! What a blessing to have a teacher who confesses the same Reformed faith guide our children! What a benefit that we have teachers who devote their lives to growing and developing in their ability to teach our children in the best possible way!

How can we thank God enough for covenantal instruction that sets forth Christ in every subject? If you have some doubts about that, talk to members of a smaller Protestant Reformed congregation who do not have their own school. Ask our missionaries. Inquire of our sister churches, some of whom are so burdened with taxes to support their socialized medicine that a Christian school seems simply out of reach.

Maintaining these schools will require sacrificial giving. Some of our families are already there. They will forgo vacations, restaurants, and many conveniences in their homes. Dad will work extra hours. Stretched past the limit, they will seek help for their daily need from the office of mercy.

Most of us, however, want all the niceties of life, and the ability to pay for the schools with relative ease. For the great majority of us, that is not reality.

Christians can expect that it will only become more difficult to maintain their schools. Expect more government demands, more attempts to control the teaching. And expect less and less disposable income. If financing our schools is not a top priority, they will collapse under the weight of unpaid tuition and failed deficit collections.

How could we, in good conscience, possibly allow our schools to be threatened by such a collapse, while insisting on a comfortable lifestyle?

Thanks be to God, who not only provides our daily bread, but also makes His people willing to seek the kingdom of heaven first. ☺

## Chapter Four

## Postmillennialism (28)

# The Disastrous Consequences of Postmillennialism (1)

## Introduction

Contrary to the overconfident declaration of the previous article in this series, that my treatment of postmillennialism was ended, I find that several additional articles are required to complete a thorough treatment of the false doctrine.

A biblical, creedally Reformed critique of postmillennialism has pastoral purposes. It intends to warn Reformed Christians off from this error. It desires to deliver Reformed saints who have been deceived by the false doctrine.

For the realization of these purposes, it is not enough to demonstrate that postmillennialism is unbiblical and opposed to the creeds. The critique must also point out the disastrous practical consequences of the false doctrine. The critique must show the bitter fruit that postmillennialism produces in the churches that confess the doctrine and in the lives of the men and women who embrace the teaching.

This is the content of these concluding articles.

## Diversion of Our Hope

Because postmillennialism is an error in eschatology—the doctrine of the last things—the consequences of the false teaching will adversely affect the life of a church and the lives of the members of a church with regard to the end of all things, that is, with regard to the relation of the church and its members to the end of all things.

The fundamental issue between Reformed amillen-

nialism and postmillennialism is the Christian hope, and the Christian hope makes the issue fundamental.

Postmillennialism takes the hope of a church and its members off the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the body. It diverts the hope of the church from Christ's return. It redirects a church's hope to the coming of the carnal kingdom of postmillennialism in history.

At best, under the influence of postmillennialism a church's hope is divided between the second coming of Christ and the postmillennial kingdom, which precedes the second coming by a thousand years or more (we remember that many postmillennialists have the earthly kingdom lasting for hundreds of thousands and even a million years, before Christ returns).

In fact, in keeping with the rule that no man can serve two masters, postmillennialists hope for the earthly, postmillennial kingdom with the hope that ought to be directed to the second coming of Christ. Hope for the earthly kingdom overshadows and gradually replaces hope for the second coming. Not the second coming of Christ is, any longer, the one, intense, all-dominating hope of a church, but the carnal kingdom of earthly peace, earthly prosperity, and earthly power.

Not Jesus Christ Himself personally and what we will enjoy when we are caught up in the air to be with Him, seeing Him face to face, is the hope of the postmillennialist, but the earthly kingdom that he himself has established and what he will enjoy in that kingdom.

Therefore, not complete deliverance from sin, not the swallowing up of death, not the public condemnation and destruction of all of God's enemies and ours, not the utter defeat of Satan by consigning him to the abyss, not

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*Previous article in this series: February 1, 2014, p. 199.*

the public vindication and glorification of Jesus Christ, and of God in Him, is the hope of the postmillennialist, but the earthly honor, power, ease, and prosperity of the postmillennial kingdom—the glitter of the “golden age.”

Thus is lost the Christian hope!

The Christian Reconstructionists have written a sizable library of books promoting and extolling their postmillennial kingdom as the genuine hope of Reformed Christianity. If they have written one book promoting and extolling the second coming of Christ as the Christian hope, I have missed it. There is certainly a paucity among them of enthusiastic proclamation of the Christian hope of Christ’s second coming. Instead, their writings on the kingdom of postmillennialism are replete with disparagement of the hope of the second coming of Christ and of the everlasting, spiritual kingdom.

Also the Puritan postmillennialists and their contemporary disciples, while careful not to deny that the second coming is *a* hope of Christians, indeed perhaps the *main* hope, nevertheless divert the lively hope of the saints from Christ’s coming to the coming of the earthly kingdom dear to the heart of postmillennialism. *The* Puritan hope of Iain H. Murray’s book by this title—and of Murray himself—is the millennial kingdom.

The hope of a church motivates the church’s activities. One’s personal hope controls his life. Murray derives both Puritan piety and Puritan missions from the Puritan hope of the millennium, thus acknowledging that for the Puritans hope of the millennium functions in both the life of the church and the life of the Christian as hope in the second coming ought to function.

In their hope of the coming postmillennial kingdom, the Christian Reconstructionists naturally devote themselves to creating the earthly kingdom on which their hope is fixed. They exert themselves to shape the culture of the nation, to reform society, to influence art, economics, and politics, to establish the earthly dominion of the Christian Reconstruction saints, if not in Tyler, Texas, then in Moscow, Idaho.

As is one’s hope, so is one’s life.

The biblical hope of the second coming, according to all of Scripture, does not galvanize the believer into an effort to transform society and the world. Rather, it mightily moves the child of God to crucify his own corrupt nature with its lusts, to endure his sufferings with

patience, to separate himself spiritually from the wicked world, and to live a holy life in accordance with the law of God.

The Puritans of the seventeenth century in Great Britain thought and strove to realize the earthly kingdom of their postmillennial dream by the revolutionary overthrow of the king, by victories in physical wars, and by the dominance of the saints and their theology in the British Isles. “The Scottish revolution [of the Scottish Covenanted movement in the seventeenth century] was grounded in the hope of a better—and solely Presbyterian—world,” that is, was motivated by “eschatological hopes” of a coming postmillennial kingdom, centered in Scotland, England, and Ireland.<sup>1</sup> “The puritan pact was intended to carry the saints into the millennium.” “The second major common theme of the two groups [the Scots and their English allies in the Westminster Assembly] was their intense millenarian optimism. Christ’s kingdom, they expected, would be extended through missionary effort and, some claimed, military conquest.” “The National Covenant was working for ‘a vast theocracy extending from Shetland to Munster and beyond.’”<sup>2</sup>

A main theme of the Puritan preachers in their regular sermons before the English Parliament in the 1640s, which created and had the oversight of the Westminster Assembly, was that “God promises a glorious future for His Church in England and Europe—a time of latter-day glory or millennial bliss.”<sup>3</sup>

Misdirection of the hope of church and professing Christian is fatal to church and member. The church may no more tolerate the falsifying of her hope than she may tolerate the falsifying of her faith. The falsifying of the church’s hope is as dangerous as the falsifying of her faith. So important is our hope that “we are saved by hope” (Rom. 8:24). Perversion or weakening of our hope threatens our salvation.

