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A Biblical Perspective on Climate Change

Last month we looked at climate change—what it is and how the world is responding to it. We also considered how God provides for life on earth through the greenhouse effect. This month we look at climate change with a biblical perspective. Although scripture does not directly address climate change, there are some biblical principles that we can use when looking at the issue.

First, whether or not climate change happens, God is still in control. He cares for his creation by his providential hand. “We believe that...God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment” (Belgic Confession, Article 13). We read also in Psalm 104:27–29, “These [the creatures spoken of in the psalm, the creation itself also by extension] wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.”

If climate change is having negative consequences upon the earth—accelerated warming leading to rising sea levels from melting ice or the acidification of the ocean from its intake of excess carbon dioxide, leading to the death of coral reefs (coral bleaching)—this in no way minimizes God’s sovereignty. A dynamic earth in no way undermines God’s rule over all events or his care for his creation. He opens his hand to the creation, enabling life, and he also...
closes his hand, preventing life. In God’s hand “is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12:10).

Second, after God created, he made man steward over the earth—a beautiful and intricately designed, Goldilocks planet. Earth is neither too close to the sun nor too far away. The temperature and atmospheric conditions are just right, enabling earth to support life. The composition of earth’s atmosphere is just right, so that it protects the surface of the planet through the greenhouse effect. The preservation of this balance and good order in creation provided by the greenhouse effect, ultimately provided for by God, is to be included in man’s duties as steward. In Genesis 1:28 God blessed Adam and Eve and said, “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” With this command of God, man is called to subject the resources of this planet to his use. However, man is to do this in a way that still allows him to care for the creation. Stripping the earth of its resources (fossil fuels) because they are there and we know how to use them is not an option. Man’s use of fossil fuels is proper and good in light of Genesis 1:28, but only if it is accomplished through the exercise of stewardship. If man realizes that using too much fossil fuel leads to an increased amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and that this increase is having adverse effects upon creation, he has the responsibility to limit his use of fossil fuels. Let’s step away from the hypothetical. It is an established fact that the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased. More and more evidence is also being brought to the table that points to man being responsible for this increase, if only in part. Now let’s look at one of the effects of climate change, briefly mentioned above. It has been demonstrated that increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is increasing the amount that the ocean absorbs. The ocean, created by God to help maintain the wonderful balance of earth’s systems, naturally absorbs carbon from the atmosphere. More carbon in the atmosphere means more carbon in the ocean, which acidifies the water. The acidification of the ocean, accelerated by climate change, has been shown to have adverse effects on many marine organisms, especially coral, even leading to coral bleaching (death) events. Now aside from this specific example of the effects of climate change, consider the adverse effects of climate change as a whole. If it is true that man is accelerating the natural process of climate change through his use of fossil fuels, man has the responsibility to put limits on his use of fossil fuels. On the flip side, if we are going to say that climate change and its negative effects on earth are a farce, we had better be sure that they actually are. God has given us stewardship of his creation—“the earth is the LORD’S” (Ps. 24:1)—and we will be held accountable for how we used it and what we did with our knowledge of creation. With greater knowledge comes greater responsibility.

Third, remember that the earth was cursed after the fall and along with man suffers the effects of sin and also longs to be delivered. God said to Adam, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:17–19). Read also Romans 8:19–22, “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” It ought not surprise us when the creation is adversely affected when the natural cycle of climate change is accelerated by large influxes of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere and the resulting temperature fluctuations. The creation too suffers the effects of sin and waits to be delivered.

Fourth, as we approach the end of time, we must realize that climate change may be used by God in part to bring about that end. Climate change is a global issue, and in the past few years we have seen the world striving to unite around this issue. During the fall of 2015, many world leaders met in Paris at the United Nations Climate Change Conference. The result of the conference was the drafting of the Paris

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Agreement, which is a commitment by the 55 sign-
ing nations to reduce the effects of climate change
by limiting fossil fuel usage. Here is an issue that is
unifying the world. Could this be a way in which the
antichrist is ushered in?

Fifth, we are sojourners on earth. Evidence of the
creation itself changing or being destroyed should
not cause us to worry. We are only here temporarily,
until the end, and the creation of the new heaven
and the new earth. Yes, we are stewards and we
should govern how we use God’s creation, but we
do so with the realization that it is only temporary.
We do not go about our work as stewards with the
concern that we are preserving the earth so that God
can establish his kingdom on it.

CONCLUSION

The issues of climate change and global warm-
ing are complicated issues. Many of the predictions
and responses are fruit of an unbelieving evolution-
ary worldview. With the evolutionary worldview laced
through many of the conclusions and predictions, it
becomes difficult to sort out the good data from the
bad. Add to this difficulty the fact that atmospheric
and climate science is extremely complicated. It’s
not just about industries and automobiles pumping
carbon dioxide into the air. There are thousands of
reactions taking place simultaneously in that atmo-
sphere. But let’s not miss the forest for the trees here.

If we concentrate on all the wrong responses and
conclusions that have been made in light of the issue,
we are going to forget that it is still an issue that we as
Christians need to be aware of and need to discuss.
If we dismiss the issues of climate change and global
warming outright, we throw the baby out with the
bath water. We all need to look into these issues and
seriously discuss their legitimacy. More importantly,
we need to shape our Christian response.

So, should we all sell our big gas guzzling SUVs
and vans and buy Priuses to help lower carbon di-
oxide emissions? Probably not. This would be highly
impractical in most cases. Are there things we can
do as stewards? Absolutely. For starters, we can pay
attention and stay informed with what is happening.

If we conclude that climate change is a legitimate
issue, does that make us part of the “tree-hugger,
environmentalist, green movement?” No. The simple
and biblical answer is that we are stewards of what
God has given us, the creation itself in this case.
From this perspective we can then shape our re-
sponse to the issues at hand. With this perspective
also we realize that we are sojourners on earth. This
world is not our final home and we do not despair
if man harms it. No matter how man treats the earth,
its ultimate end will not be caused by man, but it will
be destroyed by God when Christ comes again.

Response to “President Trump”

Dear Readers: I have received the following letter
disagreeing with some of the statements I made in
my January 2017 editorial entitled “President Trump.”
I cast about regarding the best way to reply, and
decided to keep my response short and to the point,
while at the same time addressing the content. I have
decided to intersperse my comments in brackets and
italics throughout the letter. As usual, the editor has
the last word.

DEAR MARK HOEKSEMA

My name is Christopher Morris and I am cur-
rently a member of Hope PRC of Walker, as well
as the former Michigan Field Director for Donald
Trump’s winning presidential campaign. I voted for
Donald Trump in the presidential primary, was a del-
egate to the Republican National Convention, and
was a volunteer for months before taking a senior
level position with the campaign. I have met Donald
Trump on multiple occasions, and I oversaw thou-
sands of volunteers and interns to knock on doors,
make phone calls, and staff offices. As you can see,
I am uniquely qualified to speak on this topic.

[Mr. Morris: Thank you for identifying yourself
clearly. Your resume is impressive. I would note that
based on your self-description, you are hardly an]
objective political observer, but are heavily biased in favor of Donald Trump. There is certainly nothing wrong with supporting a political candidate of any stripe. But such choice definitely colors your opinion."

After reading your editorial entitled “President Trump” I felt it warranted a response.

[Thank you for reading Beacon Lights and taking the time and effort to do the thinking that inspired your reply. We appreciate your thoughtfulness and support, as well as your dissent.]

You wrote in your 6th paragraph that “In this election we had a choice between two wicked people.” What is your point? [Exactly what I wrote.] All men are sinful, fallen creatures, both the elect and reprobate. [Very true.]

Are you judging Donald Trump’s salvation, or Hillary Clinton’s, for that matter? [I do not remember doing so, nor would I ever do so, since this is not my prerogative.]

I am curious how you would have described the choice between myself and another candidate running for president. [This is hypothetical. I prefer to deal with reality.] I would argue that it would be “a choice between two wicked people.” [I certainly hope that you do not regard yourself as wicked. I would not. An imperfect and sinful Christian—absolutely. But wicked? No.] Besides this, God has made it abundantly clear in scripture that he uses sinful men to carry out his will. David had hundreds of wives. To use your terminology, he was a “serial adulterer.” Paul killed Christians before becoming an apostle and serving as an important figure of the early church. Paul himself said, “Of sinners I am chief.” [The point being…?] Let’s make one thing clear: I am in no way defending Donald Trump’s sin, just like I don’t defend my own sin. He will have to answer to God for what he has done, just like you and I will have to, and if he is a child of God, is fully covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. [Precisely therein lies the difference between you and Trump.]

You also mention later on in the editorial that you “held your nose and voted for Trump as the lesser of two evils, and I suspect that most Beacon Lights readers did the same.” Once again, the fact that we live in a sinful world requires that we choose between the lesser of two evils. [When it concerns voting between two undesirable candidates, I agree. But how does this translate into heavy involvement on behalf of some of them?] Would you be saying the same thing if Ted Cruz (a proven supporter of Dominionism) was running against Hillary Clinton? Besides this, I know for a fact that numerous Beacon Lights readers were genuine supporters of Donald Trump, voting for him because he was the best candidate, not just because he was the “lesser of two evils.” [Is there an essential difference?]

Arguably the most important criteria when it comes to voting for a political candidate (at any level) is his or her policies and views. [There is another very important factor that you have omitted: character, or more precisely, a value system or a set of principles. Character influences and often determines actions and policies.] You admitted yourself that Hillary Clinton supported the murder of abortion, as this is well documented at all levels. Donald Trump explicitly opposes this, and went so far as to say that Planned Parenthood should be federally defunded. Hillary Clinton also opposed the second amendment (“the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed”) as well as religious freedom. Donald Trump clearly supports religious freedom, and his election directly benefited the Christian churches and schools around this nation. Most importantly, Donald Trump exposed the establishment, the system, the liberal media, and massive amounts of corruption. This is something that no other candidate could have done, as the vast majority of them were insiders. It is readily apparent that God used the sinful man Donald Trump to expose all of the aforementioned evil. [All true, but this does not alter the validity of my thesis in the least.]

As a Christian who actually was involved in politics, I can attest that the level of corruption that you mentioned is ridiculous. I battled people daily who were supposed to be on my side politically, but instead they were working against me in an attempt to preserve their self-centered careers. [In a way that I could never do, thank you for strengthening my assertion that politics is a dirty business, based on your extensive personal observation and experience.] Although this kind of environment is clearly corrupt, writing that “it is very difficult for a Christian to become involved in politics” seems to be calling out people like myself who have dedicated parts of their life to fighting the corrupt political establishment. [You quoted me accurately. Please note that I did not say that it is impossible to be involved in the current corrupt political system. But I did say that it is difficult, and I stand by that statement. It baffles
me to try to understand how a Christian can do what you have done, but never would I call you out. This is, after all, a matter of personal choice and an issue of Christian liberty.

