

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

May 15, 2019 • Volume 95 • No. 16

Seeking the things above

Rev. Michael DeVries

Could you, Protestant, go 'home' to Rome? (4)

Prof. Barrett Gritters

Dordt 400:

The case of John Maccovius

Prof. Douglas Kuiper

Reproving the world of sin: The practice of elentics

Rev. Daniel Holstege

The seventh commandment and the single life

Rev. Ryan Barnhill



The *Standard Bearer* (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster

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

Reprint and online posting policy

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting or online posting of articles in the *Standard Bearer* by other publications, provided that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; that proper acknowledgment is made; and that a copy of the periodical or internet location in which such reprint or posting appears is sent to the editorial office.

Editorial policy

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

Subscription price

\$27.00 per year in the US, \$39.00 elsewhere
esubscription: \$27.00
esubscription free to current hardcopy subscribers.

Advertising policy

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

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRCA: www.prca.org

The Reformed Free Publishing Association maintains the privacy and trust of its subscribers by not sharing with any person, organization, or church any information regarding *Standard Bearer* subscribers.

Editorial office

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

Business office

Mr. Alex Kalsbeek
1894 Georgetown Center Dr
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
616-457-5970
alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org

Church news editor

Mr. Perry Van Egdom
2324 Fir Ave
Doon, IA 51235
vanegdoms@gmail.com

United Kingdom office

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

Rep. of Ireland office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown
38 Abbeyvale
Corbally
Co Limerick, Ireland

Contents

Meditation

- 367 Seeking the things above
Rev. Michael DeVries

Editorial

- 369 Could you, Protestant, go 'home' to Rome? (4)
Prof. Barrett Gritters

Letters

- 371 Rev. K. Koole's articles and letter replies

Search the Scriptures

- 373 The tongue of the fool (Eccl. 10:11-15)
Rev. Thomas Miersma

Believing and confessing

- 375 Of man's fall, sin, and the cause of sin
(Second Helvetic Confession, chapter 8b)
Prof. Ronald Cammenga

Dordt 400: Memorial stones

- 378 The Synod of Dordt (10)
The case of John Maccovius
Prof. Douglas Kuiper

Things which must shortly come to pass

- 379 Premillennialism—Postscript: Antinomiasm (2)
Prof. David Engelsma

Go ye into all the world

- 382 Reproving the world of sin:
The practice of elenctics
Rev. Daniel Holstege

Strength of youth

- 384 The seventh commandment and the single life
Rev. Ryan Barnhill

Activities

- 386 News from our churches
Mr. Perry Van Egdom



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION



Meditation

Rev. Michael DeVries, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan

Seeking the things above

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

Colossians 3:1, 2

In the closing verses of chapter 2 of Paul’s letter to the Colossians he had been rebuking the congregation for being involved in a form of self-willed worship. If they have died with Christ to the world’s childish, trivial notions, why do they submit to man-made ordinances—touch not; taste not; handle not? Such have only a show of wisdom and only serve to indulge the flesh. It leads away from Christ and the life of gratitude. The apostle calls us to live in conformity with the fact that as believers we have been raised with Christ. We must realize the significance of Christ’s exaltation! Our union with the risen and exalted Christ must transform our entire life! We are exhorted to seek the things which are above where Christ is.

How we need this exhortation! So easily we become absorbed in the here and the now. The temptations to worldliness, materialism, and self-seeking are many. We often have little time or concern for the things above. We too can lose sight of the significance of Christ’s resurrection and exaltation as regards our life and calling.

We must not misunderstand the conditional statement with which Paul begins this exhortation, “If ye then be risen with Christ.” The idea is that there is no question or doubt about this; our rising with Christ is absolutely certain. He speaks this way to emphasize what follows. Seeing it is reality that you are risen with Christ, it must follow that you seek those things which are above where Christ is now enthroned.

So what are “those things which are above”? Scripture describes them in various ways. The object of the desire of Abraham is called a “heavenly country,” a “city which hath foundations.” Jesus speaks of these things when He speaks of having treasures in heaven where moth and rust cannot corrupt. We can think of them in terms of the promises of the Beatitudes—receiving the kingdom of heaven, inheriting the earth, being filled with righteousness, being called sons of God. We can

look at these things from the perspective of the gifts of the Spirit from whom we receive love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. They are all the heavenly blessings which are in Christ Jesus—wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption!

It is evident at once that the apostle, in verse 2, sets forth an absolute contrast. “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” There is a sharp difference here. The one is heavenly; the other is earthly. The one is out of God through Christ; the other is from the principle of sin. In order to clarify this, the apostle characterizes these earthly things. We read in verse 5: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (see also v. 8). In this light we see that these things do not simply give us the bad, the dark side of the lives of men, as if there were also another side that we could appreciate and admire. No, these are simply the former things of the flesh in which they also had formerly walked. They are the earthly in contrast to the things that are above.

This certainly does not mean that the various creatures of creation or material things as such are evil in themselves. Certainly all the things of this earth were good as the Creator formed them in the beginning. Trees and rocks, cars and computers, government, economics, and industry are all created and established by God. The various things of the earth are good creatures of God to be used in our lives.

But sin came and caused the breach, a spiritual breach, between the things above and the things on earth. Not as if the earthly things as such became sinful or evil. But through sin man turned his affection away from God and set his affection upon the things of the earth in the service of sin. He no longer acknowledged God and sought His glory in seeking the things on earth. Instead, he used everything on earth in rebellion against God. Wealth and pleasure, power and glory are sought as things in themselves apart from God. And as such they are vain, corrupt, and sinful.

Thus, the apostle exhorts us, "...seek those things which are above.... Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Literally, the idea is that we direct our affection toward, mind, or strive for the things above. We are to set our hearts upon these things that are above. The things above are to be followed after with all that is in us. These things are to be our goal in life. These things must captivate our minds, our desires, our will, and all our activity. This implies that we appropriate those things for ourselves unto the glory of God.

The apostle uses very strong language. He is unmistakably clear. But we are inclined by nature to soften these words, to downplay the contrast here. We would argue that he does not mean to say that we may not seek the things on the earth, but that we may not seek them excessively, or even exclusively. There must also be some time and energy left for minding spiritual things, the things above. So, many insist that we may set our affection upon both. We will enjoy so much of earthly things as is possible in accord with a fair chance of salvation and of going to heaven. We will try to serve two masters—God and mammon.

Be not deceived! The apostle does not say, "Seek those things which are above a little, and for the rest, it will do no harm to mind the things on earth." The apostle draws the antithesis here. He makes a sharp distinction and emphasizes, "Mind the things above, not the things that are on the earth!"

Now certainly this does not mean that we are indifferent to the things of this present life. We are not to just wait passively and indolently until we are called to heaven. We are not to live carelessly. This is not an excuse for laziness or negligence in our work and calling. This does not mean that we are to try as much as possible to separate ourselves *physically* from the things of this earth.

Rather, with our hearts and minds set upon the things above, we must use and direct the things that are on the earth in the service of the Lord. The things above must control us in the managing of all of our affairs here below. As Paul explains to Timothy, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with the thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (I Tim. 4:4, 5). In all that we do, in our home life, in our education, in our work, in our life in society, in our life in the church, with our money and our possessions, with all our talents and abilities we must be controlled by the things that are in heaven unto the glory and praise of our God.

But how is it possible to seek the things which are above? Is it not true that we are still so carnally-minded? By nature we focus upon ourselves, our pleasure,

our success, our wealth, our popularity. We are still so sinful. How can we seek the things which are above?

Let us lay hold on the gospel that Christ is risen and we are risen with Christ! Yes, to the human eye Jesus appeared hopelessly lost on the cross. He was forsaken by His own, and the enemies, to all appearances, had triumphed over Him. He had been mocked, reproached, beaten, crowned with thorns, and led away to Golgotha. There they crucified Him. And Jesus appears utterly helpless. Even God seems to be against Him as the scene is suddenly enveloped in darkness. And out of the darkness comes His cry of amazement, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." Presently, He yielded up the ghost. And the grave made it all appear so final.

But, thanks be to God, Christ arose! He arose our glorious Redeemer. He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. He was seen by His apostles and many others for forty days. And then He ascended into heaven. There He is exalted at the right hand of God. All power and authority have been given into His hands. He has received the Spirit without measure.

Having redeemed us, Christ bestows upon us all the blessings of life and salvation. Yea, we are risen with Christ! By His Spirit He has raised us up with His resurrection life, even in regeneration. He has united us to Him by the bond of living faith, so that we are inseparably united with Him. That union was an eternal reality in the counsel of God as we have been chosen in Him. And by His Spirit He has made it a reality in time. As members of His body, when Christ was crucified, we were crucified with Him. When He arose, we arose with Him. When Christ ascended into heaven, we were given to sit with Him in heavenly places.

So it is that the apostle exhorts us: "Being risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God!" In principle, we are in heaven with the risen and exalted Savior. His love has been shed abroad in our hearts. Being risen with Christ we seek the things which are above.

Of course, if that spiritual principle of life within us was such that we were already perfect, we would not need this exhortation. Then our lives would always be directed to Christ. Then our eyes would always be fixed on the things above, upon Christ who is our life. But we know and confess that it is not yet so. From day to day we struggle with the weakness of our faith and the evil lusts of our flesh. Nevertheless, even now the new life of the exalted Christ in us defines who we are and how we live. And our treasure is in heaven. There is Christ our life, our all! Let us live in the hope of Christ's appearance, for then we shall appear with Him in glory (v. 4).



Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Could you, Protestant, go 'home' to Rome? (4)

Previous article in this series: April 15, 2019, p. 321.

The recent editorials about Protestants making Rome their 'home' have had one primary purpose, and it has *not* been to show that matters are so serious in much of Protestantism that they are fixing their spiritual GPS on the Romish church. Matters *are* that serious, as the articles have attempted to demonstrate, but that has not been their chief end. Rather, their primary purpose is to have you ask whether *you*, who read these editorials and are committed to confessing the Reformed faith, could go to Rome, whether you or I in our generations could find ourselves there.

