

missions

OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES

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From Our Newly Instituted Mission Church in Spokane, Washington

By Rev. Rodney Kleyn, recently ordained minister of Covenant of Grace PRC

Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church was organized in late March 2009. Upon organization, two elders and one deacon were ordained into office. Shortly after this the congregation extended a call to me to come and be their pastor. Now, it has been almost four months since Liz and I and our five children moved out to Spokane.

At present the congregation here numbers eight families. There are five younger families, including our own, two older couples in their seventies, and three individuals, two of whom are older gentlemen. Besides members, we have a couple and two other individuals who have been in regular attendance for several years.

Congregational life includes our regular Sunday worship services at 10 AM and 5 PM, catechism classes for 9 of the 15 children here, a ladies Bible study one week and a combined adult study the other week, a monthly fellowship dinner after the morning service, and lots of interaction within the congregation between the members.

We have been very warmly received as a family here and are enjoying the closeness of the church.

The backgrounds of the members here are very interesting. None of them are of Dutch origin or



Rev. Rodney Kleyn, his wife Liz, and their five children.

of Reformed/Calvinistic background. Each of them has a story to tell of how they came to know and embrace the Biblical teaching on especially the sovereignty of God in salvation. Also, almost none of them are originally from the Spokane area but have moved in to this community from other parts of the country. Their stories are a testimony to the power of grace in the lives of God's elect, and to the fact that Christ is still busy gathering his church from outside, even within our own country.

Over the past several years a Fall conference has been put on here in Spokane. This year I spoke four times, on Friday evenings in October, on "Biblical Principles for Personal Finances." In early November Rev. Haak came and spoke on "Calvin and Predestination." We had some visitors to the finance speeches, but especially encouraging for us were the 27 visitors to Rev. Haak's speech, some of who returned for the Sunday worship services.

Since our arrival in July there have been outside visitors to our Sunday services almost every week. Some of these are people just passing through town and looking for a reformed church. Some have been PRC visitors from other congregations, which we find very encouraging. But, we have also had a steady flow of outside visitors, including repeat visitors. In the last month we have had some college students coming back repeatedly for our evening service. It is very difficult for anyone with some reformed and Calvinistic leanings to find a church in this city, and so we are able to fill that gap as a church.

The Reformed Witness Hour is broadcast in Spokane every Sunday morning at 9 AM on KQNT 590AM. Since coming to town, I have gone in to the radio station and recorded some promos for this program which are played throughout the week. I have also recorded an intro and exit for the program which identify it with



Rev. Rodney Kleyn with the Covenant Council Members



The Covenant of Grace PRC Congregation

our church. Besides this, we have used the radio to advertise for our fall conference and Calvin Lecture. I am exploring other ways to use the radio here too, maybe getting the Reformed Witness Hour on a second station, or airing our worship services, or even starting some radio program of our own. We have already had visitors to our lectures and services from the radio advertising, and besides this people are hearing the ads and telling our members (including our children at school) that they have heard them. This is one way we hope to create some more exposure and awareness in the community.

Another means of advertising we use is the internet. We have our own website, www.reformedspokane.org, which we are currently updating and redesigning. On this page are a lot of materials and links explaining the Reformed faith. Recently we also began a live broadcast of our Sunday services and special lectures from our web site. You can listen in too, if you'd like. We are also uploading all our sermons to the internet on www.sermonaudio.com. We recently began advertising on Facebook and Sermonaudio also. We are using Facebook for advertising our Friday evening lectures. This has increased the traffic to our website considerably.

The majority of visitors who have come to our services and special events have been through personal

invitations. I have been impressed with how good the members here are at getting material into the hands of other people and calling them or bringing them along to church or our speeches. This should be an encouragement for all of you in the area of personal witnessing.

Our family is settling well into the life of the church and community. Spokane is a very beautiful area and the house we live in is only half a mile from a massive state park that follows the Spokane River for many miles and has many bike paths and beautiful spots. We have enjoyed the outdoors since we have been here. The children did leave behind many good friends in Michigan, but it has been good for them to come to a much smaller church and begin to relate to adults and strangers on a more personal level. Our children are attending a small, very conservative, Baptist school, which we are very happy with. It provides a very safe spiritual environment for our children, free from many of the influences of the world, and having a high view of the Word of God and a good emphasis on personal godliness. We would like to have our own PRC school here someday, but at present that is not a possibility.

