

The Standard Bearer

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CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	Condemning Sin in the Flesh REV. JAMES SLOPSEMA	170
<i>Editorial</i>	Kingdom and Church PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS	172
<i>Letters</i>	Christian Colleges Church/Kingdom Identification	176
<i>All Around Us</i>	The URC Report on the Federal Vision (3) REV. NATHAN LANGERAK	177
<i>In His Fear</i>	The Fruit of the Spirit (10) REV. RICHARD SMIT	181
<i>Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass</i>	Postmillennialism (11) PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA	183
<i>Search the Scriptures</i>	Of Vanity and Labor REV. THOMAS MIERSMA	185
<i>Go Ye Into all the World</i>	Establishing Reformed Churches (1) REV. DANIEL KLEYN	188
<i>News From Our Churches</i>	Activities MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER	190

Condemning Sin in the Flesh

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.

Romans 8:3

This beautiful chapter of Paul's epistle to the church at Rome begins with the triumphant declaration that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. All men are sinners and thus liable to the severe condemnation of God. But for those who are in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation.

What a blessed truth!

But how can we be assured of this?

Through Jesus Christ, God condemned sin in the flesh. Our sin stands as the sole basis for God's condemnation of us. As long as we appear before God with our sin, He will condemn us. But in Christ Jesus God condemned sin in the flesh. And so there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

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



For what the law could not do....

The law is God's law. Its ten commandments express the will of God for every area of life. It shows us the duties we owe both to God and to man. The essence of the law is to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

What the law cannot do is bring us a favorable verdict of God.

The context places us in God's courtroom and speaks of condemnation. God judges us daily according to His law. His verdict is either guilty or righteous. Should we appear in God's courtroom with sin, He will declare us guilty and condemn us. This condemnation brings a terrible punishment that utterly destroys the sinner. But if we can appear before God in perfect obedience to the law, He will declare us righteous and bless us.

What the law cannot do is bring this favorable verdict of God to us. It can show us God's will for our lives. It can show us what we must do to secure a favorable verdict. It can give wonderful promises of blessing to the righteous and stern warnings of destruction to the sinner. But the law itself cannot be the means for us to

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Editorial Office

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

Business Office

Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: 616-457-5970
FAX: 616-457-5980
tim@rfa.org

Church News Editor

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

New Zealand Office

Standard Bearer
c/o Mr. B. VanHerck
66 Fraser St
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

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 Mr. Samuel Watterson
11, The Laurels
Briarfield, Castletroy
Co. Limerick, Ireland

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secure a favorable verdict in God's courtroom so that we can receive His blessing.

Many have been mistaken about this. The proud Pharisee of Jesus' day thought that he could keep God's law perfectly and that his obedience would earn him a favorable verdict of God. In fact, he considered this to be the purpose of the law—a means to earn God's favor and blessing. To him the law was a great power. This is the error of works righteousness or self righteousness. This error has continued in many different forms to this very day.

But the law has no power to bring us a favorable verdict of God.

This is because the law is weak through the flesh.

The flesh is our sinful flesh. On account of the fall of Adam, sin has taken control of the human nature, so that we are all born depraved, incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. This fallen human nature of ours is identified here and elsewhere as our flesh.

Our flesh renders the law weak (impotent) to bring us a favorable verdict of God.

Before the fall, God's law had power.

God certainly had a law for Adam in the garden. This law focused on the two trees in the garden. From one, Adam was to eat; from the other, he was to abstain. In addition, God's covenant law of love that He has for us applied also to Adam in the state of perfection.

And that law was powerful. It expressed the will of God, the standard whereby He would judge Adam. It also promised blessing to Adam's obedience, as well as a warning of punishment for disobedience. Should Adam eat of the tree of life in loving obedience to God, he would live. But if he were to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in rebellion against God, he would surely die. Adam had the ability to keep this law. He also had the ability to disobey the law, which he did. But the important thing is that he had the ability to keep the law in order to receive a favorable verdict of God and all the blessings that that verdict would bring him. The law with its promises and threatenings even encouraged Adam to obedience. In the state of perfection, therefore, the law had power.

But our sinful flesh renders the law impotent in this regard. This is because our sinful flesh makes it impossible for us to keep the law. The law promises God's rich-

est blessings to those who keep it. They will know the Lord's mercy and live long in the land that the Lord will give them. The law also warns that God will not hold guiltless those that in hatred transgress His commandments. But for all that, the law has no power to bring us to obedience and a favorable verdict of God. This is because the law has become weak through the flesh. The only power the law has is to bring us under the condemnation of God.



And so God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.

This means that the triune God sent His eternal Son into our world to assume the human nature. Through the virgin birth the Son of God became one of us. Although He remains true and eternal God, He took to Himself our flesh so that He is truly God and truly man. This is the miracle of the incarnation.

Notice that God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. No, the Son of God did not take on Himself our sinful flesh. In that case He would have been conceived and born in sin, as we are. Being miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit, the incarnate One is also the holy one (Luke 1:35). Rather, the Son of God took on Him the *likeness* of sinful flesh. This emphasizes that He was like us in every way except sin. Even the workings of death were present in His human nature, so that it was corruptible and mortal.

Furthermore, God sent His Son for sin.

This means that God sent His Son as a sin offering. In the years between the writing of the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Old Testament Scriptures were translated by 70 scholars from the original Hebrew into Greek. This translation is known as the Septuagint. This name reflects the number of men (70) who did this work. It is also sometimes identified with the Roman numerals LXX. In the LXX the Hebrew word for sin offering is consistently translated "for sin." Interestingly, the inspired writer to the Hebrews in chapter 10 quotes Psalm 40:6-8. And in verse 6 he refers to sin offerings with the LXX expression "for sin." Only in this case the KJV translates this phrase as "sacrifices."

And so we understand that God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh for a sin offering.

This means God laid upon His own Son the guilt of our sin. Repeatedly, Jesus spoke of those whom the Father had given Him. This is the elect church. The guilt of their sin was laid upon Christ, so that He stood condemned before God. All His life long, but especially on the cross, Jesus endured the punishment of that condemnation. And He did so in perfect love and obedience to God, fulfilling all that God requires of us in the law.

Through this perfect sacrifice of His Son, God condemned sin in the flesh.

By the term “sin in the flesh” is meant sin as it lives and reigns in our flesh. This is an example of personification. Sin is viewed as a person who lives and reigns in us, ruling our lives. Sin has this position and power because of the fall of our first parents.

But God has now condemned this sin.


He condemned sin so that sin is no longer able to rule

our lives. In Christ we become new creatures who live not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

Nor is sin able to bring upon us the condemnation of God. For the time being, we still struggle with sin. The works of God’s grace are not yet finished in us. But the sin that remains cannot serve as a basis for our condemnation. This is because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ covered all our sins and renders us righteous before God.

So there is no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus!

And remember this, that, because God condemned sin in the flesh, those who are in Christ Jesus no longer walk after the flesh but after the Spirit. This is the defining mark of those that are in Christ Jesus.

That we may lay hold of this personally and be assured that there is no condemnation for us, let us in Christ Jesus walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. 

EDITORIAL

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

Kingdom and Church

In this issue’s letters section, we print correspondence from Rev. Douglas Kuiper, who questions the propriety of identifying church and kingdom. I did that in my four editorials entitled, “A (Sharp) Pastoral Warning to Students in Christian Colleges” (Oct. 1, Nov. 1, Nov. 15, Dec. 1). I said, “The kingdom is the church.” In the letters section I briefly answer Rev. Kuiper. I take opportunity in this editorial to address the question more fully.

At the heart of his letter is the question, “Is the word *is* the right word to use when speaking of their (church and kingdom) relationship?” The editorials said: “The church IS

the kingdom.” Rev. Kuiper suggests that this identifying church and kingdom may have been a figure of speech in which the editor “overstates the case to make his point.” That was not my intention.

The question is: If the two are not to be identified, how *does* the biblical reality of *church* relate to the biblical reality *kingdom*? Must we instead use phrases such as “is like,” or “leads to,” or “is one of the many tools by which is established...”? No, for the *church* has connected church and kingdom with the word *is*.

Before I explain, it will be helpful to be reminded of a couple things:

First, the editorials that made this

identification of church and kingdom warned against a very serious error, namely the view that Christ’s kingdom is far broader than the church, is far more important than the church, is to be established also by means that the church cannot use, and that its most important manifestation may be in Christianized politics, Christianized economies, Christian works of art, etc. Really, the kingdom is this-world-Christianized, this-world-transformed. Although the church may be at the center of it, the church is only a small part of it. I am thankful that the questioner and his question do not take issue with

the essential warning of the articles, because the youth in many Christian colleges are bombarded with the call to “establish the kingdom” by service projects, community development, political action, and social justice efforts; but they are not called to establish the kingdom by zealous activity promoting the true church. We must let nothing muffle this warning, even if there remains some difference on the matter before us in this editorial.