<sup>1</sup> Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature & Theology 1550-1682* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-109.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Toon, *Puritans and Calvinism* (Seoul, Korea: Westminster Publishing House, 1972), 40. One of the fundamental characteristics of Puritanism was its aberrant millennial eschatology: “A strong sense that the last days...were about to dawn...that the Roman Catholic Church...would soon collapse [and] that Biblical religion would triumph.... This emphasis often became an obsession” (Toon, *Puritans*, 10).

## The One Hope of Scripture

The church has one hope. This hope is the second coming of Christ with His resurrection of the bodies of the elect believers unto everlasting life. God has “begotten us again unto a lively hope...to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven” (I Peter 1:3, 4). Believers are to “hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto [them] at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (I Peter 1:13). The hope of Christians is not bound up in an earthly kingdom, but “is laid up for you in heaven” (Col. 1:5). The “blessed hope” of the people of God is “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). The life to which the saints look forward is “eternal life” (Titus 3:7: “the hope of eternal life”).

The church’s one hope is the grace of God in its fullest, final manifestation: the coming of Jesus Christ. Her hope is not her own future work: the earthly kingdom of postmillennialism. “The new Jerusalem does not arise from the earth, but descends from heaven upon this earth; not we, with all our piety and activity, with all the work of missions and evangelism [and, I add, with all the efforts to ‘Christianize the world’ and to reconstruct society—DJE] cause the great day to come, but it remains God’s gift.... It enters catastrophically, suddenly...because God intervenes.”<sup>4</sup>

## The One Hope of the Creeds

On the basis of the scriptural proclamation of the hope of church and believer, the church’s creeds identify the one hope of the church and her members as the second coming of Christ. The Apostles Creed expresses the church’s expectation of the future in these words: “He shall come again to judge the quick and the dead.”

The Nicene Creed concludes with every believer’s one hope: “I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.”

Had R. J. Rushdoony or Iain H. Murray written the Nicene Creed, the last line would read: “I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come, but especially for the coming earthly kingdom of the saints for a thousand glorious, golden years.”

<sup>4</sup> K. Dijk, *Over de Laatste Dingen*, vol. 3: *De Toekomst van Christus* (Kampen: Kok, 1953), 55. The translation of the Dutch is mine.

The Christian hope of the Heidelberg Catechism is nowhere the earthly kingdom of Christ of postmillennialism. Rather, “with uplifted head” every Reformed Christian is taught to “look for the very same person who before offered Himself for my sake to the tribunal of God...to come as judge from heaven...[and] shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory” (Q. 52).

The only other event that is permitted place in the Christian hope of Christ’s coming is the translation of the believer into heaven in his soul at the moment of death: “my soul after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its Head” (Heid. Cat., Q. 57). This is because translation of the believer in his soul at death is an aspect of the second coming and the resurrection. At the death of the elect believer, Christ comes for him personally *in his soul*. And at his death, the believer is raised into new, eternal life *in the soul*, as in the day of Christ he will be raised *in the body*.

According to the Catechism, the lifelong grief of the Christian is not that he does not have earthly dominion over the world, a grief assuaged only by the prospect of the victory of the saints in the postmillennial kingdom. But his grief is sorrow that, “while in this life,” he has “only a small beginning of...obedience [to the law of God].” His grief is bearable and assuaged by his hope of “perfection...in a life to come” (Questions 114, 115).

The Reformed doctrine of the last things, expressing the hope of the Reformed church and her members, in the Belgic Confession is Article 37. There is not a word, or a hint, of the expectation of the “golden age” of postmillennialism. On the contrary. Earthly life for the church is “labor and trouble.” To the very end, and especially at the very end, of history, the saints are “most cruelly persecuted, oppressed, and tormented...in this world.” “Their cause” does not have an earthly victory in history, but is “condemned by many judges and magistrates as heretical and impious.”

The Reformed hope is “that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly...to declare Himself Judge of the quick and the dead.” It is the “consideration of this [final] judgment” that is “most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and elect,” that is, that is their hope in the world. The second coming of Christ will finally wipe all tears from their eyes. Then, their

cause “will be known to be the cause of the Son of God.”

Reformed Christians do not “expect,” that is, hope for, the postmillennial kingdom. Rather, “we expect [that is, hope for] that great day [of Christ’s return] with a most ardent desire.” This ardent desire does not allow itself to be distracted. We live and work and suffer in the power of this hope: “Even so, come Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:20).” This quotation is the last line of the doctrine of the last things in Article 37 of the Belgic Confession. It is not: “Come, millennial kingdom,” but: “Come, Lord Jesus.”

### Appeal to the Reformed Community

So plain and powerful are Scripture and the creeds on the Christian hope and so fundamental is hope to the Christian religion that one cannot but cry out to the Reformed community, especially the Reformed community of theologians, ministers, and elders.

“How can you so calmly tolerate, and even apparently

approve as an option for Reformed Christians, the diversion and perversion of the Christian hope by postmillennialism?”

“Is hope of little worth to you?”

“Have you never read, or taken seriously, the Nicene Creed and the Belgic Confession?”

“Do you yourself have, cherish, and live by the church’s and the Christian’s one hope?”

“And can you really encourage the members of your churches to entertain the millennial kingdom, if not as the main hope, then as an important hope of the Christian, when in fact this hope will never be fulfilled? The “golden age” of postmillennialism is as imaginary and fanciful as the “Utopia”—the ‘no place’—of the philosophers. In the language of Romans 5:5, the postmillennial hope “maketh ashamed.”

... to be continued. 

○ COME LET US WORSHIP

REV. CORY GRIESS

And God Spake All These Words:

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

## Introduction

The Moral Law of God is permanent and therefore useful for the church in the New Testament age. It reveals the holy character of God in its demands. It drives us to the cross of Christ for forgiveness. This Law also leads us into obedience, freed as we are by the gospel of Jesus Christ to take up our part in the covenant as friend-servants.

