

# The Outlook

JULY AUGUST 2008

Volume 58 | Issue 7

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

The Golden  
Candlestick

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Essay Contest  
Winners

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Examining  
the Nine Points—  
The Third Point

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Press Release  
of the Meeting of the  
URCNA Songbook  
Committee

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Press Release  
of the Meeting of the  
Joint Songbook  
Committee

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Looking Above

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In Memoriam:  
Mrs. Genevieve  
Piersma

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*"And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. ...and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon.'" (Judges 7:20).*

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# The Golden Candlestick

*“Then you shall make a candlestick of pure gold. The candlestick and its base and its shaft are to be made of hammered work; its cups, its bulbs, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it.” Exodus 25:31*

The tabernacle is an Old Testament picture of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. God gave Moses instructions on how to build the tabernacle. It was the place where God would meet with His people. Moses carried out the instructions he received from God very carefully. When the Tabernacle was completed the glory of the Lord filled it (Exodus 40:34).

Almost fifteen hundred years later, the Apostle John wrote concerning the Christ: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (literally: tabernacled among us) and we beheld His glory as of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

God Himself has come into His sanctuary to meet with us and we with Him. We have gone past the bronze altar to offer up our sacrifice to God and receive forgiveness of our sins. We have been washed at the bronze laver to have the desire of sin removed from us and to be sanctified. We are now granted the right to enter into the Holy Place.

There was no natural light in the Holy Place. As we enter, it is only natural that our eyes are at first directed towards the golden candlestick. Without its burning light, the Holy Place would have been in complete darkness and gloom. Now it is lit up manifesting the glory of God.

## The Tabernacle Today

Jesus said: “I am the light of the world: he that follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). The light of man, Jesus Christ, is the golden candlestick who sheds His light upon each member of His body. No child need ever grope in the darkness.

Jesus Christ is the Light of the World, but we must also see that His church is the lamp-holder. The church contains the knowledge, holiness, and consolation to be found in this dark, sinful world. The people of the world are strangers to this light. They wander aimlessly into error and destruction. The Bible tells us they love the darkness. Those who do come to the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, however, find that light fixed in the true church. There the light brings satisfaction to the soul, direction for life, and holiness before God.

The rays of the true light are thrown all around, inviting and attracting the entire world to enter. But you must come into the church to enjoy the light. That light comes to you from the Lord Jesus Christ in whom all fullness dwells. The Holy Spirit is the oil of gladness that Christ has freely given to the Church. As the light of the gospel is proclaimed, we are brought into the sanctuary where we find the very presence of God. It is by means of the golden

candlestick that we have fellowship with God.

## The Necessity of Purity

The candlestick teaches us the necessity of purity both within the church and Christians. The candlestick upon which we place our eyes in Exodus 25 was made of pure gold. The furniture outside the Holy Place was made of bronze. Those inside the Holy Place, the table of showbread and the altar of incense, were made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. Not even the ark of the covenant inside the Holy of Holies was pure gold. The only other item in the tabernacle that was pure gold was the mercy seat that represented the throne of God.

It is a pure gold candlestick that sends its rays of light throughout the Holy Place so that those who enter in may have fellowship with God. It is a pure church that sends its rays of light so that to all who enter in can have fellowship will God. An impure church cannot keep the light. It cannot lead a person to a knowledge of Jesus Christ nor to fellowship with God.

In Revelation 2, the Church in Ephesus was told that they must repent. They must return to the deeds they once did. Jesus accused them of having left their first love—their love for the gospel. The church was warned that if they continued in their way, Christ would come in their midst and remove the candlestick from them. The result? They would be left in the darkness, pretending to be a church when they really were not.

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The light that must shine from the church is not formal or ceremonial; it is not new programs and special events. The light from the church has to point to the true light—Jesus Christ. It must contain the pure preaching of the Word, lighting people to the path that leads them, first of all, to the bronze altar where they acknowledge their sin and misery and repent. Then they must be led to the bronze laver where worshippers no longer desire to follow the world, and then on to fellowship with Christ.

### **Unity with Christ**

As we read the description of the candlestick, we notice that its center shaft rises above the branches. It had four bowls in the shape of almonds with their bulbs and flowers. The branches of the candlestick had three bowls, each with a bulb and flower. The golden candlestick is a wonderful picture of the union the church and her members have with Christ. Christ is the center shaft. We are His branches.

More than this, our Lord is not only the center shaft, He is the candlestick itself. As the branches are part of the tree, so we are joined to our Lord. On the way to Gethsemane, Jesus used the illustration of a vine saying to His followers, “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5). Paul wrote: “For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the

members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ” (I Cor. 12:12).

The branches of the candlestick and the candlestick are one. Our Lord does not say, “I am the stem and you are the branches.” He is the vine itself. Separated from the vine, the branches are useless.

Six branches were to come out of the side of the stem. Throughout Scripture, the number six denotes incompleteness. It is only when the branches are joined to the shaft that we get the perfect number seven. Separated from the shaft the branches cannot even stand upright. In fact, they have no standing at all; no right to be in the sanctuary.

In the holy place, the sanctuary of God, we hear the wonderful message of salvation. We hear how Christ has died for our sins and begin to understand the need for the bronze altar and the bronze laver outside the holy place. They were for us: for our forgiveness; for our cleansing. They are to teach us our dependence upon the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s Cross.

There is no happier life for anyone than the branch-life—being part of the Vine. As part of the Vine you do not need to try to find nourishment for yourself, the Vine is responsible for it. You do not even need to hold yourself up; the Vine

sustains you and carries you.

Part of that is worked out in the church. Here each branch of the candlestick is not only joined to the shaft, but also to the branches on the other side, one to another. God’s children are all members of Christ and also joint members of each other. We are many members, one body. We rejoice with those who rejoice; we mourn with those who mourn. Not only is the fellowship of kindred minds like to that above, but we also share in our mutual woes, and our mutual burdens we bear. And often for each other flows a sympathizing prayer. There is no substitute for Christian love.

### **Pure Gold**

As mentioned earlier, command was given to make the candlestick out of pure gold. The gold out of which the candlestick had to be made had to go through a two-fold process of refining. It had to be burned in white heat to be made pure. Then it had to be carefully beaten out on an anvil by a skilled craftsman until it was formed into a beautiful symmetrical candlestick.

It would be well for us to understand the words “pure” and “beaten” as they are used here in God’s Word. They point us to the suffering that Jesus Christ, the pure One, had to endure so that He might shine forth as the Light of the world. Luke reminds us of these words of Jesus: “Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and then to enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:26).

Consider the sufferings that Jesus of Nazareth endured. Jesus knew poverty. After His childhood, He was homeless. He was despised,

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*The golden candlestick is a wonderful picture of the union the church and her members have with Christ.*

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misjudged, and falsely accused. He knew hunger, thirst, and weariness. He knew what it was to weep over the loss of a loved one.

The climax of His suffering came at Gethsemane and Calvary. There He felt the sting of the lash, the shame of being spit upon, the crown of thorns, and the awful pain of the nails and the cross. Far worse than any of these, He knew the awfulness of being forsaken by God. He experienced God's wrath for the sin of the world.

Forsaken by the Father, the Light of the World was extinguished, put to death—the punishment for our sin. It was then that the darkness fell upon the earth. There “He was wounded for our transgressions. The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5, 6). The author of Hebrews reminds us in Hebrews 2:10 that the captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings. He also writes in Hebrews 5:8 “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.”

Remember, also, that the candlestick was fashioned by beating one lump of gold into the center shaft and the branches. The same process that made that center shaft was used to make the branches. We become conformed to the likeness of Christ by partaking of the sufferings of Christ. Paul counted no price to dear that He might know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering (Phil. 3:10).

The shaft was of beaten gold; the branches, too, were of beaten gold. You have to be on the anvil. It is the only way to become pure gold.

## *You have to be on the anvil. It is the only way to become pure gold.*

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When Moses was forty years old he thought he could deliver his people. God could not use him then. He sent the man who was brought up in the king's palace, schooled in the wisdom of the Egyptians, into the lonely desert. There he was in God's school—forty years at the anvil—before God would have him return to Egypt to let God's people free.

God sent Samuel to anoint David king. David slew Goliath. He became a favorite among the people. Then God sent him to the cave of Adullam to be hammered by the anvil. Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the image of King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel would worship only God. As a reward for their faithfulness they were put to the anvil into the fiery furnace and the den of lions. But afterwards they did shine like candlesticks.

Our heavenly Father takes His own children into His own training school. As I look back over the twenty-some years in the ministry, I can see the hammer blows that God has permitted to fall. There were blows of many kinds. Heavy financial losses; unfair accusations; serious illnesses; loved ones who died, some after very debilitating, lingering, painful illnesses; some snatched from us much too soon. Those hammer blows are not easy to take.

James writes in James 1:2 “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when

you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.” Count it as joy? How is that possible?

Rejoice. Rejoice because you are a part of the candlestick, a branch that is being fashioned by God's workmanship to be made like Christ. “Let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right” (I Peter 4:19). You are His forever and He is yours.

Do not think it strange when the fiery trials come our way. These are the trials of our faith. This is the day of our fellowship in His suffering. The day is coming, however, when we will glory in His light and walk into the Holy of Holies.

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# 2008

# Essay Contest Winners

First Prize: High School

John Withee

## *Romans 9 and God's Sovereign Choice*

I find the first words of Romans 9 humorous in a sense, as if Paul knew way back then that two thousand years later we would have the same struggle to fully understand what it means ourselves. Paul writes, "I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying." That statement does not seem to serve a purpose in the Bible since we know that it is truth in its entirety. But when I look at what Paul writes there, a feeling of security washes over me that says, "Yes, this is true." There is a reason those words are there.

In my third year high school Bible class, students begin to learn Calvinism's TULIP acronym. This is theology that some of the students may not have heard of before. God's sovereign choice and the reprobate are not things that you learn in Sunday school or as an elementary school attendee. But once students get old enough to understand it, why is it so hard to grasp?

This teaching usually begins with denial, but it does not take long for the strong Calvinist to accept what the Bible clearly states. Once you

acknowledge the truth that you are saved by God's choice so that no man can boast, it becomes something in which you find a lot of comfort.

