

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

December 2, 2012
No. 3648

Walk As Children of Light
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear fellow saints in the church of Jesus Christ,

The apostle Paul sent the letter we are studying to the church that was instituted in the city of Ephesus. He gives these saints in the church there specific instruction about the church and their place in it. He set forth for them the beautiful truth of the church of Christ and how these saints have become members of that church.

Because this is a letter written to a particular church or congregation, we can apply it to the church of which we are members. We can apply it also to ourselves as members of that church. What Christ, through Paul, writes to the Ephesian church and the saints there, He writes to you and me.

In our last broadcast we considered the relationship of one member of the church to other members—how we are to deal with each other within the confines of the church. We were commanded to put all bitterness, aggravation, wrath, anger, arguing, and evil-speaking away from us. Then we were commanded to replace this with kindness, tender-heartedness, and forgiveness. This is how believers are called to deal with one another. It is true that we are to deal with *everyone* in this way, but the injunction we considered last time was given to members and their dealings with other members in the church institute.

Now Paul has passed on from the several exhortations he has given us in this regard. Starting in verse 3 of chapter 5 Paul gives us instruction in how we are to deal with those who are outside of the church, when they still walk in unbelief and sin. In verses 3-6 the command is very clear. The sins of the wicked society in which we live must not be named among us as become saints. Notice, Paul writes:

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Then we receive this clear and unequivocal command of verse 7: “Be not ye therefore partakers with them.” These are the sins of the world. These are the sins that characterize unbelievers, those who have no fear of God. We are children of the light. It is this positive instruction, found in verse 8, that we wish to consider today in our broadcast. We read there in verse 8:

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.

That is the admonition the members of the church, believers, receive in this passage, and that is what we study today: Walk as children of the light.

Light versus darkness. This is the best possible picture Paul can use to illustrate the spiritual difference between the believer and the unbeliever. It is either light or darkness, day or night. These are opposites. We read in verse 8: “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light.” At one time we were darkness, but now we are light.

By pointing this out to us, God's Word here forces you and me to examine ourselves, that is, examine what we have experienced in our own lives. We know the difference between light and darkness because we were at one time darkness but now we are light. God has changed our spiritual darkness to light. We know how terrible and how horrible the darkness of sin was in our lives, do we not? We also know what God has done for us in saving us from such darkness.

You see, spiritual darkness refers to the condition of our hearts and minds prior to our salvation. It refers to the bondage of our will to sin and Satan. Everything that we desired was enslaved to sin. Darkness refers to our depravity, our corruption. There was no light in us. We were blind, unable to see the glory of God or the horrible reality of sin in our lives. And we were unable to see the beauty of the cross. Things of the kingdom of God were hidden from us. Our desires were entirely worldly. We wanted nothing more than what this present sinful world had to offer.

And when we were told about the kingdom of God, about sin and the need of salvation in Christ, we, in the total darkness of our heart and mind, imagined that we were good enough in ourselves and really did not need salvation. All this because there was no fear of God before our eyes. Everything was dark. Everything was blackness.

But the darkness that Paul speaks of here in this passage includes more. It includes the punishment of sin that was due us on account of such sin. We sit in the darkness. We sit in the shadow of death. Because of our sin we are liable to punishment. And the punishment that is due us is that we be cast into outer darkness, the outer darkness of hell, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Sin is rebellion against God, and God does not suffer such rebellion to go unpunished. That, too, then, is a part of the darkness that we were subject to when we were walking in sin.

But such darkness was dispelled. What was true of us then is no longer true of us now. We are now children of the light. The darkness of soul, the bondage of sin that totally enveloped our hearts in a shroud of night, has been driven away. We were not able to drive it away ourselves. But we who sat in the shadow of death have seen a great light. It was the light of God's grace as it now shines in our hearts.

But before we consider just how it is that we have come to have light in the place of darkness, consider first your heart. What do you see in it? Is it light? Or is it darkness? Do you know from what you have been delivered? Can we reflect back on how horrible sin is and in what a terrible condition such sin left us? Are we able to see the light of God's countenance in us dispelling that night? Only as we can look back in disdain and horror at the darkness of such sin will we be able to appreciate that we are now children of the light. We now are given light to see that ours is a new life, a life that is filled with the peace of God and understanding.

That light, quite obviously, is not in everybody; in fact, it is not in most people. Fallen man may have the light of nature, that is, he may have the gifts of reasoning and desiring, but these are totally polluted with sin. The light that Paul speaks of here is a spiritual light that belongs to those in whom God has worked salvation. Notice what Paul teaches us in our text here: "Now are ye light in the Lord." Only when we are in Christ, that is, grafted into Him by a true and living faith, have we become light. Only when we are in Christ and have been made partakers of His light and life can we become children of the light. Christ suffered and died on the cross in order that the corruption, the darkness of sin and the guilt of sin, may be taken away. As Christ hung upon the accursed tree, upon Him were laid all our sin and guilt. He bore these on the

cross. He carried them with Him as He suffered hell. In doing so, He conquered our sin. He as our Lord set us free from the shackles of sin and its bondage. Christ took away our darkness.