The city of Spokane has not been hit as obviously by the national economic down-turn as some other parts of the country. There still seems to be a lot of employment opportunities here, especially in the

medical field. There are a number of larger universities in the area (Eastern Washington, Whitworth, Gonzaga), and the cost of living is relatively low. If you are considering an education, or a move to another part of the country where we have an established PRC congregation, consider Spokane. Not only would you have the experience of living in a new place, but the enriching experience of being part of a small, vibrant, growing, mission-oriented congregation.

Please come visit us and our congregation. If you are in the area, or if you are planning a trip to the West Coast or the National Parks, include us in your itinerary (we are only 5 hours from Glacier). The congregation would like to grow more into the life of the denomination and one important way for that to happen is through personal contacts and visits. It is also very encouraging for the saints here to receive visitors from our churches.

We would invite you to stay in touch with us out here in Spokane. We feel that we are continuing the denominational work of missions here and covet your prayers in this. Please pray that the Lord will bless our labors here, keeping us faithful, and increasing our size so that the witness of the Reformed faith may become more permanent in this community.

In the love of Christ,

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

MISSION WORK AND THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM



By Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma,
missionary in Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania

I am a Reformed pastor who is called by the church to preach and teach the Reformed faith on the mission field. Quite naturally then the question arises: do the Reformed confessions teach us anything about the task of missions? The Canons of Dortrecht most certainly do in several different articles. In fact, the instruction given in the Canons is indispensable, in my estimation, for a proper understanding of mission work and the call of the gospel.

The intent of this article, however, is not to examine the teaching of the Canons of Dortrecht. I wish to focus attention on the Heidelberg Catechism. Does the Heidelberg Catechism teach us anything about mission work? The question comes to mind: how often have I heard a sermon preached out of the Heidelberg Catechism on the subject of missions? I certainly cannot remember one. Neither have I preached one. Is this true because the Catechism teaches us nothing about this important work of the church? Or is there instruction in the Catechism that is overlooked because the Catechism is most often preached in the setting of the established church? Now that I have put on the spectacles of a home missionary, I admit I have a tendency to examine questions of this sort more closely. I look for Scriptural and confessional warrant for the work that I do, as well as a proper understanding of what is involved in missions.

Does the Catechism teach us anything about mission work?

Lord's Day 21; Question and Answer 54

Question 54 of Lord's Day 21 asks, "What believest thou concerning the 'holy catholic church' of Christ?" The answer to this question is indeed pertinent to the task of missions: "That the Son of God, from the beginning of time to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves unto Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life. . ." There are two important truths in this answer that touch upon missions. First, the Son of God gathers unto Himself by His Spirit and Word, a church. Second, Christ gathers this church out of the whole human race. Both of these truths address the subject of missions.

From this question and answer of the Catechism it is clear that the objective means Christ employs to gather His church in this world is the Word. By the term "Word", however, is not simply meant the Bible. What is meant here is the preaching of the Word. After all, the preaching of the Word is the power of God unto salvation (I Corinthians 1:18 ff.; Romans 10:13-15). Christ has chosen to gather His church by means of the preaching of the Word.

That is significant in light of so much that goes under the name of mission work today. Mission work is not some great humanitarian enterprise in which the church involves herself. This enterprise is carried on well enough through such secular organizations as the Red Cross, UNICEF, and United Way, etc.. Nowhere does the Bible teach that the church must join the ranks of these organizations and make it her task to do the same thing but with a distinctly Christian flavor. This is not to say that individual believers cannot seek to help others in this way. But this is not the task of the church institute.

The command of Christ to the church institute (the function of the church) according to God's Word is to preach

the Word in season and out of season (II Timothy 4:2). I do not deny that this work may take other sorts of labors and laborers to assist in the work of missions. In her work especially in foreign fields, but also in domestic missions to a certain extent, the church may not neglect the earthly needs of those to whom the gospel is brought. But when taking care of the earthly becomes the focus of mission work, and the preaching of the Word becomes only one of the peripheral tasks, then the church has carved the heart out of missions. The Catechism reminds us, Christ has chosen to gather His church through the objective means of the preaching of the Word. Everything else is peripheral.

We are also taught in question and answer 54 that this preaching must go out into all the world. Christ gathers His church "out of the whole human race". It is the task of the church, in as much as she is able, to preach the Word in all of the world since it pleases Christ to save a universal church. More can be written on this, but our space is limited. The Catechism in other Lord's Days pursues the subject of the value of the preaching on the mission field. This we wish to examine.

