



RFPA update

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30

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Justification by Faith Alone: The Heart of the Reformation

By David J. Engelsma, author of *The Gospel Truth of Justification*

This year the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) will commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation of 1517 by publishing *The Gospel Truth of Justification*, a book on the truth of the gospel that was the heart of the Reformation.

The book is a thorough explanation of the divine, saving act of justification and a vigorous defense of the doctrine, not only against the old heresies of Rome and of Arminianism, but also against the contemporary attacks on justification by the new perspective on Paul, Evangelicals and Catholics Together, and the federal vision.

Originally conceived by the author as a polemical work against the modern attacks on, and departures from, the truth of justification, the book became instead a thorough and systematic, largely positive treatment of the doctrine. Instead of contending with the theologians, it instructs Reformed and Presbyterian believers, including perhaps some ministers, in the truth that is the heart of the gospel and that, therefore, bears on all the other truths of the gospel. The book explains justification as imputation; that justification is by faith; the essential importance of justification's being by faith "only"; the meaning of justification's being "by the faith of Jesus"; the assurance of faith, with particular reference to the error of Puritanism; the "when" of justification, including a careful, moderate, and biblical defense of eternal justification; the origin of justification in the counsel of the covenant; the merit of Christ's active obedience; the still controversial relation of Paul and James; the necessary relation of justification and election; and more.

The book is permeated with biblical exposition, and the doctrine is founded upon scripture.

Although not mainly polemical, the book throughout defends justification by faith alone, especially against contemporary false doctrines and teachers. It names names. This alone makes the book worthwhile. For the present-day Reformed churches and theologians, facing an assault on the gospel truth of justification that threatens and undoes everything that the Reformation confessed and for which the reformers contended, either fall into a cowardly silence or subtly compromise the fundamental gospel truth. Thus, there is a great falling away (unto perdition)—not of the "liberal" Protestant churches, which became apostate long ago and are ready, if not eager, to fall into the embrace of Rome—but of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches that still have a reputation of "conservative" and orthodox.

Nevertheless, the book is more than a contemporary defense of justification against modern heresies and heretics, including the new perspective on Paul, the federal vision, N. T. Wright, and Norman Shepherd. It is also more than only a historical commemoration of the sixteenth-century Reformation's stand on behalf of the truth of justification by faith alone. These two features alone would make the book timely.

In two respects the book can justly, if audaciously, claim to be a development of the doctrine that was the heart of the Reformation. First, contemporary heresies have occasioned development of the doctrine, for example, the ultimate grounding of justification in the counsel of the covenant. Second, the book is a systematic, thorough, concentrated treatment of justification. The reformers worked the truth of justification into their commentaries, theological treatises on various subjects, and polemical works. They did

not, so far as I am aware, produce a work devoted strictly to justification in a systematic, concentrated, thorough treatment of the doctrine.

The RFPA contributes to the commemoration of the Reformation, therefore, not only by remembering the gospel truth of justification, but also by explaining the doctrine

to a new, much later generation of Protestant believers, by defending it against contemporary foes, and by developing it further.

Luther—to whose memory the book is dedicated—would be glad.

Annual Meeting



The RFPA annual meeting took place on Thursday, September 29, 2016 at 7:30 p.m. at Providence Protestant Reformed Church. This year the Board invited Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of Doon Protestant Reformed Church, to be the speaker. Rev. Engelsma's speech was entitled, "Lord Grant Boldness: The RFPA's Witness in the Sexual Revolution." The turnout for the annual meeting was encouraging to the RFPA Board and staff. Cars were parked helter-skelter through the parking lot, and the pictures show that we were over capacity in the sanctuary and had to set up chairs!

The secretary of the RFPA, Josh Hoekstra, gave his annual report entitled, "The Truth Never Begg: The Necessary Voice of the Reformed Free Publishing Association." Josh began his report with a quote from an editorial penned by Herman Hoeksema in 1953 entitled, "Why We Should Read the *Standard Bearer*":

Mark you well, the *Standard Bearer* is not begging for subscriptions. The truth never begs. And the *Standard Bearer* represents the truth. If many of us are not interested in the Protestant Reformed truth anymore, something which I am still loath to believe, the truth of God nevertheless stands and marches on, even without them. Besides, I do not want mere subscribers, but readers that will make careful study of our paper and read it from cover to cover.