If we believe everything the Bible says and one hundred percent of what Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Rome, then there is simply no denying that we do not have a choice in the matter. Romans 9 is very clear when it speaks in verses 10-13 about Jacob and Esau, and how God predestined the older to serve the younger.

God specifically speaks out against Esau: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." How could God possibly love someone He hates? God has complete control over the world. He raises up empires just as much as He tears down empires. I love the heading that the NIV version puts on this chapter: "God's Sovereign Choice." He is in control, and He alone.

The other real-life example that Romans 9 brings up is God's power over Pharaoh. He clearly raised Pharaoh up for one purpose and

one purpose alone: that His power and wrath might be shown to the Israelites, the objects of God's mercy. God hardened Pharaoh's heart. How could Pharaoh have had a "choice" of whom to serve?

If God chooses His loved ones, does that mean He chooses the reprobate by default? Why are we called to love the people whom God does not love? The older I get, the more I realize that I will not know everything until I get to heaven and the more at peace I become about not knowing. If God wants to use me to get the word out, then so be it. It does not mean that I have any power in the matter. All it means is that I am doing His will for my life and for other people's lives. Who am I to talk back to God? I am only the clay and He is the potter, and I have no right to question His will.

This whole issue, free will and predestination, begs the questions that philosophers, both religious and not, have been debating for thousands of years. Do we really have a free will to choose what we want, or is that all just an illusion?

When we get out of bed in the morning, are we choosing to get out of bed, or are we being forced out of bed by how we were raised and by being hungry? Do we really choose anything or is any choice

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simply a product of past events?

When we roll a pair of dice, sometimes we think that the number will come up by pure “chance.” The real reason that the number comes up is how the roller holds the dice, where the dice hit the table, the velocity of the dice, and many, many other factors that are simply too hard for the human mind to understand. So we call that “random,” or “chance.” As many philosophers believe, nothing happens by accident. Every action today is simply a reaction of what happened yesterday and how our minds responded to them.

God knows everything before it happens. He predetermines who will enter heaven and who will not. It only makes sense that He predestines those He loves to go to heaven. Not only the Bible, preaching of an omnipotent God, but also logic, guarantees to the Calvinist the assurance of eternal salvation.

However, we always have a choice: the choice to do right or wrong. We are called to do right and to shun evil. God gave us His Holy Spirit in order that we would be able to discern which choices in our lives we should make for His glory. In heaven, there will be no excuse for the sins we committed. Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from our inexcusable sins.

Sin is another aspect of predestination. According to John Calvin, people are so totally depraved from the things of God that it is impossible for us, except with God’s supernatural guidance, to come to Christ. Everyone who enters the church and confesses Jesus as their Savior

will understand that they need God and they must be forgiven of all of their sins.

This is just one more reason why being able to choose our salvation does not make sense to Calvinists. We were born in sin. There is nothing we can do about changing our situation. If we were truly able to choose our salvation, then why would we need Jesus? If we have the ability, without God’s supernatural guidance, to just choose salvation and, in a sense, cleanse ourselves

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***Not only the Bible,  
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of our sin, then the entire story of God’s plan to save humanity falls apart.

The question that remains is how should it affect my life. God is the Prince of peace, and it definitely gives people peace of mind to know that nothing happens except by God’s sovereignty. Although it is our calling to witness, and to do our best to call others into the kingdom of God, everything will always be in God’s hands.

Another thing it keeps in perspective: We are small. Who are we, simple men, to talk back to God? We are the clay to be molded and not to question. If God wants to mold me into a pot when I wanted

to be molded into a sculpture, who am I to question?

Finally, we should get hope from Calvin’s interpretation of the Bible. Every day when we wake up, we need to say to ourselves, “I am chosen. I am loved. I have a purpose.” God watches out for those that He loves, and they will always be in His care. As God said in Hosea, and Paul repeated in Romans, “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,” and, “It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God’.”

God wants us to have a mind of hope. Hope is the hidden message of Romans 9. Hope of a better future not only for this life, but also for the life to come. In the meantime, we must look toward the great commission, be obedient, spread the gospel, and rejoice in the eternal assurance of salvation which is in Christ Jesus, looking forward to meeting up with Him in heaven. We do not understand everything, but we understand that we serve a perfect God, a God of knowledge, who will some day explain everything in full. And when He does, we will finally be able to understand, and have the answers to all of these hard questions.

**Mr. John Withee** lives in Kalamazoo Michigan. He is a student at Kalamazoo Christian High School.

## *Contending for God's Word*

Jason Berkenpas

A fight is going on. Christian, do you see it? One by one, valuable things are being stripped from you. This is no ordinary fight; it is much more important. The moment you use human weapons or strategies you are done; you fail. This is a war over your worship, your life, your very soul; this fight is over your Bible, your word from God. The devil realizes its implications better than you and will do everything in his power to stop it from achieving its purpose. Today there is a compelling need to contend for the faith. That serpent of old knows his time is short and he is working harder than ever before.

James MacDonald writes "God's people who prefer contentment to contending sit by and watch" as these things are taken away from them. Our fight begins with the recognition of the power of the Word of God which destroys all opposition. It is won only if you use the Sword of the Spirit and the prayer of faith. Any other way will fail. Christian, this is a call to pick up your dusty sword and sharpen it, for your opponent has already penetrated the walls! Step up to the battle lines armed with that Word of God and contend for the faith. Will you be like so much of the world and promote contentment and compromise, or will you be a contending Christian?

In our contending for God's Word, first we need to realize who our

enemy is and his strategies, then we must see the compelling need, and finally, our response to it.

### **Our Enemy**

To start with, we need to know our enemy. What team does not know their opponent before engaging in a contest? We are dealing with no one but that serpent of old, Satan. In debating with the atheist, we debate Satan himself. In arguing with a false teacher, we argue with Satan himself. When heresy arises in the church, we deal with Satan himself. When temptations arise throughout our lives, we are being tempted by Satan himself. If we do not acknowledge this, then we will be inclined to think that God is tempting us, or God brought this sin upon us (James 1). Much more, if we do not acknowledge that our enemy is the devil, we will not know how to respond to his attacks and we will underestimate him. You see the importance in acknowledging our enemy.

### **Satan's Strategies**

What good is it to acknowledge our enemy, however, if we do not know his strategies? Christian, you are not left uninformed; your Leader has gone through the devil's temptations and revealed to you his strategies. He has left a Book for us in which He shows the devil's strategies and how to

overcome them. That Book is the Bible, our Word from God. Satan wants us to follow him in rebelling against God by uplifting the self above God (Gen. 3). Bill Pride points out Satan's chief goal: "A tiny crack in the dike can lead to a breach that floods the countryside. It only takes a spark to start a raging fire. Satan knows this and that is why he is always trying to pry the church off her firm foundation on the rock." That rock is Jesus Christ and His Word (1 Cor. 10:4, Matt. 7:24, 25). If Satan can replace that foundation with the self, if Christ and His Word are not central to our lives in everything we do, he will have won (Matt. 7:26, 27).

Satan seeks to achieve his goal in several ways that are described for us in the Bible. Ever since the Garden of Eden, he attempts to undermine God's Word. That will only continue to increase. Satan tries to get us to doubt the straightforwardness of the Bible saying, "Hath God indeed said...?" (Gen. 3:1).

For a while, it looked as though Satan had succeeded. The Roman Catholic Church believed that the interpretation of the Bible lay solely with the church. However, God in His grace caused Martin Luther to say, "Unless I am convinced by Sacred Scripture...I cannot recant." He had read the Bible personally and seen the errors the church was covering up. He showed the need for personal study of God's Word and not just leaving it to the leaders of the church. Satan uses false teachers to distract us from the truth.

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There are several ways to recognize false teachers whom Satan uses to try to deceive us. Jude gives some practical suggestions. As we have seen already, a false teacher will undermine God's authority (Num. 16:3). Jude also recognized that many times the false teacher will arise from within the church. We may find this hard to believe, but Satan provided the example, once being an angel, but falling (Rev. 12:9).

Another common characteristic is found in the example of Satan approaching Eve instead of Adam (Gen 3). God created man as the head of his family, and yet the devil did not approach the head, but went through different means (Eph. 5:23). Paul warned Timothy of this "For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins" (1 Tim. 3:6, 7). Evil teaching worms its way into your homes. From there it enters into the church. Pastor Roberts, in *How to Kill a Church Without Trying*, states "The Christian Life is the only one I know where you don't get a vacation. Why? Because the enemy never takes a vacation."

### **The Rampant Need**

Satan has not stopped working. Paul warns Timothy that "perilous times will come; For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1). Doesn't this describe our generation? Christ has warned us that "many false prophets will rise up and deceive many" (Matt. 24:11). The call Jude gives is very relevant in a day where the

church is undergoing the same problem as the church was in his day. He saw the need to contend for the faith because "certain men have crept in unnoticed..." (Jude 4). He implies that the need has grown rampantly.

As the church grows, troublemakers will come. Today, these men have crept into our churches and we cannot detect them very well. They are as wolves in sheep's skin (Matt. 7:15). They do not use such words as "Hath God indeed said..." per se, instead

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### ***Satan wants us not to worry about the simplicity of studying the Bible.***

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they "turn the grace of our God into lewdness" (Jude 4). They emphasize having fun on this playground called life because they misinterpret the grace of God. They think that Christ has already won the battle, so we as Christians have nothing to do.

It is true that Christ has crushed Satan's head with His death. He has won the battle. However, Satan still roams around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour until Christ comes again (1 Pet. 5:8). As long as Christ tarrys, false prophets will try to get us to compromise, little by little allowing more and more to be deemed as acceptable. They do not see the need to contend for the faith.

At the heart of the matter is the replacing of the Word of God in our lives. If Christ has won the battle then why do we need the Bible? Deceitful desires have taken the place of it. We need to do as Martin Luther and take every thought captive in obedience to Christ. Are we listening to music that is exalting man instead of God, watching a movie that appeals to our desires for fun but dishonors God and His Creation, or talking about vain things when it would be so much more profitable to be discussing spiritual things?

We are coming to that point where we no longer think for ourselves. Instead we look to movies to think for us and to tell us right from wrong. So what if our friends think it is not cool to take sermon notes, to sing, or to live for Christ. Christian, you have your best Friend in Heaven who will never call you not cool (John 15:13).