Second, the letter may leave the impression that the view that identifies church and kingdom is my personal opinion. The view is my opinion, but it is not *my* view. The editorials expressed the view of a large part of the Christian church during the entire new dispensation. I showed that this is the explicit teaching of the Westminster standards, of many theologians of stature, and is at least implied in the Three Forms of Unity. The neo-Calvinists concede this in the defense of their view. Badly understating the truth of the matter, one of them admitted, even if somewhat condescendingly: “Some Christian traditions...have equated the kingdom of God with the church.” Thus, in this editorial I do not *defend* as much as I try to *describe* the view and explain why the church would have connected church and kingdom with the word *is*.

Third, Rev. Kuiper’s question mentions a distinction, sometimes made and often misunderstood when describing the church, between *visible* and *invisible*. (The misunderstanding is aggravated

when we say *visible church* rather than *church visible*.) These are not two different segments of the one church, but two ways to view the church, two aspects of the church as church: she has a visible existence and life and an invisible existence and life. When I speak of church I am not referring to one or the other aspect. I simply mean the church as *the catholic body of Jesus Christ manifesting herself in instituted congregations*. This church is also in heaven, of course, but I do not believe that this will make a difference in explaining the identity of church and kingdom.

Fourth, it is my judgment that at times we have too narrowly defined the kingdom as “the spiritual rule of God,” or at least have left the impression that the concept *kingdom* is exhausted by the idea of “rule.” (And I wonder whether this narrow definition has caused some to conclude, “The kingdom is *not* the church.”) If one had to make a choice of only one among all the *elements* that make up God’s grand kingdom, perhaps this is the best one. But the profound concept *kingdom* defies a definition in one short phrase. So, rather than take sides in a debate over whether the kingdom is “primarily” *rule*, or *realm*, or something else, I instead list its elements that help us understand the identification of kingdom and church.



As I write, Christmas approaches. Luke 1 is open before me. The angel’s beautiful promise to Mary about her Son reads, “And he shall reign over the house of Jacob (the

church) forever; and of his *kingdom* there shall be no end.” Notice the Hebrew parallelism, made clearer by putting the one above the other, in which the *same* reality is expressed in two different ways:

And he shall reign over the *house of Jacob* forever;
and of his *kingdom* there shall be no end.”

The house of Jacob/Israel (the church) is the here called the kingdom.



What is it about the church that makes it God’s kingdom? Consider the real possibility that everything about kingdom can be applied to church. At the end of this list that follows, ask if there is anything about kingdom that has not been explained as belonging to God’s church. The same reality is being described, at one time with the word *church*, at another time with the word *kingdom*, emphasizing different aspects of the reality of God’s precious work in Jesus Christ.

I. Citizens

I start with citizens because more than one has asked: “True, the members of the church are members of the kingdom; but doesn’t the kingdom consist of more than the people in it?” The answer is, “Yes, the kingdom has a King, law, blessings, and more.” But we may begin speaking of membership: the kingdom’s citizens are the church’s members. The kingdom does not have *more* citizens than the church has members.

More to the point, *church members* are described as *kingdom* citizens. God depicts Old Testament Israel in Exodus 19:6 as “a *kingdom* of priests.” He describes the New Testament *church* in the same way. When the apostle Peter helps the young New Testament church mature in the consciousness of her identity, he quotes Exodus 19:6: “Ye (church!) are a...*royal* priesthood....” That is, “*You, New Testament church*, are that *kingdom* of priests.” The church is the kingdom.

2. King

Most important in a kingdom is the king. The head of the church is *King* Jesus. The head of the church-body is described in terms of royalty. At Jesus’ ascension and exaltation as King, when God put “all things under his feet” (the language of royalty), God gave Him to be “head over all things to the *church*” (Eph. 1:22). The head of the church is king of that kingdom.

3. Realm

Kingdoms are also realms. This kingdom’s realm is circumscribed by the boundaries of the church. One enters this kingdom by spiritual translation (Col. 1:13), by regeneration (John 3:5). The sign of this spiritual translation into the *kingdom* is the *church’s* sacrament of baptism (LD 27:73; Tit. 3:5). Then, when the baptized member publicly professes membership in this kingdom realm, he confesses faith and is admitted to all the privileges of a church member.

Herman Hoeksema sometimes

speaks of kingdom as “rule.” However, at the beginning of his treatment of the petition “Thy kingdom come,” he defined kingdom, even in terms of its main idea, as “realm.” “The kingdom of God as to its main idea is the commonwealth in which God is King, in which He is known and acknowledged, loved and freely obeyed, by willing subjects, as the only Sovereign of all, whose Word is law, written in the hearts of all the citizens of the kingdom.” This is the realm of the church.

4. Law

Like all other kingdoms, God’s kingdom is also ruled by a law—the Word of the King in Holy Scripture. The Old Testament made plain that the kings must rule according to the written Word of God. Today, King Jesus governs His kingdom by committing His Word as a sacred trust to the *church*. The officebearers speak and apply that law to her members. No one else has the duty to protect that Word, proclaim that Word, govern herself by the Word, but the church.

5. Rule/power

Unlike all other kingdoms, the power that rules God’s kingdom is grace. By “word *and* spirit” King Jesus enters powerfully into the hearts of His citizens. The power of His law is not outward, but inward, as His Spirit makes the citizens “willing in the day of His power” (Ps. 110:3). When the King works so, His law has a “kingdom dominion” over the believer. It breaks the dominion of sin and establishes a *reign* of grace (see Rom. 6).

All this is kingdom reality. It takes place in, and only in, God’s church.

6. Keys

To open and close the doors of this *kingdom*, the *church* holds keys. The gates of the kingdom are opened and closed by the special tools given exclusively to the *church*—preaching and discipline. Entrance into the kingdom is entrance into the church. Expulsion from the kingdom is excommunication from the church. Christ’s church has always understood that the *kingly* office of Christ is found in the *church’s* elders.

The kingdom is the church.

7. Benefits/wealth

The benefits Scripture describes as belonging to citizens of the kingdom, and the wealth promised each one, are found in the *church’s* treasuries. These blessings are “not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Kingdom riches are not found outside the church, nor are they distributed by any other institution than the church.

Listening to many neo-Calvinists today, though, one might think that Romans 14’s righteousness is civil righteousness and its peace is harmony among the races. Pontius Pilate had better understanding of Jesus’ kingdom than that. Shrewd enough to see that Jesus’ kingdom was no challenge to the kingdom he represented—because it was a kingdom of a different sort—he said, “I find in him no fault at all.”

8. Expansion

The church even expands, kingdom-like. Kingdoms extend themselves. Christ's does. His territory grows. His citizens increase in number. More are added by conquest. This is the work of the church. "Church Extension Committee" could as well be "Kingdom Expansion Committee." Preachers called as missionaries are Christ's soldiers pressing the claims of King Jesus into territories where the church has not been established.

This is the testimony of Acts 1. Before Jesus' ascension, He gave His disciples a 40-day "Capstone Course." The subject: "Advanced Kingdom Theology" (Acts 1:3). The disciples, having grasped the doctrine and passed the course, spent the rest of their lives as preaching missionaries—making more disciples, ordaining elders, and establishing kingdom outposts (churches) worldwide. For 2,000 years the church has been building the kingdom by building the church.

The kingdom is the church.

9. Defense

The church defends her kingdom. As kingdom, the church has walls, watchmen, weapons, even warning-systems ("trumpet"-like). The church is always assaulted by other kingdoms. She protects herself by going to battle. The kingdom arms her citizen-soldiers—each of them—as Paul instructed the *church* to be armed in Ephesians 6:10ff.

10. Ruling principle

And in this kingdom, the underlying principle is truth. When King Jesus explained to Pilate the reality of *His* kingdom, He said: "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." The ruling principle of the kingdom is truth.

By now, we are not surprised that the pillar and ground of the *kingdom's* truth is the *church*, "the house of God...the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15).

The kingdom is the church.



"But is the kingdom never found outside of the church?" one may ask. "Are there no influences of the kingdom outside the realm of church? Does not one see evidences of God's great kingdom elsewhere than among the people of God?" Those are legitimate questions. They may best be answered by differentiating between the *kingdom itself* and the *influences and effects* of the kingdom.

What appears to be the "kingdom" today outside the boundaries of the church may be understood by looking at David's kingdom in the Old Testament. Under his reign, kingdom changed in two significant ways. First, the boundaries of the nation extended outward as the armies took possession of land God had promised them from the beginning. Second, David's kingdom also exerted power *outside* of those boundaries. Foreign nations paid tribute.

Pagan kings complied with David's will. Peoples conformed themselves in some ways to David's will. He subdued them. But we would not call the people in these nations "Citizens of David's Kingdom," the nations outside Israel's boundaries "David's Kingdom," or their actions "Kingdom Actions." None of them served David willingly, brought their tribute gladly, or loved His rule. They submitted because of the threat of David's mighty armies. Even though the kingdom's *influences* appeared outside of its boundaries, the *kingdom* existed within the boundaries of Israel (the church).

Today, there is contact between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world—cultures and nations outside the church.

The relationship is hostile. The enmity of Genesis 3:15 continues to reveal itself. The church opposes the culture and nations, condemning them as evil; and these nations exalt themselves violently against King Christ.

Sometimes, in the goodness of God, the contact bears positive fruit. But the positive fruit is not some outward conformity to God's laws. The positive effect is personal transfer of allegiance to the kingdom of God—membership in the church.