We must be extremely careful when it comes to judging others. [I agree.] There are numerous problems in this denomination with people being looked down upon because they struggle with certain sins or are outsiders. I am sure you have spoken to many of these people during your ministry, seeing first hand their pain and suffering. [This is a completely different subject that has nothing to do with politics.] As the editor of a widely read magazine in this denomination, it is important that you set a good example for both your readers and contributors. Writing an article with such judgmental undertones sets a dangerous precedent for others to follow, and something that should be clearly avoided. [I am well aware of the position I occupy, together with the accompanying responsibility. I believe that it is exactly my obligation to make proper and biblically based judgments (which is different from being judgmental) in seeking to guide our young people in the way of living the Christian life in an increasingly corrupt world, and I intend to continue doing so as long as I remain editor of Beacon Lights. In summary, my editorial stands as written.]

—MHH

Our Goodly Heritage

Mark H. Hoeksema

Interview with

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg (2)

MHH: This matter of law?

BW: The law. I was in Kalamazoo at that time. There was a Tom Koning there who had gone to Calvin Seminary and then became Reformed Baptist and started a Reformed Baptist church in Kalamazoo. I had lunch with him a couple of times. He said, “You know, I have a whole bunch of sermons by Hoeksema.” I said, “Sermons by Hoeksema?” “Yes,” he says, “I got a whole pile of them.” I said, “I’d like to see them.” He came and he had one of these books of sermons. All hand written. Beautiful handwriting. I said, “Where did you get that?” “Oh,” he said, “we got them when we were in seminary.” I took them home and went through them, and man oh man, this is terrific. So I said to him, “If you ever want to get rid of them, talk to me first.”

About a year later, he said, “You know, it’s good material, but I never use it. For a hundred dollars, I’ll give you the whole pile.” So he gave me that whole stack. There were over 500 hundred sermons there. I started typing them out in the computer. I thought this was terrific. Every time I made a sermon, let’s see if I can find a similar one there and build on that.

Then I came across a series on Romans.

Now, to get into that question of where he got them. These sermons were recorded by Martin Swart; we all know him in First Church. He always sat up in the balcony with a notebook and took notes on Hoeksema’s sermons. He had devised his own form of shorthand. Beginning in the late 1920s all the way to the mid-forties, he was taking down these sermons. From what the Swarts say, he would go home, and as soon as he got home, he’d write them all out in pencil. Then during the following week, he would write them out with a dipped ink pen in this immaculate handwriting. You can read it just about as easily as you can read type. Everything is that distinct. When I hit this sermon on Romans, I thought, here is the lodestone of them all. So I started typing those out. When I got through it, I sent a copy to [Prof. David] Engelsma. He said, “Get those things published!” [The result was the book titled Righteous by Faith Alone]

This stuff is immensely valuable. I started using them in the Men’s Society right away. It’s the best society material I ever had. Every time I go through it, there are insights there, and there’s the master-

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ful way in which he analyzes the text. To my mind, it ought to be the basic study material in the seminary. Dogmatics, exegesis, hermeneutics, homiletics—you have it all there.

This was basically the success of Hoeksema’s teaching in the seminary. You were taken into his way of preaching, his way of analyzing the text, and how he could lay it out. You get the feeling of how he could hold that congregation. Once there was a whole row of Calvin students [in First Church] trying to figure out how he could be preaching on that heavy doctrine and hold an audience like that. They didn’t care about the doctrine, but they wanted to find out how he could hold an audience the way he could (laughter).

To get back to this difference between a legal covenant and an organic covenant. In Lord’s Day 34 he goes into it. He says, “Now, we’re not under the law any more. The law cannot tell us what to do, the law cannot curse us. It tries to get control of us and you must say, ‘No,’ to it. But we’re not against the law. The law is our friend.”

He follows that through. He was always against putting people under law. His whole principle is that your life has to come out of the heart. You deal with the heart, and don’t try to tell people how they should live. If their heart is right, they know it’s wrong to kill, to commit adultery, to steal, to lie. You don’t have to tell them that. They know that. If you put them under law, you’re going to aggravate what they’re doing rather than resolve it. He says in one of those sermons, “The law tickles sin into action” (laughter). There’s none of this long examples and stories. He drives the point home. Then he leaves it. None of this long application-type of thing. The people have to understand the text. When you preach, you take your text and explain the text as it touches the heart. He says, “There are people who ask, ‘May we do this or may we do that? I say to them, of course you may. But do you want to be part of that world for which Christ didn’t pray?’”

Then there’s the story of how the Tabitha Society (the young ladies’ society) came to him and said, “Dominie, we would like to have a sermon on whether we may dance.” As the story goes, he said to them, “You want to dance? Then dance” (laughter). The point being not that he approved of dance, but if you want to, the battle’s lost. Then you might just as well do it.

MHH: When you graduated from the seminary, what happened next? Where did you go and will you talk about your experiences?

BW: When I felt called to go into the ministry, I really always wanted to be a missionary. That was my goal. The only thing was, in the context of 1953, with all of these churches emptied out and splitting all over the place, there just was no opportunity for it. My first charge was in Creston, and it was on the verge of dying, because it was on the north side [of Grand Rapids] and most of the people who attended the church were living somewhere else. The only people left in the north side were single people and broken families.

Then I got the call to Edgerton. The first week we were there, they were having a court meeting. They had been to court to try to get their building back. They had lost their court case. They had appealed to the Supreme Court and hired a high-pressure lawyer. They had lost the case. I came there in 1960, just when DeWolf was going back [to the Christian Reformed Church]. They wanted to try to get a new case, so we went to the judge and asked him to give us a new case on the basis of new evidence. He turned us down. We had Ben VanderKooi, a Christian Reformed guy, as our lawyer. Good-hearted fellow. He simply worked with us, really not charging us anything; he would charge us only if he won the case. We lost the first time around, and now he was ready to go again. Finally Ben and I went to St. Paul to the Supreme Court of Minnesota and there was a judge on duty—one of the Supreme Court judges, a Lutheran man who was acquainted with the controversies in the Lutheran church. We explained to him that those people had gone back to the Christian Reformed Church and they were giving the building away to somebody else. So we convinced the court to hear us out. We were allowed a hearing at the supreme court. We had to prepare, briefed, to go to the Supreme Court. At that time they were having a special synod meeting in Grand Rapids. Ben VanderKooi was a pilot, so we flew over to Grand Rapids to get a decision about synod supporting our case. They were busy on theirs and they wouldn’t give it to us, so we flew back with nothing. Then we had to prepare a brief, and Ben wasn’t getting it done. Finally we’re up against a deadline. We had to have it in a couple of weeks, so I had written one. I think it must have been 9:00 at night, I had to go down to Luverne to his office. I said, “Ben, here.” I laid out on the basic principle that according to law a church
belongs to its original commitment. By leaving and going back to the Christian Reformed Church, they had rejected the original commitment.

The court gave the lawyers five minutes to give their cases. So Ben gets up there and says, “You know we often say that it’s a shame when churches go to law. But if we were in Russia today, we couldn’t have a case.” The judge says to him, “Now forget that. What are you here for?” (laughter). Ben broke out in a sweat. He stumbled through the five minutes. The other lawyer got up and presented his case, and they began to tear him apart on the basis of the brief that I had written. We came out of court, and Ben says to me, “If we win that case, I’m going to tell your consistory they have to give you a raise” (laughter).

Well, six months later, we got a decision that they allowed us a new case, and it was written in such a way we couldn’t lose it. We had bought three lots of property next to where their school is. We were going to build the church on new digs. We convinced Ben to take those three lots for his pay. It didn’t cost us a cent, other than those three lots. We got the church back and the parsonage and the whole business.

The Supreme Court system in Minnesota is a rather high quality one, and it was kind of interesting that we got them to change their prior decision.

MHH: That’s unusual, to say the least.

BW: Yes, that’s a long shot.

My real interest was always in building the churches. One of the things that I was convinced of right from the start was that if we were going to do mission work, it had to be simply on the basis of teaching our doctrine, because that was our strength.

I got the call to Lynden [WA]. They were totally disheartened. They hadn’t had a minister in years. Nobody would take a call there. They were down to five or six families. We went out there a couple of times and looked it all over. I thought, boy, this is a prime opportunity to test the system.

During those years I had been sent down to Houston to see what was going on there. Those people were interested in our doctrine. There were wild radicals when it came to politics, because they hated the Jews with a passion. I went to one church there where a guy was teaching out of the Greek New Testament. He had a massive audience. They had a whole recording room where people had these big seven-inch recorders to record his sermons, and they’d take them home and play them.

Then I got the call from Lynden, and I thought, here’s an opportunity to test the system. So when I got out to Lynden, the first thing I did was to begin to write a study sheet, called “Studies in Bible Doctrine.” My idea was to teach Reformed doctrine out of the Bible. You follow the confessions, but you don’t preach them. In fact, the first sermon of HH on the Heidelberg Catechism makes exactly this point: You don’t preach the Catechism, but you follow the Catechism and preach from scripture.

So I started writing these and, man, I had the crummiest mimeograph machine you could get (laughter). Maybe you don’t remember those mimeograph sheets…

MHH: I remember them very well.

BW: Oh, they were dirty outfits if you ever saw it. Terrible.

MHH: I used to work with them.

BW: Anyway, I started this, and I’d have a class during the week. So I sent these things out through the whole community. Got nothing back but a couple of letters: Don’t send me any more of this stuff. But I had built a mailing list—I don’t know where I got it all. That began to bring in response. So I would send it out and just say, we appreciate contributions to support this. Before long it became evident that this mailing list was growing. The amount of money that came in was sufficient to pay the bills, so it didn’t cost this little congregation anything.

Then I went to a motorized mimeograph machine, which was a big improvement, and an electric typewriter. But I figured something else has got to happen. There was a Dutch fellow there who had started a local radio station. I talked to him about the possibility of setting up an open-line telephone program in which I could explain our doctrine and take calls. He gave me an hour on Saturday night—I think it cost $12.00 for an hour. So every Saturday night I would go down there with my study sheets and build a discussion on that and take calls coming in. This grew quite well. Then we moved to a station closer to the border that covered all of Vancouver, and we would go down there on Saturday night. Then we came back to the Lynden station because they had built their bigger, more powerful station that covered Vancouver. Vancouver was an international city. You have all kinds of kooky people. You’d listen to them. The whole point is: get what they’re interested in, just let them talk, and then say, “What does the Bible say here?” You had to know your Bible pretty well.
That was one thing I learned in seminary: I mastered all of my proof texts. I had them down cold. Then if I could get people who were interested, I would try to go out and see them personally. I would hold them to the end of the program if I could, and tell the operator who was taking care of the phone calls to try to find out who they were or keep them on the line. Then I would hold a Bible class wherever they were. One day a woman said, “Oh, you should have a church like that up in Canada.” She was from the Christian Reformed Church. “Oh,” I said, “You get a group together and we’ll do that.” She’d get together through the years. But I also started to go door-to-door. I would get the mail at 10:00 in the morning, and then I’d go out till noon. I seldom got past two or three doors.