If you think these issues sound trivial in comparison to doctrinal issues and ask why not argue doctrinal issues instead, then you have succumb to Satan's attacks. He wants us not to worry about the simplicity of studying the Bible. If Satan can get us to forget about the Bible or revise it to our liking, he will have succeeded and our Sword will be rendered useless. If he can delay our response to God's Word he will have rendered our Sword useless, as well.

J.I. Packer states "If I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folk from digging into

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## *God has called me to be a contender rather than be content with sin.*

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the Bible.” Look around and you will see that in our worship services, Bible studies, and basically all parts of our lives, we lack a spirit of earnestness, intensity, and fervor because we do not believe that anything significant is at stake.

Today the Word of God is replaced by screens in worship; its words are compromised in false translations which are gender neutral, adding and subtracting from it as they please; the centrality of God in worship has been replaced with instruments, drama, and decorations. We even go as far as replacing the centrality of the Word of God with a singer or two. In every other item in our worship either we interact with God or God with us; however, in special music, only those who are performing are interacting with God. How much better would it be if the entire congregation would praise God instead of just one or two! Again, these items may seem insignificant, even trivial; however, if we allow one spark, a flame will start, one crack in the dike and a flood will come.

How long can we wait before we say something about the gross mistreatment of God’s Word in these new translations that are Man’s word instead of God’s Word. How long will we continue to uphold entertainment in our man-centered worship of God, letting

Satan accomplish his goal of delaying our response? How long will we try to use our human means before yielding them to God and submitting to His power?

Let it be said of us that we were not content on this playground called Life, but chose to speak out about sin, even if it means that our friends call us sinful for not being content. By God’s grace, He has called me to be a contender rather than be content with sin, and I believe He gives that call to every Christian. These men whom Satan works through may be in your Bible study, your youth group, maybe even in your family; Christian, does your radar detect them?

### **Our Response**

Do not despair! You are not left to yourself in the fight; God has given us what is needed for the battle. He has given us His Word: “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17), “sharper than a two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12); “It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please” (Isaiah 55:11). Jude tells us to “build yourselves up on your most holy faith” (Jude 20).

Charles Spurgeon gives us the basis of our fight, our contending: “The truth is like a lion; whoever heard of defending a lion? Just turn it loose and it will defend itself.” This does not mean that

we have nothing to do. We have that great task of letting the Word of God loose in this generation. When problems arise, we need to respond with the Word of God, not defending it with any human means. We need to attack false doctrines with the Word of God, not our words. If we let His Word loose it will accomplish what He desires. How our fight would be different if we had Scripture to respond to every circumstance that arises in our lives!

In order to respond with the Word of God, we need to have it written upon our hearts. Paul tells us to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16). We should say as Spurgeon did “It is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in Scriptural language, and your spirit is flavored with the words of the Lord, so that your blood is Bibline and the very essence of the Bible flows from you.” This is done by reading the Bible and memorizing it.

It was said of John Bunyan “Why this man is a living Bible! Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline...He cannot speak without quoting a text.” How true that should be of every Christian! If all Christians would do that, Satan could not touch us.

When Christ was tempted He wounded the serpent three times, saying “It is written...” (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Let it be said of us that our blood was Bibline. If we are attacked, we respond by bleeding the Bible. Instead of swearing or getting mad, we respond with Scripture. Christ could have been mad at Satan undermining His

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ability, but instead, He responded with Scripture. How should you be able to tell if someone is a Christian but if their blood is Bibline?

Above all, Satan is defeated when we are on our knees in prayer. Jude advises us to start “praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20). Paul tells us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Christ says “Watch and pray” (Matt. 26:41). If we are in constant communion with God, the devil cannot even approach us. Therefore our fight should be rooted in prayer.

Spurgeon speaks of the importance of prayer: “I always feel that there is something wrong if I go without prayer for even half an hour in the day. I cannot understand how a Christian man can go from morning to evening, without prayer. I cannot comprehend how he lives, and how he fights the battle of life without asking the guardian care of God while the arrows of temptation are flying so thickly around him.”

When I think of praying every half hour, it seems like a lot, but really it is not. If we truly love God and He is our Father and Best Friend, we should be in constant communion with Him. We should be constantly asking Him for help as the devil’s darts are flying about us. How our fight with the devil would change if we were in prayer every thirty minutes!

The siege ram is coming in the distance. It may not look too dangerous but each hit will bring you closer and closer to destruction. A wolf in sheep’s clothing wants to get in. Will you let it in? A

woman seeks to become a leader in the church or have a say in its leadership. A man in your church seeks to increase the amount of singing, taking away from the Word. How will you respond? Will you put your life on the line to stop heresy? Will you risk being ridiculed by your friends? Will you be content or will you contend for the faith?

The need is there and it will only increase until Christ’s second coming. The means are there too; God has not left us to ourselves. Stand up Christian and fight! The gates of hell shall not prevail against you if Christ is on your side! If you think that something is wrong, stand, even if you are all alone. Martin Luther stood alone, and look how God worked through Him. “Put on the armor of God that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes...Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (Ephesians 6:11, 13). Test all things so that one day God will say of you “Well done good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21), you have contended for the faith, for My Word. Here is “the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12)! Christian, step up to the battle lines, armed with the Word of God and contend for the faith! Lord, unleash your power on the world through us!

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# “Have It Your Way” Syndrome

*A Critical Analysis of the “Church-Hopper”*

Rev. Greg Lubbers

It seems every church has them. They are a small minority; yet, they are there. They have either just freshly entered a congregation or are in the process of making their exit. Indeed, upon careful evaluation, areas containing numerous reformed churches often display a membership rotation that mirrors a revolving door. Usually motivated by some rather minor dissatisfaction, the disgruntled individual or family vacates his or her own church’s worship service setting out upon the path of “church-shopping.” As the weeks of absence progress, perhaps the consistory, aware of the dissatisfaction and resulting absence, makes a call hears an expression of the person’s desire to find a new church.

On the other church’s end, there is notice of the new visitors and speculation concerning their ecclesiastical history and status. Talk fills the narthex and parking lot concerning reports of the visitors “not being happy” at the neighboring Reformed church. Since this is a fresh relationship, there is the extension and reciprocation of warm greetings. Af-

ter a time of mutually uninvolved observation between the family and the prospective church, the family makes the decision, and a transfer request arrives at the soon to be “old church’s” consistory table. The transfer of papers quietly takes place through the mail, the adjustment of the respective membership rolls takes place and ecclesiastical life continues.

However, what is the cost of this action? Is it simply the postage necessary for the paperwork of the transfer? Is the practice of “church-hopping” damaging to the individual and the church? Is this practice biblically valid and beneficial? Is it a symptom of spiritual weakness that ought to be pastorally addressed? It is the conviction of this article that the practice of “church-hopping” needs a biblical analysis and reform for the good of the church and the individual. The analysis will include a brief survey of the motives behind, the effects of, and the remedies associated with “church-hopping.”

### **An Analysis of the Motives Behind “Church-Hopping”**

To offset the danger of setting forth an imbalanced view of mem-

bership transfer, it is beneficial to describe briefly proper requests for transfer. Certainly, if a church degenerates to the point of losing the marks of the true church, a transfer is legitimate and necessary. All men are “duty bound” to join the true Church (cf. Belgic Confession art. 28). Furthermore, differing convictions on points of non-essential theological issues can prompt members to transfer.

In addition, geographical moves necessitate and provide opportunity for legitimate membership transfers, as do marriages between individuals of different local Reformed congregations. There could also be a valid request from a member of a large and overflowing congregation who desires or sees it beneficial to join a smaller “daughter-church” or church plant for the good of all the parties involved.

However, at times the membership transfers in populated reformed circles do not fall under the examples described above. While the actual details may vary, multitudes of transfer requests flow from disagreements over minute matters. It may range from personality conflicts or preferences over varying pulpit styles, to grudges held over the way some housekeeping decision went. Rather than taking an attitude of humility and submission for the good of the body and the glory of Christ (cf. Philippians 2:3, 4), the individual or family pulls up their ecclesiastical tent pegs and moves on to supposedly greener pastures. This behavior can develop into a dangerous pattern.

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Tent pegs pulled up once become easier to pull up again and the dangerous temptation of church drifting arises.

The problem with such membership transfers is not the simple movement of members from one congregation to another, but the attitude of the heart that perhaps motivates the transfer. Individuals must remember that church membership is not exclusively *receptive*, but rather primarily *active* in nature. This is not a denial of a receptive benefit from church membership, but rather an attempt to correct a common imbalance by stating that church membership is not exclusively receptive. The apostle Paul emphasizes the active nature of church membership when he writes, "...the whole body, joined and knit together *by what every joint supplies*, according to the effective working by which *every part does its share*, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:16)."

Furthermore, we do well to remember that the biblical characterization of church membership is one of *humble activity* rather than *selfish receptivity*. Paul emphasizes this truth in Ephesians 4:1-3 stating that the Christian is "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" and have a heart characterized by "lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another."

This distinction between *humble activity* and *selfish receptivity* is what helps separate the proper requests for transfer from the im-

proper requests. A person leaving a false church for the true Church, making a geographical move, or transferring from a large church to a "daughter-church" usually realizes and is committed to the humble and active nature of church membership. By contrast, a person transferring over personal dissatisfaction or disagreement with some minor aspect of a local congregation is often imbalanced with a selfish and receptive attitude towards church membership.

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***The problem is the attitude of the heart that motivates the transfer.***

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This difference reveals itself in the common language of "I'm not happy at my church because..." compared to a nearly unheard of "I will be obeying God by transferring" or "I sense I could be of more service to God there because...."

**An Analysis of the Effects of "Church-Hopping"**

The practice of "church-hopping" has negative effects upon both the individual and the church. For the good of the Church, we should examine these effects and the practices behind them and, if need be, correct them.

Concerning individuals and families, the quietly accepted practice

of allowing "church-hopping" permits the unbiblical mentality of exclusive selfish receptivity towards church membership to continue unchallenged. If a person attends a church simply for what he can get out of it, he is unbalanced and in need of biblical alignment concerning the nature of church membership. If an individual is governed in his ecclesiastical selection merely by how well the body responds to his likes and preferences, it is hard to understand how he is busy doing his share to cause growth for the body (cf. Eph. 4:16).