Lord's Day 25; Question and Answer 65

The Catechism addresses the reason that the preaching is so necessary on the mission field in question and answer 65 of Lord's Day 25. "Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed? From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments." It is by means of the preaching of the gospel that the Holy Spirit chooses to work faith in those who hear. That is one reason the preaching is the chief means of grace: it can actually work faith in the heart of a person. This is true, of course, only because the Holy Spirit is working through this means. The

Holy Spirit is the one who actually works faith. Christ gathers His church through the Spirit. Preaching in itself has no power to work faith. But Christ through His Spirit powerfully uses the preaching to work faith in someone.

When born and raised in the sphere of the church and covenant we often do not pay much attention to this aspect of the preaching. This is true because the preaching is also used by God in the established church to nourish, strengthen, and maintain the faith of those who are already saved. The Spirit through the preaching confirms the faith He has already worked in us. Because this is true of many of us, however, we do not give much thought to the truth that the Spirit also uses the preaching on the mission field to work faith in many who are not saved and do not have faith.

It can be true in the sphere of the established church too, but more often on the mission field the Spirit of Christ is pleased to use the preaching to transform a person from spiritual death to life. The preaching actually effects the power of regeneration or conversion. At that moment the faculty or power of faith by which a person is bound to Christ is worked as well. That, in turn, immediately produces the activity of faith. A person becomes conscious of his salvation. He receives the knowledge and confidence of faith. In this way the preaching works faith. In that connection too, often times the preaching is used by the Spirit on the mission field (especially on the domestic field where most people have been exposed to some form of Christianity already) to bring a person to a more complete knowledge and assurance of faith.

Lord's Day 31; Question and Answer 84

The Catechism further teaches us what must be preached on the mission field in order to bring men to repentance and faith. Again, there is a question and answer of the Catechism that we always seem to apply to the church institute because the Lord's Day it is found in deals with Christian

discipline. Question and answer 84 of Lord's Day 31 reads: How is the kingdom of heaven open and shut by the preaching of the gospel?

Thus: when according to the command of Christ it is declared and publically testified to all and every believer, that whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted; according to which testimony of the gospel God will judge them, both in this and in the life to come.

Certainly, we do not think that this is preached only in the sphere of the church! Sometimes I fear that it is not preached strictly enough in the church itself. Believers must also consistently hear the call to repentance. Daily we are to turn from sin.

But what is true in the sphere of the church is an even larger reality on the mission field. Here is the gospel that must be preached on the mission field. We are sinners who together stand under one common condemnation. We all deserve to perish everlastingly for our sin and unbelief. We must not deceive ourselves, the price of sin must be paid: everlasting punishment. No one will escape the just wrath of God against such sin. All men will die and stand in judgment before God. But here is the good news: God has provided for us a way out of our sin and condemnation. He has sent into this world Jesus Christ who has died on the cross to save sinners. Acknowledge your sin and repent. Turn from sin and to the cross of Jesus Christ. Believe on Him because he is the only way to escape punishment and to be received into God's favor. God gives this promise to those who sincerely repent: he that comes to Jesus Christ in true faith I will in no wise cast out! All those who thirst after Christ I will freely give of the waters of life.

The opposite must be preached

too. It must also be declared on the mission field to all unbelievers that if there is no repentance they stand exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation so long as they are unconverted. In this way God's Word preached on the mission field acts as a two-edged sword. It is a savor of life unto life and a savor of death unto death.

When the Word is preached in this way, Christ through His Spirit chooses to call people out of darkness and into the light of salvation. The Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel irresistibly draws out of this world of unbelief (John 6:44) those chosen to everlasting life (Acts 13:48) that as a result they receive the promise of the gospel and God grants them the forgiveness of sin and salvation.

In that way the preaching serves mission work. That is the purpose of mission work: to bring God's elect people to the conscious assurance and joy of salvation! Yes, my heart as a missionary goes out to those who suffer earthly want and need in this world. I am not calloused to that. Where I can, I help. But my real concern is the salvation of their souls! Has God chosen as one of His own that visitor to whom I am preaching? Has He willed to bring him or her to salvation through the preaching? Will that visitor be given by God's grace a place with me in heaven? Perhaps. But I know that God will accomplish His sovereign will and good pleasure through the preaching.

So we preach the Word. We search out every way possible to preach the Word. As a missionary I am assured that I stand in the footsteps of those who have gone on before me. Psalm 68:11, "The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it." Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" This is how Christ gathers His church. It pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save those that believe.