Usually my opening was, “Do you listen to Christian radio? Do you listen to KLYN for a good station? I’ve got a program. Are you interested in the Christian religion?” That would build up into listening to what they thought and then dealing with it. Pretty soon I knew all the conservative people in the valley, and they were complaining, “Our own minister never comes out and sees us. You’re here all the time.” I got along with them very fine.

Then two things broke out. Some Christian Reformed minister had come into town and got a coffee shop for the young people. He’d played for them this “Jesus Christ, Super-Star.” So I put ads all around town: what about “Jesus Christ, Super-Star?” I think that night I must have had just about the whole town listening to the broadcast. I just let them talk. Some guy called up and said, “What is rock music?” Well, he says, “Rock music is the music that comes out of the jungle. It’s the African music.” That always struck home with me. I took other calls and they argued back with him. It was very evident there was a big division in that town.

At that time John Hofman was minister in one of the Christian Reformed churches. John Hofman had grown up in First Church. He was going to go to seminary because Hoeksema was right. When the split came, he stood up and told HH off out of the audience. He ended up going to Calvin, and he was minister there in a church in Lynden. I had my office down in the church basement. One day I heard somebody upstairs. I went up there and there was John Hofman, picking through the pamphlet rack. He had somebody who needed HH’s pamphlet on “Infant Baptism.” He got working with the Campus Crusade people. They came up with “Key-73.” They were going to save the world in one year with this Campus Crusade. They had those four spiritual laws. I was there in all the classes. I went and bought the books. They thought they had me on the hook.

After everybody went through these classes, they had the people go out on Saturday morning to witness. They went out everywhere. Some went up to Vancouver, and some went down to Bellingham, and groups went all over the place. Saturday afternoon, they had a final meeting, and these people had to give witness. This Christian Reformed minister said, “We stopped at this one house in Bellingham and the man was listening to the football game, so we had to wait till half-time” (laughter). But we witnessed to him and told him about these four spiritual laws.” One crazy story after another. Finally they said, “How many of you are filled with the Spirit?” A few hands go up. Then he said, “How many would like to be filled with the Spirit?” Everybody stands up but me. I just let them talk. At the end of the meeting, I said, “There’s a lot I could talk about here. But Wednesday night, in church, we’re going to have a meeting, and I will talk about witnessing in a Reformed way.” There were six Christian Reformed churches there, and that night I had that little church packed. That was a start. I said, “Next week we will continue.” A big part of them came the next week, and that kept up all through the spring, until the end of the season. From that time on, I had a lot of people coming in.

To me, the key to mission work is that you’ve got to start with simply teaching doctrine. When you go through the whole liturgy of a Protestant Reformed church and preach Protestant Reformed—it doesn’t get through to them. You’ve got to sit down and talk to them. That was always the heart of HH’s teaching—this dialectic approach. Get a question and answer that question. In fact, there is an interesting quote from one of his sermons on Luke 24 about the men on the road to Emmaus. He says how these men were walking down this road talking about what had happened in Jerusalem, and Jesus comes up and says, “What things?” Now, Jesus knew more about what happened in Jerusalem than any of them did. But he stops. HH said, “There is the most fundamental principle of education. Do listen to me. Whenever you’re talking to somebody, if they agree with you, or if they disagree with you, follow this advice: let them talk, because when you get them talking, with their opinion or with their question, then
they are doubly interested in what you have to say about it." If you just talk to them, they’re just listening. Your fundamental approach has to be to get the audience talking. This basic principle of getting your people involved is fundamentally important for proper education. Once people are convinced of your doctrine, then they can come and listen to a sermon and follow it through. But you’ve got to catch them with their questions at that time.

We were getting quite a few people attending church, and some of them joining. There were people coming in very regularly so that when we left Lynden, it was up to about 25 families, and it grew all the way to 65. When we left, I had a very good relationship with the whole town, even the people who disagreed with us, because I always treated them respectfully. I never openly put them down.

We had people coming in every once in a while from Canada, who would listen to the radio program. One day we had a couple came in with two little kids. They were so persecuted because of their Christian faith. Every time this man had a job he would witness about it and tell people all about it. And they would fire him. They were finally down and out. They evidently just made themselves obnoxious wherever they went. I said to the little girl, “What’s your name?” “Repent from your sins.” I said, “I mean, what’s her name?” “Repent from your sins.” I said, “That’s the name you gave her?” “Yah, we had a hard time getting it on the birth certificate, but they finally did take it.” The little boy was sitting there and, swallowing, I said, “What’s his name?” “Or else you will perish,” they said (laughter).

Then I started getting letters from a guy. He was so in need of salvation. He was such a great sinner. If only I would come out and talk to him. So I went. He was living in a little trailer out near the bay. I went there and knocked on the door, and he got started talking. He started raving about you terrible people with your blood theology and on and on. He was just ranting and raving. He evidently knew about the religion, but all this terrible blood theology of ours was just a horrid thing. I got out of there as quickly as I could. Then I started getting letters from him. I answered some of the letters, but finally I just stopped answering them. Then I got a letter that said he was going to cause trouble in my church if I didn’t write him. He wrote a letter to the radio station threatening to blow up the towers for them. And he said that he had once threatened to kill President Ford and the FBI had come out to talk to him (laughter).

**MHH:** Wow! Strange people. Rumor has it that you were considerably influential in the formation of the Canadian [Protestant Reformed] churches. Is that so?

**BW:** That’s what I was getting to. I got side-tracked.

A Dutch couple from Edmonton came, and they wanted to see me the next morning. They said, “If we would have a church like [Lynden], we would have hundreds of people.” I said, “I don’t know if you’ll have hundreds of people, but if you can get a group together, I’ll fly up there and talk to them.” So they made arrangements for me to come, and I flew up there. They had a house jammed full of people, including their own minister. I just started talking. I said, “I come here because I’m concerned of the state of Reformed theology. Reformed theology is going by the way. People aren’t interested. They aren’t following it.” I talked about how important doctrine was, but I didn’t bring up anything controversial. The next night they had another group in another home. I said, “If you want me to come back in two weeks, I’ll come back.”

They would like to have that, so two weeks later I came up there again. Now it was a much smaller group. I said, “Let’s follow the basic principles of Reformed theology. What we’re concerned about is maintaining Reformed theology, so let’s talk about total depravity and go through the five points of Calvinism. I’ll come up two weeks from now and we’ll have another class.” So I kept on coming up every two weeks, and that brought us through about the end of the summer. They got a letter from their consistory: those meetings had to stop. I said, “It’s up to you. If you want to stop them, that’s your privilege. But if you want me to come back, I’ll come back.” They wanted me to come back.

Then I developed a different twist on the tapes. This was rather soon after cassette tapes came out. I would write a study sheet, and a week later I would make a tape. On that tape I would read some letters for fifteen minutes, and I would have a half-hour lecture. On the reverse side I’d put a sermon. I developed a little mailer of my own design so that I could send these out in the mail. I think they cost me 7¢ at the time. I’d put a little envelope in there that was just marked “contribution envelope.” That’s the only thing I would say about it. When I started working up in Edmonton, I would bring them a study sheet and a tape and say, “Now, take the study sheet and follow the tape. Then I’ll come back and discuss it.”
I did that all through the winter and for two years. Right away there was one guy wanted to start a new church. This church is no good. Let’s start a church. “No,” I said, “you don’t know anything about our churches. That’s not the point. The point is, are we agreed on Reformed doctrine, and do you believe the doctrine? That’s the only thing I’m here for. You keep going to your church, you pay the budget, you be there at all services, and talk to the people about doctrine. If you want to invite them here, that’s fine too.” And they got other people in. An elder from one of the churches came there quite early, with the purpose of breaking this thing up. He was going to point out what was wrong with us. Well, I talked to him. I said, “What’s your problem? Let’s talk about it.” He was so interested he was there the next week. Pretty soon he was one of the most regular attendants. His wife didn’t want anything to do with it, but he was always at the meetings. Finally with their eight or ten kids they became part of the group there, and he’s still there today.

This thing kept on going about an even two years. Then my dad got cancer, and Mom was alone. I got permission from the consistory to come and stay with mother through Dad’s illness because there was nobody else around. Prof. Decker went out and filled the pulpit in Lynden. Before I left, I said [to the Edmonton group], “You can just wait till I come back and we’ll take up again, or we’ll have Prof. Decker come out and hold some meetings. Or, if you want, you can ask for a missionary to come. Or, if you want, there’s even the possibility of going to the Classis and asking them to organize you into a congregation.” When I got back there in July, they said that they’d been thinking it over and they would like to be organized.

When they asked to be organized, Classis organized them. And that’s how they started.

It [the meeting arrangement] was a real neat setup. I could leave Thursday morning, drive to the airport in Vancouver, fly to Edmonton. They would pick me up early afternoon, drive me out to where we were going to have supper and then go to the meeting. Early Friday morning they’d drive me back to the airport. I would land in Vancouver and by noon on Friday I’d be back. The cost ran around 70 bucks. I think the Mission Committee picked up the tab on less than half and the people up there paid for the rest of it. All told it cost the denomination only two or three thousand dollars.

**BW**: That’s pretty amazing.

**MHH**: But we’ve lost the feel for the importance of the value and the validity of our doctrine.

That comes straight from Bavinck. Although H.H. was an admirer of Kuyper as an organizer, his theology came from Bavinck.

I have an unpublished dissertation by Hoekema on Bavinck’s view of the centrality of the heart—that the heart is central, and it’s the heart that determines what a person thinks, what a person wills, what a person does. H.H. always said, “If people have a good relationship with God, you don’t have to tell them what to do. They know. You don’t have to convince people that it’s wrong to commit adultery. They all know it’s wrong.”

After your dad [H. C. Hoeksema] got sick in Tasmania and flew home, there was a question of what to do there. They asked me to go there for a year.

**MHH**: You were where at this time?

**BW**: In Kalamazoo. I was willing to do it. Then all of a sudden they canceled that and they wanted to send [Prof. Herman] Hanko there, and then synod decided Hanko had to stay in the school. So we went there in the fall of 1990, and we were there till April of 1991. At that point the question was whether their students could come to our seminary or not. The biggest part of the people were dead against it. So I went there and then I stayed, just like your dad did, in Burnie. But I got on the telephone, and I talked to all of the ministers.