The complete secretary's report and the annual meeting speech will be printed in an upcoming issue of the *Standard Bearer*. If you have not listened to the speech, you can do so at our website, rfpa.org/pages/rfpa-annual-meeting-speeches.

New RFPA Board



Back Row (L-R): Charles Doezema, Jon Rutgers (Chairman of Membership & Marketing), Josh Hoekstra (Secretary), Nathan Price, Gord Schipper (Vice-President & Chairman of Book & SB), Jim Koole (President)

Front Row (L-R): Gary Nienhuis (Vice-All), Dan Schipper, Dan Kuiper, Andy Bylsma (Treasurer & Chairman of Finance)

Not pictured: Jason Engelsma, Eugene Kamps

The Importance of *The Reformed Baptism Form*

Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-944555-12-2. 448 pages. Retail: \$39.95
Book Club: USA \$25.97 | International \$27.96

The Reformed Form for the Administration of Baptism is one of the most important of all the secondary confessions of many Reformed churches worldwide. It is certainly the most widely read form in the churches. The original edition dates back to the late 1500s—not long after the dawn of the Protestant Reformation. This edition used by Reformed churches today was officially adopted by the Synod of Dordt in 1618–19.

The Form has been translated into various languages, including Dutch. Today it is read at the baptism of adult converts and of the infant children of believers in many Reformed churches throughout the world. By virtue of its use to administer, solemnize, and explain the sacrament of baptism, this form is read in the worship services of Reformed churches more often than any other creed or form, with the exception of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Lacking, however, has been a thorough, faithful, sound commentary on the Baptism Form in the English language.

This lack is now fulfilled for the first time by the authoritative, if not definitive, English translation of the commentary on the form by the highly qualified and esteemed Dutch pastor and theologian, Dr. B. Wielenga, *Ons Doopsformulier*, (in English: *The Reformed Baptism Form: A Commentary*. Kok of Kampen originally published Wielenga's commentary in Dutch in 1906.

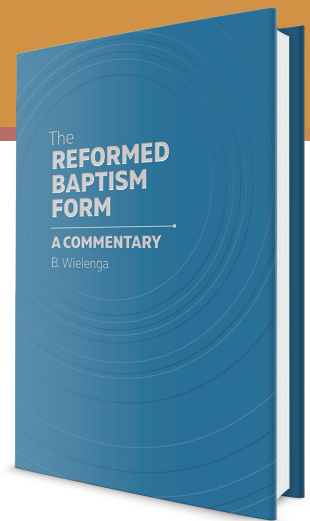
The 448-page commentary includes chapters on “The Doctrine of Baptism in General”; “The Doctrine of Infant Baptism in Particular”; “The Prayer before Baptism”;

“Admonition to the Parents”; and the “Prayer of Thanksgiving after Baptism.”

The commentary sets forth the Reformed doctrine of baptism as sign and seal, the doctrine of the covenant of God with the children of believers, and other vitally important truths related to the sacrament, including the relation of the covenant and election.

It is also intensely practical, considering such matters as whether the officiating minister should sprinkle once or three times; whether it is proper to make of the administration of the sacrament an occasion for the gathering of relatives and friends; and, more significantly, whether parents and church are to regard and rear the baptized children of believers as regenerated, saved children of God, or as unsaved “little vipers”—in which the latter case, of course, no rearing is possible.

The author was determined to explain the language itself of the form, avoiding the temptation to introduce his own convictions. Written clearly and simply to be of benefit to all Reformed believers, the commentary also gives the Reformed pastor deep insight into the sacrament of baptism and its administration. This is a book that will help all Reformed Christians, pastors, and churches to be Reformed in thinking and practice with regard to the sacrament of baptism, especially with regard to the baptism of the infant children of believing parents.



New RFPA Blog Writer

We are excited to announce another writer who is joining the existing pool of writers for the RFPA blog. Aaron Cleveland is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is married to Molly and they have seven children. In his writing Aaron will bring a perspective from the pew. Aaron began writing for us mid-November, so you have likely already read some of his posts.



New Technology

The RFPA's phone system was donated and installed at the time of the construction of our building in 2006. This phone system has since become very outdated and had many deficiencies, e.g., no caller ID and not easily programmable. Since copper phone lines will soon be a thing of the past, we installed a new internet-based phone system using funds that are budgeted each year for equipment improvement. This system has all of the necessary features needed by the staff and can even be programmed remotely in the event that the staff cannot make it into the office—such as a Michigan snow storm!