## The Law and the Worship Service

The Law can and ought to be used those ways in the worship service of the church. The worship service

is where the covenant of grace is declared and maintained by God, and is one of the chief places where that covenant is experienced. As far as the regulative principle of worship is concerned, the reading of the Law falls under the category of the element of reading Scripture. The reading of the Law in particular is not therefore itself demanded by the regulative principle, but it is part of one of the elements demanded by that principle, the reading of the Word of God. The reading of God’s Word is demanded of us in the worship of the New Testament,<sup>1</sup> and there is in the Bible at least one instance of the reading of the Law in particular in worship.<sup>2</sup> In addition there was a reading of the Torah

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<sup>1</sup> See a previous article in this series, “The Reading and Preaching of Scripture in Worship” (March 1, 2013, p. 260; May 15, 2013, p. 368).

<sup>2</sup> Nehemiah 8, to which I refer to below.

every Sabbath day in the synagogue worship both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> The reading of the Torah included of course the reading of both Law and gospel, nonetheless it is evidence of the reading of Law in public corporate worship. Consequently, the reading or reciting or even singing of the Law has been a part of Reformed and Presbyterian worship since the time of the Reformation.<sup>4</sup>

The question regarding the reading of the Law is not so much whether or not it is necessary as part of the dialogue of the covenantal assembly, but rather, the question is how it is to be used in that assembly and at what point. There has been disagreement about this. In the liturgies that came out of the Reformation, the order of worship included a separate time for confession of sin and a declaration, which the minister read from the Word of God, that God's people were forgiven of those sins. The reading of the Law in these liturgies, therefore, often did not function as a means to make us see our sin, since there was already confession of sin in the service. Rather, the reading of the Law functioned in the service as a guide to a life of gratitude to God. In Calvin's church, for example, the Law was read right after a time of confession and then absolution from God's Word. The Law's place in the service was to indicate to God's people that now we must show our gratitude for the forgiveness God declares to us in His gospel, and we show that by living according to His Law.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, the reading of the Law gradually became in the Reformed tradition a replacement for that part of the service designed for confession of sin. Instead of having a time of confession of sin and then a reading of a passage of Scripture to declare sins forgiven, the Law was read so that the congregation might stand before it, be convicted of their sins, and see their need for Christ. The logic was that then the gospel of Christ that freed them

from guilt would be presented to the congregation in the sermon following. The sermon (among other things it accomplished) would take the place of a separate time of absolution by declaring the gospel of justification by faith alone.

At various times in the history of the Dutch Reformed churches attempts have been made to reinstate the separate time of confession of sin into the service, and then to have the Law read not as a means to convict of sin but, as Calvin had it, as a rule of gratitude.<sup>6</sup> In the history of the Protestant Reformed churches, Prof. Hanko has made the suggestion in the *Standard Bearer* that we go back and forth, sometimes reading the Law before the sermon to expose sin, sometimes reading it after the sermon as a rule of gratitude for what we have been given in Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, it remains the practice in the PRC, and in most Reformed and Presbyterian churches that still read the Law, that the Law is read in the service primarily for the purpose of exposing our sin and driving us to Christ. And though these things should be discussed by us, the current practice is still good in my judgment as long as we understand that one of the purposes of the sermon following the reading of the Law is absolution of guilt in the gospel proclaimed. The reading of the Law in Nehemiah 8 is used for conviction of sin. After the Israelites returned from Babylon, Ezra was commissioned to read the Law in front of the whole congregation of the people. The people had not heard the Law read in many, many years, and the result was conviction of sin. Nehemiah 8:9 says that all the people wept when they heard the reading of the Law. And Nehemiah had to go around to comfort

<sup>3</sup> Edersheim, Alfred. *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*. London: James Clark and Co. LTD., 1961. 267. Christ Himself participated in this worship.

<sup>4</sup> Beginning with Bucer, and then Calvin when he was in Strasbourg.

<sup>5</sup> Although, interestingly, in Calvin's liturgy he had the Law sung one line at a time and after each line the congregation said, "Lord, have mercy" (*kyrie eleison*), which may indicate that Calvin saw the use of the Law in the service, to some extent at least, as being to expose sin.

<sup>6</sup> A. Kuyper tried to get this changed in the Dutch Reformed Liturgy so that the Law would be used again in its third use in the service, but in this matter he did not win the day. Some Reformed and Presbyterian churches today have returned to the old practice of a separate time of confession and absolution from God's Word. This is worthy of more discussion.

<sup>7</sup> See volume 60, issue 15, "Our Order of Worship," Prof. Herman C. Hanko. "It might be well to consider, therefore, changing the place of the Law in our order of worship, sometimes reading it in its customary place and sometimes reading it at the end of the service, with the minister making clear in each case what is the main emphasis in this particular service. Of course, it ought to be understood that, if the Law is read at the end of the service as the 'rule of our gratitude' then there ought to be some other provision made at the beginning of the service for 'confession of sin' and 'absolution.' These things are, in my judgment, worth pondering a bit."

the people, reminding them that they were God's people, redeemed in the gospel.

### **Our Personal Experience of the Law Read in Worship**

Is this conviction your and my experience when the Law is read? It is read every week, and though it is not going to bring us to tears every time, do we realize what is happening when the Law of God is being read? God Himself is speaking. It is not the minister; it is God upon His mountain in all His holiness speaking to His people. This is an element of worship where, in the covenantal dialogue, God is speaking to us, declaring His sovereignty over us. He is placing upon us His holy Law in order that we might be humbled before Him. Do we use the reading of the Law this way? Christians need to see their dependence upon Christ day by day, week after week. Part of the worship of God's name is bringing our sins before the Lord and telling Him that we know He alone can forgive in Jesus Christ. Our worship is our dependence upon Him, and our seeking His mercy. In Reformed churches that still preach through the Heidelberg Catechism regularly, God's people hear the Ten Commandments expounded every year or two so that they might understand God's laws and their implications for our lives. In the reading of the Law we are to put those sermons to continued spiritual use. We ought to be running the past week through our minds, seeing our sin exposed to us here before the face of God in His Law.

Perhaps we come to this assembly thinking that we are pretty good people and really deserve to be here. And the reason why we are here is that we have made ourselves different from other people. We cannot continue to think that when we hear God's voice in the Law. We hear, "Thou shalt have no other gods," and we think about how we fell down before the god of money this past week, and in conviction we confess it. And we confess that our sin is not just breaking an external moral code, but a personal offense against a personal Holy God who loves us. We confess that in breaking His Law we have really attacked Him. We are not afraid that God will drive us out of His presence. We still hear Him say, I am the Lord *thy* God which brought Thee out of Egypt. But we are once again conscious of our failure to satisfy His Holiness on our own, and of our need to repent before Him.

And then, in the next Psalter number sung after the reading of the Law and in the congregational prayer, we repent and seek forgiveness. That song after the Law should have something to do with repentance and God's grace. We express our sorrow for sin in song, having been convicted by the Law, and we confess sin exposed by the Law in the congregational prayer. And in the sermon following we hear God exonerate us from guilt in the gospel of His Son. This is the experience of worship that is triggered with the reading of the Law.