There *is* some outward conformity to God's law by the influence of the kingdom's citizens. Sometimes Christians serve in positions of civil government and establish laws for the land in harmony with God's law. But it would be an *insult* to King Jesus to call that law

“God’s Kingdom,” or the country that has that law “God’s Kingdom,” or outward conformity to His law “God’s Kingdom.” Yet that is done today. We may be very thankful for that influence of God’s people in a nation. But that is not the kingdom of God. And especially when civil laws are made without any acknowledgment that they are the will of King Jesus (as in the USA) and are called God’s Kingdom, the King is insulted. Yet some neo-Calvinists call them God’s kingdom. The laws may be called many things (“selfishness” and “plagiarism” come to mind); but they ought not be called “God’s Kingdom.”

Outside the church is the rule of

Christ’s power, comparable to David’s dominion of the neighboring nations by brute force. *Within* the church exists the *kingdom* in all its beauty and dimensions.




So if you college students are asked: “Where is God’s kingdom now?” point to the church. Love the church. Devote yourselves to the church. Let Psalm 137’s confession be yours:

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

(The editor of the *Psalter* had it right, too, when he entitled Psalm 137’s speaking about Jerusalem’s kingdom, “Remembrance of *Church Privileges*.”)

And if any ask you what is the *future* of this kingdom, point them to the other side of the bodily return of Jesus Christ, when “the full perfection of (God’s) kingdom take(s) place, wherein (God) shall be all in all.”

Be busy as a Christian in all the spheres of life in which God calls you to live (perhaps more editorials are needed on this). But seek the kingdom and find the kingdom in His church. 

LETTERS

■ Christian colleges

I’ve been meaning to write you a note of appreciation for your articles that give a much needed warning to students who are attending or planning to attend a Christian college. I can identify with many, many of the examples and instances you brought out in your articles. The “kingdom” language and “engaging” or “transforming” culture were philosophies that figured prominently in the instruction and life at the Christian college from which I graduated recently.

Looking back, I know that I, for a time, was drawn in by that language. I can see it in some of the papers I was assigned to write for my communication courses. While I will always be grateful for my time at that college and look back on those years with great fondness, I find myself not so thankful for the education I received and the friends that I made as I am for God’s keeping me on the right path by providing me with good friends, an encouraging and supportive family, and a wonderful PR church family to turn to on Sundays.

A Christian college can give a false sense of security

for a Protestant Reformed believer. Thank you for your articles!

Bethany Kingma
Grand Rapids, Michigan

■ Church/Kingdom identification

Having read all of Professor Gritters’ editorials entitled “Pastoral Warning to Students in Christian Colleges,” I make three comments.

First, thank you for exposing and warning against this widely held view that “puts God’s church in the background and God’s kingdom...in the foreground” (p. 6), that makes “the *church* narrow and *kingdom* wide” (100), and that considers the church “merely a tool (only one of many) to establish the kingdom” (52). This warning is timely.

Second, Prof. Gritters refrains from using footnotes “so that you are not distracted by names and footnotes but concentrate on the views” (53). I speak for myself: I am the worse for the absence of these footnotes. Footnotes are not mere evidence that a man is scholarly; they are

aids to the interested reader who wants to read more on the subject. The uninterested reader can easily ignore the footnotes; but the interested reader cannot consult them if they are absent. Could Prof. Gritters give me his references that are “all...at hand” (53)? I would appreciate that.

My third comment relates to his identification of God’s church and kingdom: “The church is God’s kingdom” (6); “The visible church...is the kingdom” (77); “Historic, Reformed Christianity holds that the *church* is God’s kingdom” (78).

Without doubt, there is a close relationship between God’s church and kingdom (pages 54-55, 77-78). But are the two identical? Is the word “is” the right word to use when speaking of their relationship? Especially I wonder this, because Prof. Gritters clearly speaks not only of the *invisible* church as being the kingdom, but of the *visible* church.

Connecting visible church and kingdom with the word “is” raises questions: how can the *visible* church be the *spiritual* kingdom? And, understanding the instituted church to be a microcosm of Christ’s spiritual body, does saying that the church *is* the kingdom mean also that the church visible is a microcosm of God’s kingdom?

I raise the questions, not to assert that the professor is wrong, but for my own deeper understanding.

Perhaps Prof. Gritters’ identification of church and kingdom is a figure of speech by which he overstates the

case to make his point. I would not fault him for this—every speaker or writer does this, and the audience usually understands it so.

But if this identification of visible church and spiritual kingdom, without any qualifiers, is a reality that I have missed to this point, I’d like to see it more clearly.

Thanks again, professor, and editorial staff, for your hard work bearing the standard.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper
Randolph, Wisconsin

Response:

Thanks to Rev. Kuiper for the important question that he raises in his letter about the relationship between church and kingdom. The question gives opportunity to follow up on the series of editorials (Oct. 1, Nov. 1, Nov. 15, Dec. 1) in which I identified the church and kingdom. An extended answer to the question is found in the editorial in this issue.

As to footnotes.... Until recently, the *SB* has had very few footnotes, since it is not intended to be a scholarly magazine, which does not mean that the articles are not researched carefully. We hope all the articles have good research in their background. Rev. Kuiper has been sent the version of the editorials that includes references to authors and publications.

The *Standard Bearer* appreciates letters. It shows us that the magazine is being read, thoughtfully.

— BG 

ALL AROUND US

REV. NATHAN LANGERAK

The URC Report on the Federal Vision (3)

A Curious Charge

I have been examining the report on the federal vision received for information at the 2010 Synod of the URC. The report is dangerously flawed because, while it criticizes the federal vision for its heretical doctrine of justification by faith and works, it leaves the vicious root of this heresy in the federal vision’s erroneous doctrine of the conditional covenant untouched.

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

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The federal vision teaches that every baptized child is a member of the covenant; that every baptized child receives the promise of the covenant; and that many children who are baptized, are members of the covenant, and receive the promise, fall away into perdition. The federal vision is the logical development of the doctrine of a conditional covenant in which every baptized child is a member of the covenant. It is the logical fruit of the denial that election determines membership in the covenant of grace.

The burning question in the controversy with the federal vision is, what is the right doctrine regarding membership in the covenant that harmonizes with Dordt’s

doctrines of grace and specifically Dordt's teaching of an unconditional election that is the "fountain of every saving good," including membership in the covenant of grace?¹

In its analysis of the federal vision's answer to the question of membership in the covenant, the report repeatedly levels the clichéd charge that the federal vision identifies covenant, election, and salvation. According to the report, the federal vision exhibits "a tendency to identify covenant membership with election to salvation in Christ."² Proponents of the federal vision also

argue for the closest possible relationship between covenant, election, and salvation. When God covenants with His people (believers and their children), He graciously elects them to a true and saving communion with Himself. All who are members of the covenant people of God may legitimately proceed from the conviction that they are "elect in Christ" and possess accordingly all the saving benefits of Christ's work as Mediator. With respect to the doctrine of justification, this means that all covenant members enjoy all gospel benefits, including justification, by virtue of their membership in Christ and His church.³

According to the report, "the FV tendency to equate election and membership in the covenant of grace compromises the Canons of Dort's teaching of *unconditional* election."⁴

Furthermore, according to the URC report's evaluation,

from the standpoint of the Confessions, this FV identification of covenant, election, and salvation is at best overstated and at worst seriously unbiblical. By identifying covenant, election, and salvation, FV proponents are unable to maintain clearly that those whom God elects in Christ will unfailingly be granted the fullness of salvation in unbreakable communion with God. Since not all those with whom God covenants in history are "elect" in the proper sense of the term, especially as election is defined

in the Belgic Confession (Article 16) and the Canons of Dort, we may not assert in an unqualified manner that they are all elected unto salvation and participate in the saving benefits of Christ's work as Mediator.⁵

Note well, it is not the errors of the federal vision with regard to election, covenant, and salvation that are "seriously unbiblical," but the federal vision's "identification of covenant, election, and salvation," that is "seriously unbiblical."

According to the report, this identification is the explanation for the federal vision's inability to "maintain clearly that those whom God elects in Christ will unfailingly be granted the fullness of salvation." This identification of covenant, election, and salvation is the cause of the federal vision's heresy of the falling away of the saints.

Furthermore, according to the report, "not all with whom God covenants in history are elect." Membership in the covenant must be wider than election.

What is this charge of identifying "covenant membership with election to salvation in Christ?"⁶ The charge does not mean that the teachers of the federal vision are such inept theologians that they are unable to differentiate between election and covenant. The charge of identifying "covenant membership with election" means that the report finds "seriously unbiblical" the teaching that election and membership in the covenant are co-extensive, that is, that membership in the covenant is as wide and as narrow as election. Rather, the report maintains that membership in the covenant is wider than election; the covenant includes more people than those whom God eternally chose to salvation in Jesus Christ and whom He will certainly save.

The charge of identifying "covenant membership with election" is a curious charge.

It is a curious charge in light of the controversy itself in which the proponents of the federal vision have repeatedly insisted on the exact opposite. They refuse to teach that the decrees "trump" the covenant.⁷ It can be argued that the whole controversy arose out of the federal vision's

¹ Canons of Dordt, 1.7, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 156.