To be clear, the question is not whether you *want* to go to Rome, so that "could" in my title means "willing to, or, might consider it...." I consider it very unlikely that any who would read the *Standard Bearer* for edification would confess that they would be happy, on their deathbed, to see their grandchildren defecting to Roman Catholicism. But the question is whether you could find yourself in your generations on the other side of the Tiber *under the judgments of God*. And that's different.

That may be the future for a clan or a church with whom God is displeased. God may judge the church that does not love and confess grace by *sending* them to a place like Rome. You are probably not surprised to hear said that God's heavy hand may fall on a church that *looks* Rome-ward. But I am proposing that God's heavy hand may *send* a church or denomination Rome-ward. That is, it's possible that going to Rome may *be* God's judgment. God *sent* Israel into Babylonian captivity to judge her for her idolatry.

So our attention in this final editorial about Rome is not on those Protestant Evangelicals who are talking with Rome, but on us who are repulsed by the idea, horrified at the possibility, stunned that some of our close spiritual relatives are thinking Romish thoughts. Our hearts' desire and prayer to God for these relatives is that they might be saved (Rom. 10:1). We grieve over their departure. Now, however, we must examine ourselves. Could you and I go to Rome?

Five areas of concern

There are five areas where every Reformed Christian ought to examine himself and his church humbly, so that he can *work* honestly and *pray* (without tempting Him!) that God preserve him and his church in the generations to come. If Reformed people are not careful, they will find themselves saying, "God, I thank thee, that I am not like other men are, self-righteous, social-gospelers, Federal-Visionists, or even as these Roman Catholics...." If matters are very serious, they will not even recognize, when they speak so, with whom they identify. For all these sins and errors that the previous editorials have exposed have their source in our sinful natures. Let us who think we stand, beware.

In the previous editorials we saw that many who in their generations were Reformed and Presbyterian are slouching toward Rome. Praying for grace to examine yourself rather than everyone else, consider the following:

Social gospel orientation

There are two ways in which a church (or family) could be exposed to Rome's determination to emphasize social and political concerns more than the gospel.

First, there may exist in the church a crass and almost exclusive interest in earthly life and physical well-being. The Old Testament prophets reserved some of their strongest denunciations for the Israelites who were more interested in their wine, ointments, and homes than the worship of God. They built their expensive, many-roomed homes, paneled with cedar and stained with vermilion (Jer. 22:14), while God's house remained in ruins (Hag. 1:4,9). Soon, God blew them away (Hag 1:9) and the funeral of the victims of the tornado was no more respectful than the burial of an ass (Jer. 22:19). Would God that our hearts be inclined to *spiritual* riches!

Or, a church or family may gradually become more interested in social and political matters than in the church because they did not learn the *history* of the social-gospel error (today called 'transforming society' and 'redeeming creation'), and how *every* generation faces that 'first'

temptation to feed the world with bread rather than Bread (Matt. 4:4). The primary calling of the church and the people of God is to seek the “words that proceed out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). At the very same time that we fulfill a diaconal calling to “all men” (Gal. 6:10), let us pray God that we see the difference between this and an attempt to redeem the world. And, pray that we teach our children to seek first the spiritual kingdom of God and His righteousness—both for themselves and for the poor they hope to assist with ‘bread.’

Trusting in orthodoxy rather than Christ

There comes another temptation for Reformed people who see the horror of false doctrine and the monstrosity of denying grace—that they trust in their doctrine rather than in Christ. Determined as they are to protect orthodoxy, they fall into the error of believing that their maintenance of truth saves them rather than the blood of Christ. No Reformed man, of course, would admit this and, in fact, would be indignant at such a warning. Yet if the determinedly Reformed father will not say to his sons, “Boys, trust Jesus, and not your orthodoxy,” it will not take but a generation or two and these boys will have the outside of the cup and platter clean, but inside be full of greed and self-indulgence. Yes, we *must* have orthodoxy, or we perish. But *trusting* orthodoxy is the height of pride that God will judge. Trusting orthodoxy rather than Jesus is a denial of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, high treason to God. The Pharisee never becomes extinct.

Sheer ignorance

Rome’s spiritual demise was the ignorance of the people. The people were destroyed for lack of knowledge. God forgot them in their generations because they forgot Him and His Word, like Israel in Hosea’s day (4:6). This can happen to any generation, in any denomination, and has happened time after time. Why would it not happen in your denomination? What makes anyone suppose that it could not?

So let’s ask ourselves how interested we are in reading, and how determined we are to lead our children, by our own example, to read. What have we done to swim against the powerful, almost irresistible, tide of distraction that comes from the Internet, television, and sport? What new habits have we adopted, at the expense of learning, growing in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? Fathers, what decisions have you made regarding the screens in your home? About regular family worship? About your reading choices?

If one does not face these questions, and act, he exposes himself and his churches to the judgments of God.

A word is in order to consistories as well. Ministers

must have time to make good sermons, that is, instructive sermons, and not be distracted by *anything* that makes this impossible. As to catechism, we thank God for what we have, and pray that we maintain what we have, even consider restoring the nine-month season and hour-long classes, in spite of the many pressures to go the other direction. And let us all be men who read—Scripture first and foremost.

A new popery

I mentioned in the previous articles a disturbing trend that is hard to miss. Men—good men—are trusting in what other men say rather than what Scripture says. How many people appeal to a man’s writings as “the end of all strife” (to borrow from the apostle)? Protestants have been accused of making their *creeds* a “paper pope.” We deny that charge, vehemently. But does the sin of having a new ‘papacy’ appear in a bolder way than anyone would ever have expected it? People in every area of the church—call them conservative or liberal, strict or loose—express the wish that “If only we could find what so-and-so thought about this; matters would be different then.” Or, “I sure wish Rev. So-and-so, or Professor So-and-so would weigh in this argument; then matters would be settled.” But “should not a people seek unto their God?” Go “to the law and to the testimony”! (Isa. 8:18, 19). Of course, “every heretic has his text,” so we’re not proposing ‘proof-texting.’ But the creeds guard against that, and we must be a people of the Word and creeds, not followers of men to whom we give a pope-like authority.

Failure to love truth

Finally, and most importantly, examine yourself whether you (and I) truly love the truth. II Thessalonians 2 teaches that God deals very severely with those churches or families who *have* His truth but do not *love* His truth.

...they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie... (vv. 11, 12).

God’s severe judgment is to send strong delusion to those who do not *love* His truth, so that the people believe the lie—perhaps the Romish lie. Notice, the people or church are offensive to God *before* they believe the lie. That is, it was not their embrace of the lie that made them displeasing to God, it was their lack of *love for truth*. For that, God may judge with a Romish delusion.

How does this apply to us? What must a church learn who believes that she is faithful? It is time for serious self-examination. It is one thing to write about truth, preach about the truth, defend truth; but that is

not the same as *loving* the truth. There are likely thousands who taught truth but did not love it, preached truth but did not preach it because they loved it, even defended it at great cost to themselves without loving it. And no one knew except for God who judges the heart.

Is the Lord's heavy hand judging? Is it for these sins, of which we are so often guilty? Let us examine ourselves, and not everyone else whom we believe may be at fault. And if our self-examination results in God revealing ("Search me, O *God!*") that we love self above truth, as we all do by nature, let us repent with genuine, fervent sorrow for sin and learn to pray what we have prayed in all our generations to the great Master of the Vineyard:

Thy vineyard no longer Thy tender care knows,
Defenseless, the victim and spoil of her foes;
O turn, we beseech Thee, all glory is Thine,
Look down in Thy mercy and visit Thy vine.

The branch of Thy planting is burned and cut down,
Brought nigh to destruction because of Thy frown;
The man of Thy right hand with wisdom endue,
The son of man strengthen Thy pleasure to do.

When Thou shalt revive us Thy Name we will praise,
And nevermore, turning, depart from Thy ways;
O Lord God almighty, in mercy restore,
And we shall be saved when Thy face shines once more.
Psalter # 220:4-6

Letters

Rev. K. Koole's articles and letter replies

I have followed this controversy closely since it began. It is of special interest to me. I am very concerned with this tendency in the preaching of some Protestant Reformed ministers to *improperly* emphasize man's response and obedience to the preaching of the gospel. It comes as no surprise to me that this is now coming to a head in our churches. In fact, for the truth's sake, I believe it must.

Let me say at this point that I am not a hyper-Calvinist or antinomian, nor do I believe God saves man as a stock and a block, as those who speak up seem to be so readily accused of. I firmly believe that grace is conferred to the elect by means of the admonitions of Scripture, "and the more readily we perform our duty, the more eminent usually is this blessing of God working in us" (Canons III/IV, 17). Further, I have no issue with Canons III/IV, 12 when it ends by saying (after correctly explaining why), "Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received." And, finally, I have no problem with the demand of the gospel to every hearer of it, that they repent and believe.

As to Rev. Koole's criticism of Rev. H.H.'s [Herman Hoeksema] sermon on Acts 16:30, 31, he is completely wrong. Rev. H.H. understood clearly what he was saying and what he was trying to emphasize to his hearers. Nor does this sermon contradict other sermons by Rev. H.H. or John Calvin, as Rev. Koole tries to tell us. In fact, if you listen carefully, as I urge every reader to do, you will notice that Rev. H.H. even affirms that the call of the gospel to repent and believe is a true and correct statement. What Rev. H.H. wants us to understand is the grave danger, not in the wording itself to repent and

believe, *but in where the emphasis is placed. Man or God. What will you have? The one leads to conditional theology, the other to the truth.*

Rev. Koole *puts all the emphasis on what man must do, instead of what God irresistibly does by His grace.* That is what is wrong with his teachings. He doesn't deny outright that one's obedience is wholly the fruit of God's salvation of him, of course not. To deny that would be going too far. Nevertheless, the fact is he wants to place all the emphasis on man and what man must do in order to come to a conscious enjoyment of his own salvation, not on God. Rev. H.H.'s sermon on Acts 16:30 was aimed exactly at this teaching. No wonder Rev. Koole wants to discredit it.