Pay attention to it. It is important. Open your Bible and follow along if it helps. It does no one any good just to sit there when it is read if no attention is paid to it and if it is not viewed as God speaking His sovereign rule over my life. Only when the mind and heart are involved is it truly a part of the meeting with God in worship.

### **The Law and the Church World**

The day and age in which we live is similar to the time of the Judges, an age where every man did what was right in his own eyes. In this age, every man is a law unto himself. The Law of God is rejected. Our society has said that there is no law from above. We can make up our own laws. We can do what we want. And the effects are clearly seen. Homosexuality is no longer a sin in this land. Over 50 percent of marriages in the US end in divorce. *Time* magazine recently reported that 40 percent of Americans believe the institution of marriage itself is obsolete and should be done away with altogether.<sup>8</sup>

American churches need the reading of the Law in their service and the exposition of that Law regularly in the preaching, for the churches of our day and age are influenced by the lawlessness of the society. The divorce rate in most churches in America is the same as it is in society. A vast majority of churches in this country no longer observe the fourth commandment. There is the increasing problem that the message in American Christianity is not about man's sin and the need for forgiveness before a holy God. The Law has lost its place. And the result is that the gospel has too.

What all this indicates is a deeply rooted problem.

<sup>8</sup> Al Mohler, "Who Needs Marriage? TIME Magazine Cover Story Asked the Question—Do You Have an Answer?" *The Aquila Report*, November 29, 2010, accessed 12/5/10, <http://theaquilareport.com/who-needs-marriage-time-magazine-cover-story-asked-the-question-do-you-have-an-answer/>

The root issue is a lack of reverence for God Himself. A low view of God will always manifest itself in a low view of His Law, and reverence for God will always manifest itself in respect for God's Law. What the church world needs is the reading and exposition of the Law of God.

What we need in *our* church is the reading of God's Law every week, and faithful exposition of it repeatedly. "Every Sunday the voice of God from Mount Sinai must echo in the assembly of believers. This is the only way in

which the Law of the Ten Commandments is imprinted on the hearts and minds of believers in such an impressive way that it becomes part of their consciousness, and becomes an inseparable part of their moral awareness."<sup>9</sup>

And having heard the law, we run to the arms of Christ. 

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<sup>9</sup> Kuyper, Abraham. *Our Worship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009. 131.

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD

REV. WILBUR BRUINSMA

## Church Extension, Church Reformation, and Domestic Missions (3)

**I**n this article we continue to examine one of the paragraphs of the preamble to the constitution of the Domestic Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches. That paragraph reads:

We believe that this missionary activity includes the work of church extension and church reformation, as well as the task of carrying out the Gospel to the unchurched and heathen. However, we are convinced that our present duty lies primarily in the field of church extension and church reformation (1942 Acts of Synod, p. 26).

In our last two articles we concerned ourselves in the main with definitions. We defined church extension, church reformation, and labor among the dispersed. The focus of this article and the next is whether we have become so committed to the work of church reformation that we falter when it comes to presenting the gospel to unbelievers or the unchurched.

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We concluded in our first article that church extension was actually the goal of domestic missions, while church reformation was the means we used to reach that goal. The constitution of the Domestic Mission Committee has linked these two together. It states: "our present duty lies primarily in the field [not fields—WGB] of church extension and church reformation." These two are considered one work. The goal of domestic missions or local evangelism is to extend the church of Christ, either by adding members to our congregations or by adding churches to our denomination. This is church extension. The means used in the Protestant Reformed Churches to accomplish this goal is church reformation, both in the narrower and the broader sense of this term. There are either individual congregations that, under the guidance of their officebearers, desire to re-form themselves into a faithful church, or there are groups of people looking to leave their apostatizing churches in order to become a congregation in the Protestant Reformed Churches. These then send a request to our churches to labor among them to that end. We as churches have always utilized such opportunities, both in foreign as well as domestic missions, to preach the gospel and strive to reform

and extend the church. Our labors have been focused on those who are already believers and ask of us our help.

But it seems that, somewhere in our history, the idea that both local evangelism work and domestic mission work must be done by means of church reformation prevailed. In the mind of many, church reformation is not simply the common way of doing mission work and local evangelism, but, indeed, the only proper norm for doing mission work. Any other way is suspect.

This, in turn, has led to various ideas and practices that flow out of church reformation. Here are a couple of examples.

First of all, many believe that the “Macedonian call” is necessary before we can begin a work in a certain area. The reference is to what took place during the second missionary journey of the apostle Paul. Paul had intended to do mission work in Bithynia, a region in northern Asia Minor, but the Spirit “suffered them not” to go there. Paul then traveled to Troas and while there he received a vision of a man from Macedonia who said, “Come over into Macedonia and help us.” God had obviously directed Paul through this request into the region of Macedonia, to which Paul went directly and in which he took up his work. Many conclude from this incident in Paul’s journeys that the only proper way our Domestic Mission Committee may initiate a mission work is in response to being asked by a group of people to “come over and help” them.

This implies, of course, that there is a group of believers who are unhappy with what is being taught them in their church and who ask the Protestant Reformed Churches to organize them into a congregation in our denomination. By accepting the request we immediately enter into the work of church reformation. Or, perhaps a similar scenario: there are a few unrelated contacts in a given area, all of whom have expressed a desire that we come and help them. If there are enough of these contacts, the Mission Committee is willing to investigate a possible mission work there. This, too, results in the work of church reformation, since these contacts are already believers who are unhappy with the conditions found in their own churches.

Insistence that the Macedonian call is the only portal through which we can enter to initiate a mission work binds our churches solely to the labor of church reforma-

tion. There is no doubt, of course, that the Macedonian call has its place in determining a mission labor, but to say that it is the exclusive way to begin a work ignores the method Paul used in the remainder of his mission labors, and severely limits our present mission labors. In the May 1, 1994 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, in an article entitled “The Macedonian Call,” Rev. Carl Haak observes:

...we must not interpret the Macedonian call to mean that before the church would engage in a work of missions she must have a specific call to a specific area. To interpret the Macedonian call in that way puts the command or the call to engage in mission work which the Lord gave us into a straight-jacket and may actually produce in the church idleness and put an obstacle in front of the work of missions which is already hard enough.

We agree with this assessment.

That church reformation has driven our mission work and church evangelism work is also evident, in the second place, in the lectures we sponsor and pamphlets we produce. There certainly is a place for the many lectures that have been sponsored by our churches. They are spiritually wholesome and edifying for the church of Christ. Our members ought to utilize such opportunities to attend our lectures. Besides, lectures have effectively served in the past to stimulate interest in the truth of the gospel and in our churches. They have served well in the area of church reformation. The same is true of our pamphlets. They still are valuable in the promotion of the gospel all over the world. There are many believers who have read and still read our pamphlets and are drawn to the doctrines of grace taught in them.