² https://www.urchna.org/sysfiles/site_uploads/pubs/pub5243_2.pdf, 8.

³ https://www.urchna.org/sysfiles/site_uploads/pubs/pub5243_2.pdf, 23.

⁴ https://www.urchna.org/sysfiles/site_uploads/pubs/pub5243_2.pdf, 25.

⁵ https://www.urchna.org/sysfiles/site_uploads/pubs/pub5243_2.pdf, 23.

⁶ https://www.urchna.org/sysfiles/site_uploads/pubs/pub5243_2.pdf, 8.

⁷ http://www.federal-vision.com/resources/joint_FV_Statement.pdf, 4.

bold denial that the decrees determine membership in the covenant.

It is a curious charge in light of the official creeds of the men who wrote the report. One would not suppose that those who have the Canons of Dordt as their official creed would find it within themselves to see a problem with the “identification” of covenant, election, and salvation.

It is also a tired charge. What if there were a denomination of faithful churches who with her sisters and allies taught that membership in the covenant is determined by election, that only the elect were members of the covenant of grace, and that only the elect received an unconditional promise of grace? Furthermore, what if because of her faithful maintenance of this doctrine this denomination of churches has been charged repeatedly with “identifying covenant membership with election?” They could be forgiven for being offended—and somewhat bemused—by the charge that the federal vision “identifies covenant membership with election to salvation in Christ.”

No Error of the Federal Vision

Of committing this “seriously unbiblical error” of “identifying” covenant, election, and salvation that “compromises” Dordt’s teaching of unconditional election the federal vision is not guilty. They have never done this.

The federal vision denies—boldly, clearly, unmistakably—that the eternal decree of election determines membership in the covenant of grace.

In its war on the creedal truth of election as the “fountain of every saving good,”⁸ including membership in the covenant of grace, the federal vision rejects “the tendency to privilege the confessional and/or scholastic use of words and phrases over the way the same words and phrases are used in the Bible itself.”⁹ Having thoroughly trampled on the creeds, the federal vision insists on a new “covenantal” definition of the creedal terms.¹⁰

We deny that the unchangeable nature of these decrees prevents us from using the same language in covenantal ways as we describe our salvation from within that cov-

⁸ Canons of Dordt, 1.9, in *Confessions*, 157.

⁹ http://www.federal-vision.com/resources/joint_FV_Statement.pdf, 3.

¹⁰ http://www.federal-vision.com/resources/joint_FV_Statement.pdf, 3.

enant. We further deny this covenantal usage is “pretend” language, even where the language and terminology sometimes overlap with the language of the decrees. The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children, that we may keep the words of this law.

Specifically, in order to make covenant membership wider than the eternal decree of election, the federal vision has redefined election as a historical choice of God, a conditional choice, and a losable choice, entirely different from election as defined in the Canons of Dordt. God’s eternal election, which is the only election that the creeds teach, the federal vision relegates to the hidden things of God and only grudgingly trots it out from the dusty corners of the theological stable when forced to admit that all the elect will be saved.

But as far as election’s determination of membership in the covenant, “East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet, Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgment Seat.”¹¹ For the federal vision, election is one thing, and membership in the covenant is another, until everything is worked out at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ—on the basis of men’s works!

The error of the federal vision is not the identification of covenant, election, and salvation. The federal vision’s error is the redefinition of election as a historical, conditional, and losable choice and a denial that the eternal decree of election determines membership in the covenant.

Because the federal vision redefines election as a historical, conditional choice of God, the federal vision teaches that membership in the covenant includes every baptized child. Baptism incorporates every child into the covenant. If every baptized child is in the covenant, then necessarily every child receives a general, conditional promise in the covenant. If every baptized child is incorporated into the covenant, and receives the promise, then the difference—whether the children are saved or not—between the children cannot be from God. The children make themselves to differ. God’s will does not determine covenantal membership and covenantal salvation, but the will and work of the children determine covenantal membership and covenantal salvation.

¹¹ Rudyard Kipling, *Ballad of East and West*, in Stedman, Edmund Clarence, ed. *A Victorian Anthology, 1837–1895*. (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1895).

Because of this redefinition of election, and the refusal to let the eternal decree determine membership in the covenant and the objects of God's promise, the federal vision teaches that God's promise fails and many baptized, covenantal children fall away.

This doctrine of the federal vision is the logical implication of every form of the teaching of a conditional covenant. The federal vision has simply taken the doctrine of a conditional covenant and drawn out its implications so that all may see clearly where a conditional covenant—a covenant whose membership is wider than election—leads. It leads to the teaching of justification by works, the falling away of saints, and a full-scale denial of Dordt's doctrines of grace.

The Burning Question

The burning question in the federal vision controversy is: who are the members of the covenant? To whom does God give the promise of the covenant? Who are those whom God certainly preserves to eternal salvation?

If Reformed churches, when answering these questions, would "identify" membership in the covenant with election instead of treating this "identification" as a contagious and deadly theological disease; if Reformed churches, having "identified" covenantal membership with election would say that the elect alone are members of the covenant; if they would teach that every member of the covenant of grace receives the gracious, unconditional promise; if they would teach that every member who receives that promise is saved by that promise, for the word of God cannot fail and His promise cannot be without effect—if only they would say these things, then they would have laid hold on the federal vision error at its root, for the good of those churches and the people of God. If they would only say this, they would decisively refute the deadly covenantal heresy of the federal vision with its conditional covenant divorced from election, its general, conditional promise, and, consequently, its deadly errors of justification by faith and obedience, the falling away of saints, and the denial of all the doctrines of grace so gloriously set forth in the Reformed creeds.

Contrary to the URC report, when refuting the federal vision heresy, these three—election, covenant, and salvation—must be held in the closest possible connection.

Contrary to the URC report, membership in the cov-

enant cannot be wider than election. If God covenants with more than the elect, as according to the URC report He does, then the promise of the covenant that all members of the covenant receive is necessarily wider than election, and God's promise to those who are not saved necessarily falls to the ground. That covenantal doctrine will lead to the federal vision's bold denial of the doctrines of grace. The federal vision has demonstrated that.

A Covenant Determined by Election

Membership in the covenant is determined by election, as is the reception of the promise of the covenant. Is this any different from what the Canons of Dordt teach?

This elect number...God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion [covenant—NJL] by His Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His Son, finally to glorify them for the demonstration of His mercy and for the praise of His glorious grace.¹²

And:

It was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should bestow upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death.¹³

Are the Canons guilty of "identifying" election, covenant, and salvation?

In answer to the question of covenantal membership raised in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) over fifty years ago in a controversy that painfully tested her, tore her apart, and yet strengthened her by God's grace, the PRC adopted the *Declaration of Principles* that clearly states what doctrine of the covenant harmonizes with the Reformed creeds.¹⁴


¹² Canons of Dordt, 1.7, in *Confessions*, 156.

¹³ Canons of Dordt, 2.8, in *Confessions*, 163–64.

¹⁴ The *Declaration* can be found in *Confessions*, 412–431. I will gladly send a copy of this document to anyone who requests one.

The *Declaration* demonstrates that the creeds teach the glorious doctrine of an unconditional covenant of grace flowing from God's eternal "fountain of every saving good"—election—and a covenant whose membership is determined by that same decree.

That *Declaration* should be read by every Reformed church member who is concerned about the federal vision.

The *Declaration* should be highly prized by the PRC because what it teaches about the creedal doctrine of the covenant is the inoculation of those churches against the pestilential heresy of the federal vision that by its doctrine of the covenant shamelessly denies all of the doctrines of grace. 

IN HIS FEAR

REV. RICHARD SMIT

The Fruit of the Spirit (10)

Faithfulness (2)

Because Christ is faithful to His church, His saints also share in that blessed virtue, faithfulness, by His Spirit of sanctification. Some of the saints noted for their faithfulness in the Bible include Abraham (Num. 9:8); Moses (Num. 12:7, Heb. 3:5); Daniel (Dan. 6:4); Hanani (Neh. 7:2); Shelamiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, Pedaiah, and Hanan (Neh. 13:13); the Colossian saints in general (Col. 1:9), and Onesimus of the Colossian church in particular (Col. 4:9).

The Lord gives special attention to the need for this virtue among officebearers in His church. Ministers to whom are entrusted the faithful doctrines of God's Word must be faithful (II Tim. 2:2). They must be faithful so that at the end of their ministry in a particular congregation or mission field, or at the end of their life when ready to meet their righteous and merciful Judge, they may confess their faithfulness to Christ, His truth, and His places of labor for them. Like the apostle Paul, they may confess: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (II Tim. 4:7).

That virtue of faithfulness to God, Christ, His truth, and a godly walk of life is not required exclusively for the ministry of the Word. It is also a necessary virtue for the

offices of elder and of deacon. Upon installation into office, every elder and deacon must answer this question: "Whether ye promise, agreeably to said doctrine, faithfully, according to your ability, to discharge your respective offices...?" By their "Yes" in response, and by their signature to the Formula of Subscription, they have promised before Christ and His church, and, consequently, over against the enemies of Christ and His church, that they will "diligently teach and faithfully defend the aforesaid doctrine..." (cf. The Formula of Subscription). They have pledged to be faithful to Christ and His church in their work for the duration of their term in office. Faithfulness in an officebearer towards Christ and His Word, faithfulness in their behaving orderly and decently in the church institute, is necessary for the spiritual welfare and continuation of faithful churches.