IN REVIEW: CHRISTIANIZING THE WORLD: REFORMED CALLING OR ECCLESIASTICAL SUICIDE?

David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. Hardcover. 192 pages. \$19.95.

Reviewed by Julian Kennedy, a member of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland

The publication of this book, which is based on a speech given by Professor Engelsma in a public lecture in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 2014, ostensibly coincides with the imminent appearance of the English translation of Abraham Kuyper's three-volume magnum opus on common grace which has been funded by various Reformed and Presbyterian churches and the Acton Institute—which is essentially Roman Catholic.

Engelsma's points are incisive, convincing, and devastating of all Kuyper's errors. "Christianizing the world" is NOT a Reformed calling and it denies total depravity, breaches the antithesis, destroys the oneness of the true Reformed worldview, causes world conformity, leads to an erroneous belief in postmillennialism, and ultimately the apostasy of churches and the rise of antichrist (the latter point actually made by Kuyper himself!) On a more local level it has led to the falling away of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and Calvin Theological Seminary. Many, many other Reformed churches are erring through espousing this doctrinal system.

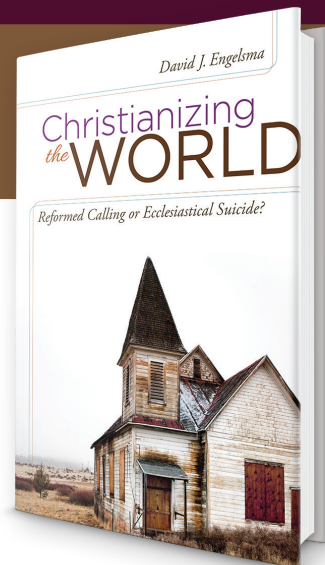
Engelsma shows that Kuyper's interpretation of the Noahic covenant is wrong and that what he taught was

anti-confessional and not Reformed.

Among the charges made about the Protestant Reformed Churches—the only denomination to oppose Kuyper's view and its adoption by the CRC—was that they were "Anabaptist." Engelsma again shows that this is spurious and false stating, "The Reformed Christian is permitted, indeed required, to live this godly life in physical contact and even earthly cooperation with the ungodly, for example, at work, in the neighbourhood, and in the life of the nation."

The second half of the book consists of Engelsma's answers to questions from the floor and others posted later. It also delves into several ramifications of Kuyper's views.

It is a much-needed book that ought to be read by every member of Reformed and Presbyterian churches whose seminaries and leaders are almost all falling away from the Biblical truth of the five points of Calvinism and in particular sovereign, irresistible, particular grace.



New RFPA Staff Member



The newest addition to the RFPA staff is Miriam Koerner. Miriam is completing her final year at Grand Valley State University. She will graduate in the spring with a BA in English with a focus in Language and Literature and a minor in Writing. She has a special interest in children's literature and has taken related classes. In the summer of 2016, Miriam had an internship at the Holland Museum. During her internship she researched Isaac Cappon, the city's first mayor, and his family, and served as a docent leading tours of the family home. Miriam is a member of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids and a granddaughter of the late Rev. Peter Breen. We welcome her to the staff!

New Book Releases

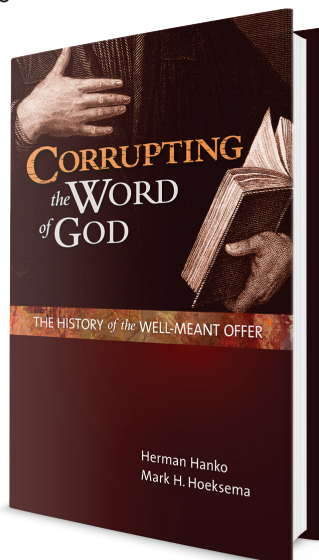
Corrupting the Word of God: The History of the Well-Meant Offer
Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-944555-10-8
272 pages. Retail: \$24.95
Book Club: USA \$16.22
International \$17.46

Does the eternal, unchangeable, all-powerful, and sovereign God really have a temporal, changeable and weak desire to save those whom he has unconditionally reprobated (Rom. 9:22), for whom the Son did not die (John 12:31), and whom the Holy Spirit will not regenerate, sanctify or glorify (John 3:8)?

Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Anabaptism, Arminianism, Amyraldism, and Marrowism say yes to the well-meant offer of the gospel. The biblical, Augustinian, Reformed, and creedal position is no!

Emeritus professor of church history, Herman Hanko, guides us through fascinating doctrinal controversies in the early Reformation and modern eras of the church, taking us to North Africa, Switzerland, France, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, and America, emphasizing the teachings of the great theologians, such as Augustine and John Calvin, on God's particular grace, which is always irresistible and never fails or is frustrated.

In dealing with the historical perspective of God's absolutely sovereign grace versus the well-meant offer, this book fills a gap in the literature, and does so in a way that is warm and easily understood.



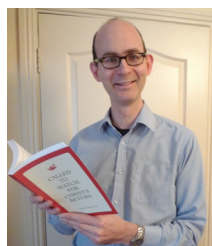
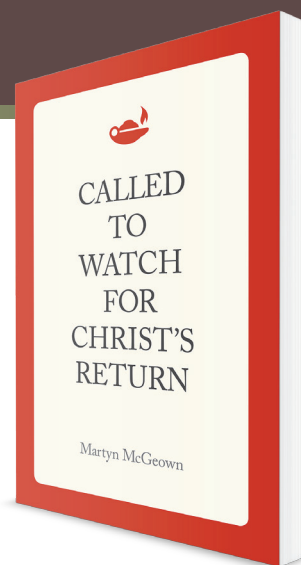
Called to Watch for Christ's Return
Softcover.
ISBN 978-1-944555-14-6
304 pages. Retail: \$14.95
Book Club: USA \$9.72
International \$10.46

A few days before Jesus gave his life on the cross, his disciples asked, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3). Christ responded with the Olivet Discourse, a detailed teaching on the doctrine of the last things.

We need to understand the signs of Christ's coming for our comfort as we look for "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Christ had two concerns. First, his disciples must know the signs of his coming, which are footsteps of his approach. But Christ is not satisfied with mere "sign-gazing," which can lead to speculation and idle, foolish living. He did not give signs to satisfy our curiosities, but so that we will be ready for him when he returns. Therefore, Christ's second concern was the readiness of his disciples, which is expressed in his urgent and repeated warnings to watch for his coming in light of the signs.

Watch, pray, and serve the Lord with an eye to the signs of his return!



Rev. McGeown

Martyn McGeown grew up in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland and is a member of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland. He graduated from the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in June 2010 and has been the missionary-pastor of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship in Limerick, Ireland since July 2010.

Free *Standard Bearer* Special Issues

For many years the *Standard Bearer* has published special issues that recognize significant events in the Reformation of the church (e.g. Abraham Kuyper and the Reformation of 1886, The Synod of Dordt, etc.) or important topics in the believer's life (e.g. Prayer, The Reformation and a Holy Life, etc.). The RFPA has a surplus of inventory of many of these special issues and we are offering them at **no charge** for evangelism purposes, discussion groups, and personal use. The complete list can be found at the RFPA blog at www.rfpa.org/blogs/news/standard-bearer-special-issues. To place your order call (616-457-5970) or email (mail@rfpa.org).





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Reader Feedback

From a reader in Illinois (*God's Goodness Always Particular*): "...Hoeksema does an incredible job of not only handling a handful of disputed passages, but he demonstrates the "current" of the Bible's teaching on the doctrine of grace. It is hard not to look at the two denominations that came away from this theological battle in 1924 and not see that Hoeksema and company were right. Ninety-two years later, the PRC is still upholding the Reformed faith, still training ministers to be faithful to scripture, and still adhering faithfully to the Three Forms of Unity. [The] CRC is riddled with liberalism and moral relativism—the very things Hoeksema warned would come as a result of their pernicious doctrine of "common grace."

Feedback on *Christianizing the World*: "Thank you for writing (and publishing) this important book. For me, it connected so many dots that I knew were there, but just could not figure out the 'common' denominator."

From a reader in Canada: "Thank you for your diligence! May God continue to mightily use and bless your work in His name!"

From a reader in Canada: "Thanks for all you do and all the RFPA does in printing and spreading God's precious word."

From a reader in California: "The blog posts are one of the best ideas yet!"

The RFPA UPDATE

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