What is more, Christ as our Lord fought against our enemies and conquered the hold that they had on us. He faced Satan and He ruined Satan's grasp on us. Having then fought the battle, our Lord rose again from the dead, and in so doing sealed our pardon from sin. He took away our guilt and the punishment due us on account of sin. Christ took away our death and He thus removed our darkness and has given us light.

That life and light our Lord bestows on each one of His people, on every believer, by means of the work of the Spirit in our hearts. The life of Christ now dwells in us because the Spirit lives in us. Through the Spirit, we are given eyes to see and hearts to understand the things of the kingdom of heaven. It is that life of Christ in us that lightens our hearts and minds. The light of salvation has shined and has made us children of the light.

Children of the light. We, through the blood of Christ, have now become God's adopted children. Since God is light, and in Him is no darkness; since Christ is the light sent into this world to lighten the hearts of every believer, we are now adopted to be children of the light. That is the message of the gospel to us today. That is the good news. If you are still in darkness, then the call of the gospel is loud and clear: Repent and believe. Only at the cross is found the light of salvation.

The figure of light and darkness before us presents us with another truth that we may not ignore. A light shines. It sends forth rays of light that dispel the darkness. These rays of light must be evident in children of the light. In other words, we are called to live in the light. Salvation must shine forth in our works. These works stand in contrast to the works of darkness. Paul speaks of the unfruitful works of darkness in verse 11 of this chapter. These works refer to what wicked, unbelieving man does according to his view of this world and his life in it. It is all darkness. What the wicked world teaches us concerning social and moral issues through education, art, and especially its media (that is, television and song and books) is all darkness. What the unbelieving world has to say about single life; about dating, marriage, and sex; about the role of husband and wife in marriage; about having children and raising children; and much more—it is all darkness.

But opposed to these works of darkness there are also the deeds of light that ought now to reveal themselves in the life of the redeemed child of God. These deeds are the fruits of the Spirit in us. They are deeds that flow forth out of lives that are now dedicated to serving God. They are deeds that follow strictly the Ten Commandments and other injunctions of God's Word.

The Word. Ah, that is the key to the light that is within the child of God. The light in the child of God is the light of God's Word. That is the objective guide according to which we live our lives in this dark world. We are able to overcome the unfruitful works of darkness by walking by the Spirit and Word. Everything that we may have learned about this world and life in it we evaluate according to God's Word and through the Spirit. God's Word and Spirit change us radically, so that we view life so much differently now. The way we view single life. The way we view marriage, sex, children, our place in the church, our place in society—it is all changed. And it is all revamped according to the Scriptures. And the result is that we bring forth fruits of the Spirit and we walk in the light.

But the command to walk in the light is easier said than done, is it not? You see, we carry with us vestiges, leftovers, of sin. We have a sinful flesh and we are prone, by nature, to listen to what the dark world teaches us about life. We allow the wicked sometimes to shape, at least to a certain extent, our world-and-life view. Of course, we are children of our society and world. The unbelieving world likes to pass off bad as good and good as bad. Those who promote sinful behavior are adept at this sort of thing. And we are prone, by nature, to give in. We are so disposed to listen, it seems, to society. Drunkenness—it's harmless fun. Fornication—it's necessary in order to get to know someone. The philosophy about having children (or not having children) and raising children is totally worldly. We are in an unbelieving society, and that unbelieving society pounds on these issues. It is always in our faces. Our sinful flesh hears of it so much that we begin to believe that what is said by society, by fallen man, is true. Thus the command, the urgent command, that we receive in this Word of God: "Walk in the dark world as children of the light."

No person needs a command to walk in this world. Everyone is walking, believer and unbeliever alike. The term "walk" makes reference to the way one conducts himself as he walks through this present life. This is why we can say that everyone walks. Everyone follows a certain path, a certain code of conduct, in this life as he lives. The path each individual walks varies much from one individual to the next. Your life and my life vary so much given the different places: where we were born, or the families into which we were born. Well, we are called to walk—as children or young people or singles or married or elderly saint—in the light. Besides this, each of us walks a different path every day of our lives, do we not? We walk in our homes, our families; we walk in school; we walk in different places of labor. Our paths are constantly crossing one another's, but then they lead us elsewhere once again.