Lest we overlook the wives of officebearers, the Lord reminds them of the need to be faithful. "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things" (I Tim. 3:11). Just as important as it is for a man to have the necessary qualifications for being a deacon or an elder, so also it is important that their wives be "faithful in all things"—to their husband, to their home, to their Lord, in all aspects of their station and calling in life. Their faithfulness will assist their husbands not to be weary in the well doing of faithful labors in the churches.

Children must be faithful to their parents in all good

Rev. Smit is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, the Philippines.

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and lawful things. In the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 39, children are taught to show all honor, love, and fidelity to their parents. That fidelity is the same thing as faithfulness. Children must be faithful to submit to their parents and to obey them in all good and lawful things for the Lord's sake. Children are in duty bound to be faithful to the covenant instruction of their parents, so that when they are old they will in faithfulness not depart from the good instruction of their believing parents.

Workers must be faithful to their masters or employers (Eph. 6:5-8). They may not steal from their employers by wasting their time or abilities on company time, but be faithful. What is the purpose of that? The purpose is that the godly employee may adorn the doctrine of God in all things (Tit. 2:9-10). That word to servants or workers reminds us that, if one confesses the doctrines that are faithful to God's Word, but then does not adorn that doctrine with godliness, his confession and Reformed Christianity is vain and hollow. Faithfulness in our daily life in the station and calling to employers, or others in a position of authority over us in the workplace, shows our inner, heartfelt faithfulness to Christ and our heavenly Father out of the motive of thankfulness.




The Scriptures teach that faithfulness is a virtue that we must desire for ourselves in ever richer measure. By way of contrast, we must detest the shameful of unfaithfulness. We are taught in Psalm 78 to set our hope in God, our faithful God, and not be as the fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, who set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God (Ps. 78:7-8). Later on in Psalm 78, the Lord shows how Israel was not steadfast with God and was unfaithful. Israel "tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies: But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow" (Ps. 78:56-57). For that unfaithfulness, God severely judged Israel in the wilderness with 40 years of chastisement in their wanderings. In the land of Canaan, during the days of the judges, when every man did that which was right according to his own understanding and, as a result, became unfaithful to Jehovah, He sent severe judgments upon Israel's chronic unfaithfulness (Ps. 78:58-64).

Since God by His judgments upon Israel showed

His hatred against her unfaithfulness, so must we hate unfaithfulness to Christ, hate disloyalty to God's truth, and hate quitting the way of laboring in our stations and callings in life by a true and living faith. Instead, marveling in the faithfulness of our God towards us in Christ Jesus and for His sake alone, let us be steadfast to Him in cheerful contentment and in humble submission to His commandments and His wise way for our life.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," Christ commands and promises (Rev. 2:10). Living out of God's truth daily, praying on the basis of God's promises and His mercies, new every morning, and laboring daily through faith in Christ alone is the way of our faithfulness. In that way, we hear and delight in blessed promises of the crown of life and much more. He that is faithful shall not be hurt by the second death, which is hell (Rev. 2:11). Instead, in heaven he shall eat of the hidden manna, and he will receive a white stone with a new name written upon it (Rev. 2:17). He shall receive power over the nations and shall receive the morning star (Rev. 2:27-28). He shall be clothed in white raiment. He shall know that his name is written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 3:4-5). He shall have the expectation of becoming a permanent pillar in the house of God and of receiving a new name (Rev. 3:12). Finally, he shall have the blessed expectation that he will sit with Christ in glory in His throne.

How sweet is this fruit of the Spirit and its results! The faithful labors and covenant instruction of God-fearing parents yields, by the grace of God alone, the fruit of children who walk with us in the truth. The faithful labors of church officebearers yield the fruit, by the grace of God, of congregations who are built up and strengthened in the life and confession of the Reformed faith. The faithfulness of husband and wife to each other, until God by death separates them, yields the fruit of a stable, peaceful, Christ-centered, and God-glorifying home. The faithfulness of a believer to Jesus Christ throughout his life in his station and calling, even unto his last fleeting breath, yields the fruit of a crown of life. Upon wearing that crown of life, we may then in eternal faithfulness praise our covenant God for His everlasting and never-failing mercies in Christ Jesus towards us, and in the perfection of that faithfulness know fully that Jehovah's faithfulness is incomparably great! 

Chapter Four

Postmillennialism (11)

The Fundamental Elements of Postmillennial Eschatology (cont.)

Preterism

A third fundamental element of postmillennialism's doctrine of the last things is "preterism." "Preterism" in postmillennial eschatology is a certain way of explaining all the New Testament passages that predict abounding lawlessness, apostasy, Antichrist, and tribulation in the last days, that is, the days immediately preceding the return of Christ. Preterism explains all these passages as referring to events that, with regard to the church in the twenty-first century, have already happened, in the distant past.

The word "preterism" derives from the Latin word meaning "past."

Contemporary postmillennialists make a verb out of this new theological term: "preterize." When a postmillennial interpreter of the Bible exerts himself to explain some New Testament passage prophesying struggle and persecution for the church in the last days as referring to that which has already occurred in the past, he is said to "preterize" the passage.

The importance, indeed necessity, of preterism for postmillennialism is immediately obvious. Postmillennialism forecasts earthly victory for the church in the last days. Vast numbers of converts will swell the membership of the church worldwide, at the very least a majority of the human race. The world of nations will be "Christianized," that is, live in obedience to the law of God in all spheres of life. The church will enjoy earthly peace and prosperity. She will exercise earthly dominion.

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

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The church will rule the world. The future of the church in history is the "golden age."

Against these optimistic prospects stand all the numerous New Testament passages warning the church of abounding lawlessness in the world of the ungodly and in the churches (Matt. 24:12; II Tim. 3:1ff.); of the becoming cold of the love of many church members and a great falling away from the truth (Matt. 24:12; II Thess. 2:3); of the rearing up of the world power of Antichrist (II Thess. 2:3ff.; Rev. 13); and of great tribulation for the disciples of Christ (Matt. 24:21; Revelation).

If these passages apply to the church throughout the time of the new covenant (for the whole of the present age is the "last days" and "last hour," as Acts 2:17 and I John 2:18 teach) and if they apply especially to the church in the time immediately before the coming of Christ, postmillennialism is exposed as an empty dream and a dangerous delusion.

What to do with these most unwelcome passages, these surds in the postmillennial calculation?

Why, explain them all as referring to events that took place long ago! "Preterize" them, one and all! Then, the warnings, which to postmillennialism are "pessimistic," do not apply to the church of the twenty-first century. All such passages (a huge section of New Testament Scripture!) hold merely historical interest for the church and believer today.

"Preterizing" Matthew 24

The main instance of preterism for contemporary postmillennialism is undoubtedly the explanation of most of Matthew 24 as referring exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The theologian whose interpretation of the passage is decisive for postmillenni-

alists is J. Marcellus Kik. Rousas J. Rushdoony indicates his dependence on Kik's interpretation of Matthew 24 in his endorsement of the new edition of the book containing Kik's exegesis of the chapter: "The writings of J. M. Kik give us that eschatology of victory which Scripture sets forth."¹ Martin G. Selbrede has acknowledged that "virtually all reconstructionists appreciate the service Kik performed for postmillennialism by successfully preterizing the first half of Matthew 24."²

With appeal to verse thirty-four, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled," Kik insists that everything foretold by Christ in Matthew 24 prior to verse thirty-four happened completely and finally in the days leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The key to Matthew Twenty-four is verse 34.... Every thing mentioned in the previous verses were (*sic*) to be fulfilled before the contemporary generation would pass away.... The first thirty-four verses of Matthew 24, along with verse 35...deal with the destruction of Jerusalem.³

On Kik's interpretation of Matthew 24:1-35, the wars of verse six; the catastrophes in creation of verse seven; the persecution of verse nine; the heresies and apostasy of verses eleven and twelve; and the false prophets and false christs (the many antichrists and the personal Antichrist) happened, fully and exhaustively, before AD 70. Indeed, Christ's prophecy that the gospel would be preached worldwide was realized by the year AD 70 (which absurd explanation of verse fourteen by itself exposes the falsity of preterism and, therefore, of postmillennialism). The "end" of verse fourteen, which immediately follows the

¹ Rousas John Rushdoony, "Introduction," in J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), ix.

² Martin G. Selbrede, "Reconstructing Postmillennialism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on Eschatology* 15 (Winter, 1998): 159.

³ Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, 59, 60, 67. For a Reformed, amillennial refutation of Kik's interpretation of Matthew 24; explanation of the "key text"—verse thirty-four; and critique of "preterism" in eschatology, see David J. Engelsma, "Matthew 24," "A Timely Question about 'Preterism,'" and "The Preterism of Christian Reconstruction," in *Christ's Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism* (Redlands, CA: The Reformed Witness, 2001), 69-89, 129-158.

preaching of the gospel to all the nations, is not the bodily return of Christ in the future (as the churches of the Reformation have always taught), but the end of the Jewish nation as the covenant people and the end of the types and shadows of the old covenant, especially the temple and its service, in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Roman army.