Herman D. Boonstra,
member of Loveland PRC

Response:

Brother H. Boonstra:

An interesting letter and charge, namely, that my articles "[put] all the emphasis on what man must do, instead of what God irresistibly does by His grace." I find that statement interesting and significant because it brings us to what is becoming the heart of the issue in our present controversy, namely, when it comes to the wonder of irresistible grace, what historically has Christ's church meant to establish by this confession? Or, briefly stated, what is it that the sovereign God actually accomplishes by this grace that is irresistible?

What we must understand is that when it comes to the church's confession of salvation all of grace, the question is not only what is it that God in His sovereign grace has accomplished *for* a man by the death of His

Son, but also what does He by this grace work *in* an elect person? What does the Lord Christ by His Spirit do *to* a man, or, if you will, make of a man?

When it comes to H. Hoeksema's sermon on the Philippian jailer, I understand quite well what HH was doing. He was magnifying God's sovereign grace over against the incipient Arminianism in conditional covenant theology. I esteem him for that. But in this instance, he went about it in an unnecessary manner, one that can easily lead to improper doctrinal conclusions and charges.

HH's explanation of the salvation of the Philippian jailer in this one sermon is not the *full* Hoeksema.

In order to condemn conditional covenant theology, one does not have to say that the apostles were calling regenerated men to do nothing. All one needs to do is to bring into the picture the truth of *irresistible grace*. And by that I mean, the truth of grace as the power of the Spirit of the risen Lord Jesus that so transforms a man's heart and mind that he is, in the words of Galatians 6:15, a *new creature*. A new creature is a man in whom, as a rational-moral, choosing creature, has been restored the image (life and mind) of the last Adam, Christ Jesus. And having been made a new creature, one is able to respond obediently to the call of the gospel to repent and believe. When the call to repent and believe comes to such a one with the voice of Christ (one whose "ears" have been opened—spiritual deafness removed), one actually does that—one repents in utter abhorrence of self and casts oneself on the mercy and work of Christ.

Such a perspective in no way diminishes that salvation is all of grace. Rather, this magnifies grace and its confession. Not of self, not of man, but of the saving power of a renewing Jehovah God.

We are speaking, after all, of a grace of irresistible power that enables a man (gives him the gift, the ability) to do once again what he (what we) had lost and forfeited by man's first rebellion in the first Adam. Such grace enables sinners to respond to God's call and word in an obedient way. Spiritually renewed, they once again sincerely desire righteousness and its ways.

This is the teaching of the Canons in Article 16, Heads III/IV. This article was written over against the Arminian contention that the rigorous Calvinistic view of things turned men into nothing but disabled stocks and blocks, meaning, that for all intents and purposes the Spirit does the repenting and believing for men. Because after all, charged the Arminians, rigorous Calvinism maintains that fallen man can do nothing for or of himself when it comes to salvation.

Which is true—fallen man can do nothing for or of himself when it comes to salvation. For that matter, neither can the regenerated man! Not *for* and *of* himself.

But *that* does not mean that when God by grace irresistibly works newness of life, elect man is still unable to do anything spiritual and respond to the gospel call in a spiritual way. After grace works in the sinner, now he is able to—not *of* himself, but *because of* what the Spirit of Christ has worked in him. All the glory still goes to the risen Christ Jesus, re-creator of men and women now renewed! But it is the renewed sinner who *does* the responding. One must actively, willingly respond in faith "if one is to be saved" (which is nothing less than biblical language), that is, if one is to appropriate salvation for himself in a personal way.

This is the burden of Article 16, Heads III/IV. In this way the Arminian "stock and block" charge was dismissed. Having pointed out that true-hearted Calvinism does not teach that sin deprives man of his human nature (that is, being a rational-moral, self-aware willing creature) the article goes on to explain the significance of irresistible grace (the grace of regeneration, as the Canons call it, a grace that does not "take away [our] will and its properties"), namely:

[T]hat where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed, [now] a ready and sincere spiritual *obedience* begins to reign, to which the true and spiritual *restoration* and freedom of our will consist [emphasis added].

Notice, in place of carnal rebellion comes now a ready and sincere obedience to the gospel call. Regenerated men and women hear the call to come to Christ and to lay hold on the righteousness that justifies in order to appropriate it as their very own. And they do. According to the Canons, a man does so by the restored freedom of his will (a will renewed and sovereignly set free.)

That's confessional truth. And it is confessional truth over against Arminianism and any supposed conditional covenant view and its doctrine of a conditional promise.

Now, we ask, to whom goes the glory? Does this give too much credit to man, and by implication steal glory from God?

Not according to the conclusion of Article 16. Take note!

Wherefore, unless the *admirable* Author of every good work wrought in us, man could have no hope of recovering from his fall by his own free will, by the abuse of which, in a state of innocence, he plunged himself into ruin [emphasis added].

So, according to the Canons, by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, in place of a carnal rebellion, a "ready...obedience begins to reign." How is this possible? By *irresistible grace* a man's will has been set free, enabling one to hear and choose aright again.

Yes, we do the choosing. And it is incumbent upon

us to do so. The gospel confronts us with that command. But, as the Canons make plain, this in no way diminishes or steals the glory from the “admirable Author of every good work wrought in us,” which is to say, from the Son of God and His wonder-working grace. In fact, it is exactly this that underscores what He as the Word, by whom God made all things to begin with, is able to remake (recreate) out of burned, charred, and ruined material. We have once again been made willing in the day of *His* power.

In conclusion, I say this: Brother Boonstra, you state that “[Rev. Koole] doesn’t deny outright that one’s obedience is wholly the fruit of God’s salvation of him, of course not. To deny that would be going too far. Nevertheless, the fact is, he wants to place all the emphasis on man and what man must do....”

In reply, I say, first, if indeed, what I have been asserting does put too much emphasis (or, to use your allegation, *all* the emphasis) on what man, elect man in particular, does (is called to do), then so do the Canons. But that I can assure you is not so. The Canons are as balanced and biblical as a document can be when it comes to what sovereign, irresistible grace works.

But, second, you inform us that you are neither hyper-Calvinist nor antinomian, and that you are convinced God does not save man as a stock and a block. I am glad to hear that. To do otherwise would be anti-confessional. But, that said, for one to claim something is so does not mean one’s position is consistent with his claims (as you pointedly allege in regards to myself).

Brother Boonstra, I am convinced that while you want nothing to do with hyper-Calvinism, antinomianism, or labeling regenerated men stocks and blocks, you are heading in that direction by your failure to give full glory to what irresistible grace makes of a man, what it enables us as new creatures *to do* in response to the Word of God in law and gospel. That’s what becomes consistent with your view. Not staying out of the hyper-Calvinist ditch, but sliding into it. And that must not be.

It is the truth and power of irresistible grace preached and worked that keeps us out of that ditch, calling us to keep to the strait and narrow way and then enabling one to do what the Lord Christ calls His disciples to do.

All of this, I say again, does not diminish or take from the Lord Christ His proper glory and that salvation is all of grace. Rather, it is exactly this that properly *magnifies* the Lord Christ, the Lord Christ who on the basis of His cross work has the right and the power to restore what we forfeited and lost, spiritual gifts and abilities, and so once again enabling us to begin to function and respond as living, willing, choosing children of God.

It is the view you are espousing, brother Boonstra, that in the end seriously underestimates and diminishes the true power and work of the indwelling and sanctifying Holy Spirit. And that, in turn, will have an adverse effect on what the preaching can and must expect of regenerated, confessing men and women in Christ’s church.

May God graciously keep us from that.

Yours for the cause of truth and grace,
Rev. Kenneth Koole



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Thomas Miersma, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

The tongue of the fool

Previous article in this series: April 15, 2019, p. 327.

Ecclesiastes 10:11-15

Earlier in chapter 10 we read, *Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to everyone that he is a fool (Eccl. 10:3)*. The walk of the fool has been found among rulers. That walk is also found by ignoring God’s ordering of things under the sun. It is with that in view that the text now turns to the speech of the fool and his tongue: *he saith to everyone that he is a fool*.

This consideration begins by pointing out another

thing that belongs also to the ordering of things. *Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babler is no better (Eccl. 10:11)*. The figure drawn is of a swaying serpent, rising up and moving its head and body to strike. The charmer by the swing of his body, and often with his swaying reed instrument, charms or masters the snake, semi-hypnotizing it, holding it under control. Such a scene would not have been uncommon at the time in the Middle East, as it is still found in parts of Asia.

The figure is applied to a “babbler” or, more literal-

ly and clearly, the tongue and its master. The tongue is like a swaying serpent, full of poison. To master it requires the powers of a snake charmer. The owner of the tongue has no advantage, and is no better than the serpent and the snake charmer. In James 3 the point is made using other figures for the tongue and its influence. James there speaks of the tongue, *For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison* (James 3:7, 8).

A believing child of God, with the spiritual gift of wisdom, understands this infirmity of his flesh and struggles with it, seeking by the grace of God to tame his tongue. Hence, the contrast now introduced, *The words of the wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of the fool will swallow up himself* (Eccl. 10:12). By gracious words is meant more than pleasant or beautiful. They are words spoken soberly in truth, rooted in the truth of God, and therefore just. And yet they are beautiful for they edify and build up the hearer in the fear of God. Thus Jesus' words are described when He was in the synagogue in Nazareth, in Luke 4:22, *And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth*, though their response was one of unbelief.

The fool in his speech, which is the focus here in the text, swallows up himself, that is, he works his own self-destruction by his words. *He saith to every one that he is a fool* (Eccl. 10:3). His speech is that of a poisonous serpent—evil, dissembling, full of arrogant folly. His mouth is an untamed serpent. The result is: *The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness* (Eccl. 10:13). The text describes both the beginning of the words and the end of the speech of the fool, and in doing so includes all the content in-between; his entire speech. It is characterized by the folly of sin, by that which is evil or mischievous, which works evil. It is the madness of sin that strives with God, with His word and with His providence.