**MHH**: In Tasmania?

**BW**: Oh, no, through the whole country. They had churches in different places on the mainland. I got around and visited everybody. Here again: talk things out. Get to be a friend of everybody. Finally they had the presbytery meeting and they voted that their students could come here. Ina Kleyn said to me just a few weeks ago, “I thought, why in the world is he on my phone all the time. It costs so much money.” “But,” she said, “if you hadn’t done that, they wouldn’t have come.”

**MHH**: And we wouldn’t have two Kleyns in the ministry today. You filled the pulpit also while you were there?

**BW**: Yes, I filled the pulpit in Burnie. We had a wonderful time there. They are the most gracious hosts and hostesses you could get. They took you all over the place; you saw everything.

**MHH**: Rev. Woudenberg, how would you compare
DeWolf played into it. If you would hear his sermons days. That was the real point. In a very subtle way that was when it came to the top. We have to have these practical subjects. If you go back to the late 1940s, when the whole controversy was building, and again, it's on marriage, raising children—all subjects they have for conference and lectures. Again, we're preoccupied with the behavior of people. Look at the things people have to do, you are preoccupied with doctrine. Now it's preoccupied with what Classis and Synod says or does. When this type of preoccupation disappears, then you've lost what was the strength of our denomination.

MHH: Why do you think that it was so strong in your youth and that it is no longer strong today?

BW: Through 1953, we drifted out of this focus on doctrine into a focus on church polity. Now it's preoccupation with what Classis and Synod says or does. They can say or do anything they want, but that doesn't put it into the heart of the people. If it's just what you are doing that preoccupies everybody, you're back into works. You can say, theologically, we don't believe in conditions, but if you get preoccupied about what things people have to do, you are preoccupied with the behavior of people. Look at the subjects they have for conference and lectures. Again and again, it's on marriage, raising children—all these practical subjects. If you go back to the late 1940s, when the whole controversy was building, that was when it came to the top. We have to have more practical preaching. We're sick of this doctrine. That was the leading objection against HH in those days. That was the real point. In a very subtle way DeWolf played into it. If you would hear his sermons today, they would be doctrinal sermons compared to what we have.

I think one of the things that has affected this is the preoccupation of the ministry with counseling. Some years ago now, Jay Adams started this matter on counseling, with his book Competent to Counsel. You may be familiar with it.

MHH: I am indeed.

BW: His starting proposition is, you're competent. If you had a good seminary education, you are more competent to counsel than any psychiatrist. What's his method? His method is simply get people in every week, talk to them, and give them a worksheet. For example, you may recall, this lady comes in. She's depressed. You say to her, “How much ironing have you got that’s not done?” “Oh, I got piles of it all over the place.” “Well, here’s your worksheet for this week. Go home and get your ironing done. Then come back and you'll feel better.” But every week it's a work program. Do this, do that, which ends up with a kind of trickle-down theology. If you’re living right, it'll somehow sink down into your heart, so that it goes into your heart rather than coming out of it.

I think our people expect ministers to be counselors. I wouldn't say, don’t go to a counselor. But you have to recognize that that's not the job of a minister. You preach the scriptures. And expository sermons are losing out—good, expository sermons. And we've got the perfect example of it there. That's why [Hoeksema’s sermons] ought to be all typed out. Not all should be published. They vary in quality, they vary in their usefulness. But they are a real pattern of how it ought to be done. And it’s a different day and a different preoccupation. You have different problems today that they didn’t have in those days. It's the difference between the poverty of the depression and the wealth that we've become accustomed to. Pretty hard to fight that. You've got the media, you have the television. There’s an interesting book going around: Young, Restless, Reformed. There are Reformed people going back to Reformed doctrine all across the country. They're using rock music and they're using rap music and all the stuff that makes a bad show. But they're talking their doctrine. It's a perfect opportunity for us to play into. In fact, the last chapter of the book is about the people around Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who are delving into Reformed doctrine, and we don't even know it.

MHH: Do you feel that our churches are weaker than they were when you were young? Is that a...
correct inference for me to draw from some of your comments?

BW: If HH is correct, this is the food of life. The big problem we are dealing with is we have a lot of people who are not interested in doctrine, who don’t want doctrine, and who are saying these practical sermons are wonderful.

They’ve been led into that gradually. One of the advantages of 1953 was that a lot of them just left. So to a degree, it was purification. But a lot of them came out of a blind loyalty, and we carried along a lot of legalistic tendencies.

I had the call to be missionary. We didn’t have any place to work at the time, but they had to have a missionary. I said, “I’ll do that, but then I want to settle down in Grand Rapids and prepare material along the line of what I have been sending out.” This material started the work in Ghana and started the work in the Philippines, and worked very early with Paul Raj in India and with my contacts in Hungary—just teaching plain doctrine. I never, never bring up the Protestant Reformed Churches as Protestant Reformed Churches. That’s incidental. Sure, there’s a strength to our background. But our strength is completely in the theology that we received through Hoeksema, which represents the mainstream, the central, strongest stream of Dutch Reformed theology.

MHH: Are there any other issues that you would like to address or any other opinions that you would like to express concerning the churches?

BW: We’ve got some serious thinking we should do on our past. The Reformed Free Publishing Association was called “Free” because it was to be open to everybody. Here was to be a paper in which everybody would be free to express their opinion. We have a kind of cloak of silence that has spread through our churches. You don’t talk about anything we differ with. HH invited discussion on things he differed with. But somehow, if you have questions about something, then you’re not being loyal, and then you’re not really PR.

We have almost drifted into what Calvin called an “implicit faith.” You have faith in belonging to the right church. If you’re in there, you belong there. Just because someone joins the church, they can teach in the school. If they don’t belong to our church, they can’t teach in the school. Just because they’ve joined the church, does that make them competent to give good Reformed instruction? If our school system is so important to us, why aren’t we spending time discussing and studying what is the Reformed attitude or position in education, as far as what you teach? Are we capable even of discussion?

In our origin we maintained strongly the autonomy of the local congregation. Now we have had Classis and Synod override consistories in repeated cases that have really hurt the churches. We’ve closed down New Jersey. We’ve closed down Pella against the wishes of the people. Lynden was broken apart over against a vast majority of consistory members. That was not what we were built on. We were built on the idea that Classis and Synod are advisory bodies.

MHH: The advice of Classis and Synod seems to have a bit more teeth than it did…

BW: Oh, sure. It’s got strong teeth, to the point if you disagree, you’re out.

A lot of this is hidden. To have a closed session of Classis or Synod was almost impossible. If it was very personal, they might for a brief while. Now we have a lot of closed sessions. It’s not intended evilly, but it’s a lack of proper respect for what has gone before. And we have numerous times when Classis will make a decision, and sometimes within the same session, they make the opposite decision.

Anyway, I think that’s about it. We have a lot to do, and we’re not doing very well.

MHH: Thank you, Rev. Woudenberg, very much for the interview, for your time, for your comments and your views. This concludes this interview.

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March 8

**Read Genesis 25**

As we were discussing these stories in Bible class recently, a student raised her hand and said, “Would people start dreading being the oldest, because they never actually got the blessing?” I had never really thought of this before, but she had a point. There are many examples throughout the Bible of the covenant promise going to a child other than the oldest. Abel, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, David, and Solomon all fit this description, and I’m sure there are others. Of course, this happened only a handful of times over the span of thousands of years, but God is definitely teaching us something by this consistent deviation from social norms. God’s way is different from man’s way, and he’s the one in control of all things. God chooses whomever he will based solely on his mercy, not on any earthly situation or accomplishment.

Sing or pray Psalter # 27.

March 9

**Read Genesis 26**

Imagine you told your child not to touch the pan right when it comes out of the oven, because it’s very hot and will hurt them. They listen solemnly to your warning, but then proceed to grab the pan just as you bring it out. While you rinse the screaming child’s hand under cold water, you tell him you hope he has learned his lesson. However, the next time the casserole is finished, he proceeds to grab the pan immediately. As you again rinse his hand under cold water, his brother, who has been silently watching everything, seizes the pan in both hands. I, for one, would be pretty exasperated.

It would be absolutely senseless for the brother to grab the pan at this point, yet that is the same thing that Isaac did. He had heard about his father trying and failing at this same move TWICE, and somehow he still convinces himself that it’s the right thing to do. Sadly, we are no different. We know that this or that is a sin, and yet we give in to our sinful nature and do it anyway.

Sing or pray Psalter # 325.

March 10

**Read Genesis 27**

The reality television industry that is so prevalent today thrives on creating as much drama as possible, and the story of Jacob and his wives seems as if it would fit right in. First, Jacob marries the “wrong” girl. Then he tries to fix the situation by marrying the one he really wanted, which so happens to be his first wife’s sister, the following week. Both women want to have children with their husband, but only the unloved wife succeeds. This gives her hope that she will become the favorite, and prompts her sister to convince her husband to marry her servant. Unloved Leah stops having children, while Rachel’s servant begins having them. Leah freaks out that she is going to get behind in the game, and so she convinces Jacob to marry her servant as well. Before he knows it, Jacob has a house full of angry wives all vying for his attention. It’s hard to imagine what the supper table must have been like. Jacob’s family life was a living testament to all of us of the self-destructing nature of sin.

Sing or pray Psalter #291.

March 11

**Read Genesis 28**

We must not miss the irony in this story. Jacob did not trust in God to give him the covenant blessing, so he and his mother took matters into their own hands. Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob, but he knew that God’s blessing was only to Jacob, so he didn’t dare give it to Esau. By succeeding in making Isaac believe that he was Esau, Jacob failed to receive the only blessing he really needed, God’s blessing.

We often like to think that we know better than God, but man has never succeeded when he tries to do things his own way. Psalm 18:30 says, “As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.” Sometimes it is very difficult for us to see it while we are going through trials, but God’s way is always perfect, and he will always give us the strength to endure when we put our trust in him.

Sing or pray Psalter #42.

March 12

**Read Genesis 29**

It used to be that the primary goal of a wife was to provide a son to carry on the father’s name. This thinking even extended into modern world history, as we see from the story of King Henry VIII. This English king was famously married six times in his search for sons, and he had no problem disposing of anyone who didn’t quickly provide him with one. Ironically, the only wife to succeed in bearing him a son died only a couple of weeks later. I remember learning in school what happened with these six wives by memorizing, “Divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived.”

Sing or pray Psalter #42.
Leah knew that she was not the favorite wife, and she hoped that providing her husband with sons would turn him in her favor. The names Leah gave to her first few sons give us a very sad glimpse into her life. After each birth she had futile hope that now Jacob would love her as much as Rachel. God was also clearly showing Jacob by Leah’s fertility and Rachel’s barrenness that Leah was the chosen wife for him, but Jacob was hardened in his sin.