In addition, the great tribulation of Matthew 24:21 does not at all apply to the church, but to the Roman persecution and slaughter of the Jews in the days leading up to AD 70.

Even the Lord's promise of His coming, a visible coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, in verse thirty, was fulfilled, not merely typically, but actually and fully in AD 70 in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Danger of "Consistent" Preterism

Here the difficulty, if not impossibility, of the preterism of Kik and his exegetical disciples to hold at bay the full preterism of such men as James Stuart Russell, R. C. Leonard, and J. E. Leonard is evident. Russell and the Leonards teach that *all* the eschatological prophecies of Scripture were fulfilled in AD 70. According to them, there will be no future bodily coming of Christ, no future resurrection of the bodies of all humans, no future final judgment, no future destruction of the present form of creation by fire, and no future new heaven and earth.

Since the coming of Christ, as predicted in the New Testament documents, has already taken place, little scriptural basis exists for perpetuating the doctrine that it still lies in the future.... We have presented the evidence that the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 represents the fulfillment of what the apostolic church knew as the promise of Jesus' coming and the end of the age. The future hope of today's church, therefore, lies in another direction.... For today's Christians, the last days to which the New Testament refers lie in the past. Our task is not to anticipate the end, but to live in the new community inaugurated by Jesus Christ.⁴

⁴ R. C. Leonard and J. E. Leonard, *The Promise of His Coming: Interpreting New Testament Statements concerning the Time of Christ's Appearance* (Chicago: Laudemont Press, 1996), 216, 219, 220. The Leonards are heavily dependent upon James Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: a Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming* (Bradford,

These are the end-time scoffers, who say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (II Pet. 3:3, 4).


The contemporary postmillennialists in the Reformed sphere insist, loudly and even angrily,⁵ that their form of preterism be distinguished from the full, consistent preterism of Russell and the Leonards as only a “partial” and (ominously) “inconsistent” preterism. Kik and the Christian Reconstructionists want to hold on to a bodily, visible coming of Jesus Christ in the future. But their explanation of the coming of Christ promised in Matthew 24:30, 31 must prove fatal to their desire, no matter how sincere, to maintain the future coming of Christ. The reason is not so much that the description of the future coming of Christ elsewhere in the New Testament, for example, I Thessalonians 4:14-17 and II Thessalonians 1:7-10, is unmistakably similar to the description in Matthew 24:30, 31. But the reason is that the testimony of the apostles to the coming of Christ is based on Christ’s own teaching of this coming in Matthew 24 and in the parallel passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21. If Christ, in Matthew 24:30, 31, was referring, not only typically and provisionally, but also actually, exhaustively, and finally to His coming in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, so

PA: Kingdom Publications, 1996). This latter work is a new edition of the book originally published in 1878.

⁵ See the response of Gary DeMar and Andrew Sandlin to my charge of preterism against the postmillennial Christian Reconstructionists in David J. Engelsma, *Christ’s Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism* (Redlands, CA: The Reformed Witness, 2001), 146-149.

also must the apostolic testimony to the coming of Christ refer exclusively to that past event.

At the very least, the postmillennialists are playing an exceedingly dangerous game with their preterist explanation of Matthew 24. It is a game that jeopardizes nothing less than the promise of the bodily coming of Christ—the climax of all the promises of the gospel, as of all the ways and purposes of God in history, and the great hope of the church. That the danger is real is evident in the full and consistent preterists—Russell, the Leonards, and others. The contemporary full and consistent preterists aggressively promote their eschatology, or rather complete lack of an eschatology. That the danger is real is also evident from the falling away of one of the Christian Reconstructionists’ own, David Chilton, into full and consistent preterism, that is, the hope-destroying and soul-damning heresy of denying a future, bodily, visible coming of Jesus Christ. And the reason why the postmillennialists in the Reformed churches are willing to play this risky preterist game is their dream of an earthly kingdom of Christ in a “golden age” in history.

It is this very obsession with an earthly kingdom of Christ that drives the full and “consistent” preterists to deny a future, bodily coming of Christ altogether: “Our task is not to anticipate the end, *but to live in the new community inaugurated by Jesus Christ.*”⁶ 

⁶ R. C. Leonard and J. E. Leonard, *The Promise of His Coming*, 220; emphasis added.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

REV. THOMAS MIERSMA

Of Vanity and Labor (Ecclesiastes 1:1-11)

The opening words of the “Preacher” are in many respects very striking. His identity, which as we have seen is that of Solomon, is stated as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” But that identity is ini-

tially set in the background. He steps before us first of all as the “Preacher” and his “words.” His words are “vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” This truth we must hear from the outset. It is from this truth as it is developed that he will lead us to the whole duty of man, the fear of God, and the calling to remember our Creator particularly in our youth. His purpose is to show us this vanity concretely in the world about us so that we see it, reflect upon it, and

Rev. Miersma is pastor of the Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2010, p. 129.

indeed wrestle with it so that the point is driven home.

He therefore steps forth with his words as “the words of the Preacher.” The word preacher here has the idea of calling or summoning with one’s voice. The term draws a certain visual picture, of one stepping forth among the assembly of God’s people. He stands before us to show us by his words the reality of the world we dwell in as it is before us “under the sun.” We too must see it, as it were, experience it, and the burden to which he would draw our attention. The viewpoint is of the life of man as he lives from day to day, “under the sun.” Yet that viewpoint is of one who lives by faith standing in the Word of God and God’s covenant promises, who stands upon the foundation of God’s Word and God’s counsel also over the affairs of life. It is in the congregation and before the people of God that he speaks his words concerning the realities of life under the sun.

That life under the sun is characterized by vanity. The word has the idea of a breath or vapor. It is used of idols, who have no substance, but are vanities. It sets before us here the futility and emptiness of life in a fallen and sinful world as it lies under the sun and, as such, under the curse of God upon sin. That life lies in a world of constant change. It is transitory, constantly in motion, yet does not arrive or achieve anything under the sun. The meaning of life and its purpose also cannot be found in the world itself under the sun. This is not pessimism, but realism. The Word of God would lead us beyond the things that are made, to the Creator of them all and His fear, for therein alone is the meaning and purpose to be found.

It is the purpose of the book to expound more fully what is meant by vanity. To set before us why *all* is vanity, vanity in the extreme, or “vanity of vanities.” To point us in that direction, the text, having raised the subject of vanity, comes to us with a question: “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” What does he achieve? What does he really accomplish? What of that labor abides? “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh.” The earth endures or abides, but man and his life do not. Man dies and leaves all his labor and activity. He can take nothing of this world with him. Death, the reality of it and the outworking of it, as the curse of God upon sin, renders the life of man vain. The Word of God in Ecclesiastes will repeatedly bring up that relationship between this life, the reality of death, and how it renders the labor of man vain and empty. The

world under the sun was not made by its Creator vain in its beginning, but good. It is sin and the judgment of God upon sin that have rendered it vain. The wages of sin is death, and therefore all things, even the life of the creature, are subject to vanity, and “groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Rom. 8:20-23).

The creation itself is in constant motion and activity, so that it also may be said to be full of labor. The sun rises and sets, the wind “whirleth about continually,” “all the rivers run to the sea.” Yet in all that motion, what destination is achieved? What is truly accomplished? The sun goes around and around again, making its circuit in the heavens. The wind does likewise, turning south or north, blowing “continually.” The wind never arrives. It goes in circles. The same is said, in the text, of the rivers. They run into the sea, “yet the sea is not full.” Not only is the sea not made full but “the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.” Nothing that endures forever is accomplished by it. The cycles of the sun and the seasons, the blowing of the wind and the flowing of the rivers, are full of labor and activity, in constant change and motion, yet it is vain, it goes in circles.

Now that too is under the appointment of God the Creator. The world before the flood was perhaps different in the manner in which God’s curse operated. We read of Noah’s sacrifice and God’s pronouncement:

And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease (Gen. 8:20-22).

By that declaration God Himself set the cycles of the seasons in the creation so that the very motions of the creation are not merely the result of some natural process but are a work of God the Creator. The effect of that work of God is that “all things are *full* of labour” and subject to vanity.

But there is another element to the truth that nothing *can* be satisfied with fullness. Nothing is ever truly full, so that it gives an abiding satisfaction. When an end is

obtained, the end should satisfy and endure. As the creation, however, is in constant motion and activity under the sun, nothing in life endures. This is true of man and his life. The life of man in the world is such that his eye is not filled with seeing or his ear with hearing. Enough is never enough, so that a true end is accomplished. Rather, the labor of life is a weary burden, because it neither satisfies nor obtains an enduring end.

This wearisomeness is set forth in the text in the idea of “labour.” Yet, as the Preacher will point out later in the book, the deceitfulness of sin is such that the things of this life *present* themselves as that which *can* satisfy, as that which *will* make a man’s life full. Therefore men are given to labor to heap and gather, not considering whose those things will be. He will also direct us to the right use of the things of this

life and their value, which is to enjoy the present gifts of God, in effect our daily bread, with thanksgiving.