The text implies a warning to discern our own speech, as the folly of sin cleaves to us according to the flesh. It also calls us to consider what we hear and to whom we give much ear. The speech of the fool is poisonous; it leads one to further folly. It has the character of being arrogant, proud, and boastful, so that the speaker is full of himself: his will, his plans, his profane language.

James speaks of this as something inconsistent and sinful in the life of a believer, who should have wisdom:

Out of the same mouth proceeded blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water

and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom (James 3:10-13).

In like manner, Solomon points us to the way of wisdom in godly speech that also flees the speech of the unbelieving fool of this world and seeks not its company or imitation.

This is further illustrated: *A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?* (Eccl. 10:14). The idea of the text is the reality that a man cannot determine what shall be, the immediate future, nor can he tell or predict what shall come to pass after he dies. The future is simply unknown to man, both for tomorrow and into the distant future. God alone, who has ordained the end from the beginning, can tell us what shall be. But man cannot find it out by his own reasoning. His plans are subject to God's sovereign will.

Yet the fool is *full of words*, that is, in this connection, his plans and expectations. In his pride the fool speaks not only endlessly of himself but of what he will do and what he will accomplish. He speaks as if the future is in his own hand, under the government of his will and thought. His trust is in his own prowess. Such is the speech of the world we hear on a daily basis, both regarding the immediate future and its long-term expectations. The wise man speaks of these things in the consciousness, even if not always expressed, that the future is in the hands of the Lord and that we ourselves do not determine this or that, but as the Lord wills.

James, who may have much of this section of Ecclesiastes in mind in James 3 and 4, says:

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil (James 4:13-16).

It is that self-confident boasting and rejoicing (James 4:16) which applies particularly here. This forms the multitude of the fool's words. He trusts in himself. He is like the fool in the parable of the rich fool who will build bigger barns but regards not God (Luke 12:15-21).

The result of both his walk and words (Eccl. 10:3) is that he fails. He pursues what is vain as an end in itself. *The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them,*

because he knoweth not how to go to the city (Eccl. 10:15). The fool spends his life and strength in vanity, driven by the lust of his own flesh, heedless of God and his government, and boasting in himself. He accomplishes nothing of value under the sun, but wearies himself. He lacks spiritual common sense. *He knoweth not how to go to the city*. That is, he lacks the basic sense of direction and purpose in his life and labor. He cannot read the sign posts in the world around him, which would direct him in the way. Of the Word of God he wants nothing, and even the ordinary boundaries of life, which God has ordained, he sets aside in his pride. He will dig a pit and not fall into it. And his tongue boasts

thereof, particularly when for a season it may seem as if he gets away with his folly and that consequences do not immediately befall him. Instead of not knowing how to go to the city, we would probably say of the fool that he does not know enough to come out of the rain and, rather, gets soaked. From beginning to end he is a fool and that folly is in his heart; therefore, it is “because” he does not know how to go to the city that he wearies himself. The cause lies in his heart.

To His people God shows the way in His word, which is gracious, and gives wisdom in the walk of life, and to guard our speech in the way. He also shows us the way to an eternal city that He has built in Christ.



Believing and confessing

Prof. Ronald Cammenga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Of man's fall, sin, and the cause of sin

(Second Helvetic Confession, chapter 8b)

Previous article in this series: April 15, 2019, p. 330.

Death

By death we understand not only bodily death, which all of us must once suffer on account of sins, but also eternal punishment due to our sins and corruption. For the apostle says: “Who were dead in trespasses and sins...and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy...even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:1 ff.). Also: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12).

The subject of chapter 8 of the Second Helvetic Confession (SHC) is the fall of man into sin and its consequences. The main consequence was death. That had been the warning that God attached to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, one of the two trees He had planted “in the midst of the garden” (Gen. 3:3). His word of warning had been, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely

die” (Gen. 2:17). Man disobeyed God, heeded the lie of the Devil, and ate of the forbidden fruit. Under the judgment of God, as the consequence for their sin, Adam and Eve died. God carried out His word. He killed man, the rebel; He executed him, for man's sin was a capital offense.

The death that God inflicted on man affected every aspect of his being. First, that death was *physical* death: “By death we understand not only bodily death, which all of us must once suffer on account of sins...” Obviously, Adam and Eve did not drop dead at the foot of the tree. But thereafter they were made subject to death. From then on, they endured the misery, the pain, the sicknesses, and all the sorrows that are aspects of death and lead to death. From a certain point of view, it would have been better for man had he dropped dead the moment that he ate of the forbidden fruit. Instead, he was made to endure suffering and sorrow for some nine hundred years before finally succumbing to death. That was by far a greater judgment of God.

What the SHC makes plain is that death is the consequence of sin. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom.

6:23). Death is not part of the warp and woof of the universe—the natural order of things. Not at all. That is the teaching of evolution, both of atheistic evolution and of its theistic variety. They have in common that they deny the biblical account of the origin of death. The origin of death is sin. The origin of death is the judgment of God on account of man's guilt for his sin against God. That fundamental truth every form of evolution denies. And therein, those who teach evolution demonstrate that they are opposed to the teaching of the Word of God.

This is also the reason on account of which man will never be able to conquer death. That is man's dream. From the days of the early explorers to our day man has been in search of the fountain of youth. More than any buried treasure, this was the discovery that he hoped to make. It can be argued that, from a certain point of view, this is the main goal of all modern man's medical and scientific endeavors. He spends endless time and millions of dollars annually in the hope of discovering the secret for overcoming death. But man will never be able to conquer death. And he will never be able to conquer death and live forever because death does not have only a natural cause; death is the judgment of God.

The rest of Scripture confirms the teaching of the opening chapters of Genesis. This is Paul's teaching in Romans 5:12, as cited in this paragraph of the SHC: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." He teaches the same thing in I Corinthians 15:21, 22: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." In Adam, all men have died. Because of Adam's sin, death passes upon all men. On account of the fact that Adam was the head of the entire human race, God visits the consequence of his sin upon all those of whom he is the head.

But this paragraph of the SHC is concerned not so much with physical death, as it is with *spiritual* and *everlasting* death: "By death we understand...also eternal punishment due to our sins and corruption." Man's spiritual death was also the consequence of his sin. On account of his sin he lost the spiritual life that he had by virtue of his creation. God took that spiritual life from him as punishment for his sin. What this means is that God punished sin with sin. And ever since the first sin, God has continued to punish sin with sin. This, in fact, is the very worst punishment of God upon the sinner, that God punishes his sin by giving him over to further sin. The sinner does not "get away" with his sin, as we often suppose, but by additional sin he increases his guilt and aggravates his final judgment.

And that is also death—*everlasting* death in hell. Death is separation from God, which is the awful reality of hell. Death is pain and suffering, and that too is the reality of hell. Death is the conscious experience of the judgment of God. In hell the sinner experiences the most awful judgment of God. In hell there is no hope, for the suffering of hell is endless—everlasting: "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire shall not be quenched" (Mark 9:46).

Original sin

We therefore acknowledge that there is original sin in all men.

Actual sin

We acknowledge that all other sins which arise from it [original sin] are called and truly are sins, no matter by what name they may be called, whether mortal, venial or that which is said to be the sin against the Holy Spirit which is never forgiven (Mark 3:29; I John 5:16). We also confess that sins are not equal; although they arise from the same fountain of corruption and unbelief, some are more serious than others. As the Lord said, it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for the city that rejects the word of the Gospel (Matthew 10:14 ff.; 11:20 ff.).

In one short sentence the SHC acknowledges the reality of original sin. Original sin is the sin of every human being in Adam. When Adam sinned, he did not sin as a private individual, but as the head and father of the whole human race. His sin was the sin of "all men," that is, of every man. When he sinned, we all sinned in him.

Original sin consists of both original corruption and original guilt. However, it is original sin as original corruption that is on the foreground. That is plain from the fact that the article speaks of original sin "in" all men. The reference is to man's total depravity, the sinfulness of every man by nature. This is the sinfulness "in" all men.

At the same time, original sin is the source of all man's actual sins. "We acknowledge that all other sins which arise from it are called and truly are sins...." Our actual sins—our sins of thought, word, and deed—have their source in our original sin. The Reformers were agreed in their doctrine of original sin—agreed also in their rejection of the Roman Catholic doctrine of original sin. Although Heinrich Bullinger's statement is briefer than that of Guido de Brés' statement in the Belgic Confession, he was in full agreement with de Brés:

We believe that, through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind; which is a corruption of the whole nature and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected even in their mother's womb, and which produceth in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof, and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind (Art. 15).

It can be said that the Reformation restored to the church the biblical doctrine of total depravity. And fundamental to the truth of total depravity is a right understanding of the doctrine of original sin. If the Roman Catholic Church had rightly confessed the truth of original sin, she could never have invented the fiction that baptism washes away original sin in all who are baptized—never. That much was clear to the Reformers.

The Reformers also denied the Roman Catholic doctrine of actual sin, especially its distinction between mortal (deadly, sometimes capital) sins and venial sins. Prior to the Reformation, Roman Catholic theologians developed the teaching of the “seven deadly sins.” The seven deadly sins were usually identified as lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride. These seven deadly sins were set over against sins that were classified as “venial,” that is, forgivable. Determination of whether one had committed one of the seven deadly sins could be determined by the answers to three questions: 1) Did the act involve a grave matter? 2) Was the act committed with the full knowledge of the wrongdoing that had been done? 3) Was the act done with the full consent of the will? If all three of these questions were answered in the affirmative, the criteria for a deadly sin had been met. If any one of the three was answered in the negative, the criteria for a venial sin had been met.

The Roman Catholic Church taught that deadly sins, in distinction from venial sins, were not only more serious than venial sins but also so serious as to cause one to lose the grace of justification. The consequence for the sinner who falls into deadly sin is that he falls from grace and, thus, what the Roman Catholic doctrine of free will implied becomes explicit in the open denial of the perseverance of the saints. Without demonstrating that at this time, it should be evident that Rome's doctrine of mortal and venial sins lies behind its unbiblical teachings of penance, the Mass, and purgatory.