But our lectures and pamphlets serve their purpose only in the area of church reformation. Lectures address themselves to audiences that already have a certain level (a very high level at times) of knowledge of Scripture and the Reformed confessions. The only ones who will understand these lectures are those fairly well steeped in Reformed theology. Most of the pamphlets produced by our evangelism committees assume that those who read them have a good understanding of the Word of God and the Reformed confessions. Such pamphlets have their place. But the function they serve as far as evangelism and mission work are concerned is very limited because they serve only the work of church reformation. Rev. Ronald

Van Overloop, in an article written for the special issue of the *Standard Bearer* of December 1, 1981 entitled, "Our Publications and Missions," writes a glowing report about the publications of the Protestant Reformed Churches. With that report we are in total agreement. In the article he also turns his attention to the "function our books and pamphlets are performing in the area of mission work." He states:

One must say that, although these pieces of literature are all good as far as their content is concerned, and are useful in many ways, they are not designed to any great extent for mission work. There are some reasons for this.

Many of the books and pamphlets are directed to Protestant Reformed people. This is evident from the fact that many are but printed copies of lectures directed to Protestant Reformed people. These are very good and useful in instructing our people in the truth of God's Word, but not intended for mission work and therefore have a limited value.

This is equally true of the pamphlets which were written for our mission work of years ago. They were directed to people who were of the denomination out of which the Protestant Reformed denomination came. The nature of mission work is changing as we find ourselves working more and more with non-Dutch people and with those who are not of the same Reformed background and heritage....

Another reason why it is said that our current list of literature is not designed to a great extent for present mission work is that today doctrinal knowledge is slim. The exceptions are trained officebearers and an occasional layman. A greater number may be acquainted with some of the theological terms and expressions, but they have little or no idea what they mean. Besides this, each group of churches tends to have its own peculiar theological expressions. The phrase "the counsel of God" conveys much significance to some, but to others little or nothing. Our pamphlets and books have many of these and similar expressions. This makes them difficult to understand if these terms, phrases, and concepts are not simply and clearly explained. To the extent that these are not explained, and their meaning and significance is assumed, the literature loses its value when used outside the sphere of our denomination.

There are those who may disagree with what Rev. Van Overloop states, but their argument is based on a limited

notion of church extension and mission work. Our lectures and literature serve missions in the area of church reformation. But their testimony does not go beyond our witness to Reformed believers.

If we tie church extension together only with church reformation, this will hamper our domestic mission labors and, in some areas, church evangelism. The work of church reformation has become almost non-existent today. Maybe there are those who do not see this as true because they are not actively involved in evangelism and missions. If there are requests for us to help, they are very, very few. Neither are our present lectures and pamphlets shaking up the church world enough to break some loose so that they seek to be re-formed. That is a sad and disheartening fact to admit, but it is true. That does not mean we give up on this area of labor. We have the calling to carry on in the important work of church reformation. But it does mean that we need to reevaluate church extension and missions.

This is where the vision of our fathers in 1942 enters in. They stated in the preamble of the constitution of the Domestic Mission Committee: "We believe that mission work includes...the task of carrying out the gospel to the unchurched and heathen." It is true that they added, "However, we are convinced that our present duty lies in the field of church extension and church reformation." But they did state "that our *present* duty" lies in this field. That was seventy years ago! Neither ought we to overlook the sentiment that was expressed in the original draft of the constitution to the synod of 1942: "Although we look forward to the time that the way will be opened for us to labor among the heathen, both here and abroad, and among the dispersed, we are convinced that our present duty still lies in the field of church extension and church reformation." Our fathers looked forward to the time when we as a small denomination, so limited at that time in manpower and finances, could go beyond the work of church reformation. True, this statement was not included in the constitution as it was adopted, but it was left out, not because of any disagreement, but only for the sake of brevity.

The Lord for some time now has made it apparent to those busy in domestic mission work that the time has come to bring the gospel to the unchurched and

heathen in our land. We need to carry our work and the methods we use to accomplish that work beyond (not excluding) church reformation and begin a broader labor in mission—and even in local evangelism. Church extension or mission work must be done among the unchurched! Why? Because the vast majority of people in our own land are indeed unchurched. This phenomenon has been developing for many years already and rapidly

continues to worsen. We cannot ignore it. If we do, we will find that we have very little left to do in our witness to this world as churches. We must continue in the work of church reformation but willingly swing the door open wide to work among the unchurched.

In a fourth article we will address the practical matter of how we can initiate a mission work among the unchurched. 

Calling (1):

## Fishing for Men

If God has chosen to save only some, and if He regenerates these people without their seeking it, what is the purpose of preaching the gospel to all men?

Many professing Christians ask this question. It is common to hear them ask it when they hear the truth that God desires to save only some people. That doctrine does not fit with their view of the content of the gospel and the purpose of the preaching.

In other words, the question these people ask serves to bring out an important point: If you have a wrong view of salvation (and of regeneration specifically), you will also have a wrong view of the gospel and of the purpose of preaching it.

Having covered in four articles some central points on regeneration, this article will be the beginning of a series on the subject of the call of the gospel. What is the gospel? What does it mean to preach it? What does God accomplish by means of this preaching? With this article we begin a consideration of these subjects.

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### First regenerated, then called

There is an order in which the blessings of salvation are given to God's people. We commonly refer to this as the order of salvation, or *ordo salutis*, for those who enjoy using the Latin.

The first two in that order are as follows:

**Regeneration:** God giving a person a new spiritual heart.<sup>1</sup>

**Calling:** God speaking to those whom He has already regenerated, and in this way drawing the regenerated unto Himself.

Having already considered the first, we are proceeding now to the second.

God speaks to the regenerated. He speaks to us through Christ, and Christ speaks to us through the preaching of the church. This is the means our Father uses to call the regenerated and draw them unto Himself.

This drawing is necessary. No one can come to Christ

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<sup>1</sup> There is a broader use of the term regeneration. Sometimes it is used to refer not only to God's act of giving us a new heart, but also to His act of constantly converting us so that we live a new life. In this article, however, I will be using the term in the narrower sense, referring only to God's act of giving a person a new spiritual heart.

unless God draws him. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me” (John 6:44-45). God’s people are not only *in* this world, but are by nature also *like* this world. What is their need? That God draw them *out* of this world, so that they come unto Christ and commune with those who are in Christ.

God Himself draws them to Christ, and this passage from John explains how He does that. He draws them by teaching them. It is all those who have “heard, and learned of the Father” that are drawn out and come to Christ.