Sing or pray Psalter #220.

Read Genesis 30
What are the mandrakes talked about in this chapter, as well as in Song of Solomon 7:13? Well, there appears to be debate on that issue. Some think they were just some type of pretty, sweet-smelling flower, but many point to a plant that botanists have named Atropa mandragora, according to Smith’s Bible Dictionary. This plant has similarities to the poisonous nightshade and the tomato, and is a member of the potato family. It is native to the area of the world in which Jacob’s family lived and looks a little bit like lettuce. Its fruit is about the size of a small apple and has a very pleasant taste and odor. The Arabs have nicknamed it “devil’s apple” because of its power to encourage intimacy. Here, Reuben brings some of these “apples” to Leah, which makes both her and Rachel confident that their husband Jacob will spend the night with her. Rachel attempts to get Leah to share the mandrakes with her, but Leah wants Jacob all to herself and is having none of it. Once again, it’s sad to see the kind of family life that resulted from Jacob’s sin.

Sing or pray Psalter #2.

Read Genesis 31
Laban destroyed his own family with his greed, as evidenced by Leah and Rachel’s response to Jacob in verses 14–16 of this chapter. This is one of the few instances in which the two sisters were united on something. They had been used by their father and were looking forward to getting away from him. Laban had sold them to Jacob, as if they were no more than cattle. Then, instead of showing love towards his son-in-law’s family, he tried to squeeze whatever he could out of them.

Greed is destroying the family unit in our own day as well. According to childcareaware.org, Coloradobans are paying $26,000 per year to have a baby in daycare, and the cost is similar in other states. The child daycare industry is booming, because society tells the mother that she should be in the workplace, not the home. In addition, about half of all marriages end in divorce, according to cdc.gov. This statistic, along with the common-law marriage tendency, has caused a huge spike in children growing up in a facility instead of a home. The push to accumulate as much earthly wealth as possible is done at the expense of the family.

Sing or pray Psalter #4.

Read Genesis 32
This story of Jacob wrestling with God reminded me of the parable of the persistent friend in Luke 11. In it a man goes to his friend’s house in the middle of the night and asks for some food to give to his guest. The friend refuses at first, but finally gives in because the man is persistent. He keeps knocking and does not take no for an answer. Jesus concludes this parable in verse 10 by saying, “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” God commands us to have active faith. We don’t just lie back helplessly and let whatever happens happen. We bring our petitions before God. We show our faith by spiritually wrestling with God, as Jacob did physically, and pleading our cause. Only those in whom God has worked believing faith wrestle with him, because they are the ones who know he’s the only one that can help them in time of need.

Sing or pray Psalter #6.

Read Genesis 33
In Genesis 33:10, Jacob urges Esau, “Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.” Why does Jacob seem to be comparing God’s face to that of his wicked brother Esau? Was this a sin on Jacob’s part?

Matthew Henry provides two possible explanations for this statement of Jacob. First, Jacob sees that Esau has moved on from his prior anger towards him for stealing his blessing and now they can be friends. This friendship is what Jacob desires to have and has already experienced with God. Second, Jacob sees in Esau’s friendly attitude towards him that God is caring for him. God has answered his prayer and is protecting him from his murderous brother.

Sing or pray Psalter #5.

Read Genesis 34
When I was in student teaching, I had the opportunity to sit in on parent-teacher conferences. There was one student who had failed a subject because he had cheated on a test, which the parents didn’t know about. As the teacher explained that the failing grade was due to cheating, I saw the father start to get very angry. He was angry at the teacher for not telling him beforehand and at his son for doing it. However, I had the disturbing feeling that he wasn’t angry because it was a sin, but because his son had embarrassed him. I saw no love on that man’s face, and could only imagine what was going to happen when father got home that night.

Just like this father, Simeon and Levi were very angry about a sin, but for the wrong reasons. These men were seeking revenge, not just punishment for sin. They were...
embarrassed by the fact that their sister had been violated, and they intended to make the guilty man’s entire city pay. Simeon and Levi show their true colors by lying and brutally murdering an entire city, and by their callous response to their father at the end of the chapter.

Sing or pray Psalter #12.

**Read Genesis 35**

Jacob finally returns to Bethel as God had commanded, something that he’d been putting off as long as possible. He tried to appease God by making an altar in Shechem, as if God would agree that that was good enough. This reminded me of one of my siblings who used to say, “Don’t worry, dad, I spanked myself.”

When we discussed this in class, the students were confused why Jacob wouldn’t want to go back to the place where God had appeared to him. In response, I told them to imagine that their parents suddenly had the ability to know everything they were thinking. Would they want to be around their parents very much? You should have seen the looks on their faces, when they started to think about it this way! That’s how Jacob felt. He had stood before the all-knowing, omnipotent God, and he was very conscious of his weaknesses and sin.

Sing or pray Psalter #61.

**Read Genesis 36**

In this genealogy we read of Amalek, the son of Eliphaz, the son of Esau and his wife Adah. Esau hated Jacob, and Adah was a Canaanite, so it’s no wonder that there was fierce hatred between the Amalekites and the Israelites. There are quite a few major battles between these two nations mentioned in the Bible. In Exodus 17, we have the account of the Amalekites trying to destroy Israel soon after they had left Egypt. Israel won whenever Moses had his rod pointed towards heaven and lost whenever his arm started drooping. In Numbers 14, God directed the Amalekites to defeat Israel, because they didn’t believe God would be able to give them the land of Canaan. In Judges 7, God delivered an enormous host of Midianites and Amalekites into the hands of Gideon and his three hundred men by them blowing trumpets and breaking lanterns in the middle of the night. Finally, in 1 Samuel 15, we read of God’s giving Saul a great victory over the Amalekites, but then sending Samuel to tell Saul that the kingdom would be given to another because he didn’t completely destroy them as God had commanded.

Sing or pray Psalter #80.

**Read Genesis 37**

Have you ever been in a group where a fellow saint’s name was being slandered? You know that what people are saying is wrong and that you should stand up for what’s right, but you don’t want to lose popularity with your friends. After allowing the mockery to rain down for a while, you finally speak up with something like, “C’mon guys, let’s leave him alone for a while.” This allows you to feel like you’re doing the right thing while not hurting your standing in the group.

However, God does not see this as doing the right thing. When we allow a sin to go on around us and don’t speak strongly against it, then we are guilty of that sin ourselves. This is the situation with Reuben in our story. He knew it was wrong to mistreat Joseph, but he wasn’t spiritually strong enough to stand up to his brothers, so he made a weak compromise with them of throwing Joseph in a pit instead of killing him. God calls us to stand up for the truth, not make compromises with those who hate it.

Sing or pray Psalter #71.

**Read Genesis 38**

Throughout scripture God shows us how blinded we are to our own sin, yet how quickly we see that sin in others. The story of Nathan the prophet coming to David in 2 Samuel 12 likely came to mind when you read this chapter, as it did me. Here, Nathan tells David a story about a rich man who had a visitor, and instead of killing a lamb from his own flock, he slew the single precious lamb of his poor neighbor to feed the traveler. David was livid when Nathan told him this story and demanded that the rich man be put to death. It was then that Nathan told David that he was the rich man in the story, because he had taken Uriah’s wife and then his life.

Judah is rebuked by God just as dramatically in this chapter. When Judah hears that his daughter-in-law had been playing the harlot he says, “Bring her forth, and let her be burnt,” even though he had just slept with a harlot himself. Then Tamar brings out his signet, bracelets, and staff, and Judah is forced to admit his sin.

Sing or pray Psalter #138.

**Read Genesis 39**

We are called throughout scripture to flee temptation. 1 Corinthians 6:18 brings this out specifically in regards to fornication by saying, “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” Fleeing from sin means that we make a conscious effort to stay away from whatever it is that tempts us. It means that if we are tempted to overindulge ourselves at the bar we pass on the way home, then we had better go home a different way. Joseph did not have this luxury. He had no choice but to keep working in Potiphar’s house where the man’s wife threw herself at him every day. Joseph could not “go home a different way.” Instead, God was his escape. He refused to give in to temptation, because he wouldn’t sin against his master and against his God. As Psalm 46:1 puts it, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

Sing or pray Psalter #126.
**Read Genesis 40**

When we studied this history in class, one of the questions the students wanted to know was whether or not Potiphar really believed his wife’s accusations against Joseph. I don’t think we can know for sure, but it’s doubtful. Joseph was a very honest, hardworking man, which was obvious to everyone he had contact with. Potiphar trusted him so much that he gave Joseph complete control of his household, to the point that Potiphar didn’t even know what he owned. The only one who knew was Joseph. In addition, Joseph was given a position of authority in the prison, even as an inmate himself. Genesis 39:22–23a tells us, “And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand.” Just like Potiphar before him, the keeper of the prison trusted Joseph completely. Even while he was going through these trials, God made it clear to Joseph that he was with him.

Sing or pray Psalm #24.

**Read Genesis 41**

Isn’t it amazing how quickly life can change? Two negative examples of this come to mind immediately. First, it was said of Job, “This man was the greatest of all the men of the east” (Job 1:3). He had everything one could want, including a large family. Then, in one day, he lost his children, his servants, and all his possessions. The second example that comes to mind is Belshazzar. In Daniel 5, we read of Belshazzar having a huge feast with one thousand of his government officials, in which he drank from the gold and silver vessels taken from the temple. Suddenly, a hand wrote on the wall that in which he drank from the gold and silver vessels taken from the temple. Suddenly, a hand wrote on the wall that. The second example that comes to mind is Belshazzar. In Daniel 5, we read of Belshazzar having a huge feast with one thousand of his government officials, in which he drank from the gold and silver vessels taken from the temple. Suddenly, a hand wrote on the wall that he would be overthrown, and he was killed that very night.

On the other hand, the story of Joseph here is a positive example of this. In one day, Joseph went from sitting in a dungeon with his life in danger to being the second in command over the entire nation of Egypt. One day he was wallowing in his own filth, and the next he was riding in Pharaoh’s chariot with a gold chain around his neck.

Sing or pray Psalm #35.

**Read Genesis 42**

This trip the brothers made to Egypt to buy food definitely didn’t go as they had planned. First of all, they were immediately accused of being spies. It made perfect sense that Egypt’s rivals would be interested in attacking while Egypt was weak, so this accusation must have made the brothers fear for their lives. After accusing them, Joseph threw them in prison for three days, giving them plenty of time to think about what was happening and why they deserved it. Then Joseph told them that Simeon would remain in prison until the brothers could return with Benjamin and prove that their story was true. If they couldn’t convince their father to let Benjamin go, they would die. To make matters worse, they found that all their money was still in their sacks during the journey home. Now they had to return to the man that was accusing them of being spies and explain why the money had still been in their sacks when they left Egypt, while keeping their younger brother safe. These men were being punished for their sin, and it was far from over.