The Reformers repudiated Rome's unbiblical distinction between mortal and venial sins. They taught that all sin is mortal in the sense that every sin deserves death. At the same time, all sins are also venial, for the blood of Jesus Christ covers the guilt of the worst sins. John Calvin repudiated the Roman Catholic distinction between mortal and venial sins in more than one place

in the *Institutes*. He writes, for example, (book 3, chapter 4, paragraph 28):

At this point they [the Roman Catholic Church] take refuge in the foolish distinction that certain sins are venial, others mortal; for mortal sins a heavy satisfaction is required; venial sins can be purged by easier remedies—by the Lord's Prayer, by the sprinkling of holy water, by the absolution afforded by the Mass. Thus they dally and play with God. Though they are always talking about venial and mortal sins, they still cannot distinguish one from the other, except that they make impiety and uncleanness of heart a venial sin. But we declare, as Scripture, the rule of righteous and unrighteous, teaches, “the wages of sin is death” [Rom. 6:23]; and “the soul that sins is worthy of death” [Ezek. 18:20]; but the sins of believers are venial, not because they do not deserve death, but because by God's mercy “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” [Rom. 8:1], because they are not imputed, because they are wiped away by pardon [cf. Ps. 32:1-2].¹

The Reformers' rejection of the distinction between mortal and venial sins, did not lead them to reject all distinctions between sins, especially the distinction between sins that are more serious and sins that are less serious. Besides the sin against the Holy Spirit that is never forgiven, Bullinger says: “We also confess that sins are not equal; although they arise from the same fountain of corruption and unbelief, some are more serious than others.” He concludes the paragraph by citing Jesus' warning that “it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for the city that rejects the word of the Gospel,” as recorded in Matthew 10:14-15 and 11:20-24. Not the sins of the flesh, which we often account to be the worst sins, but the sin of rejection of the truth of the Word of God, especially by those who have been brought up in the church and in covenant homes, is the very worst sin. In God's eyes, such sins against better knowledge are the most serious sins. Such as turn their backs on covenant instruction and on the church, in which they were born and baptized, will be beaten with double stripes. Their suffering in the everlasting death of hell will be the most grievous.

1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.4.28; 1:654-5.



Dordt 400: Memorial stones

Prof. Douglas Kuiper, newly appointed professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

The Synod of Dordt (10) The case of John Maccovius

...These stones shall be a memorial unto the children of Israel forever.—Joshua 4:7c

In early May of 1619 the Synod of Dordt treated three cases of alleged false teaching: it condemned four Remonstrant ministers; it condemned Conrad Vorstius (see the issue of April 15); and it exonerated John Maccovius.

Maccovius and the charge against him

John Maccovius was born and raised in Poland. He attended various European universities, including the one in Franeker, Friesland. In July 1614 he began teaching theology at Franeker, with Sibrand Lubbertus (delegate to Dordt) as his senior colleague. It soon became evident that Maccovius maintained supralapsarianism as strongly as Lubbertus maintained infralapsarianism. Maccovius was also fond of using scholastic terms and distinctions. Almost five hundred years earlier, the “scholastics” had begun the work of systematic theology, of explaining various biblical doctrines in relation to each other. This required them to analyze doctrine logically and to make logical distinctions. Using scholastic distinctions, Maccovius defended Reformed orthodoxy against Arminianism.

However, some orthodox men, including Lubbertus, became suspicious of him, and charged him with fifty errors. Among the allegations was that he taught God to be the author of sin (supralapsarians are often accused of this), that fallen man is not the object of God’s predestination, that God has two elections (one to grace and one to glory), and that the purpose of God in causing the reprobate to hear the gospel is to leave them without excuse.

The Classis of Franeker declared Maccovius guilty of heresy. In 1618 he appealed the matter to the provincial Synod of Friesland, which investigated the matter and asked Dordt to treat it.

Actions of the Synod

The Synod received the materials of the case at session

139 (April 25), and discussed how to proceed. The materials were lengthy; Synod read them aloud over the space of the next two days. Synod then appointed six delegates, three Dutch and three foreign, to bring advice. The committee reported on April 30, but its recommendations were not adopted. On May 4, at its 152nd session, Synod declared Maccovius not guilty of heresy, but unwise in how he expressed himself in particular instances. Synod admonished him to adhere more closely to the language of Scripture.

The Maccovius case is significant for two reasons. First, it underscores that the Synod was determined to defend sovereign grace against Arminianism. It did not desire to limit orthodox Reformed men in their understanding of the order of God’s decrees, or to forbid them to express themselves in different ways within the bounds of orthodoxy. Part of the process of growing in our understanding of Scripture and of developing doctrine is that room is allowed for discussion of, and even disagreement on, certain aspects of Reformed doctrines not clearly addressed by our Reformed confessions.

Second, the case reminds us that the way in which we express our doctrinal convictions does matter. As Synod would say in the “Conclusion to the Canons,” we must regulate both our sentiments and our language by Scripture, according to the analogy of faith. A man may be orthodox, but if he does not express himself well, his statements might become the occasion for controversy.

It would be easy for us to suppose that past councils and synods have come to their decisions easily. Rarely has such been the case. Part of the process has always been dealing with personalities, sorting through unclear charges, studying the matter intensely, and tolerating debate by orthodox men who did not see eye to eye. This is true when, in the end, the church condemned a man as a heretic. It is equally true when the church dealt with men who were accused of heresy, but were later exonerated.



Things which must shortly come to pass

Prof. David Engelsma, professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Premillennialism (26)

Postscript: Antinomism (2)

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2019, p. 285.

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.”

Hebrews 10:16

“Why will God...have the ten commandments so strictly preached?...That we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in a life to come.”

Heid. Cat., Q. 115

Introduction

To my examination of the doctrine of the last things of premillennialism I add a postscript of several installments.

This postscript consists of a critique of a teaching of premillennialism which, if it is not, strictly speaking, part of premillennialism’s doctrine of the last things, is, nevertheless, a fundamental element of the heresy of dispensational premillennialism.

The teaching in view is premillennialism’s rejection of the law, that is, the Ten Commandments, as the rule of life of the New Testament church. This false doctrine is known as “antinomism,” which literally means “against the law.”

The previous article in this series demonstrated that the founding fathers of premillennialism were avowed, virulent antinomians. So strong was their rejection of the law that not only did Lewis S. Chafer reject the law of the Ten Commandments as the rule of life for New Testament believers, but he also described the commands of God in the New Testament Bible to Christians as mere “suggestions.” God does not command the believer to worship Him alone, and rightly; He “suggests” that we do so. God does not command the believer not to commit adultery; He “suggests” that the believer not commit adultery. God does not command children to obey their parents; He “suggests” that they obey their parents. No doubt, this god, like some weak parents, begs, “Please”: “Please, obey your parents.”

The “Lordship” controversy over antinomism

A present-day, powerful movement among dispensational premillennialists is developing this antinomism to its extremes. This movement includes leading premillennial theologians, including Zane C. Hodges, for many years professor of theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, the foremost premillennial seminary in the world. The movement teaches that Jesus can be one’s Savior without being also the Lord of his life.¹ It is possible that someone is saved by believing in Jesus while continuing to live a life ruled by Satan and sin. It is very well possible that a saved believer lives impenitently in sin to the end of his life and yet be saved eternally. True, saving faith does not assure a life of good works in obedience to the law of God. It is a real possibility that a saved sinner permanently “drops out” of the Christian life.² Good works are not “an inevitable outcome of saving faith.”³ According to the antinomian gospel of Zane Hodges, one can be saved “without repentance” and without “a life of good works.”⁴

Although Hodges does not expressly acknowledge it, his antinomian book and theology are his defense of fundamental dispensational, premillennial doctrine. The law is for Israel in the Old Testament and in the coming millennium. The law is not for the church. The church is saved by faith, which faith is not expressed by, or bound to, the law, that is, a life of good works.

The dispensational premillennialism of Zane Hodges and his colleagues is antinomian, is lawless. This lawlessness denies the Lordship of Jesus over His people.

And the faith that produces or tolerates this lawlessness, or simply fails to manifest itself in sanctification of life, is not the living faith that unites the believing sinner with the holy Jesus Christ. It is a dead, false, obnoxious faith, worthy of Satan, who shares this faith with the dispensationalists.

1 This is the content of Hodges’ book, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989).

2 Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 80.

3 Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 167.

4 Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 163.

This is antinomism in an extreme form of the heresy. It is perilously close to, if not the same as, the developed form of antinomism that exclaims, “Let us sin, that grace may abound!”

This development of premillennialism’s inherent antinomism has occasioned a controversy within the ranks of dispensationalism. The controversy is known as the “Lordship” controversy. The name is taken from the denial by some premillennialists that Jesus the Savior is always also the Lord of the life of the one He saves. Some dispensational theologians oppose this teaching. They maintain the Lordship of Jesus over the life of all whom He saves.

A prominent dispensational premillennialist who defends the truth that wherever He is Savior Jesus is also Lord is John MacArthur. This Baptist preacher, therefore, claims to oppose antinomism. He is popularly regarded as opposing antinomism.

The claim and regard are mistaken.

As a dispensational premillennialist, John MacArthur is an antinomian. He is not a friend of the Reformed doctrine of the law, but one of the enemies. And Reformed Christians must know this about him and his theology.