The Belgic Confession states in article 28 that the proper attitude towards church membership is "as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren...." Likewise, the Heidelberg Catechism emphasizes in question #55 that the Christian is to "feel himself bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the advantage and welfare of other members." Before exiting his or her "old church," the disgruntled individual ought to stand before the biblical truths of the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism concerning church membership and examine if they are operating with a biblical mindset.

One danger of simply ignoring the common practice of "church-hopping" is that it allows a person to drift from congregation to congregation without seriously addressing his imbalanced mindset. This robs the Church of the benefits that person might bring if he used his gifts for the good of the body. It also allows the person to rob

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himself of the benefits of a positive, contributive perspective to membership within a church.

Related to the first problem with “church-hopping” is the danger that in reality “church-hopping” membership transfers are usually the simple transfer of a problem. Upon a “church-hopper’s” transfer, it is likely that the former dissatisfaction that blossomed out of the root problem of *selfish receptivity* will eventually flower again once the new ecclesiastical courtship and honeymoon are over. Chances are that the pattern of transfer will continue if the attitude behind the pattern remains unaddressed. Moreover, the attitude is often unaddressed as the “former church” feels relief at the disgruntled member’s departure and the “new church” is glad to add a number to the membership role.

Nevertheless, the danger in this situation is that the improper and unbiblical attitude towards church membership that often motivates “ecclesiastical roaming” remains unaddressed. In light of Christ’s command in Matthew 5:22, 23, “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” As Reformed churches, we need to ask ourselves honestly if we are allowing individuals who harbor animosity against former congregations, past office-bearers, or fellow Christians to exist in our congregation without them receiving the necessary biblical confrontation.

## *We live in a day and age of little loyalty.*

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A third damaging effect of “church-hopping” is a mentality that often is gradually impressed upon the individual’s posterity. We live in a day and age of little loyalty. While our ancestors often spent their entire lives driving one brand of automobile, living in one home, and working at one place of employment in addition to being baptized, married and buried in one congregation, our generation displays an unending shift from one thing to the next. While such fluidity is defensible in relationship to vehicles, homes, and employment, it is not healthy for ecclesiastical affiliation.

The gravest danger for the individual who is a “church-hopper” is that the disease of ecclesiastical dissatisfaction along with the symptom of a lack of church loyalty is contagious and will be caught in a more radical form by the generations to come. It is no surprise when a young person raised in a childhood environment of minute complaining and frequent transferring takes a complete exit from the parent’s revolving door of ecclesiastical affiliation. Sadly, children who follow along upon such parental ecclesiastical roaming, who often hear the expressed complaints against the local church, run a higher risk of setting up their own tents pegs outside of ecclesiastical land altogether. Families that leave a trail of “church-hopping” transfers need pastoral admonitions concerning the effects their

practices may have on impressionable children.

The practice of “church hopping” impacts consistories negatively also. One of the main negative influences of “church-hoppers” upon consistories is the undermining of an ability to admonish pastorally. Whether it be from the pulpit, on family visitation, in private conversations or consistory decisions, Scripture is clear that the office-bearers of the Church of Christ must frequently admonish individuals within the congregation (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14).

However, receiving admonishment is difficult for the human nature. It is especially difficult for a human nature characterized by selfish receptivity. Nevertheless, it is especially the selfishly receptive human nature that is in need of admonishment (cf. Philippians 2:1-4ff). The pastoral dilemma is that the person who is in need of biblical admonishment often is most opposed to it and most likely to make an ecclesiastical “bolt for the door” when confronted with it. One wonders how many pastors and elders have refrained from offering a necessary, biblical admonishment for fear that the confronted party might be motivated to the practice of “church-hopping.” Indeed, this is a negative impact of “church-hopping.”

The discouraging and frustrating dilemma is magnified when the individual does “bolt for the door”

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in response to a necessary admonishment and then is politely received into the membership of a neighboring congregation. In such cases, it seems that the person in need of admonishment slips through the cracks of ecclesiastical disharmony while the admonishing consistory, who was simply seeking to be faithful to God, is left with an undeserved reputation of being a contentious consistory.

In summary, it is rather easy to identify several harmful effects associated with the practice of “church-hopping.” In contrast, one would be hard pressed to offer one positive effect for the individual or the congregation.

#### **An Analysis of the Remedies for “Church-hopping”**

It seems that the simple step of honest consistory investigation and communication would go far in curbing the practice of “church-hopping.” The investigation would be as simple as the receiving consistory asking a few pointed questions of the members requesting transfer about the motivation behind their request. Questions, such as, “Why are you proposing to leave your church,” or “Are you not already members of that Reformed church,” would quickly reveal whether an individual or family is transferring because of and with an attitude that is one of *humble activity* or *selfish receptivity*. Further

questions such as, “Can you leave on good terms in full brotherly love with everyone within that congregation” or “were there any recent events within your church that are prompting this transfer” could also be helpful in identifying the motivation behind membership transfer requests.

An important qualifier related to the asking of these questions is that the investigative consistory would have to be poised to defend their neighboring consistory’s good name and admonish the interviewed individual of their duty to bear with the shortcomings of their consistory in light of the fifth commandment if need be. Furthermore, the consistory would have to be ready and willing to instruct the prospective transferring individual to endeavor “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” and remind them that there is “one body and one Spirit (Ephesians 4:3, 4).”

It is not only the receiving church that has an investigative responsibility. There is also a proper and legitimate place for the sending consistory to investigate the motivation behind the membership transfer request by way of questions. Often the individual’s response to the mere process of discussing motivations for transferring will reveal the spirit behind the request. If they would refuse or hesitate at such a con-

versation with their current consistory, that would seem to indicate that the transfer request flows from a heart out of line with the requirements of the fifth commandment. This should also serve as an alarming indication for the receptive consistory.

If the investigative action was carried out faithfully, the next logical step would be for cooperative, consistorial communication. This step would imply something more than the signing and mailing of an official transfer and the return of a receipt. While sending a family to the “new country” with their ecclesiastical papers in hand may have been suitable for immigrants in the nineteenth century, our age of technology affords us convenient opportunity for mutual communication. A simple phone call, email, or coffee visit between delegates from respective consistories to share the information gleaned during the investigative meetings would begin to reduce improper membership transfers.

While investigation and communication between consistories would be beneficial in curbing improper membership transfers, another remedy would be a return to the ideology of boundaries or ecclesiastical districts. This would work more appropriately within churches belonging to the same federation, but could be implemented to a certain degree among like-minded confessional, Reformed churches. Some may be quick to object that church membership is voluntary in nature. However, the way this commitment to the ideology of boundaries

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*One would be hard pressed to offer one positive effect for the individual or the congregation.*

could work would be a simple *consistorial encouragement* for members to associate with the churches of their federation that are of the closest geographical proximity. A commitment to the ideology of boundaries or districts would greatly eliminate the practice of “church-hopping.” In addition, it would make ecclesiastical life simpler.

Too often, improper motives drive the membership transfers within densely populated reformed communities. This practice is bound to have damaging effects on the individuals and congregations involved. However, simple consistorial investigation and communication in relation to these requests along with a commitment to the ideology of ecclesiastical boundaries would begin to address the problem in a positive manner for the good of all involved.

**Rev. Gregg Lubbers** is the pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

## First Prize: Adult

# *Morning Star*

Mrs. Glenda Mathes

When I rise on clear mornings, the dark pre-dawn sky is pierced by the beauty of a bright star throbbing like a living diamond. Joyful hope fills my soul and my spirit sings as the star reminds me of Christ, the bright and morning star.

This is an appellation that Christ gave Himself in His penultimate words to believers: “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you about these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16, NKJV).

Christ’s self-ascribed title as “the Bright and Morning Star” creates a rich mental tapestry of intricately interwoven threads: Christ’s presence at the dawn of creation, Christ’s incarnation in fulfillment of biblical prophecy, the Magi’s adoration as the first fruits of the nations’ worship, and Christ’s return at the culmination of His Kingdom.

The morning star that seems to pulse in silent rhythm reminds me of the morning stars that sang together in sheer joy at the creation of the world.

God asks Job: “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” and adds, “When the

morning stars sang together” (Job 28: 4, 7). Realizing the limits of his finitude, Job is appropriately shamed and silent. He was not present at creation.

Christ, however, was.

John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:1-5).

The morning star shining in the darkness before dawn reminds me of the light that came into this dark world. That light is the Word through which all things were made at creation, when the morning stars sang for joy.

Seeing the morning star also reminds me of a delightful moment in Old Testament history, Balaam’s involuntary prophecy.

In the book of Numbers, we read that the Amorites came against Israel under the leadership of their king, Sihon. The Amorites were not weak; they had recently overcome the Moabites and taken a great deal of their land. But

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God gave the Israelites the victory as well as the Amorites' land.

And the Israelite victory over Sihon and the Amorites was not a fluke. When Og, the king of Bashan, brought his people against the Israelites, God proceeded to grant Israel another rousing victory and even more land.

Enter Balak, the king of the Moabites. Balak is shaking in his boots. The Bible says that "Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel" (Num. 22:3).

Moab was "exceedingly afraid" and "sick with dread." No wonder! How could Moab hope to overcome the conqueror of their conquerors?

Realizing that military might is powerless against the Israelites, Balak decides to bring the metaphysical heavy guns to the front. He sends for the prophet Balaam.

Despite warnings from the Lord via a dream and a donkey, Balaam travels with the Moabite emissaries and meets Balak. And, in spite of Balak's best efforts to set the stage for a spectacular curse pronouncement against Israel, Balaam is capable only of uttering a series of increasingly affirming blessings.

One of the most beautiful of all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah is found in Balaam's fourth prophecy, when Balaam involuntarily prophesies of the coming King of Kings:

### *Two New Testament references to Balaam appear in close connection with the two other New Testament references to the morning star.*

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"I see Him, but not now;  
I behold Him, but not near;  
A Star shall come out of Jacob;  
A Scepter shall rise out of  
Israel" (Num. 24:17a).

As in Revelation 22:16, the star is linked to Israel with clear implications regarding the royal line of David.