It is by means of gospel preaching that God teaches His people. This is the means by which the regenerated come to hear and learn of their heavenly Father. The more they hear their Father and understand that they are like their Father in the new man, the more they willingly separate from this world, and come unto the one who has begotten them from above.

### **Drawing (not creating) the fish**

Our Lord said, “Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17).

Preaching is fishing. It is the means God uses not to create the fish, but to draw out the fish that He has already created.

God creates good fish when He regenerates them. This is when they become “new creatures” or good fish. Then God uses the preaching of the truth to draw the good fish to Christ, and to cause them to school with other good fish.

It is of great importance that we understand this. There are many who view the preaching to be the means by which the unregenerated (bad fish) come to recognize that they are bad fish, so that they will ask God to regenerate them and thus make them into good fish. Those who have this view will often think that it is especially the unregenerated who need the preaching, so that they can become aware of their unregenerated condition and ask God to raise them from the dead.

This is really the Arminian view of salvation and gospel preaching, but it often seeps into churches that

refer to themselves as Reformed. Thus it is important that we understand the proper order: First God gives us a new heart, and only then do we have a desire to eat the preached Word that is spiritual food for our spiritual life.

### **Drawing the good fish**

Many today try all sorts of means other than the preaching of the truth to draw people into their church. Although they may succeed in acquiring more fish, most or all of the fish that they will gather will not be the good ones.

The good fish are gathered by setting out the good food. Although man by nature despises the distinctive doctrines that we preach, those whom God has raised from the dead long for this food. God regenerates whom He pleases. To us He has given the calling to preach the truth that He has taught us, knowing that God will use that preaching to draw the living unto Himself.

First God puts His Word in our heart. Then when we hear the preaching of that Word we have a delight in it, and experience ourselves being graciously drawn toward the one who is teaching us.

This then brings us back to the question brought up at the beginning of this article. If God wants to save only some people, why preach to all men?

Part of the answer to this question has already been given. God uses the preaching of the gospel to draw out those whom He has already regenerated. In the preaching the truth is cast out as a net. This net is used not to create the fish, but to draw the fish into the boat.

But another point could be added about the work of missions. Although we preach to “all persons promiscuously and without distinction,” we are called to preach the Word to all those “whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel” (Canons II, 5).

As our Lord showed to His disciples, He alone knows where the good fish are. Therefore we must constantly look to Him to guide us as we go forth to the nations, preaching the one Word that will be effective in drawing His people into the church. 

## Vowing Jacob's Vow

“And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God.”

Genesis 28:20, 21

**W**hat is the meaning of God's everlasting covenant of grace and what is its significance for you?

The covenant has its meaning and significance for your parents and for your church. Your parents belong to the people of God. They believe in Him, and through faith they enjoy all the blessings and benefits of their salvation. Your church is the church of God. In faith she confesses His name, and she worships Him in faithfulness to His Word. But the meaning and significance of that covenant for your parents and your church points also to you and has something to say about you. You are the seed of your parents. You are the children of your church.

On account of that covenant, your parents presented you for baptism, the sign and seal of washing in Jesus' precious blood, the blood of the covenant. Because of that covenant your parents vowed their vows. They vowed that they would care for you and raise you as one of God's sons and daughters, sealed with the blood of Christ. In reliance on God's covenant promises, your parents took on the work they vowed to do. They instruct you by their word and example. They take up the necessary work to see that you attend a good Christian school. They pray for you, trusting God's covenant promise.

The covenant also has its meaning and significance for your church. Your church demands that your parents baptize you, take care for your spiritual welfare, and see to

your Christian education. Your church sees to it that your parents take you to the worship services and bring you to your catechism classes. Your elders pay attention to you, especially when they visit you and your family in your home. They take care to see that you are developing well as a Christian young man or woman. They regard you as a member of the flock. All because of God's covenant.

But what is the meaning and significance of that covenant for you? Does it mean only that you are going to be on the receiving end of so much attention and care? Does it mean only that someday, sometime, all the care and attention your parents and the church give you will have its result, and you will believe, supplying your part, so that God can then do His part, and save you? Does it mean only that someday God will be your God?

Certainly not!

God's everlasting covenant of grace means that God is your God now. He is your God, not in some far-off, remote way. Not a possibility, not a maybe, but God is your God. Just as He is the God of your parents. Just as He is the God of your church.

For God was Jacob's God. God was Jacob's God before Jacob was born. God was Jacob's God when Jacob saw the importance of the birthright and the blessing. God was Jacob's God when God protected him from Esau's hatred. And when God appeared to Jacob at Bethel, in that stunning vision, God made it crystal clear that He was Jacob's God. Then and there God promised Jacob the same promises He had made to his father and grandfather, Isaac and Abraham. He promised to bless Jacob and to take care of him.

So now you must hear God saying the same things to you. His covenant is an everlasting covenant. According to His covenant promise, as He is forever the God of your parents, so He is forever your God. He will bless you, and He will keep you. He will lead you all the way to His eternal kingdom.

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*Rev. VanderWal is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario.*

How did Jacob answer this Word of God?

He vowed a vow: "Then shall the Lord be my God."

See how Jacob's vow completely agreed with God's promise, and was based on God's faithfulness to His promise. God had promised all these things, and Jacob took God at His Word. As God will show Himself faithful, to do everything He has promised, so will Jacob have God for his God. God had said, "I will be with thee." So Jacob vowed, "If God will be with me..." God had said, "I will keep you." So Jacob vowed: "If God...will keep me in this way that I go." God had said, "I will give you bread to eat and raiment to put on." So Jacob vowed, "If God... will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on."

With those words Jacob already received and believed the promises that God made to him. Already he placed his life entirely in God's hand. He did not trust in some other god to be with him and keep him. He did not trust in himself for his food and clothing. Jacob looked to God alone, to be his God and to supply his every need. Already he understood his place in God's covenant by the Word of God to him that night at Bethel. Already he determined to have the Lord as his God.

But Jacob also vowed, "Then shall the Lord be my God."

These covenant words are filled with meaning and significance for you.

Your parents have led you this way. You cannot remember back to the time when they began teaching you to pray, bringing you to the Lord's throne of grace. They led you there so early in your life because of God's covenant. They taught you to pray because He promised to them that He would be the God of their children (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). He promised them that He would take care of you. He would be with you and keep you. He would give you food and clothing. So they led you to know your God and your complete dependence on Him. They taught you to ask Him for your care and protection, for your food and your clothing.

So you have continued to pray, and so you continue to trust.

As you have prayed, and as you have trusted, so you know God's faithfulness to you. He has been your God. He has been with you. He has kept you. He has given you your food and clothing every day. He has blessed you with His peace. His faithfulness you have known for so

many years already. You have known it in the food you ate. You have known it in the clothing you put on. You have known it by your safety at home and school and on the road. You have known it in the worship and service of God. His grace, mercy, and peace you have experienced in your heart and mind.