Antinomian MacArthur

Contemporary premillennialist John MacArthur is compelled to acknowledge that Chafer, a founding father of dispensational premillennialism, taught “an ‘age of grace’ that smacks of antinomianism.”⁵ With the use of the word, “smacks,” MacArthur hedges on his criticism of L. S. Chafer. Chafer’s gospel “smacks” of antinomism, because it is antinomism. Necessarily, therefore, the teaching of Chafer, and of the other fathers of premillennialism, “paved the way for a brand of Christianity that has legitimized careless and carnal behavior,” that is, paved the way for antinomism in life and conduct.⁶

By the legitimizing of careless and carnal behavior, MacArthur refers specifically to those dispensational premillennialists today who believe that one can have Christ as Savior without having Him also as Lord of their life. They gladly adopt the practical conclusion: One may believe, or may have in the past believed, in Jesus, but go on living a wicked, unholy, and lawless life, all the while having the assurance that he or she is saved, and will be saved in the end. This is the fruit of the denial of the Lordship of Jesus, as MacArthur rightly contends.

What MacArthur refuses to recognize, and admit,

5 John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles: The Role of Works in the Life of Faith* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1993), 228.

6 MacArthur, *Gospel According to the Apostles*, 228.

however, is that the sheer, open, and ugly antinomism of his anti-Lordship, dispensational colleagues and fellow church members is the natural, inevitable development of MacArthur’s own antinomian dispensationalism. It is not only the founders of dispensational premillennialism and some contemporary, anti-Lordship, dispensational theologians who are antinomian. But the theology itself of dispensationalism is essentially and incurably antinomian.⁷

Dispensational premillennialism denies that the law of God consisting of the Ten Commandments applies to, and is binding upon, the New Testament church and believer. From this viewpoint—the viewpoint of the theology of dispensationalism itself—and from within that theology, the anti-Lordship dispensationalists are right, and MacArthur is wrong, in the Lordship controversy. In their controversy over “Lordship,” Hodges is consistent with the theology that he and MacArthur share. MacArthur is inconsistent.

It is a striking feature of MacArthur’s defense of “Lordship salvation” that in all the book contending with his openly antinomian colleagues and fellow church members, *never* does MacArthur so much as *state* that the Ten Commandments are the rule of life of the New Testament believer. Much less is there an entire chapter, or even entire section, calling attention to this issue as fundamental in the controversy and then defending the vital truth that the law of the Ten Commandments is the authoritative rule of the life of the Christian.⁸

Indicating that he is well aware that he is skating on thin dispensational ice in his controversy with his bolder, more consistent antinomian colleagues, MacArthur defines “antinomianism” wrongly in a glossary at the end of *The Gospel According to the Apostles*. He defines the heresy as the teaching that “Christians are not bound by any moral law.”⁹ The truth is that antinomism is the teaching that Christians are not bound *by the moral law of the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5*. But for the dispensational theologian to have defined antinomism correctly would have been for him to have exposed himself to the devastating charge that he is no dispensationalist at all. And the fact is that, as a dispensationalist, John MacArthur denies that the law of the Ten Commandments is the rule of the Christian life.

As a dispensational premillennialist, John MacAr-

7 On the Lordship controversy among dispensational premillennialists, see John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, defending Lordship, and Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), denying Lordship.

8 See John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles*.

9 MacArthur, 259.

thur is incapable of teaching and defending what the Reformed faith calls “the third use of the law”—the use of the law as the guide of the Christian life. No doubt, he is unwilling to teach “the third use of the law.” He is antinomian *in principle*. His controversy is not with antinomism, but with the consistent *development* of that heresy by his colleagues.

It is not to MacArthur’s credit that in this book at any rate, the subject of which is the bold, developed rejection of the law by MacArthur’s own dispensational colleagues—their avowed antinomism—the Baptist preacher does not so much as indicate the root of the error in dispensationalism’s repudiation of the Ten Commandments as the guide of the life of the Christian. About this aspect of the Lordship controversy MacArthur is silent. *Significantly* silent! *Necessarily* silent! *Culpably* silent!

To John MacArthur defending the Lordship of Jesus against his antinomian colleagues, the Reformed reader has this question: “Tell us, Dr. MacArthur, are the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 the authoritative rule of life of the New Testament Christian? Yes, or no!”

The judgment of the Reformed faith upon the controversy within dispensationalism over Christ’s “Lordship” is that it is a tempest in a teapot.

Contemporary premillennial antinomism

Proving the charge that dispensational premillennialism is inherently antinomian is the open rejection of the law of the Ten Commandments by contemporary premillennialists who present themselves as “moderating” the theology of the fathers of the teaching.

Contemporary disciples of Scofield and Chafer, although moderating some of the teachings of the fathers, maintain this repudiation of the law. In the volume that is intended to placate covenant theologians and achieve ecumenical relations with Reformed and Presbyterian churches, the premillennial theologian, Carl B. Hoch, Jr., bluntly proclaims premillennialism’s antinomism: “The entire Mosaic law is no longer the rule of life for Christians. Christ abolished the entire Mosaic law.” He approves the declaration of another premillennial theologian that the law was “abrogated.”¹⁰

Writing in the same volume, another, supposedly moderate premillennialist does away with the law in these words: “The leading of the Spirit renders the law obsolete.”¹¹ The obsolescence of the law is supposed to be the

meaning of Romans 10:4: “Christ is the end of the law.” The writer explains: “Paul uses the word *end* in this passage in the sense of supercession.” That is, Christ has set the law aside and replaced it with something else.¹²

This necessarily raises the question, with what has the law been replaced? The seriousness of this question is recognized by Lowery, when he assures Christians that the replacement of the law “does not mean the church is without guidance.”¹³ That which now takes the place of the law as the guide of the Christian life is the example of the life of Christ: “what he said and did.”¹⁴

In addition to his characteristic premillennial error of dividing the history of salvation into essentially different dispensations, whose differences include differing ways of salvation, Lowery errs in his understanding of the word “end” (Greek: *telos*) in Romans 10:4. Christ is not the “end” of the law in the sense that He abolished the law for His people. But He was the “goal” of the law. For righteousness, the law always had Him in view, always aimed at Him. The law directed the Old Testament people of God to Jesus Christ for the perfect obedience that the law demands. This righteousness became theirs, as it becomes ours now, by faith in Jesus Christ. This is the gracious gift of justification.

But justification does not exhaust the truth of Jesus’ being the “end,” or goal, of the law. He is also the “end” of the law in that He works within the hearts and lives of His elect, justified people the righteousness that the law demands. What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did, so that “the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:3, 4). This is the gracious gift of sanctification, as the phrase concerning walking after the Spirit shows.

In this sanctifying work, Jesus does not dispense with the law. Not only does He work its righteousness in the lives of His people—the love of God and the love of the neighbor, both tables of the law. But He also uses the Ten Commandments as the clear, objective, authoritative, abiding guide, or rule, of the conduct of His people.

Jesus does not render the law of God “obsolete.”

To say so is disparagement of the will, and ultimately, of the very being of God Himself, the revelation of which perfect will of whom—the righteous God—the law is.

To say so is to condemn the ministry of Jesus Christ. It makes Him the quintessential antinomian.

in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, Blaising and Bock, 246.

12 Lowery, 230.

13 Lowery, 246.

14 Lowery, 246, 247.

10 Carl B. Hoch, “The New Man of Ephesians 2,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 116.

11 David K. Lowery, “Christ, the End of the Law in Romans 10:4,”

Jesus is the *fulfillment* of the law. And He is the law's fulfillment both in justifying the guilty sinner and in sanctifying the corrupt sinner.

The Reformed faith honors the law as “holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). Premillennialism dishonors the law as an evil, certainly an evil with regard to guiding the life of the New Testament Christian.

The Reformed faith retains the law as the rule of a holy, thankful life. Premillennialism rejects the law, leaving the Christian without a rule, or guide, of life; encouraging the Christian to trample the law under foot; and inevitably producing the denial of the “Lordship” of Christ in dispensationalism.

The Reformed faith calls to, and produces, a law-abiding, Christian life.

Premillennialism is lawless. It is antinomial—“against the law”—at the core. It produces and excuses, if indeed it does not justify, contempt for the law in mind and in behavior.

Everyone must recognize that these are damning charges against dispensational premillennialism, charges that by themselves expose that doctrine as un- and anti-Christian.

In contrast, its honoring of the law of God redounds to the highest praise of the Reformed faith, approving it as the faith of the gospel of God.

(to be continued)



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Daniel Holstege, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines

Reproving the world of sin: The practice of elenctics

Previous article in this series: January 15, 2019, p. 189.

In the wilderness of Judea, John the Baptist began to preach, saying, *Repent* (Matt. 3:2).

In the towns of Galilee, Jesus began to preach, saying, *Repent* (Matt. 4:17).

In some of His last words to the disciples, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit who would *reprove the world of sin*,¹ righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8).

In the Great Commission, Jesus sent us into the world, saying, “*Repentance and remission of sins* must be preached in my name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

O man of this world, what have you done with God? Last time we considered that profound question of elenctics that the believer puts to the unbeliever. That question seems to bubble up inevitably in the soul of the child of God as he or she lives in the midst of this wicked and perverse world. As we observe a sexual revolution rolling over the world like a horrific, earthshattering tsunami; as we hear about a new law permitting the most extreme and nauseating forms of abortion; as we witness a stunning increase in iniquity in all spheres of life, from marriage to science and from entertainment

to politics, we find ourselves crying out, “O man of this world, what are you doing with God?”

But the question arises too, or ought to arise, when we meet a man who is lost in the darkness of heathenism: offering incense to dead ancestors, bowing to images of Buddha, groveling before the myriad of Hindu gods, prostrating himself before Allah, or invoking the mother of Christ in prayer. Or when we face a man who imagines that God created the world long ago but has had nothing to do with it ever since; or that God is not a real person but some kind of mystical force subsisting in the world; or that there is no God. The question surfaces too when we hear the man of this world take the name of our God in vain or the woman of this world boast about her sexual exploits with a coworker. But it ought to arise too when we encounter any unbeliever, even the friendly neighbor who does not feel the need for God in his life.

O man, you know about the true and living God, for God hath showed Himself to you in the things that are made! But what have you done with Him?

That question of elenctics must be followed by the practice. For God in Christ has loved, chosen, and redeemed us to be His *witnesses* to the world. He has

¹ The word *elenctics* comes from the Greek word *elenchein* which means “to reprove, rebuke, or refute.”

given us to know and believe and understand that He is God, before Him there was no God, neither shall there be after Him. He, even He, is the LORD; and beside Him there is no Savior (Is. 43:10-11).