A cursory reading of Numbers might make it seem as if Balak was the driving force behind efforts to bring down Israel or that Balaam was a helpless pawn in God's plan, but other passages give a glimpse into Balaam's motivation and character.

In 2 Peter 2, Peter describes the depravity of false teachers, saying, "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet" (vv. 15-16).

And in the apocalyptic letter to the compromising church at Pergamos, Christ says, "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality" (Rev. 2:14).

Balaam was depraved and greedy. He loved the "wages of unrighteousness." He was a false teacher who contributed to Israel's sins by instructing Balak on the most effective methods for placing "a stumbling block" in the path of the people of Israel.

Remarkably, these two New Testament references to Balaam appear in close connection with the two other New Testament references to the morning star. Before Peter describes destructive doctrines and the doom of false teachers in 2 Peter 2, he concludes the preceding chapter with a beautiful description of the trustworthiness of God's Word.

In 2 Peter 1:19, he writes:

"And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

And just a few verses after Christ's criticism of those who hold to the false doctrine of Balaam in Revelation 2, Christ provides this vivid promise to the faithful:

"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to

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him I will give power over the nations—

‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—

I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star, He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 2:26-29).

These two New Testament references to the morning star are full of hope for a victorious future in which believers will experience the fullness of blessing in Christ and share in His rule over the nations.

Commenting on Revelation 2:28 on p. 73 of *More Than Conquerors*, William Hendriksen writes, “As the morning star rules the heavens, so believers will rule with Christ; they will share in His royal splendour and domination. The star is always the symbol of royalty, being linked with the scepter (Nu. 24:17; cf. Mt. 2:2).”

In his commentary on Revelation 2:28 in *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text (New International Greek Testament Commentary)*, G. K. Beale notes how similar patterns in it and 2 Peter 1:17-19 pair the Numbers allusion with the messianic Psalm 2. Like Hendriksen, Beale associates the morning star with the messianic reign and the scepter. He writes, “The application...to believers indi-

cates that they will participate in this reign if they overcome” (pp. 268-269).

The intertwining of these threads is amazing. The wonderful promises recorded in 2 Peter and Revelation 2, which fill believers with hope for the final victory, are found in close proximity to references regarding Balaam. God used that depraved prophet to utter an involuntary prophecy about the coming Messiah, a prophecy that links royal reign and sovereignty with a star.

The singular star shining in the east reminds me of the eastern star that signaled Christ’s incarnation. That star very literally fulfilled Balaam’s prophecy and brought the first adoration from the nations to Christ’s feet.

The wise men associated the star with royalty. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they asked, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Matt. 2:2).

The wise men were products of their age. In the ancient world, certain stars were considered symbols of sovereignty. Some people groups began to worship stars as gods and some ancient kings claimed divinity. Astrology was born in Babylon (*Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 41).

The star I see in the east is actually the planet Venus. It shines most brightly before sunrise or after sunset, earning it the titles of “morning star” or “evening star.”

Beale writes that Venus as the morning star “was a symbol of sovereignty in the ancient world and especially in Rome.” He explains that Roman emperors claimed descent from the goddess Venus, Roman generals constructed temples dedicated to the star, and Roman soldiers carried standards bearing the star of Venus (p. 269).

When Christ was born in the fullness of God’s time, a new star appeared above the horizon of the Roman world. This star outshone Roman gods and Roman glories. Emperors would die and the Empire would fall, but this star represented the infinitely superior and everlasting kingdom of the King of Kings.

The final manifestation of that kingdom is described in Revelation 21:23-24:

“The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring

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***In the ancient world, certain stars were considered symbols of sovereignty.***

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their glory and honor  
into it.”

The wise men kneeling in adoration of the infant Jesus were the first fruits of the nations that will one day worship Christ and bring their glory into His kingdom.

Isaiah prophesied that the “Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising” (Isa. 60:3). This prophecy weaves the adoration of kings and nations with Christ’s light and 2 Peter 1’s imagery of the rising morning star.

All of these threads—Christ’s contribution to creation, the fulfillment of Balaam’s prophecy in Christ’s incarnation, and the Magi’s adoration as the first fruits of the nations’ worship—are intrinsically interwoven with Christ’s return and the victorious culmination of His Kingdom. The book of Revelation focuses on Christ’s victorious return and the complete implementation of His Kingdom. And that focus is at the forefront of my mind when I see the morning star.

Which brings me back to Christ’s words in Revelation 22:16: “I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”

Coming at the end of John’s apocalypse, the imagery of Christ as the Morning Star cannot be separated from the image of Christ as the returning King on the last day. The vivid imagery of Revelation will come to pass in a reality that will fill unbelievers’ hearts with fear, but fill believers’

hearts with joy. Christians may rest in God’s promises and look forward to Christ’s return with joyful anticipation.

The threads twining around the morning star are again apparent in this verse from the conclusion of Revelation. Here is Christ, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. Here is Christ, who fulfilled prophecy as the long-awaited Messiah and the true King of Israel. Here is Christ, whose brightness will rise and shine before the nations, who will bow in submis-

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### *This star outshone Roman gods and Roman glories.*

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sion before His sovereignty. Here is Christ, who will lead his followers to conquer every foe and reign with Him in glory.

Beale notes that Christ’s title in Revelation 22:16 combines the star prophecy of Numbers 24:17 with the root prophecy of Isaiah 11:1, 10 “concerning the messianic king’s triumph over his enemies at the end of time” (p. 1146). Beale also sees an allusion to the opening verses of Isaiah 60, part of which I quoted earlier in connection with the worship of nations:

“Arise, shine;  
For your light has come!

And the glory of the  
LORD is risen upon you.  
For behold, the darkness  
shall cover the earth,  
And deep darkness the  
people;  
But the LORD will arise  
over you.  
And His glory will be  
seen upon you.  
The Gentiles shall come  
to your light,  
And kings to the bright-  
ness of your rising”  
(Isa. 60:1-3).

Christ as the fulfillment of messianic prophecies and as the Davidic King affirms what is sometimes called the “already and not yet” aspects of Christ’s reign, or what theologians call the “inaugurated and future” fulfillments. Christ’s kingdom “already” came with His first advent, when He accomplished all that was necessary for our salvation; but His Kingdom has “not yet” come into the fullness that will be implemented at His second advent.

In his commentary on these two aspects, Beale notes further intertwining of the morning star passages:

“That both inaugurated and future fulfillments are intended here is apparent from the use of the dawn of a new day or age as a metaphorical association of ‘the bright morning star.’ Christ has begun a new redemptive day, which he will culminate at his final return. This is also pointed to by 2 Pet.

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1:17-19, where ‘the morning star’ is synonymous with the dawning day, both possibly metaphors for the inauguration of the OT ‘prophetic word’ in Christ’s first coming” (p. 1147).

Seeing the morning star reminds me that Christ has already come and accomplished everything needful for my salvation. And it reminds me that—although His kingdom is not yet complete—He soon will come again in glory to usher in the fullness of that kingdom.

Then hopeful joy fills my heart and—with the hymn—my spirit sings, “How Bright Appears the Morning Star!”

Philip Nicolai, a Lutheran pastor in Germany during the Protestant Reformation, wrote the words and music to that beloved hymn. Nicolai was driven out of his first charge by mercenary troops of the Spanish Counter-Reformation. He fled to the Catholic city of Cologne, where he ministered to Lutheran house churches that met in secret. He became Court Preacher for the Count of Waldeck in 1588, and he became a pastor in Unna, Westphalia, in 1596. While he served in Westphalia, the bubonic plague was sweeping across Europe. Hundreds of his parishioners died.

Seeing 30 graves dug in a single day inspired him to pen the words to his famous hymn. The song first appeared in his book, *Joyous Mirror of Eternal Life*, published in 1599 ([www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org)). An English translation appears in the section of hymns regarding Christ’s birth found in the blue 1959 *Psalter Hymnal* (#336).

When I read the words of the hymn, I feel an affinity with Philip Nicolai. Although my suffering cannot compare with the losses that triggered his words of praise, perhaps I share some of his thoughts and feelings when viewing the morning star.

The hymn focuses on Christ’s incarnation, with a line in the first stanza alluding to Isaiah 11:1 and indirectly to Balaam’s prophecy: “O Righteous Branch, O Jesse’s Rod!” A line in the second stanza calls to mind Christ’s role in creation and His sovereignty over it: “The whole creation’s Head and Lord.” And two lines of the third stanza bring to mind Christ’s victorious return and the worship of the nations: “Ride on, ride on, great Conqueror; Till all know Thy salvation.”

When I look to the east and see the morning star, these different threads of biblical truth regarding Christ weave through my mind. Although my finite mind can see

only the tangled back of the tapestry, I know these threads form a beautiful and unified whole that fills me with hope.

Just as surely as I know dawn is near when I see the morning star, I know that the dawn of Christ’s return is near. The morning star’s light pierces the darkness of our inter-advental existence and rekindles the hope of His return and the ultimate dawn.

**Mrs. Glenda Mathes** lives in Knoxville, Iowa. She is a member of the Pella United Reformed Church.

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*The morning star reminds me that Christ has already come and accomplished everything needful for my salvation.*

# Examining the Nine Points:

## Point Three

*Synod affirms that the Scriptures and confessions teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone and that nothing that is taught under the rubric of covenant theology in our churches may contradict this fundamental doctrine.*

Therefore Synod rejects the errors of those:

3. *who confuse the ground and instrument of acceptance with God before the fall (obedience to the commandment of life) with the ground (Christ who kept the commandment of life) and instrument (faith in Christ) of acceptance with God after the fall.*

When Synod says “acceptance with God” with respect to Adam, they were referring to the biblical and confessional doctrine that Adam was given a law to obey as the condition of glorification.

Genesis 2:16-17 says: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (ESV). Our Belgic Confession calls these words the “command of life.” Adam’s life (and ours in him) was contingent upon obedience to this command, which we, with Paul, understand as a synecdoche, i.e., a part for the whole. The law of God requires that we love God with all our faculties and our neighbor as ourselves. In this case, Adam’s immediate neighbor was Eve but, in a sense, as the federal (representative) head of all humanity, Adam was to love us also by keeping the law, which he had the power to do.

Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15:45 set the paradigm for our understanding of this aspect of Gen 2. In 1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul speaks of the “first man Adam” and he calls Christ the “last Adam.” That is, he reads the whole of redemptive history in terms of two representative men: Adam and Christ. One was disobedient and missed glorification. The other was obedient and glorified. In Romans 5:12–21, the Apostle Paul uses the same “two Adam” scheme to interpret redemptive history. In v.12 Paul says that it was Adam’s *disobedience* that brought sin into the world. Notice that it was not Adam’s “fall from grace.” Adam’s sin was law breaking. That is also what the Apostle John says: sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4). Thus, Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 14 defines sin as “any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.” The fundamental human problem is legal and therefore its solution must also be legal.

This is the biblical and theological ground for synod speaking of our

“ground of acceptance by God.” On what basis does God accept anyone? On the basis of perfect legal righteousness and because Paul links Adam and Christ so closely and they are so closely linked in our theology and confessions, whatever we say about Adam tends to color what we say about Jesus. If we say that God would have accepted Adam’s obedience on the basis of grace (or congruent merit whereby God imputes perfection to imperfect obedience) then what will we say about Christ’s obedience? Some defenders of the covenant moralists have said that God the Father accepted Jesus’ obedience by grace.

Some of them have argued that Paul teaches this in Philippians 2. David VanDrunen and I have replied to this claim in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*. The short answer is that this claim relies on a fallacious etymology. In fact, as we demonstrate, Jesus earned approval from the Father by doing all that the Father gave him to do and all that he voluntarily agreed to do on our behalf (John 17). Just as the First Adam was in a covenant of works, so the Last Adam was in a covenant of works. Unlike the first, Adam, however, Christ, the last man, did not fail. He resisted temptation (Matt 4:1–11). He rebuked the evil one with God’s Word and he underwent the penalty due to the first Adam and all his children (1 Pet 3:18). This is precisely what Paul continues to teach in Romans 5:14, that Adam was a “type of the one who was to come.”

According to Paul, (v. 15) “many died through one man’s trespass....” That “one man” was Adam. Again, please note that Paul here speaks of Adam’s “trespass.” This is the language of the courts. “To trespass” is to violate the law. Only in this case does the contrast make sense: “But the free gift is not like the trespass.” When Paul says “free gift” he is speaking of grace. We, who trust in Christ’s finished work, are the beneficiaries of the satisfaction of the law made for us by another (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 12–19). Grace is premised on righteousness. Christ satisfied all righteousness (Matthew 3:15).

Adam’s disobedience brought death and condemnation (vv.16, 18a). Christ’s obedience brought grace, life, and salvation to all who believe (vv.16, 17). In v.18b Paul puts a fine point on things. He contrasts Adam’s “one trespass” with Christ’s “one [act of] righteousness” that brought “justification of life.” Verse 19 says the same thing. By “the one man’s disobedience” all were constituted sinners, i.e., Adam’s sin was imputed to us all. So too, by the “the one man’s obedience” will believers be constituted as righteous. Just as Adam’s trespass is imputed to those whom he represented (all humanity), so the Second Adam’s obedience is imputed to all those whom he represented, i.e., the elect, those who believe. In both cases, the ground of our standing before God was righteousness. In Adam’s case, it was his actual righteousness, under the terms of the covenant, until he forfeited it by sin. In Jesus’ case it was actual, inherent righteousness by virtue of his obedience

for us that is imputed to us. This is the ground of our justification.

Though the Roman Catholic and covenantal moralist critics of the Reformation doctrine of justification deride it as a “legal fiction,” our view is no such thing. Indeed, it is both Rome and the moralists who teach a doctrine of justification by legal fiction since they both teach that God imputes perfection to our best efforts (congruent merit). The Reformed churches teach that Christ actually *fulfilled* the law. His actual, perfect righteousness is credited, reckoned, imputed to all who believe. The ground of our righteousness, after the fall, is not inherent or intrinsic to us. It is inherent or intrinsic to Christ our righteousness and credited to us who believe.

Following a small group of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians including the neonomian Richard Baxter, the Federal Visionists have repeatedly called into question the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ, either by denying the imputation of Christ’s active obedience, or by quibbling about “imputation,” or by openly denying that we sinners need anyone’s righteousness imputed to us. In contrast, Synod Schererville declared “that the Scriptures and confessions teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, based upon the active and passive obedience of Christ alone.”

Synod also rejected the revision of the definition of faith, in the act of justification, proposed first by the Arminians—that faith justifies because it obeys—and put forward by

Norman Shepherd from 1974, i.e., that faith justifies because it trusts and obeys. Of course, it is obvious that if faith justifies because it works then the power of faith does not rest fully in Christ and in his finished work. If that were so, in the words of Belgic Confession Art. 22, “it then would follow that Jesus Christ is only half a Savior.

And therefore we justly say with Paul that we are justified ‘by faith alone’ or by faith ‘apart from works.’”

The question about the “instrument” of justification is about the nature of faith in God’s declaration of justification. How does faith function in God’s declaration? Does God declare us righteous because true faith “embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, and makes him its own....” (Belgic Confession Art. 22) or does God declare us righteous because we trust *and* obey? This was the choice faced by the Reformed Churches at Dort and this is the choice faced by the Reformed Churches today. This is why we deny that “faith itself” justifies (Belgic Confession, Art. 22). Faith itself does not justify. Faith is not the legal basis for God’s declaration that we are righteous. Christ’s righteousness imputed justifies. Christ’s righteousness imputed is the legal basis for our justification. We confess that, “faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness.” (Belgic Confession, Art. 22).

This is what Synod meant by speaking of the “instrument” of acceptance with God. The Heidelberg Catechism defines true faith as a “certain knowledge and a

## THE NINE POINTS OF (URCNA) SYNOD 2007

Synod affirms that the Scriptures and confessions teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone and that nothing that is taught under the rubric of covenant theology in our churches may contradict this fundamental doctrine. Therefore Synod rejects the errors of those:

1. who deny or modify the teaching that “God created man good and after His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness,” able to perform “the commandment of life” as the representative of mankind (HC 6, 9; BC 14);
2. who, in any way and for any reason, confuse the “commandment of life” given before the fall with the gospel announced after the fall (BC 14, 17, 18; HC 19, 21, 56, 60);
3. who confuse the ground and instrument of acceptance with God before the fall (obedience to the commandment of life) with the ground (Christ who kept the commandment of life) and instrument (faith in Christ) of acceptance with God after the fall;
4. who deny that Christ earned acceptance with God and that all His merits have been imputed to believers (BC 19, 20, 22, 26; HC 11-19, 21, 36-37, 60, 84; CD I.7, RE I.3, RE II.1);
5. who teach that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness (CD, I, V);
6. who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC 21, 60; BC 29);
7. who teach that Spirit-wrought sanctity, human works, or cooperation with grace is any part either of the ground of our righteousness before God or any part of faith, that is, the “instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness” (BC 22-24; HC 21, 60, 86);
8. who define faith, in the act of justification, as being anything more than “leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified” or “a certain knowledge” of and “a hearty trust” in Christ and His obedience and death for the elect (BC 23; HC 21);
9. who teach that there is a separate and final justification grounded partly upon righteousness or sanctity inherent in the Christian (HC 52; BC 37).

hearty trust.” Belgic Confession Article 23 defines faith in the act of justification (God’s declaration) as “leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified, which is ours when we believe in him.” Because we define faith this way, it is inappropriate to speak of Adam or Jesus having faith in this sense. Certainly the First and Second Adam trusted their Father, but Adam, in his state of righteousness, needed to trust no one else for justification because he was just. He needed no “mediator,” in that sense. To say that our Savior needed to trust the righteousness of another is blasphemy (Belgic Confession Art. 22).

For us sinners, Christ and his obedience for us, in our place, is our righteousness. True, justifying, faith leans, rests, trusts, and accepts Christ and his righteousness as its own. Anyone, for whatever reason, who says anything else about the ground or instrument of justification before God, is certainly not teaching the Reformed doctrine of justification.

**Dr. R. Scott Clark** is an Associate Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California.

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## Press Release of the Meeting of the URCNA Songbook Committee April 23 and 24, 2008

Our meeting was opened by our chairman, Rev. Knott, reading and making remarks on Psalm 150, and leading us in prayer. We were advised that Mr. Henry Nuiver, an original member of our committee, had passed away in February of this year. We note with appreciation the work that Mr. Nuiver did on behalf of the churches, as a member of our committee, and express our sympathy to his wife, Trudy, and their family.

After approving the agenda, and the minutes of our last meeting, we decided that we would anticipate meeting face to face for two days, three times per year, as URCNA committee, reserving one day per year for meeting as a joint songbook committee with the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise. This decision was made in light of the decisions made by Synod Schererville with respect to our mandate, namely, Acts of Synod Schererville Article 63, point 6, and, Article 78, point 10.

We agreed to review a list of hymns, drawn mainly from the 1987 Psalter Hymnal of the CRC, and *Cantus Christi*, for possible inclusion in the collection of hymns that we will propose to our churches.

We discussed a paper prepared by Rev. Lankheet on the “vivid historical present”, in order to help us address the legitimacy of speaking in the present tense about events that have taken place in the past,

particularly as we find that in many hymns about the birth, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The paper will be distributed to the members of the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise, for discussion at a future meeting of the joint committee.

We discussed the advisability of adding further members to the committee. We are inclined to seek out volunteers who will serve as resource people to help us with specific aspects of our work, e.g. the production of the songbook itself.

We discussed a proposal from Rev. Vander Meulen for the structure of the hymn section of the songbook. We also received from Rev. VanderMeulen some suggestions as to how we could educate the churches of the URCNA about our work. From Mrs. Daphne Jasperse, we received updated indices of the hymns we have placed on the “gross list” of hymns for possible inclusion in the songbook. We reviewed a number of recently published hymns, mainly produced by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, as well as selections from several songbooks, proposed for our consideration by Rev. Lankheet.