Sing or pray Psalm #154.

**Read Genesis 43**

It’s natural for us to feel a little sorry for Joseph’s brothers when we think about how utterly confused they must have been. First they are randomly accused of being spies. Then their money appears back in their sacks, even though they remember paying the Egyptians. When they return to the land they learn that they are invited to a special banquet with Joseph, and they have no idea why. Is the Egyptian ruler being kind to them or getting ready to kill them? In addition to that problem, the brothers are anxious about explaining the money in their sacks. They nervously bring this issue to the attention of Joseph’s steward, but he tells them not to worry because he had their money. What? That definitely wasn’t the answer they were expecting. Then, at the banquet, Joseph allows them to clean up after their long journey, makes conversation, and feeds them a delicious meal. The brothers give each other astonished and confused glances at this drastic turn of events. To top it all off, they look over at their brother Benjamin and find enormous piles of food all around him. What was going on?

Sing or pray Psalm #152.

**Read Genesis 44**

This story reminds us that man never “gets away” with his sin. Joseph’s brothers had no problem selling him into slavery and bringing a huge amount of grief upon their father by their lies, and now they were receiving the just punishment for their sin. There were now agreeing to become the slaves of the very brother they sold into slavery themselves. They showed no remorse over destroying their brother’s life, and now they were forced to save their younger brother from the same circumstances they had brought upon his older sibling. As we see all throughout the Old Testament, this is a very vivid earthly picture of what is true today spiritually. Although it can often appear that the wicked have the most carefree life with no obligations or responsibilities, God will still punish sin. Wicked man finds that true happiness eludes him in this life, and when death comes for him there is only the weeping and gnashing of teeth for all of eternity. It is only by God’s grace that we are saved from that same end ourselves.

Sing or pray Psalm #240.
Read Genesis 45

Genesis 45:7–8a says, “And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.” Sometimes we can’t understand how God’s plan is working together when we are experiencing a trial, but he gives us a glimpse of it later in life. Joseph showed great faith throughout his whole life of slavery and imprisonment, but there must have been times when he doubted God’s promise to him. Yet he is now able to look back and clearly see God’s purpose in all of it. If Joseph had not become a slave in Egypt, he would not have been accused by Potiphar’s wife. If he had not been accused by Potiphar’s wife, he would not have interpreted the butler’s dream. If he had not interpreted the butler’s dream, he would never have been brought to Pharaoh. If he’d never been brought to Pharaoh, there wouldn’t have been a plan to store food. If there had been no stored food, Joseph’s family would have died. If Joseph’s family would have died, the covenant promise would have been broken.

Sing or pray Psalter #241.

Read Genesis 46

It is amazing to see throughout history how God always preserves his people and uses the wicked for their good. Here we read that Pharaoh gave Jacob and his family the land of Goshen, which was the best land in all of Egypt. Wouldn’t Pharaoh want to keep the best land for himself? This land was given to them because it was good for grazing, and the sons of Jacob were shepherds. Since this was an occupation that the Egyptians saw as lowly and unclean, they kept their distance. God used the Egyptians’ own wicked ideas to provide his people with the best the land had to offer. This negative view of shepherds pointed to man’s rejection of our Savior Jesus Christ, the shepherd of the elect. This antithesis is also clearly shown in the fact that the Israelites lived in Egypt, but they did not mingle with the Egyptians. In the same way, we live here in this wicked world, but we don’t join with it.

Sing or pray Psalter #55.

Read Genesis 47

The law of supply and demand explains how business works. If there is a lot of a product, the price goes down. No one would expect to pay a lot for a plastic ring, because there’s tons of plastic around. However, if there is a very limited supply of a product, the price goes up. People expect to pay a lot of money for a gold ring with a precious stone or diamond on it, because there’s a much smaller amount of those things available.

The famine placed Pharaoh in the perfect business position, because he had the only consistent supply of food. Since the people would die if they didn’t get it, this allowed Pharaoh to charge whatever he wanted. Once the people had given him all their money, they started trading in their livestock for food. Once Pharaoh owned all this, they sold themselves and their land to him. This meant that from then on the Egyptians had to give one fifth of their crop to Pharaoh every year. At the end of the seven years of famine, Pharaoh was one of the most powerful men in history.

Sing or pray Psalter #262.

Read Genesis 48

As I was reading this chapter, I suddenly wondered why Joseph was Rachel’s son. If Rachel was so wicked, then why did God make this righteous man her son and not Leah’s? As I thought and discussed this question, I came to realize two things. First, we don’t know that Rachel was wicked. The Bible tells us about her doing wicked things, but it never says that she was reprobate. In Jeremiah 31:15 we read of Rachel weeping for her children, which doesn’t put her in a negative light. Second, God’s people come from every possible background, and it’s not for us to judge. Sometimes we like to speculate over whether or not we believe someone is saved based on their public actions, but we have no way of knowing for sure, and it isn’t for us to know. One of the greatest joys in the life of the church is seeing those who were brought up in the world being led to see the truth. We must leave God’s work to God. Our job is just to spread the good news of the gospel to all nations.

Sing or pray Psalter #238.

Read Genesis 49

As I read Israel’s blessing upon his sons, I was struck by the fact that many of them are pretty negative. For example, we read of Reuben in verse 4, “Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wastest up to thy father’s bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.” Biblegateway.com explains that, as the firstborn, the priesthood, the royal line, and the double inheritance should have come to Reuben. However, because of his great weakness he received none of these things. Instead the priesthood went to Levi, the royal line was Judah, and Joseph received the double inheritance through his two sons. Deuteronomy 33:6 tells us that Reuben was a small and weak tribe; no great man ever came from the tribe of Reuben. They were also one of the first tribes to be taken away into captivity (1 Chron. 5:26).

Still, it’s important for us not to lose sight of the fact that Reuben, although very weak, was still part of the church. By nature we are all like Reuben. Heaven will be full of Reubens who have been delivered from sin and weakness that they might sing God’s praises for all of eternity.

Sing or pray Psalter #143.
April 2

Read Genesis 50
When we studied ancient world history, I had the students mummify stuffed animals. We learned that mummification was a pretty involved process. First, the brain and all other organs, except the heart, had to be removed. For the brain, this meant being pulled out through the nose with a little hook. Then the body cavity was filled with stuffing and left to dry in salts for about forty days, as mentioned in Genesis 50:3. Finally, the body was wrapped in linen, covered with a sheet, and placed in the sarcophagus, or coffin.

This chapter speaks of both Jacob and Joseph being embalmed by the Egyptians when they died. We’ve probably all heard of the mummies of Egypt, but why did the Egyptians embalm their dead? The reason is that they believed that the soul left the body when someone died, but would need to be able to recognize the body when it came back for it later. The Egyptians were correct in saying that our soul leaves our body at death, but they did not understand that God has no need of an intact earthly body in order to raise us on the last day.

Sing or pray Psalter #261.

April 3

Read Exodus 1
The Israelites were like an itchy scab on the Egyptians. Have you ever had a scab on your leg that itched horribly, and you just had to scratch it? Your mother said to leave it alone, because itching it would only make it worse, but you couldn’t help it. You itched around the scab a little bit, but that only made it itch more. The more you scratched it the more it itched, until finally it started bleeding again.

Exodus 1:12 says of the Egyptians enslaving the Israelites, “But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.” In their attempt to weaken the nation of Israel, the Egyptians only succeeded in making them stronger. This is really true of the wicked all throughout history. Wicked man always has as his goal the destruction of the church, but God uses him for the church’s benefit.

Sing or pray Psalter #122.

Read Exodus 2
Oh, the irony! Pharaoh is doing anything he can think of to try to weaken the Israelites. He demands that the midwives kill all the baby boys, but they claim that the Israelite women are having the babies too fast for them to get there and do anything about it. Since it’s obvious that the midwives aren’t going to cooperate, Pharaoh commands all the people of Egypt to throw the Israelite baby boys into the river. Pharaoh figures that this method of extermination will be easier for the people to fulfill. Of course, there is irony that Pharaoh is commanding his people to pollute their drinking water with corpses, but that isn’t the real issue here. What’s really ironic is that after trying so hard to kill all the baby male Israelites, his own daughter saves one and raises him in Pharaoh’s house! This lends a new meaning to the phrase “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.” Not only that, but this was the one Israelite that Pharaoh really needed to kill, as Moses would be used by God to lead the people out of Egypt.

Sing or pray Psalter #276.
I am a member of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (LRF), which is a mission work of the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland. While Northern Ireland belongs to the United Kingdom (UK), Limerick, where the LRF is located, is a city in the Republic of Ireland, a sovereign country independent of the UK. This political difference also defines the difference in religious background, explaining the unique (from a PRC mission work point of view) situation in which the LRF finds itself. Northern Ireland is a roughly even mixture of Protestants and Roman Catholics, and while a lot of the Protestants are in liberal, apostatizing denominations, and many don’t even go to church regularly, Northern Ireland nevertheless has one of the highest concentrations of Bible-believing evangelicals in Europe. In that way it is somewhat similar to the United States. The Republic of Ireland, on the other hand, never truly had a reformation, such that Protestants are a tiny minority, and only 1–2% of the population are evangelical. Most of the evangelicalism is of the independent Baptist and Pentecostal type, with little to no knowledge of Reformed theology. The nominally Roman Catholic majority is highly secularized, with religion being mostly restricted to Easter and Christmas church attendance. The loss of cultural influence of the once dominant Roman Catholic church was recently underscored by the Irish people voting in gay marriage in a landslide referendum in 2015, during which any appeals to religion for an argument against gay marriage were considered faux pas. Thus the majority is in reality highly secular in the post-Christian, post-modern sense: despising any hint of Christianity while being mostly ignorant of its teachings, they have embraced evolution, hedonism, relativism, and leftist, along with a smidgen of humanistic politeness to give a self-righteous veneer of love.

Thus our mission field, even though in a nominally Christian country, is vastly different from that of most PR churches: the few evangelicals around us mostly despise Calvinism in general and our mission work in particular, while the majority of secular Catholics despise all religion (though non-Christian religions are despised in a politically correct way). As such, most people are not really willing to listen to even the first introduction we make. The question of an unconditional covenant or the free offer of the gospel means as much to them as the necessity of supersaturation for nucleation means to someone not acquainted with physical chemistry.