What, then, is this practice of elenctics?

Reproving the world of sin. The Greek word *elencthein*, which appears many times in the New Testament, means to reprove, rebuke, convince, or convict. The pastor rebukes those who sin and reproves the congregation in his preaching (I Tim. 5:20; II Tim. 4:2); the bishop convinces gainsayers by sound doctrine (Titus 1:9); one brother tells another brother his fault in private (Matt. 18:15); believers reprove the unfruitful works of darkness by the light (Eph. 5:11-13). But ultimately, God alone can perform this act, though He uses us. “When he is come,” Jesus said about the Holy Spirit, “he will reprove the world of sin...” (John 16:8).

The practice of elenctics, in the context of missions and witnessing, is the act of reproving the man of this world for his sin of idolatry, showing him the error of his heathen religion, and calling him to repentance. The spirit of our age is against this. It is the spirit of religious tolerance. I suppose you have seen the bumper sticker with symbols of major religions and the single word “Coexist.” I remember working with a man at a summer landscaping job (a very easygoing man, I might add), who told me that he is against mission work in foreign places like Africa. He thought we should not be going out into the world trying to convert people to Christianity. We should certainly not reprove them of sin. Rather, we should celebrate their religions and worldviews. We should take delight in their customs and look for the beauty in them. We should all coexist and tolerate each other in this world. We should not be so proud to think that we are right when it comes to religion. We should humbly admit that we do not know what is true and false when it comes to religion. I think he may have even admitted that he was an agnostic. That is the spirit of our age, especially in the western world. But we must swim hard against that current, because the task of elenctics is an essential element of our mission as the church of Jesus Christ in this world.

Jesus calls us to reprove the world of sin, to preach repentance and remission of sins in His name among all nations!

Two missionaries of our Lord were faithful to this calling long ago when they came to a town full of heathen men and women. While preaching the gospel to the local pagans, one of the missionaries saw a man who was a cripple from birth. He performed a miracle of healing, saying, “Stand up on your feet.” The local people saw the wonder and shouted in their local tongue,

“The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men!” The local priest took bulls and garlands to the gates of the city to prepare a sacrifice to the missionaries! O man, what are you doing with God? You hold the truth in unrighteousness and worship the creature more than the Creator! The missionaries ran to the people and earnestly reprovved them, “Sirs, why are you doing these things? We are mere men just like you! We preach that *you should turn from these vanities to the living God* who made the heaven, the earth, and the seas; who formerly let the nations walk in their own ways; but who never left Himself without a witness, for He did good, sent rain from heaven, and filled our hearts with food and gladness.” That elenctic message was delivered by Paul and Barnabas in the city of Lystra (Acts 14:8-18).

The practice of elenctics is to reprove the world of sin. According to J. H. Bavinck, who served as a Dutch Reformed missionary in Indonesia in the 1930s, elenctics is “the conviction and unmasking of sin and the call to responsibility.”² That is no quick and easy task. We must not, ordinarily, imagine that we can just approach the man of this world, tell him to repent, and go on our merry way. For the act of reproving the world often involves long and patient work on the part of the missionary and witness of Jesus Christ. It is the task of pulling down the strongholds of false religion and casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. It is seeking to destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. It is refuting the profane and vain babblings of man and the oppositions of science falsely so called, the philosophy and vain deceit that are after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

The practice of elenctics is bound up with missions. *Go into all the world and teach all nations.* Allow me to make some distinctions. For there is a task of defending the truth of the Word of God as a warrior of Zion against the flaming arrows of the enemy who attack the fortress of the church from the outside. We call that *apologetics*. There is also a task of refuting by sound doctrine the gainsayers who rise up within the walls of the fortress, whose mouths must be stopped, lest the people of God be bewitched by those who pervert the gospel of Christ. This we call *polemics*. Then there is this task of going outside the walls into enemy territory, confronting the dweller in darkness face to face, and reprovving him of sin, in the earnest desire of pulling him out of the fire (Jude 23). This is the task of *elenctics*. It is part of the work of the missionary and the witness of every believer.

² J.H. Bavinck, *Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1977), 226.

When Paul stood before Felix, the Roman governor in Caesarea, he spoke to him “concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled” (Acts 24:24-25). Paul always took the opportunity to speak concerning the faith in Christ, the precious good news that Jesus died and rose again according to the Scriptures, and that those who believe in Him, by the grace of God, will be saved. But Paul did not hesitate at the same time to reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. He reproved Felix of sin and warned him that a day will come when he will be the one standing before the Judge of the living and the dead. And Felix trembled.

But Paul always had a missionary motive.

Later he stood before Herod Agrippa. He asked the king if he believed that Jesus was indeed the Christ promised in the Scriptures. Agrippa replied that he was almost persuaded to be a Christian. Whereupon Paul expressed the missionary motive in his heart, “I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds” (Acts 26:29).

Jonah, on the other hand, did not want to go to Nineveh to reprove them of their evil ways. Only when God sent a mighty tempest and brought a great fish to swallow him and carry him in its belly for three days and three nights was Jonah willing to preach repentance to Nineveh. God used his preaching too, in spite of his lack of missionary motive, to spare that great city wherein were more than six-score thousand persons

who could not discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle.

The motive of elenctics ought not be to win an argument with an unbeliever; not to show the absurdity of his heathenism; not to make ourselves feel good about ourselves; not merely to do what we know we must do. But the motive of elenctics is always, if it is the will of God, the repentance and salvation of the man of the world. This can only be done by the believer who not only believes in the Lord with all his heart, but whose heart also throbs with desire for the salvation of the elect who are still outside the walls of the city of God.

The Holy Spirit will reprove the world of sin and save the elect of God using believers who thrill to sing these words of Psalter #259, a versification of Psalm 96:

Tell of His wondrous works, tell of His glory,
Till through the nations His name is revered;
Praise and exalt Him for He is almighty,
God over all let the Lord be feared (stanza 2).

Vain are the heathen gods, idols and helpless;
God made the heav'ns, and His glory they tell;
Honor and majesty shine out before Him,
Beauty and strength in His temple dwell (stanza 3).

Make all the nations know God reigns forever;
Earth is established as He did decree;
Righteous and just is the King of the nations,
Judging the people with equity (stanza 5).

But how exactly should I do elenctics?

How do I unmask the sin of the man of this world,
convince him of that sin, and reprove him for that sin?

Let's come back to that next time.



Strength of youth

Rev. Ryan Barnhill, pastor of the Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Dyer, Indiana

The seventh commandment and the single life

Previous article in this series: January 15, 2019, p. 187.

In my last article I addressed the sin of pornography. Warnings concerning the sin and our calling with regard to it were also brought. Even though it was pornography that was addressed, the instruction, warnings, and calling that were given can be applied more broadly to any sexual sin.

But the question may well be asked by young people, “How *ought* we, then, to live? We are to flee from por-

nography and other sexual sin. But what can be said *positively* about how God will have us to live in light of the seventh commandment?” We may not, therefore, stop at issuing the negative calling to flee from such sin, but we must also give the positive calling. The Heidelberg Catechism, in its treatment of the seventh commandment, certainly brings out the prohibition of the commandment, but also teaches us its requirement:

“[That we must] live chastely and temperately, whether in holy wedlock or in single life...[s]ince both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, He commands us to preserve them pure and holy...” (Q&As 108-109).

We will notice, this time, what God requires of us in the *single* life. Probably most of the young people reading this, as well as some of the young adults, are single. Although this article applies to those who are older and unmarried, it certainly applies to you who are younger, even to those who are dating and not yet married.

Allow me to suggest three categories, all starting with “C,” that help us understand our life and calling in the single state as related to the seventh commandment.

Christ

What is most important in the unmarried state is to understand that you *are* in a relationship. Carefully read Ephesians 5:22ff. Marriage is a picture of the relationship of Christ and the church. We are intimately united to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, and the church is His body. This spiritual reality applies to all of God’s people—also those who are single. We have everything, absolutely everything, in Him. *This* relationship is everything! *This* relationship is all-satisfying.

Knowing this relationship, there is contentment even when the Lord has not given a husband or a wife to live with in the intimacy of marriage. Knowing the present bliss of Christ and the blessings in Him, gladly do we behave chastely in dating before marriage. Knowing the delight of this relationship with our Lord, there is a joy we have that is so much deeper than the “happiness” offered in electronic immorality. Knowing the everlasting treasures found in our loving Savior and Head, Jesus Christ, the fleeting promises of sexual pleasure outside the marriage bed offered by the world no longer have their hold.

Are we under the chief means of grace at church, where Christ is preached in all His glory and beauty? Are we in the Word day after day, studying and meditating upon that relationship of Christ and His church which fills the pages of Scripture? This is what you need, young people, in your unmarried life. Stand in wonder, day after day, as you gaze by faith upon the lovely face of your Savior.

Chastity

God calls single young people and young adults to a life of *chastity*. This is one idea, among others, included in the biblical word “pure.” Purity is one of the characteristics of the citizens of the kingdom, as Jesus says in Matthew 5:8: “Blessed are the pure in heart:

for they shall see God.” The citizens of the kingdom are those for whom Jesus has died. The citizens of the kingdom are those who have been regenerated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ—Jesus Christ, who is *the* pure in heart. These citizens are sanctified by the Spirit of Christ—separating them from sin and defilement and consecrating them to God. To be sure, we kingdom citizens have only a small beginning of obedience. All our lifetime we learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 115). What characterizes the citizen of the kingdom is a genuine devotion to the thrice-holy God, a life of thankful service to God.