We received and discussed a letter received from Dr. John Smith, a minister of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, in answer to a question we had asked him, and several other scholars, regarding the use of the first person singular

pronoun, “I”, in the psalms. Since the psalms provide us with Scriptural examples of songs acceptable to God, we believe that understanding how the first person singular is used in the psalms will help us to apply Guideline 7 of the “Guidelines for Selecting Songs” (see Report of the Songbook Committee to Synod 2004), which instructs us to avoid “individualism” in the music of the church. We found Dr. Smith’s remarks very helpful.

We scheduled an on line meeting, to discuss the hymns from *Cantus Christi*, for May 20, 2008, and, our next face to face meeting, for July 9 and 10, 2008, in Jenison, Michigan. Thanks were expressed by the chairman for the good spirit in which the meeting was conducted, and Mrs. Jasperse led us in closing prayer.

for the committee,  
Rev. Dick Wynia, secretary

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## Press Release of the Meeting of the Joint Songbook Committee April 24, 2008

Our meeting was opened by Rev. Rand Lankheet, reading Psalm 115, making some remarks, and leading us in prayer. We were made aware of the fact that Dr. Nick Gootjes has asked to be temporarily relieved of his duties on the committee, in view of health concerns.

We spent quite some time discussing the actions taken by our respective synods with respect to our work as individual and joint committees. We were thankful to note that the Joint Committee's recommendations were adopted, unanimously, at Synod Smithers. At Synod Schererville, all but one of our recommendations were adopted. Synod decided to "postpone indefinitely" consideration of our recommendation that synod state its commitment that the songbook would be the official songbook of the united federation.

The decision of Synod Schererville to adopt Overture 17, which asked for clarification of the URCNA Songbook Committee's mandate, will have an impact on our work together as a joint committee. In view of the URCNA committee's goal of presenting a collection of hymns to their churches by June 2009, we decided that the URCNA committee would review the hymns on the gross list, plus some additional hymns. They will forward their remarks and conclusions to the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise, for their consideration. We will

compare notes at our next joint meeting.

We decided it would be helpful to speak together about "the **concept** of a common, official songbook", including some discussion of the use of official songbooks in the history of the Reformed churches, and, the purposes served by adopting such a songbook. We hope to take this up also on the agenda of our next joint meeting.

Following some discussion, and some revision, we approved the provisional Table of Contents for the Hymn Section. We decided that in principle, paraphrases of psalms are permissible, but, that they ought to be placed in the hymn section. We discussed the advice we had received from Dr. John Smith, regarding the use of "I" in the psalms, and how we might appropriately apply Guideline 7, which warns against allowing individualism in the church's songs. We are awaiting further expert advice on this subject.

We decided to ask some scholars to help us to possibly prepare new translations of several Latin hymns. In view of the advice we have received from Dr. C. VanDam, and Rev. M. VanderHart, and, in light of the usage in most of the Bible translations currently in use among our churches, we decided in principle that we will not use "Jehovah" as a translation of the covenant Name, "YHWH".

We agreed to meet, D.V., November 5-7, 2008, in Wyoming.

Thanks were expressed by the chairman, Rev. Knott, for what we could accomplish together, and the joy we find in our cooperation; we were led in closing prayer by Rev. VanderMeulen.

for the committee,  
Rev. Dick Wynia, secretary

### The Glorious Work of Home Visits

Rev. Peter G. Feenstra looks at the long standing practice of home visitation. This book gives direction for office bearers and others. Contents include: Scriptural underpinnings, history, character, purpose, and benefits of home visits. Price: \$5.71 plus shipping and tax.

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## Classis Reports of the URCNA

### Classis Michigan

July 8, 2008

Classis Michigan met on July 8, 2008 at the Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan. Rev. Brian Vos served as chairman. Before tackling the primary purpose for assembling, the delegates elected Rev. Greg Lubbers as the new clerk of classis, effective after the current meeting. Rev. Vander Meulen reported on the activities of the Mission Committee. The classis approved the financing of a mission website. Treasurer Vander Meer reported that the premiums for the classis health insurance would only increase one percent. Three delegates of classis also spoke of blessings and concerns within their respective churches.

The bulk of the meeting consisted of the candidacy examination of Mr. Travis Grassmid, graduate of Greenville Seminary. Mr. Grassmid was examined in areas of Practica, Bible knowledge, biblical exegesis, confessional knowledge, Reformed doctrine, church history, and ethics. After a brief discussion, delegates of classis agreed that Mr. Grassmid had sustained his examination and that his consistory could declare him eligible for call in the URCNA. They also voted that, should Candidate Grassmid receive a call within Classis Michigan, he would not need to be re-examined.

Another matter that generated some discussion was the transfer of membership of an emeritus minister from a disbanded church in Classis Michigan to a URC Church in

Ontario, Canada. While the church in Canada received the membership of the emeritus minister, it did not accept his ministerial credentials. Claiming that the ministerial credentials of an emeritus minister reside in the last calling church, the church in Canada absolved itself of any discipline, spiritual care, or financial obligation to the retired minister. The Canadian church went on to argue that Classis Michigan in general and one church of the classis in particular had “the burden of responsibility” to provide financially for the emeritus pastor.

After some discussion, which included the difficulty of maintaining spiritual oversight of a minister who is a member of a church several hundred miles away, classis advised the “one church in particular” that they were not responsible for the retired minister’s financial welfare since they had never called him. Classis went on to encourage all the churches of Classis Michigan to assist in the support of the minister, but acknowledged that it could not force churches to do so.

Advice was offered to two other churches on requested matters. After thanking Trinity URC for their gracious hospitality, the vice-chairman closed the meeting with prayer.

Respectfully submitted by  
Rev. W. H. Oord

### Classis Southwest U.S.

June 30, 2008

Classis Southwest U.S. was convened at First United Reformed Church of Chino, California, by the consistory of the High Desert United Reformed Church of Apple Valley. Because of a light agenda, this was one of the few times that the classis was held for only one day, rather than two. All twelve churches of classis were fully delegated. The delegates were led through the day under the chairmanship of Rev. Mike Brown assisted by Rev. Marcelo Souza. The meeting ran very smoothly.

The main part of the day was taken up with the candidacy examination of Mr. Jonathan Moersch of Oceanside United Reformed Church. Mr. Moersch was examined in all the areas prescribed by the Church Order and unanimously sustained the examination. We rejoice with him and his family and pray that God will use them greatly in His service.

Rev. Jay Fluck from the Western Classis of the Reformed Church in the United States was present to give ecumenical greetings on behalf of that denomination. The delegates also heard reports from members of the various synodical committees on which they serve. We also heard about the initial work toward a new church in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer

# This is My Outlook

For those in the Christian Reformed Church in North America who believe the Bible clearly teaches that women are not to hold office in the church, Synod 2008 has spoken. As seen in last month's article "It's Decision Time," the debate has been a long one with Synod declaring that the two opposing sides are both proper interpretations of Scripture and that those holding opposing views should seek unity with one another.

Two decades ago many who were opposed to women in ecclesiastic office drew a line in the sand saying that they could concede women as deacons, but would leave the denomination when synod approved women as elders. It did not take very long for that line to be washed away. A new line was drawn in which conservatives said they could accept women elders as long as they were not delegated to classis. Many conservatives left the CRCNA. Those remaining said they would leave the denomination when synod approved women as ministers. That line, too, was erased and the mantra became, "As long as it is not in my classis," which soon changed to "as long as it is not in my church."

Synods in the past tried to walk a fine line by not permitting women elders and ministers to be delegates to synodical meetings. Delegates to Synod 2008 saw not only women delegates but those in favor of women in office flaunted their view by voting for a woman as vice president.

According to the *Grand Rapids Press*, delegates opposed to women in ecclesiastical office protested the pre-synod service where women elders served the Lord's Supper. They believed that delegates opposed to women in office should have a male elder serve them. It seems the line in the sand for CRC conservatives has changed from "as long as it is not in my church" to "as long as it is not in my pew." How long can this last? Synod declared that it was up to the church leading the service who would serve communion.

The lines that conservatives have drawn in the sand over the last twenty years for the sake of unity have been washed away by the waves of tolerance. Although the CRCNA Synod has declared their view of Scripture as valid, it has rebuffed those opposed to women in office at every turn. It has mocked them in their convictions.

Centuries ago the prophet Jeremiah spoke of false prophets who cried out, "Peace, peace" when there was no peace. Today they cry out "Unity, unity" when there is no unity.

## Director of Youth

Cornerstone United Reformed Church of Hudsonville, MI is inviting applications for a Director of Youth Ministry (non-ordained). We seek a man who loves Christ, who is committed to the Reformed faith, who loves youth and who is passionate about and gifted in youth ministry. This individual's primary purpose is grounding the young people of our congregation in the Word of God and challenging them to grow into men and women of God. A complete list of job qualifications and responsibilities is available upon request by emailing [office@cornerstoneurc.com](mailto:office@cornerstoneurc.com). Interested candidates should send a cover letter and resume to Cornerstone URC, Attn Glenn Hop, 6442 – 32th Ave, Hudsonville, Michigan 49426.

# Looking Above

## A Series on The Revelation of Christ

### Revelation 11:15-19

#### “The Last Trumpet”

The trumpets of Revelation 8-11 have been sounding, shaking the created order with trumpets one through four, unleashing the hordes of hell with trumpet five, and ravaging the earth with war and rumors of war with trumpet six. The trumpets have been sounding since the time of Christ's first coming. They will continue to sound until Christ comes again. These trumpet blasts are intended to warn an unbelieving world of the judgment to come, summoning them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. These trumpet blasts are harbingers of the last trumpet that will sound on the great and coming Day of the Lord. The Day is coming when the last trumpet will sound!

It is the last trumpet that is set before us in Revelation 11:15-19.

“Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”” (v. 15). Here world history is brought to its conclusion. All is ended, and only one kingdom remains: the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever!

Note well that the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ comes in its consummate form only with the sounding of the last trumpet. The

kingdoms of this world do not become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ until the day when that last trumpet sounds. This means that Christ brings His kingdom; we do not. Christ brings His consummate kingdom in the great decisive event of the last day. Christ ushers in His kingdom; we do not. The eschatology of the book of Revelation is not the eschatology of the postmillennialist. Revelation knows nothing of a “golden age” for Christianity. Revelation knows nothing of a gradual process in which Christians, by their political and social machinations, usher in the kingdom of God. The eschatology of Revelation is clear: the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ comes as a decisive event that God Himself brings about, at the sounding of the last trumpet on the last day, when Christ returns!