Nevertheless, the white horse of the gospel is going forth conquering and to conquer, even in Limerick, Ireland. Jesus, the Lord of the church, has gathered about 15-20 of us from a mostly evangelical independent Baptist background to meet twice a Lord’s Day to hear Reformed sermons by our faithful missionary, Rev. McGeown. Through faithful preaching (we do not have the Lord’s Supper yet as we still lack elders) as well as catechism classes and Bible study, we are being continuously built up in our faith, and most of us have fully embraced the Three Forms of Unity as understood by the PRC. We are learning to live together in the communion of saints; to be better fathers, mothers, children, employees, students, neighbours; to live the antithetical life of grace. As such, we have very similar trials to any established church. That there are so few of us carries the obvious difficulty of discouragement and a lack of older people to be role models (as many of us are young parents), although it does create a very close bond between the members, who all know (and love!) each other quite well. Furthermore, King Jesus has been constantly adding people to our fellowship, both through the birth of four covenant children (all of whom Rev. McGeown baptized) and through evangelical contacts becoming convinced of the Reformed faith. Despite this, our fellowship has not grown numerically over the past 2–3 years, as additions have been counter-balanced by very painful losses of members mostly returning to generic evangelical churches.

Recently, however, we have had increased interest from several Muslims and a Hindu. Ireland, like most other Western nations, is experiencing a huge influx of immigrants from India and Muslim countries, and it seems these people are much more
interested in talking about religion. The evangelistic lectures that we hold every 2–3 months and have widely advertised in the past are, apart from our own members and usual contacts, only being attended by a handful of Muslims and Hindus that we personally know through work. In years past we focused these lectures and our outreach on the evangelicals in the city, which we seem to have exhausted in terms of interest; we subsequently targeted pious Catholics, with little fruit, and then attempted to reach the unchurched, the secular, for whom we now run very basic lectures such as “Looking at the Meaning of Life” and “Who is Jesus?”, though we have so far also had little to no interest from such unchurched people.

Although we all know it isn’t about numbers, we all are concerned about the lack of numerical growth overall, and would really appreciate prayers for this. The aim of our mission work is to be established as a proper church with elders and deacons; even if all our current members were sufficiently spiritually mature, we would probably still lack the numbers needed to make this happen. Furthermore, we need wisdom to know how to engage people in our culture and to be faithful witnesses to our families and colleagues. We also have several members and families who are experiencing deep, and in some cases long-term health trials. Thus for both these reasons, we covet your prayers that we may remain enthusiastic about the wonderful truth of God’s particular grace that we have learned and now live every day.

Last, let me say that we are all extremely thankful to God for the PRCA: thankful for the rich doctrinal heritage we have received through the PRC, of the Reformed faith in all its glory (the glory of God) as it defends the sovereignty of God and the immutability of his love in all spheres of theology and (covenant) life. We are also extremely grateful for your financial support of our mission work and our missionary pastor. And we are certain that Jesus will build his church, because this he has promised.

Manuel is a member of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship.

Christian Living

Brian Feenstra

 Mercy for the Poor, Honor for the Maker of the Poor

Note from the Society for Protestant Reformed Special Education: “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made Day” at Heritage Christian School quickly becomes one of the favorite school days for students and staff alike. On this special day, volunteers pour into the school to present a particular disability to the students, generating in them a deeper love for our special needs children and a keener awareness of their God-given disabilities. Each year, this day is a tremendous success. To begin this year’s “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made Day,” Seminarian Brian Feenstra led the school chapel, reflecting on our calling to honor the Maker of the poor by showing mercy to all, especially those with special needs. What follows is his speech.

Psalm 139:14: “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.”

Proverbs 17:5: “Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.”

Proverbs 14:31: “He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.”

God is the God of the poor. That is what we sing in Psalter 112, stanza 4:

Although I poor and needy be,
The Lord in love takes thought for me;
Thou art my help in time of need,
My Saviour, Lord, art Thou;
Then, O my God, I pray, I plead,
Stay not, but save me now.

This is a theme that runs throughout the Scriptures. God loves the poor. God helps the poor.
God saves the poor.
God defends the poor.
These two passages from Proverbs teach us how God views the poor, and how we are called to treat the poor.

Who are the poor? To be poor means to lack something. The poor person does not have something that he needs. The poor person does not have enough. Usually we think of poor people as people who do not have enough money. But a person can be poor if he lacks ANYTHING that he needs. A person can be poor if he does not have enough strength, knowledge, ability, friendship, or anything else that he needs. So as we consider the poor, do not think only about money, but also about other things of which our classmates and friends do not have enough.

What do the poor have to do with the event that we celebrate today, “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”? Today is a day to learn about the poor among us, and what we can do to help them. We are especially concerned with those who have disabilities and special needs. But we are also concerned about every one of our classmates who are poor: those who have troubles, difficulties, or weaknesses. And let us not be uncomfortable to think of our classmates as poor this morning. Being poor is nothing to be ashamed of, which is why I began the way that I did. We are all poor. We all have troubles and difficulties and weaknesses. And we all need help from one another. When we give that help to the poor, we honor our Maker, the God who loves the poor.

The Mockery of the Poor

Mocking the poor is laughing at the poor for their problems or difficulties. Oppressing the poor is hurting them and holding them down, so that pain from being poor is made even worse.

There are many examples of the mockery and oppression of the poor in scripture. Jesus pointed out the wickedness of the Pharisees because they mocked and oppressed the poor. The Pharisees liked the rich people better than the poor people. When the rich man came into church, the Pharisees would give him the best seat. But when a poor man came to church, they gave him the worst seat or no seat at all. This is one of many instances in which the Pharisees did not love the poor and seek to do them good.

The greatest example of the poor being mocked and oppressed is with Jesus himself. The world mocked and hurt our poor Savior, Jesus Christ, as he hung on the cross. They laughed and shouted at him: “if you are the son of God, get yourself down from that cross; you saved others but you cannot even save yourself!” They spit in his face and slapped him. Men mocked and oppressed Jesus.

These proverbs imply that the poor are often mocked and oppressed. It is always our tendency to mock and hurt one another other, especially the poor. It is not all that hard for us to mock a poor person for his problems. Much easier it is to avoid helping them, and instead join in mocking them.

I still remember how that happened when I was in school. We had a wonderful special needs girl in our class. She was so sweet. She almost always had a smile on her face and a positive attitude even though she could not walk, could barely talk, and would never learn most of the things that the rest of us were able to learn. But I also remember a few people saying mean things to her and about her. How sad! Even more sad was that I did not say anything to stop the mockery. I was afraid to defend her. It was much easier to join in and speak lowly of her behind her back. And that still bothers me to this day.

Why are the poor mocked and hurt? The poor are not great in the eyes of men. The wicked world says that the poor are weak. The wicked world praises the rich, the professional athletes, and the good singers. But we would be wrong to think that the famous people of this world are more important than the poor.

Mocking the poor is rooted in pride. We are tempted to mock the poor and hurt them because we think that we are better than they are. Do you think that you are better than any of your classmates? Do you think that you are better than anyone who has disabilities or special needs? Do you think that being a fast runner makes you better? Do you think that being smarter makes you better? You are not! Thinking that you are better is pride. And thinking that you are better than the poor is sin. Mocking the poor because you think you are better is even worse. God hates it when we mock the poor, because he is the maker of the poor.
The Maker of the Poor

God is the maker of all men. God created all of us, each a special creation of God. We are fearfully and wonderfully made by our Maker (Ps. 139:14). We are an amazing creation of God. The creation of man is so amazing that no scientist will ever discover all there is to know about man’s body. We are masterpieces of our Maker.

God made each one of his masterpieces different. God made both the poor man and the rich man. That is what 1 Samuel 2:7–8 teaches us: “The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, and he hath set the world upon them.”

God made the boy who can run fast, as well as the girl who needs a walker to walk around. God made the strongest and the weakest are all masterpieces, amazing creations.

Because God is my maker, I may not be unhappy with who I am. He made me just the way that he wanted me to be. I may not be unhappy with what I look like. I may not be disappointed with my abilities. And I may not be jealous with what God gave others. God is my maker. He made me just right. I must be content with the way that God made both me and my neighbor. Why do we not always see that? Why is it that we look at the poor person as though he or she is not a masterpiece, but a monster? Because we forget that God is our maker. How do you see yourself? How do you see your classmates? You are God’s handiwork, a marvelous creation.

Thus mocking the poor is reproaching God, who is the maker of the poor. That is what makes the sin of mocking the poor so terrible. Reproaching God is telling God that he did not do a good job—his masterpieces do not look so nice. This is the opposite of honoring God. Honoring God is praising him for the wonderful work he has done.

The point of this proverb is that when you mock and hurt the poor, you tell God that his work is bad. God made all men. Man is his handiwork. When you mock God’s creature, you are mocking God himself. God also chose what to give every man. God chose who would be poor and who would be rich. God chose who would be a fast runner and who would not even be able to walk. God chose some people to have disabilities and special needs. The Maker makes everyone just the way he wanted, and he gives them exactly what he wanted to give them.

Who are we to tell God that his work is bad? We are nothing. We may never disapprove of God’s work. His work is perfect. Do you realize that when you make fun of someone for being poor that you are spitting on God’s masterpiece? Let us not mock or hurt the poor, but have mercy on them.

Honoring the Maker of the Poor through Mercy

Our calling is to have mercy on the poor. Mercy is feeling the pain of the poor person who is in trouble and helping them out of that trouble. This is the very opposite of mocking them and hurting them. Mercy is helping them.

It is as though the poor person is stuck in the mud-pit. Mercy is seeing his pain and feeling it myself. It hurts me to see him in such terrible pain. I want to help him! I need to help him! So I reach for his hand and drag him out of that mud-pit.

How do we show mercy for the poor in our class? Love the poor, and desire to help them. Put their needs above your desires. Eat your lunch with your classmates who have special needs, and spend your recess time with them. I think you will soon find that both of you will enjoy it. Make a special point to include those with special needs in your conversation. Pick first the players who are normally picked last. Defend the poor person that everyone mocks on the bus. Leave an encouraging note in the desk of that person who does not have very many friends. That is a very short list that all of you need to make longer. Do all that you can to show mercy toward the poor.

Do that because this is what Christ did for us. This is the gospel. Christ had mercy for us poor sinners. Christ saw us hopelessly stuck in the mud-pit, the pit of sin. Because he loved us, he felt bad for us, and desired us to be free of our sin. So he went down into that mud-pit of sin, covering himself with our muddy sin, and pulled us out. He cleaned us up and gave us new clothes. Christ, the glorious Lord, was mocked and hurt for us. He died in the place of poor sinners to pay their debt. He did not save us from our sins because we deserved it. He had mercy on us because he loved us who were poor sinners.

We are followers of Christ! The things that he did for us, we want to do for others. If we love Christ, then we will have mercy on the poor. We
will help our classmates out of the mud too. No, we can never clean away sin like Christ did for us, but God certainly calls us to help our poor classmates in their troubles.