But your blessing is also to vow, "Then shall the Lord be my God."

Take in all those years of the Lord's care for you. As you prayed to Him, He remembered you, providing your needs, and guiding you in the way that you have gone. Now that you are capable of reflecting on all God's care, it is your privilege to vow, "Then shall the Lord be my God." This is the full significance and meaning of His covenant: You are God's and He is yours. As He has spoken and proved, so now it is yours also to speak and to prove.

That vow is yours to remember in your heart. Remember it when you come to God's Word. When you read it and meditate on it, and when you hear it preached to you, remember that it is His covenant with you. By that Word He is with you, telling you in so many words that He is your God forever. Remember that vow when you pray to Him, setting before Him every day your needs. Remember that vow when He shows every day His faithful answer to His Word and your prayers. As you remember, say, "Then shall the Lord be my God."

That vow is also yours to vow before your parents and your church. Think of those three questions you will be asked when you make confession of faith (Psalter, p. 90, after the Form for the Administration of Baptism). In three different ways they all ask the same thing: Do you vow Jacob's vow? Will the Lord be your God? Your parents and your church will delight in your answer: Yes! The Lord shall be my God!

How can you vow this vow? This vow you can vow because of God's faithfulness to His covenant promise. His faithfulness to that promise means that He will forever be your God. He will be your God, not only to provide you always with the protection and the food and clothing you need. But also He will be your God to provide you always what you need to keep your vow. As He has in the past, so He will continue to give you faith and obedience and perseverance (Heb. 8:10). You can vow to have Him as your God forever because He will be your God forever. All because He has promised. 

# A Definition of Gospel Preaching: Calvinistic or Arminian?

I think the right method of preaching is this. At our first beginning to preach at any place, after a *general declaration of the love of God to sinners and his willingness that they should be saved*, to preach the law in the strongest, the closest, and the most searching manner possible; only intermixing the gospel here and there, and shewing it, as it were, afar off.... I mean by preaching the gospel, preaching *the love of God to sinners*, preaching the life, death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ, with all the blessings which in consequence thereof are freely given to true believers.<sup>1</sup>

Who said these things? Who presented this as his view of preaching and his definition of preaching the gospel? Who here begins his statements of gospel preaching as a declaration of a universal love of God for all men absolutely (common grace) and His will or desire to save everybody (free offer)?

It was not free offer advocates like Louis Berkhof, Phil Johnson, Iain Murray, or John Piper. It was that arch-Arminian John Wesley (1703-1791)!

Even more than Jacob Arminius himself, Wesley has probably done more to further Arminianism than any other man. Through the 40,000 plus sermons he preached in Great Britain, Ireland, and America; his vast writings (including his sermons, journal, and *Notes on the New Testament*), totalling 32 volumes in one

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, Book 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), I:152-153; italics mine.

Rev. Stewart is pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland. This article appeared first in the British Reformed Journal, issue no. 59.

edition; his Arminian hymns (along with those of his brother, Charles) sung all over the world; the many ministers his movement produced, including lay preachers and women preachers, on all continents; the many societies and churches he established or spawned across the world—Wesley has promoted global Arminianism more than any other.

He provided the seeds not only for the Methodist movement and other Arminian churches, but also for the Holiness movement (for his Arminianism led him to embrace and promote perfectionism), as well as for Pentecostalism and Charismaticism (which are typically Arminian and which develop Wesley's endorsement and promotion of charismatic phenomena, such as dreams, visions, healings, "gifts," etc.), with their many respective churches and numerous denominations across the world.

No wonder Wesley had to "gut" the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, the confession to which he was sworn as an Anglican minister! His unfaithfulness to his ordination vows and creed have also been widely followed throughout the church world. Many are the ways in which he has sought to undo the Reformation! The wise words of Solomon certainly apply to John Wesley: "almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation" (Prov. 5:14).

Centuries after his death, Wesley continues to be the darling of millions of Arminians and even, sadly, professed Calvinists, the world over. The latter would have especially pleased him for he hated the gospel of particular grace, calling it a "blasphemy" that represents "God as worse than the Devil, as both more false, more cruel, and more unjust."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley, A Biography* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2003), p. 78.

John Wesley sought to weaken and destroy the truth of the sovereignty of God in any way he could, even resorting to condensing, distorting, and falsifying Augustus Toplady's 134-page book *Absolute Predestination* into a 12-page tract, ending with these scurrilous words: "The sum of all is this: One in twenty (suppose) of mankind are elected; nineteen in twenty are reprobated. The elect shall be saved, do what they will; the reprobate will be damned, do what they can. Reader believe this or be damned. Witness my hand, A- T-." Toplady neither wrote nor held any such thing. Wesley biographer Stephen Tomkins is right: "Now this fraud had proved [Wesley] a criminal worthy to be transported to America if not hanged."<sup>3</sup> Toplady understandably declared of John Wesley: "I believe him to be the most rancorous hater of the gospel system that ever appeared in England."<sup>4</sup>

Earlier in the letter from which the quotation at the very beginning of this article was taken, Wesley rightly

<sup>3</sup> Tomkins, *John Wesley*, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Tomkins, *John Wesley*, p. 173.

declares that the nature of the gospel to be preached is a "very important" issue: "I have had many serious thoughts concerning it, particularly for some months last past; therefore I was not willing to speak hastily or slightly of it, but rather delayed till I could consider it thoroughly."<sup>5</sup>

And what was his conclusion? The Arminian Wesley does not here define the gospel as universal atonement or the opportunity that man can be saved if he uses his free will aright. Rather, Wesley, after "many serious thoughts" and "some months" of thorough consideration, distills and defines the Arminian gospel as "a general declaration of the love of God to sinners and his willingness that they should be saved"—the very gospel of common grace and the free offer so beloved of many professing Calvinists!



<sup>5</sup> John Wesley's letter to Ebenezer Blackwell, dated 20 December, 1751 (<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-letters-of-john-wesley/wesleys-letters-1751/>).

## NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

## MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

### Sister-Church Activities

The Covenant Keepers (young people) and Covenant Keepers Seniors (young adults) of our sister church in Singapore, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, celebrated their anniversaries on January 25. It was fourteen years for Covenant Keepers and six years for Covenant Keepers Seniors. The celebration began with the singing of some Psalter numbers, and an exhortation by Elder Felix Chan based on Romans 11:36-12:2, in

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

which he spoke of using everything in this life to serve Christ. This was followed by an address by one of the young people, Marcus Wee. Following that, there was a welcoming of new members to each group, and the giving of gifts of appreciation to Bible study leaders and committee members. We could not help but be reminded of the words of Genesis 17:7 while writing this. Not many years ago there were no children or young people in Covenant. Now, we see this remarkable evidence there of God's establishing His covenant with believers and their descendants after them. To God be the glory!