Do not allow yourself to be deceived by those who want to restore culture in a vain attempt to usher in the kingdom of God. Do not allow yourself to be deceived by those who, in the name of common grace, want to wipe out the antithesis, thereby embracing all of culture in an attempt to realize creation regained. Our calling is not to bring about creation regained. Our calling is not to labor until justice and peace embrace. Such an approach sets our minds upon this world. Such an approach has as its goal

this world. Such an approach strips Christianity of its hope in the world to come. Such an approach leaves us so earthly-minded as to be of no heavenly good.

There is a world to come, and that world is our goal. The goal is not this world; the goal is the world to come. The goal is that world to which Christ brings us. The goal is that world which Christ brings. Michael Horton writes: “Christ's kingdom, though present in the power of the Word and Spirit, is nevertheless both qualitatively and quantitatively different from the fullness of the kingdom in the age to come. Although the kingdom is spreading throughout the world, it is never identified with the world in this age, but must always be distinguished from the temporal kingdoms and cultural identities that believers share with unbelievers. Only with the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15 do we finally hear the announcement: ‘the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever!’ It comes as a decisive event, not as a gradual process, for it is not the Church that carries the world into the Promised Land on her shoulders, but the Church herself whom the Rider of the White Horse carries on His train. It is He who, at the end of the age, sends His angels to drive the Canaanites out of the land and to bring Sabbath rest finally to Israel's war-weary camp.”<sup>1</sup>

At the sounding of the last trumpet, Christ will bring His kingdom, and He will reign forevermore, and that will bring the worship of His people,

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verses 16-18. “And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God...” (v. 16). Once more, we have the twenty-four elders, whom we have identified as symbolic of the office of the elder. Now, however, the imagery of the twenty-four elders has expanded. Here the twenty-four elders represent not only the office of the elder, but also the entire church. The entire church of Jesus Christ now falls on its face before the King of kings and Lord of lords in worship. We are reminded once more that salvation is not an end in itself. We are saved for a purpose, namely, that we might worship God. The worship of God is the end of our salvation.

Thus we hear the song of the Church in heaven. It is the song of thanksgiving: “We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty...” As the Church, we are servants of God, and here we are pictured giving thanks to the great and powerful King who has delivered us. He is the Lord God Almighty. He has power and invincible strength and has used it to save and deliver His people. Concerning this name, Herman Bavinck writes, “In this name God’s divinity and everlasting power is no more an object of fear and terror, but a source of blessing and comfort. God gives Himself to His people, and His invincible power is for them the guarantee of the fulfillment of His promises and of the fact that He will ever keep His covenant.”<sup>2</sup> What is your confidence that you are delivered and shall be preserved to the end, even through all eternity? It is the sovereign, invincible, almighty power of your God!

“We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned.” Most versions leave out the phrase, “Who is to come,” so that the passage reads, “We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was...because You have taken Your great power and reigned.” This translation is preferable. The phrase “who is to come” is intentionally omitted; it is omitted and replaced with the words, “because You have taken Your great power and reigned.” We are dealing here,

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***Salvation is not an  
end in itself. We are  
saved for a purpose.***

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after all, with the last trumpet; we are dealing with the Day of His coming. When the last trumpet sounds, Christ will come; there will be no more, “Who is to come...” On that day He will come!

In verse 18, the Church then sings of judgment and salvation. First comes the judgment of God upon the wicked: “The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged.” The nations were angry, and God’s wrath has now come. The nations will be angry for all eternity, but they will never again rise against God. Christ will reign forever and ever. Next, the Church sings of her salvation: “And that You should reward Your

servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great.” The Church is rewarded with the gift of her inheritance. This reward is not earned; it is a gift of grace. Otherwise, why would the Church give thanks? Finally, the Church sings again of the judgment of God upon the wicked: “And should destroy those who destroy the earth.”

The structure of verse 18 then, is as follows: judgment upon the wicked, the reward of the righteous, followed once more by the judgment of the wicked. Why this structure? Why the movement from the judgment of the wicked to the salvation of the righteous and back to the judgment of the wicked? I would submit to you that the movement is to underscore the nature of our inheritance. Note the last phrase, “and should destroy those who destroy the earth.” This earth, this present world, is capable of being destroyed. In fact, it is destined to be destroyed. It will be destroyed and it will be removed. In other words, this world, this earth, this creation, is only provisional, only temporary. It was never intended to be eternal. It was never intended to remain forever. The original creation was intended, from the very beginning itself, to give way to something better, namely, the eternal, transcendent order of the everlasting kingdom. This present heavens and earth will give way to the new heavens and the new earth.

The movement in verse 18, from judgment to salvation to the destruction of those who destroy the earth, is intended to focus our sites upon the inheritance that is ours in

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Jesus Christ: the new heavens and the new earth, wherein righteousness dwells, the eternal kingdom that can never be shaken, the eternal kingdom in which our Lord and His Christ shall reign forever and ever. That is our inheritance! Not creation regained. Not the garden restored. Not this world. Heaven is our inheritance!

And we receive it all of grace. Is that not where verse 19 finally points us? “Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.” The temple of God was opened in heaven. Make no mistake about it, this is not the earthly temple; this is the true temple made without hands, eternal in the heavens. This is heaven itself. This is the presence of God Himself, now being opened to us.

“And the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple.” The significance of this beautiful statement is found in the Old Testament imagery of the Day of Atonement. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the sacrifice. He would take that blood and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat. On top of ark, there were the cherubim, those heavenly beings that guarded the presence of God. Indeed, God Himself said that He dwelt between the cherubim. Inside the ark, of course, was the Law of God, that Law that all have transgressed, that Law against which all have sinned. And what do you find there between the presence of God and the transgressed Law, but the mercy seat? And what do you find

on that mercy seat but the blood of the sacrifice? Do you see it? Do you understand it? The blood of Christ has been shed, covering all our sins, so that we may stand in the presence of God with our sins washed away and clothed in the righteousness of Christ! The blood of Christ has availed for our salvation! The blood of Christ has washed away all of our sins! “The ark of His covenant was seen in the temple.” Do you see how this passage ends with the sovereign grace of our God? The Lamb that was slain, the One now exalted as the King of kings and Lord of lords is the very bulwark of our salvation, and that for all eternity!

There is one more thing to be pointed out. Note where our passage begins: it begins with God (v. 15). Note where our passage ends: it ends with God (v. 19). We begin with God, we end with God. And there in between, what do we find, but God giving Himself to His people? We begin with the throne of God, we end with the throne of God, and there in between we have the mighty acts of God in Christ Jesus by which He brings us to His throne, there to dwell for all eternity!

Here, in Revelation 11:15-19, then, we have reached the end. We have reached the end, though not exhaustively. We do not have here the full description of the end; we do not have here a developed description of heaven; for that we’ll have to wait until we proceed further in the book of Revelation. But here it is sufficient for us to know, that even in heaven, we shall never cease worshiping God for the glory of His sovereign grace!

Here, in Revelation 11:15-19 we have the last trumpet. God has told us what the end will be. We know how the story ends with the sounding of the last trumpet. As we hear the trumpets sounding even now, and as we anticipate the sounding of the last trumpet, we are led to delight all the more in Christ Jesus, our blessed Savior and Lord. Christ is on the throne, and when the last trumpet sounds, He will bring His kingdom, and He will reign forever and ever. And because of His sovereign grace, we shall see His face, and we shall reign with Him forever and ever!

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Horton, Michael. “Back to the Future, Rightly Understood.” *Modern Reformation*. Volume 10, Number 5, September/October 2001. p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Bavinck, Herman. *The Doctrine of God*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1951. p. 102.

**Rev. Brian Vos** is the pastor of the Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan.

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# In Memoriam: Mrs. Genevieve Piersma

Mrs. Genevieve Piersma, the wife of the late Rev. John H. Piersma, was called home to glory on May 31, 2008, at the age of 91 years. The funeral service was held at 10:30 a.m. on June 5, 2008, in Covenant Reformed Church in Pella, IA.

Rev. Patrick Edouard read from Revelation 21 and Psalm 73, reminding listeners of God's promises to take believers to glory and wipe away their every tear. He noted that it is natural to remember Genevieve Piersma as "Mrs. John Piersma" because she was so actively attached to her husband and his ministry for so many years. "Her life was one of service," said Rev. Edouard, "of grace, dignity, humility, and servitude."

That life of service began when Genevieve Scholtens was born in Grand Rapids, MI, on December 1, 1916, the second of seven children born to Edward and Jennie Japenga Scholtens.

She and John Henry Piersma met while they were attending Grand Rapids Christian High School. They were married on June 19, 1942, at the Alpine Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids. God brought two children into their home: John Dale, born on November 27, 1946, and Jane Ethel, born on June 9, 1951.

Following Rev. Piersma's graduations from the Protestant Reformed Seminary in 1943 and from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1947, the Piersmas moved to Oostburg, WI, where they served the first of many churches. Over the span of more than fifty years, they served congregations in Wisconsin, Michigan, Alberta, Iowa, Illinois, and Massachusetts.

While serving alongside her husband in the gospel ministry, Genevieve pursued her education and taught in elementary schools. Her children remember her not only as their mother, but also as their teacher.

The Piersmas returned to Pella, IA, in 2000 and Rev. Piersma served as the Associate Pastor at Covenant Reformed Church until his death on December 17, 2004.

Anyone who knew Gen Piersma will remember her warm eyes and wide smile. Her diminutive frame held a huge heart and gracious spirit. She exemplified humility and grace. Mrs. Genevieve Piersma was a small woman, but she was a great lady.

## Reformed Fellowship Annual Meeting November 7, 2008

Mark your calendars! Dr. Carl Trueman will speak at the Annual Meeting of Reformed Fellowship on November 7, 2008. Dr. Trueman is the editor of *Reformation 21*. He is a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and visiting professor at Puritan Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids.

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## Coming in September

Our September issue will be dedicated to men who have been called to the ministry. We anticipate several articles focusing on recent graduates from a variety of seminaries.

In addition, if you are looking for material for next season's Bible Study, we plan to begin a Bible Study on the Book of Judges.

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