When we show mercy to the poor, we give honor to the God who made them. Helping our classmates who have needs gives praise to God. Having mercy on the poor shows that we think highly of God’s masterpieces. I pray that you learn much today at school that will teach you how to be merciful to the poor. For then you will learn to praise God for his fearful and wonderful creation of man.

Brian is currently a senior seminarian at the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

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**The Heavens Declare His Glory**

*Rev. Cory Griess*

This article is an adaptation of a speech given on August 17, 2016 at the Young Adults Retreat held at Lake Okoboji, IA.

Psalm 19:1–4: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”

**The Heavens’ Task**

The heavens declare something. That is, without speaking they speak. To declare is first of all to communicate. These inanimate objects, the sun, moon, stars, galaxies, objects with no brains, no consciousness, are communicating. More properly they are mouths through which God is communicating something. God reveals things about himself through them.

To declare is, second, to communicate authoritatively. The Hebrew word indicates more than to speak; the word is translated correctly declare. The heavens are preaching. The sun, moon, and stars are heralds placed above us to declare the message of the King.

Where does their voice travel? Verse 4 says, their line (or voice) is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. There is nowhere a human being can go to escape this declaration. In America as well as in China the voices speak. On an ocean, on a mountain, where you can hear the voice of no other human being on earth, in a place where there is no cell phone coverage and where not even Siri or “ok Google” can reach you, these voices are still heard loudly and clearly. The earth is a ball spinning through the vast universe, as though God was ensuring that from all directions all the voices of his heavenly preachers would be heard by men.

Who on earth hears this declaration? Every single human being hears and understands. Psalm 19:3: “There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.” The heavenly heralds’ declaration is spoken in a universal tongue. It overcomes the divisions of language at Babel. Their speech is a speech that every human being intuitively knows and can receive. Men don’t have to learn the language in which the heavens make their declarations; they are born with the ability to understand it. No matter how loud it gets with the rumbling of traffic and trains and planes and jackhammers, this speech is heard.

When do the heavens speak thus? Every second of every day, from the beginning of creation to the end they speak. Verse 2: “Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” In addition the translation of verse 1 is better read the heavens are declaring, constantly declaring, the glory of God. There is no rest for these heavenly preachers. Day and night they speak, and their voices never get hoarse. In the daytime the sun, clouds, and storms declare. At nighttime the moon, stars, and galaxies take over. They change orators, but the speech continues uninterrupted. The same speech is declared throughout all history. Through all the changes and developments on this globe over the space of 6–10,000 years, the advancements of men from huts to houses, stone etchings to voice recognition computers, this same speech continues...
unchanged.

**What the Heavens Declare**

It is a speech that every man must hear in his time here, be it short or long. The heavens are declaring the glory of God.

The Hebrew word for glory means weighty. God’s glory is the weight that results from the sum total of all that he is. And the point is weighty, not in the sense of poundage, but in the sense of “by virtue of its own majesty demands respect.” When God reveals himself, by definition, he uncovers before men his weightiness. And when he does, there is a weight about him known in the mind and conscience, the sense of his majesty.

Though the revelation of his weightiness in the heavens is limited in scope, it is unique among the ways God reveals that glory. The heavens declare the glory of God in a way that nothing else can, absolutely nothing. The heavens are not the only means God uses to declare his glory. And surely the scriptures reveal that glory much more fully in the face of Jesus Christ. But the heavens declare his glory in a way that the Bible itself cannot match, and to all men. By virtue of their sheer vastness and complexity they uniquely reveal God’s glory.

They reveal that God is, and that he is great. The word for firmament in its root means expanse. The expanse shows his handiwork. All 46 billion light years of it1 that we know about. It is huge! And its hugeness and complexity declare the glory of the God who made it all, in a way nothing else can. He must be powerful and majestic beyond even the majesty of the heavens he created.

The heavens declare to all that this glorious God must be obeyed. The sheer weightiness of him who must have created this expanse declares that. The fact that the bodies in the heavens maintain their courses shows it. These glorious bodies obey. How much more should not we!

The heavens declare that this God judges men. The psalmist says the sun as a picture of God goes forth from one end of the earth to the other and nothing is hid from its heat (verse 6). The word for heat is almost always translated wrath and used as a picture of judgment. No one can stand before the heat of God’s wrath for sin. And everyone, everyone, knows it, for the heavens declare it to all men.

**The Purpose of Their Declaration for the Reprobate Unbelieving**

This brings up a question. Why do so many, hearing these declarations nonstop day and night, reject the God of whom they speak? The answer is not because of a fault in the heavenly preachers. The message is clear, and they all hear it. Instead, the answer is precisely because the heavenly preachers are so good at what they do. The weightiness of God revealed by them is so clear that it exposes the fact that the only reason that men dismiss the one they testify to is because of their depraved hearts that despise him. There is in the heart of man after the fall and apart from grace a depraved, twisted, sinful denial of the glory of God revealed. Evolutionism and all unbelief is an attempt to escape from the implications of that glory in the mind. But the heavens never stop declaring and therefore men are held without excuse as their depraved heart is ever exposed. How appropriate then that the very same heavens that for so long have been declaring God’s glory to them will in the end be used to communicate to them God’s judgment for not heeding their message. In the end the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens are shaken, announcing the coming of the Son of man for judgment. That’s the purpose of this revelation for the reprobate.

**The Purpose of Their Declaration for the Believing**

For the elect but not yet believing, this declaration may be used by God in his sovereignty as part of what brings them to an interest in the truth.2 For the elect believer who has the life of Christ in his heart and lives in the sphere of God’s special revelation, he looks up through the lenses of scripture, and his faith is strengthened by the heavens’ declarations.

As you face your future maybe some of you who read this are confused, not sure of what your place is. Maybe you are fearful of what is in store. Maybe some are lonely. You need the heavens to declare to you what you know, but need to hear in a way that only they can declare it. Your God is great! He made all this! And he holds you in the palm of his hand and swears to you that all is well, under control for your good, that you are not alone here, but one

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1 If you believe the scientists

2 For the elect only as God works in them sovereignly. This is no Romish using nature to climb to grace.
with him day by day.

Maybe someone reading this needs courage. Maybe you have been living with compromise. You have been slouching into the course of the world. You are influenced by what the professor says. You are influenced by the people you work with. Maybe you have found yourself embarrassed to stand on his side, to be different. Look up to the heavens and have your faith strengthened. My God did this! And everyone sees it and knows it and knows he’s great even if they won’t admit it. He is awesome. It is no back corner of the woods faith I have. It’s the God of the heavens I live for. Take courage, soul, and speak, and live on his side in all things.

But maybe the main thing you need is to worship with a zeal you have not had for a time. You have been going through the motions. Look up and let the heavens fill you anew in a way only they can, with wonder and awe at your God. Did you know if you scale down the size of the sun to a penny, and scale down the Milky Way galaxy around the sun to the same scale, the galaxy alone at that scale would stretch 7.5 million miles. That’s with the sun scaled down to the size of a penny. And the sun is really 864,938 miles in diameter. It takes 1.3 million earths to fill up the sun. You can’t even get your mind around this one galaxy or the sun in it. And there are thousands upon thousands of galaxies in the 46 billion light year big universe! At some point the believing child of God stops to ask why. Why did he create all this? The sole answer is to declare just how great and glorious he is. Its greatness must fill us who are regenerated with wonder and awe.

When was the last time you were filled with awe and wonder? When a Lamborghini drove down the road past you? When someone hit a ball 400 feet over a fence? When someone decorated a building nicely for a wedding? We are way too easily satisfied people of God. Look up to the heavens. We need this. He made us and remade us to be able to be filled with wonder at what he has done. Because the end of such wonder is worship. Remember that Psalm 19 is a psalm. Awe and wonder ended in worship from David’s heart. It came out in song upon the page. Maybe our souls need that wonder and awe that leads to worship. Not maybe, they do. We find this awe in scripture regularly. But sometimes we need it in the unique way that the heavens alone give as they declare the glory of our God.

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

Church News

Melinda Bleyenberg

BAPTISMS

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Mark 10:14

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

- Shania Kate, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Bouma—Byron Center, MI
- Bridget Kate, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Leah VandenToorn—Byron Center, MI
- Jaimee Dale, son of Mr. & Mrs. Andy & Carissa De Jager—Doon, IA
- Nolan Timothy, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Hannah VanDyke—Georgetown, MI
- Abigail, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Josiah & Huiqi Tan—Georgetown, MI
- Brielle Ruth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nate & Dawn DeVries—Hope, MI
- Selena Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brent & Kathryn Tanis—Hope, MI
- Tyson Reid, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Alyssa Butler—Hudsonville, MI
- Graham Robert, son of Mr. & Mrs. David & Elisabeth Faber—Hudsonville, MI
- Lydia Sue, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brett & Kyndra Dykstra—Hudsonville, MI
- Damian Justice, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Leah Nieuwenkamp—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
- David James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Daniel & Rachelle Wierengo—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
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CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 10:32

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

- Brad Hanko—Grace, MI
- TJ Mastbergen—Grace, MI
- Michael Laning—Hull, IA
- Molly Buter—Randolph, WI
- Devin Hiemstra—Trinity, MI

MARRIAGES

“For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14

Mr. Luke Mantel and Miss Sarah De Roon—Doon, IA
Danny and his sister Becky studied a picture of a Roman sword. Their mom gathered their hot chocolate mugs. “It’s almost time to leave for catechism.”

“Do we have to go?” Danny sighed as he reached for his boots and coat. “It’s boring.”

His mom pointed at the picture of the Roman sword. “All armor needs to be cleaned and maintained, but a sword takes a lot of work and constant care. A soldier must make sure it is cleaned after battle. He has to grind a stone along its edge to keep it sharp and take out any dents and scratches. He also has to polish the sword with oil to stop it from rusting.”

“That is a lot of work.” Danny tugged on his coat.

“Yes. As soldiers of God, we have a sword. It’s the Bible, since that is the word of God. No, the word of God can’t rust or decay, but our knowledge of it can. If we don’t read and understand the Bible, it’s like we have neglected our sword. We’ve let it rust and get dented.” Danny’s mom handed him his Bible and catechism book. “That’s why we have to learn and study and go to catechism. You are polishing and cleaning and caring for your sword.”

Danny looked at his catechism book and Bible. “It sounds like a lot of work.”

“It is a lot of work to care for a sword. But it’s important if you want to be prepared for the war of this life to fight sin and evil.”

Questions to think about

1. Read Ephesians 6:17 by yourself or with your parents. How do we care for the sword we have been given?
2. What do we do to care for the sword we’ve been given?
Holding forth the word of Life

Philippians 2:15-16

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