Before that consideration, however, we must have clear before our minds that the cycles of life render the delusion of sinful man, who heaps and gathers, a vain delusion. For man comes with the false notion that he has achieved something new. He speaks as if “this time things are different.” The reality is rather otherwise: “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9). He asks: “Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us” (Eccl. 1:10).

In asking this, the Preacher is asking a question concerning the underlying principle or the essence of things. Development in science and technology has the appearance of something new in their external form. But they are not essentially new. Transportation is transportation. That one can travel faster, quicker, and in more comfort does not change the fact that transportation is a means to get from one place to another. Increasing complexity in technology from handwriting to printing-presses to typewriters to computers is not an essential change. It belongs to the confusion of the early industrial revolution that men equated such changing complexity with a

*...the labor of life
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because it neither
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an enduring end.*

genuine advancement in life itself. But man, the sinner, is still sinful man, though you give him more and abundant means to sin. In principle, the new thing is just the old repackaged in another form. It truly “hath been of old time which was before us.” This is even more true of man in his society, governments, and history as they lie in sin. Sin and depravity make the Pelagian idea of human progress

a vain hope. The idea that man will solve all his problems by his own efforts, or by improving education, or the environment, or health care, is a vain denial of reality. “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done” (Eccl. 1:9).

Moreover, as the text points out, the problem is in our perception, because man does not truly remember. Each generation as it rises grows old and dies and is succeeded by another.


“One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh” (Eccl. 1:4). The effect of this is that the knowledge and wisdom born of experience of the preceding generation also passes with it. The result is: “There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after” (Eccl. 1:11). Generation succeeds generation. That very succession limits man’s perception and understanding. The mistakes of the past are repeated. The kingdoms of the world rise and fall through the same causes of decline, corruption, and the sins of men, yet such is the vanity of man himself that though he know *of* the history of the past, there is *in him* no true remembrance. The same follies in the life of men come again and again in the world.

It is against the background of that transitory character of man’s life that all things lead to vanity and futility under the sun. The Preacher would stand in the congregation of the people of God to teach us wisdom. He would lead us to see the spiritual realities with which these issues confront us, for they are not simply practical matters but spiritual issues. In doing so he stands in the promises of God in Christ, which are by the true knowledge of God our Creator and the reverence of faith that fears Him. Of man and all his activity there is nothing

new under the sun. There cannot be, for man is finite and fallen in sin. That which is new can only be *of God*, and that by a wonder of grace. Ecclesiastes stands as part of the background of the gospel. For as it paints a true portrait of the vanity of life, it points us to God and the *new thing* that He alone has wrought in Jesus Christ.

The wisdom the book teaches is spiritual wisdom for a godly seed, which the eye of sinful man cannot see. It leads us away from the false seeking of happiness and satisfaction here below, and the deceitfulness of sin, to the true treasure that is above and to that which alone satisfies. Jesus Himself

more than once summarizes and paraphrases the spiritual principles of Ecclesiastes in His preaching. He does so when He warns us that the abundance of a man's life does not consist of the things he possesses, and when He calls us to seek our treasure in God's grace in Him.

Before we explore the spiritual wisdom that this Word of God would teach, the Preacher leads us to contemplate more fully wisdom itself. This is necessary, for wisdom and searching out wisdom is itself also touched with the vanity of this life. It too belongs to the wearisome burden of labor in the vanity of the world. To this we will return next time. 

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD

REV. DANIEL KLEYN

Establishing Reformed Churches (1)

Mission work is done by us in obedience to the command of Christ. He calls us to preach and teach His gospel of truth to all the nations of the world. This must be done tirelessly and unceasingly until the day of His return.

The truth that Christ has given us to proclaim in our mission work is not something bland, for we have in our possession as a Reformed church the rich and precious heritage of the Reformed faith. Christ has entrusted that to us. We are privileged and blessed to have it. And thus we are able to preach and teach what it really means to be a Reformed believer and a Reformed church.

That raises an important question: What does it mean to be a Reformed church?

This is a significant question in the work of missions, especially as we have as our goal to establish, as the Lord wills and under His blessing, Reformed churches. In my own (limited) experience as a missionary, I have had to answer this question many times. I have also given a series of lectures on the subject. Those whom the Lord places in our path seriously want to know what it means for them to be Reformed (or Protestant Reformed) churches.

Rev. Kleyn is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, the Philippines.

In answer to this question, we will consider especially five things that characterize a truly Reformed church.



First of all, a Reformed church is one that is Reformed in its history.

This means it is a church that has a direct, historical connection to the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. It is an heir of what God restored to His church at that time. It follows in the footsteps and path of the reformers.

Prior to the Reformation the church had become corrupt. The Roman Catholic Church was the worldwide church of that day. But it was thoroughly man-centered in doctrine, idolatrous in worship, and immoral in life. The Word of God had been replaced with the inventions and traditions of men.

God used the reformers to reshape and renew His church. Through such men as Martin Luther and John Calvin, God delivered His remnant church from the evil traditions of men. God brought His church back to His Word and put her on the "old paths" and the "good way" that alone provide "rest for your souls" (Jer. 6:16).

A Reformed church is not, therefore, a progressive church, with new ideas, contemporary practices, and novel ways of attracting people into its membership.

Such a church has departed from the Word of God and is on the road to apostasy.

The Reformed church is one that loves and walks on the old paths set forth in the Word of God. She recognizes the great work God did, through the reformers, to lead His church back to the truth. She holds to the five great “*solas*” of the Reformation: Scripture alone, Christ alone, Grace alone, Faith alone, and Glory to God alone.

For some churches, being Reformed in history means they are able to trace their historical roots directly to the Protestant Reformation. They have, by the grace of God, been Reformed in their generations. Their calling, then, is to be sure they remain on that historical path that has been handed down to them from generation to generation.

But for others, to be Reformed in history means they must first find the old paths, and then begin the work of walking in them. This is how it is for those among whom we labor in the Philippines. The Reformed faith is something new to them and their generations. They have had to discover what the historical path of the Reformed faith is, and then deliberately set their feet on that path. And by the grace of God, this is what they have done and are doing.



Secondly, a Reformed church is one that is Reformed in its doctrine.

This follows from being historically Reformed. In fact, so close is the connection that we may say a Reformed church is one that is historically Reformed in its doctrine. It is a church that upholds the truth as taught by the reformers. It is a church that is confessional, walking the path of the truth as set forth in the Reformed creeds.

For us as Protestant Reformed churches, to be Reformed in doctrine, and to have as our desire to establish churches that are such, means that we believe and teach distinct truths. I have in mind the fact that God has given us, through our history, a distinct and clear understanding of the truth of His absolute sovereignty in salvation—specifically over against two errors: common grace, and a conditional covenant.

Many so-called Reformed churches claim to be preaching and teaching this same truth. But the sad fact is that

they have long ago departed. They no longer hold to sound doctrine. They have abandoned the old paths and the good way of the Word of God. Though they might claim otherwise, such churches are no longer Reformed.

The truly Reformed church confesses that salvation is God's work from beginning to end. There are no works of man involved. There are no conditions for man to fulfill. God is everything, and man is nothing. The truth that such a church confesses is a truth that gives all honor and praise to God. If what a church teaches fails to do this, it simply is not Reformed.

But that is not all. The church that is truly Reformed in doctrine also confesses that the grace of God is particular. There is no such thing as a common grace of God. He does not love all men. Nor does He offer salvation to all in the preaching of the gospel. If a church denies any of this, it has no right to claim to be Reformed.

Still more. A truly Reformed church holds to doctrine that is covenantal.

This means first of all that over against those who speak of the covenant as a pact or agreement, a truly Reformed church confesses that the covenant is God's relationship of friendship with His people. He makes us His friends in Christ. He brings us into the enjoyment of a life of blessed fellowship in His own family. And He does this without our fulfilling “covenant conditions.” We are saved and brought into the covenant fellowship of God only because God Himself brings us in.

To hold to covenantal doctrine also means confessing truth that stands in stark contrast to the views of Baptists (confronted often in our work in the Philippines). Over against their dispensational views, the truly Reformed church teaches the unity of the Old and New Testaments. Her firm conviction, on the basis of God's Word, is that God has one covenant, one covenant people, one covenant Savior, and one covenant way of salvation.

And it is also the firm conviction of the truly Reformed church that the covenant of God includes the children of believers. The church and kingdom of God is made up, not of adults only, but of believers and their seed. God also brings children into His covenant fellowship (something that clearly underscores, by the way, the absolute sovereignty of God in the work of salvation). The truly Reformed church holds to and practices, not believers' baptism, but infant baptism.

These are some of the main doctrines we hold to and teach. Through sermons each Lord's day, through Heidelberg Catechism preaching, through occasional lectures, through catechism instruction for children and youth, through classes for young people and young adults on the Belgic Confession of Faith, through an adult study of the Canons of Dordt, through weekly Bible studies, through discussing with interested contacts the distinctive doctrines of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and through instructing existing and prospective ministers in the six loci of Reformed dogmatics—in all these concrete ways we have the opportunity, in our mission work, to make it clear what it means for a church to be truly Reformed in doctrine.