The Consistory of the Grand-

ville, MI PRC recently approved of their pastor, Rev. Ken Koole, along with Elder Dave Kregel, traveling to Singapore at the end of February. This trip was made on behalf of Grandville, as the calling church, for our denomination's work there, and our churches' Contact Committee. Plans called for the men to conduct church visitation, to visit with the Lanning family, as well as to discuss with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church their calling Rev. Lanning to be their pastor later this year. The delegates planned on being in Singapore the Sundays of February 23 and March 2, returning home, D.V., Monday, March 3.

### **Young People's Activities**

The Young People's Society of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI sold homemade soup by the quart for a fund-raiser toward this summer's convention. The soup choices were split pea with ham, chicken chili, vegetable beef, and chicken fajita. The soup was delivered frozen the first week of March.

If you preferred your soup fresh and not frozen, there were plenty of other opportunities available for the soup connoisseur. One was a soup supper sponsored by the Young People's Society of the Hull, IA PRC on February 11 at the Hull Community Center. If the soup wasn't enough to draw you to Hull that night, there was also a basketball shooting contest for all ages, held the same night at the same location. There were prizes, including gift certificates for pizza and subs, but none for leftover soup.

The newly organized Young People's Society of the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA is in the process of holding their first fund-raiser for this summer's convention. Instead of a Yard Sale this spring, the young people are planning a craigslist sale. Members of Covenant of Grace were asked to donate anything they thought could be sold on craigslist. The advantage to this type of sale is, of course, that the sale can continue over a longer period of time, instead of just a couple of days, and, besides, there seems to be no limit of just what can or cannot be sold on craigslist these days.

The Young People's Society of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville,

MI reminded their congregation to continue to save returnable bottles and cans. The young people were only too happy to return those empties for them. Cans could be brought to Trinity during catechism classes on Monday night. The money earned from those returns (10 cents a bottle or can) was meant to help get the young people to this summer's convention.

The Young People of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada sponsored a fund-raiser for this year's convention entitled, "Piece of Cake and Silent Auction" for February 7 at their church. The congregation was encouraged to enter a baking contest. Members could submit an entry in three different categories; cake, torte, and pie. There was also an entry fee of \$5 for each item submitted. There were judges who handed out 1st and 2nd place ribbons for each category. Opportunities were given to sample the baked goods that were submitted. The young people were also looking for items to be sold in a silent auction taking place at the same time that the baking contest was being held.

The Young People's Society of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada invited everyone in their congregation to a skating party at Michener Park on Family Day, Monday, February 17.

### **Evangelism Activities**

The Evangelism Committee of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI recently placed an announcement in a bulletin asking their congregation if there was a topic

on which they would like to hear a lecture or that could be the subject of a seminar. The committee wanted to hear suggestions from their congregation for lectures or other major projects for them to work on this year. In other words, if you have any ideas, please share them. A reminder for all of us. If you have any thoughts or ideas, let your Evangelism Committee know. They will appreciate it.

### **Congregation Activities**

The Council of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI invited all the members of their congregation to join them for a lecture following their annual Council dinner on February 6. Dr. Brendan Looyenga, a member of Faith, spoke on the topic, "Teaching About Evolution and Evolutionists Within a Biblical Framework." The congregation was also invited to join the Council for refreshments following the lecture.

### **Young Adult Activities**

The Young Adults Retreat Committee of the Loveland, CO PRC hosted a Recital/Dessert night on January 31. The recital began at 7 P.M. in the sanctuary, and dessert was served after the program. Donations went to help fund the upcoming young adults retreat planned for early April.

### **Minister Activities**

Rev. Ron Van Overloop, currently pastor of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI, declined the call extended to him to serve as the next pastor of the Doon, IA PRC. ☺

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Teacher Needed

■ The Protestant Reformed Christian School of Dyer, Indiana is accepting applications for two open positions. First, we are accepting applications for a full-time Discovery Center (Resource Room) teacher for the 2014-2015 school year. Also, the goal of our school board and association is to start a special education program in our school. To that end, we are also accepting applications for a Special Education teacher. Interested applicants or inquirers are urged to contact our administrator, Ryan Van Overloop, at (219)558-2660 or ryan.vanoverloop@dyerprcs.org, or our Education Committee chairman, Matt Bennett, at (219)558-0861 or Matt\_bennett\_74@yahoo.com.

### Notice

■ The Council of Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA is soliciting for private unsecured 5-year loans to fund the purchase of a church building. These notes will bear interest at a rate of 4% per annum with principal due in full at maturity. Interested parties should contact either Fred Johnston (f.l.johnston@hotmail.com or 509-638-8438) or Rev. Rodney Kleyn (r.kleyn@prca.org or 509-850-5120).

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sympathy to Jane Heemstra and the Jon and Courtney Eldersveld family, and to Bill and Carol Huber and David and Nancy Ondersma in the death of their husband, father, grandfather, and brother;

#### TIM HEEMSTRA.

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14: 1-3).

Rev. Carl Haak, President  
Jerry Kuiper, Clerk

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sympathy to Frank Block and to Vicki DeKryger and her children in the death of their wife, mother, and grandmother;

#### ESTHER BLOCK.

Our prayer is that they may be comforted by the words of the prophet, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10).

Rev. Carl Haak, President  
Jerry Kuiper, Clerk

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Lammert and Mary Beth Lubbers and Mark and Sara Engelsma and their families in the death of their mother and grandmother;

#### MRS. DENA ENGELSMA.

May they find their comfort in the Word of the Lord in Psalm 103:17. “But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children.”

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President  
David Kregel, Assistant Clerk

### Synod

■ All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2014, are hereby notified that all material for this year’s synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Don Doezema  
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW  
Grandville, MI 49418

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council of the Hope PRC express their sympathy to their fellow officebearers Elder Michael Engelsma and Deacon Ken Engelsma and families in the death of their mother;

#### MRS. DENA ENGELSMA.

“Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (Psalm 73:24).

Rev. Overway, President  
Dave Moelker, Clerk

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their sympathy to Mrs. Betty Bylsma, Phyllis Bylsma, Tim and Sharon Rus and Alisha, and Andy and Shannon Bylsma in the death of their beloved husband, father, and grandfather, and our beloved fellow saint;

#### STUART BYLSMA.

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written...” (Revelation 2:17).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President  
David Kregel, Assistant Clerk

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sympathy to Rev. Bernard and Fran Woudenberg in the death of her sister;

#### SARAH KNOTT.

“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him” (Psalm 34:8, 9).

Rev. Carl Haak, President  
Jerry Kuiper, Clerk