Purity can, of course, refer to many areas of life, but we are interested in *sexual* purity. Citizens of the kingdom, the pure in heart, abhor the filth of sexual sin. Pornography and related sexual sins are like sewage. Beneath the streets of New York is an extensive sewer system, carrying polluted water. This sickly green water is thick, frothy, and slimy. The very sight and smell of this underground flow is repulsive and revolting. The kingdom citizen seeks, by God’s grace, to be unpolluted in a world of so much sexual sewage. Sexual purity is a life of thankful service to God when we are on our phone, reading a book, thinking thoughts, and when we are all alone at home. Earlier I referred to the spiritual reality of Christ and the church. In this relationship, the church *submits* to Christ, her Head. The church submits to Christ’s will also regarding sexual matters, and this manifests itself in a life of chastity, even though such a life includes difficulties and sacrifice. In short, a life of sexual purity is this: “glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (I Cor. 6:20).

Preparation for marriage is also a part of this chaste single life. Certainly, marriage is not for all—the single life is *good* (I Cor. 7:8), and we must remember this and be sensitive to this. However, not all have the gift of sexual self-control, and such ought to marry; it is better to marry than to burn in lust (I Cor. 7:9). The citizen of the kingdom who understands this will, with a Spirit-worked desire for sexual purity, seek out a spiritually like-minded man or woman to date, chastely prepare for marriage in that period of dating, and then marry. Here is a paragraph from our biblically-based Marriage Form:

For, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and every woman her own husband (I Cor. 7:2); insomuch that all who are come to their years and have not the gift of continence are bound by the command of God to enter into the marriage state, with knowledge and consent of parents (or guardians) and friends; so

that the temple of God, which is our body, may not be defiled; for, whosoever defileth the temple of God, him shall God destroy (I Cor. 3:17).

Care

But we can say more about our life and calling as those who are unmarried. These single years are an opportunity to care for the things of the Lord. Consider what I Corinthians 7:32, 34 say: “But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord:...[T]he unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.” This word “careth” is the same word the Bible uses in other places in the sense of anxiety—a mind that is drawn in different directions and filled with a flurry of thoughts. In the I Corinthians 7 passage, this care is not anxiety, but rather describes the single person who is *consumed* with the things of the Lord. This caring for the things of the Lord is a life of holiness: separation from sin (including sexual impurity) and consecration to the Lord (including the area of sexual purity). As the context in I Corinthians 7 makes plain, the unmarried can serve the Lord *more fully* than the married, for the married must attend to the responsibilities of their marriage, their home, and their day-to-day earthly existence (I Cor. 7:33, 34).

What does this care for the things of the Lord look like? Although consistent devotional life should mark

all the years of your life, *now* you have the opportunity to give yourself to that in a uniquely full and rich way! When was the last time you visited with and encouraged those elderly saints in your church? Are you a well-prepared, regular, and lively attendee at your church Bible society? What about that volunteer work at the local Christian school, or that committee work at church? Young ladies, have you ever considered lending a hand to that busy mother in your church, or just offering a word of encouragement? Young men, have you ever given thought to walking alongside and helping that man in your congregation who is struggling in his marriage?

There is a warning to be issued. What is often true of saints who fall into sexual sin is that they had been slothfully neglecting their callings. Idleness is Satan’s workshop. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, he had stayed back to enjoy leisure in Jerusalem when he should have been on the battlefield. In contrast to this, remember Joseph, who was *busy* serving the Lord in Potiphar’s house, not giving heed to the advances of Potiphar’s wicked wife. God’s will for us as unmarried Christians is busyness in serving Him.

Dear single reader, your life right now ought to be one of full, rich service to the Lord Jesus Christ! This is your willing and thankful service to your Master, the One to whom you belong.

In the next article, Lord willing, we will consider to what we are called, positively, in the life of *marriage*.



News from our churches

Mr. Perry Van Egdome, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa

Trivia question

In looking for a trivia question, I randomly picked a bound volume off my shelf. The report of Classis West held March 2-3, 1977 stared out at me. So...where was that Classis held? And how was the weather? Answers later in this column.

Congregational activities

Attention all Sunday School teachers, parents of Sunday School children, and any others in the Grand Rapids area who are interested: Plan now to attend a lecture

by Rev. J. Smidstra on “The Value of Sunday School for the Body of Christ.” The lecture will be sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Sunday School Teachers’ Association and will be held at Byron Center PRC on May 16 at 7:30 P.M.

Why do we use the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible? What errors are found in other versions? A presentation was held May 9 at Calvary PRC in Hull, IA on the KJV.

From Georgetown PRC’s (Hudsonville, MI) bulletin we find this significant item in April:

This month is our congregation's 25th Anniversary. We confess together from our hearts: God is Good! God is Faithful! "God has done great things for us; whereof we are glad" (Ps. 126:3). The Council is forming a 25th Anniversary Committee to help us celebrate His Covenant Faithfulness to Georgetown. Details will follow in the bulletin in the coming months. Do you have personal memories, pictures, special blessings God has given you as a member of Christ's body in Georgetown? Please give them to the Pastor or to Elder Mike Moelker.

Back in March, Byron Center PRC bulletin had this follow-up note of interest: "Investigation into the start-up of a daughter congregation—as a result of the meeting this past Tuesday, the following men were elected to the steering committee: Mike Kooienga, Joe Lubbers, Sid Miedema, Chad Mingerink, Duane Mingerink, and Rich Sleda." This steering committee met March 18. We will look for further developments in the months ahead.

Seminary information

If you have not yet done so, check out the new PRC seminary website (prcts.org)! There are many new features and updates, including a blog. Visit the site and check out the various pages—and sign up to receive seminary news by email!

Sister-church activities

From a recent "Pastoral Voice" of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore:

One of the precious Reformed heritages of a faithful Reformed church is to maintain and teach the true doctrines that are prescribed in the Word of God. The faithful Reformed church maintains this calling in these three aspects. First, through insisting on the faithful and solid doctrinal preaching from the Word of God in our worship services. Secondly, conducting catechism instruction for our children and youth. And last but not least, having family and personal worship where we are instructed from God's Word. These, Covenant and her members must see to it that they are carried out in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, in today's world, the faithful Reformed churches are challenged that their emphasis of doctrines in the lives of God's people are not practical to Christian living. We want to refute this. Doctrines shape our lives. They cultivate our values. They direct us on the path we tread. They instruct us in the decisions we make. They show us if we are walking in the right way, and they comfort us when we go through difficult trials and even face death. Doctrines encompass the whole of our lives, from the time we are born till we breathe our last breath. Doctrines move a child to obey his/her parents when he/she remembers the fifth commandment. A youth chooses the kind of lifestyles he/she adopts because they are governed by God's Word. A young person seeks to

marry a godly spouse because they knew the calling to set up a covenant home. A mother who gave up her career to care for her child was moved by the doctrine of God's covenant. A father labors hard to provide and protect the family because he knows he is appointed by God to be ruler of his household. When we are afflicted with difficult trials, we can be comforted because we believe that they come from our Father's hand and it will be good for us. When an old saint closes his/her eyes the last time, they do so in peace because they are assured that they will be with their Lord Jesus in heaven. Beloved, be not deceived. Doctrine is our lives. Without true doctrines, we will be tossed to and fro without meaning and direction in our lives, waiting to be deceived. The Devil shapes the ungodly world and her followers with his doctrines and values. Our lives and values must and will be shaped by the Word of God. May the Lord give us grace to preserve this Reformed heritage.

And from a recent bulletin of Maranatha PRC in Valenzuela City, Philippines: "We have temporarily cancelled our Bible study due to the severe heat because of the effect of 'El Nino.'"

Minister activities

On March 24 Rev. Bill Langerak announced he had been led by God to accept the call extended to him by Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. We praise God for a clear indication of His will! He preached his farewell in Southeast, Grand Rapids PRC on April 28 and was installed in Trinity on May 12.

Also on March 24, Immanuel PRC of Lacombe extended a call to Rev. Erik Guichelaar (Randolph PRC) and Grandville PRC called Rev. Clay Spronk (Faith PRC) to be minister-on-loan to Singapore. On April 14 Rev. Guichelaar acknowledged God's will that he remain in Randolph. And on April 21, Rev. Spronk declined the call from Grandville PRC.

Senior activities

Senior Retreat 2019 will be held September 17 – 20, 2019 at Gull Lake Ministries (MI). Registration forms will be sent to the churches and will be available on Zion PRC's website: zionprc.org. Registration dates: May 1, 2019 – August 1, 2019.

Trivia answer

Here is what that 1997 Classis West report included:

Classis West met in Hull, Iowa in the midst of a snowstorm reminiscent of the famed Hull blizzard of March, 1965. More than a foot of snow fell on Wednesday with the result that the delegates were unable to get to their lodging in the country that evening. Since all travel by car was impossible even within the

town of Hull, delegates were transported to homes by snowmobile. It was an amusing sight: delegates perched warily on the back of the suspicious machine, one arm holding the driver for dear life, the other arm grasping a suitcase, and a hat left to fend for itself. The hostility of the elements was more than matched by the warm hospitality of the Hull congregation, some of whom put up five or six delegates on Wednesday evening. Indeed,

in the good providence of our God, the One who “saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth” (Job 37:6) the storm served to increase the fellowship of the delegates and the brothers and sisters of northwest Iowa.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1.

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Randolph PRC extend their Christian sympathy to Gerri Huizenga, Brent and Shannon Huizenga and family in the death of Gerri’s husband, **Mr. Berwyn Huizenga**. May we find comfort in Psalm 116:15 “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”

Rev. Eric Guichelaar, President
Kent Hoksbergen, Clerk

Teacher needed

The Edmonton PR Christian School is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2019–2020 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1–4, and the board is willing to work with the teacher on a curriculum suited to their preference. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com.

Call to Synod!!

Synod 2018 appointed First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI the calling church for the 2019 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2019 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 11, at 8:00 A.M., in the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 10, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. R. VanOverloop, president of the 2018 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Dan Monsma, 460 Comstock Blvd. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505. Phone: 616 308-3664.

Consistory of
First Protestant Reformed Church
Dan Monsma, Clerk

Reminder

Remember that the *Standard Bearer* is published only once during the summer months: June, July, and August.