What a privilege it is to teach and preach sound doctrine (II Tim. 4:3). We are able to teach others what it means to be Reformed, not just in name, but in truth. We are able to work toward establishing churches that are truly Reformed in this regard.



To be Reformed in history and doctrine is crucial, for it

is foundational. Only if a church is well grounded in the truths of God's Word, as set forth in our Reformed creeds and confessions, will that church continue to be and does that church have the right to call herself Reformed. Sound doctrine is fundamental.

But some might think that doctrine is all that matters. They might even say, "We have Reformed doctrine, and that's enough. That's what makes us a truly Reformed church!"

Some do indeed take that perspective. There are those (and we have met them) who seem to be interested in only one thing with regard to being Reformed—doctrine. Nothing else. Nothing more.

But to be Reformed in doctrine is not enough. The Reformed faith is all-encompassing. When the Reformed faith takes hold of a person and church, it makes radical and sweeping changes. There is no area in the life of the church or believer that is left untouched.

It is this that we will consider when we return to this subject in the near future, the Lord willing, to look at the three remaining characteristics of a truly Reformed church. ∞

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Young People's Activities

Although we cannot say for certain, we are rather confident that all of our young people's societies, in all of our congregations, in one way or another, have the opportunity during the month of December to spend an evening caroling together. This caroling is usually done to the elderly, the widows and widowers, and the shut-ins in the various churches, but it can also include a trip to a nearby retirement home, or hospital, or even just a tour of the neighborhood around the church. But we are certain that no matter how it is done, or even to

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

whom it is done, the caroling is much appreciated. Our senior citizens deeply appreciate being thought of, and they appreciate all the cards and messages from their congregations. So for all of them, we extend a heartfelt thank-you to all our young people for showing you are part of a wonderful caring family of fellow believers.

Not only did our young people spend time together caroling last month, many of them also sponsored Christmas sing-spirations in their churches. Such was the case in the Loveland, CO PRC on Sunday evening, December 12, with a collection taken to help meet expenses for this summer's PR Young People's Convention.

One week later, Sunday, December 19, the young people of the Edgerton, MN and Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls,

SD hosted the annual Christmas singspiration for the area Protestant Reformed Churches (including also Calvary, Doon, and Hull). This year's singspiration was held at Edgerton.

The young people of the Hull, IA PRC invited all those 60 and older in their congregation to a night of playing games and having fellowship together on December 7.

The young people of the Calvary PRC in Hull, IA hosted a young people/grandparents game night on December 9 in the music room at Trinity High School.

Congregations also had the opportunity to support their young people's fund-raising efforts for this summer's convention in Wisconsin by means of attending different dinners. The young people of the First PRC in

Holland, MI sponsored a spaghetti dinner on November 30, and the young people of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI held their annual chili dinner on December 4.

Mission Activities

The young people of the Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines, were invited to a day activity by the young people of the First Reformed Church of Bulacan on December 21 at the ECO-Park in Quezon City. This activity began at 8:00 A.M. at the park.

Prof. and Mrs. H. Hanko returned home in mid-December after six weeks of preaching and teaching in Singapore. Prof. Hanko reports that he is greatly encouraged by the continued interest in the distinctives of the Reformed faith and church polity in the Covenant ERCS. Especially he is encouraged by the development of and interest shown by the young people. We can also add that the Hankos were a bit shocked when they arrived in Grand Rapids, MI from Singapore last month. Imagine, if you can, going from 90 degrees F to 6 degrees F. It takes a bit of getting used to! In fact, we are not sure one ever does get used to it.

A delegation from the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI made an official visit to the Pittsburgh Mission the weekend of December 10-12.

This delegation included elders Steve Kuiper and Tom Vander Woude and deacons Marc Kuiper and Eric Lubbers. They visited with missionary Rev. W. Bruinsma, and with Pittsburgh's Steering Committee. They also supervised the administration of the Lord's Supper on December 12 and made several family visitations.

Congregation Activities

The choir of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI invited their congregation, and others from neighboring churches, to join them on Sunday evening, December 12, for their annual Christmas concert.

The Christmas concert of the Georgetown PRC choir was held on Sunday evening, December 12, following their evening service. Their congregation, and others from around Hudsonville, MI, were invited to hear selections by the choir, sing along with them, and enjoy a piano solo and a piano-flute duet.

The Hull, IA congregation enjoyed a choir program and singspiration sponsored by their choir on Sunday afternoon, December 5.

The deacons of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI hosted a widow/widower breakfast for those members of their congregation on Saturday morning, December 11.

Bound to Join, the new book on church membership by Prof. D. Engelsma, is the next book the Reading Club of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA plans to read and discuss. Their first discussion began already in late November, with more to follow each month, D.V.

On Sunday evening, November 21, Rev. C. Haak, pastor of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, preached his annual sermon on the persecuted church. This worship service is meant to call attention to the reality of the persecuted church of God on earth and our call to prayer for God's sustaining grace to rest upon our persecuted brethren. Rev. Haak preached from Acts 12 (II Cor. 4:9) under the theme, "Persecuted but Not Forsaken."

The deacons of the Byron Center, MI PRC planned on conducting a food-drive again during late December. Byron's congregation was encouraged to drop off their donations between December 26 and January 2.

Minister Activities

Rev. G. Eriks received the call from the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. D. Overway declined the call extended to him to serve as the next pastor of the Wingham, Ontario PRC. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Teacher Needed

■ The Protestant Reformed Christian School of Dyer, IN is accepting applications for lower grade teaching positions for the 2011/2012 school year. Interested applicants can send a letter of inquiry and resumé to the school. If you have questions regarding the positions, contact Ryan Van Overloop at 219-558-2660 (school) or 219-374-6547 (home).

Classis West

■ Classis West of the PRC will convene on March 2, 2011, 8:30 A.M., at the Protestant Reformed Church of Crete, IL. All material for the agenda of this meeting must be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, January 31, 2011.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper,
Stated Clerk

Seminary

■ All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Stefan Engelsma (Phone: 616-662-9363). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 21, 2010, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Stefan Engelsma, Secretary

Teacher Needed

■ Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan is accepting applications for 2 full-time teaching positions for the 2010-2011 school year. Applicants should be certified for Secondary Education and interested in teaching in one or more of the following subject areas: Mathematics, Spanish, Social Studies, Bible, Church History, and Mechanical Drawing. Applications can be obtained by contacting Rick Noorman at 616-453-5048 or ricknoorman@gmail.com or Jeff Terpstra at 616-735-0775 or jeffterpstra@gmail.com.

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Thomas and Gretine Bodbyl, Dan and Anna Mae Bodbyl, and their families in the death of Thomas and Dan's father,

MR. JOHN BODBYL.

May the family find comfort in the words of Psalm 118:14, 15, "The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacle of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly."

Rev. K. Koole, President
Herman De Vries, Asst. Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Byron Center PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to Bill and Ardith Oomkes and Mark and Amy Oomkes in the death of Ardith's sister and Mark's aunt,

FIRDENE BRANDERHORST.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Timothy 4:7, 8).

Rev. A. Spruiensma, President
Dale Bartelds, Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness to God, we rejoice with our parents,

HERMAN and LOUISE OPHOFF, who will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on January 25, 2011.

We thank our heavenly Father for their many years of covenant instruction and for the godly example they set for us. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:7).

- * Steven and Karen Ophoff
Steven
- * Bruce and Rosanne VanSolkema
Tedd, Andrew, Nancy
- * John and Patricia Ophoff
Jessica, Monica, Natalie, Lexi,
Nicholas, Joshua
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness to God, we celebrated the 50th wedding anniversary of our parents,

MAX and VIRGINIA MOORE, on December 12, 2010. We thank our heavenly Father for providing us with parents who gave us covenant instruction. We are also thankful for the many years the Lord has given them and pray that God may graciously bless them in the years to come. "The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy" (Psalm 147:11).

- * John and Lara Moore
- * Matthew and Heidi Moore
- * Duane and Cindy Reinhardt
- * Mark and Melinda Moore
- * William and Rebecca Moore
- * Thomas and Jodi Moore
- * Daniel Moore (1963-2003)
28 grandchildren
1 great-grandchild

Loveland, Colorado

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Byron Center PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to Bernie and Ruth Lubbers, Bruce and Deb Lubbers, Ed and Melanie Hekstra, Ken and Machele Elzinga, and Heather Lubbers in the death of

LINDA JOYCE LUBBERS.

May the family be comforted knowing Linda is in glory, singing praises to our Father. "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Philippians 3:21, 22).

Rev. A. Spruiensma, President
Dale Bartelds, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Norm Vogel in the death of his mother,

MARGARET J. VOGEL.

May our Father in heaven comfort them by His word. "Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle forever; I will trust in the covert of thy wings" (Psalm 61:1-4).

Rev. J. Laning, President
Gerald Brummel, Clerk of records

Notice

■ View a free video on the Internet, of "Federal Vision, Unconditional Covenant, and the Reformation's Gospel of Grace," by Prof. David Engelsma. The address is www.southhollandprc.org/lecture. The lecture was given November 19, 2010 at the Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, IL.