The big concern of the Word of God before us here is this. Where we walk, we must walk as children of the light. That must be the one guiding principle of our lives in this world as we walk through this world. Walk as God's children who have been given the light of their salvation. The decisions we are called to make, we make as children of the light. And the vocation I choose, the Word of God is my guide. Do I choose a job that will take me away from the church, from where the truth is preached? Do I take a job that will require of me Sabbath labor or put me in league with unbelievers? In the eyes of the world, of course, these questions do not even enter into the picture. But they do with me. Why? Because the law of God is written in my heart. It is the guiding principle of my life. I am a child who is the light. I will not date just anyone. I will not follow the godless methods and ways of recreational dating that are exercised in the world. When I marry, my marriage will be in the Lord. I believe children are a heritage of the Lord and the fruit of the womb is my reward. My view of children is so much different from that of unbelieving society. My view of raising those children is so much different—radically different—from those who despise God's Word and commandments.

Now walk as children of the light. Let the Word of God dwell in you richly. Walk in the Spirit. Abandon those old patterns of life that characterized us in the past. That, too, according to this Word of God that we consider today, is our calling. What places do those who walk in darkness frequent? Where is their abode? Where do they enjoy themselves most often in their sin and unbelief? What places do they seek in order that they might be entertained? The media is teaching the sinful ideas of its darkness in its movies and songs, remember.

Here I am, a child of the light, an adopted child of God, who in His grace has loved me and changed my heart. Do I enjoy the pleasures of sin together with those that are lost in unbelief

and darkness? Here I stand, outside the door of that place of entertainment. Would I step through a door that had a deep pit on the other side into which if I fell it would be to my hurt and destruction? Do I enter that door if I know there is darkness, spiritual darkness, on the other side of that door? Do I seek it out? Walk in the light. Say “no” to darkness in the path of life we choose as ours. And with purpose true walk down that path that leads us in the way of light.

God’s Word is so clear. The exhortations Paul gives in this chapter are clear. He writes the same to the Galatian church in Galatians 5:19-21. He writes there:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness...drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

When we seek the darkness of this world, we are defying the clear teaching of God’s Word. If we do, it is because one of two things is true of us: Either we are such pitiful, weak Christians that we walk in darkness despite the clear testimony of God’s Word, or we simply are not children of the light (though we like to say that we are). By their fruits ye shall know them, Jesus says. Our works reveal that we are in fact children of darkness when we walk in these sins.

In either case, the command of the gospel is to turn from these wicked ways. “Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?” To walk as children of the light is a twofold calling. On the one hand: hate evil, flee sin, walk in opposition to darkness. On the other hand: seek good, follow in the ways of God, keep God’s Word, and walk in the Spirit.

The result of walking in this twofold way will become evident. First, as God’s children we will say “no” to sin and evil. We will recognize the gulf between faith and unbelief and refuse to build bridges in our lives in order to cross over into the ways of the wicked. This is a conscious matter. The church and her members are light. The world is darkness. What concord does light have with darkness or faith with unbelief (II Cor. 6:14, 15)? So that, first of all, is the result of recognizing we are children of the light.

The second is this: we become witnesses to the light. We do not hide our light under a bushel. We set it on a candlestick, Jesus says, and it lightens the whole house. When we walk as children of the light, it reveals itself to others. Others see our walk of life and God uses it in their lives, too. God uses the godly witness of His children to bring others to the light. That ought to give the believer incentive to let his light so shine before men that they may glorify our God in heaven.

This little light of mine. I’m going to let it shine, let it shine, let it shine all the time. So goes the child’s hymn. And it is true. The true church is the light of the world. Walk as children of the light.

Let us pray.

Gracious and eternal Father, work in us by Thy Spirit the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. May that life of Christ within us be light unto our pathway in this world. May we walk, saying “no” to that which is sin and evil and walk in Thy ways and in Thy precepts, knowing that they are good and that they are right. May we be bold to do that. And where we have stumbled in the way of sin and darkness, we pray forgive us of those sins. We thank Thee for the justifying blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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The Mystery of Marriage
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

There is a certain way of life that exists among the members of the church. This is true because salvation has changed the lives of God's people. It has changed the way believers view this world and their place in it. This "new life" in the hearts of believers has much to say about how a believer is called to deal with the world of unbelief and sin. We must walk as children of light and have no fellowship with darkness.

Now Paul enters into the part of this letter where he addresses how salvation changes also the way we conduct ourselves in our relationships with others. The first of these relationships is the closest of all—that of husband and wife. The wicked view this relationship, as we will find, in an entirely different way than believers in the church view it. In other words, our salvation results in a right and proper understanding of marriage, and the place of a husband and wife in marriage. In Ephesians 5:22 and 23 Paul devotes much time to husbands and wives. Neither are we going to skip over the calling of a wife and husband toward each other. The last verse of chapter 5, that is, verse 33, treats that subject, and we will treat it next time when we come to that verse. But on our broadcast today we are going to consider verses 31 and 32. They read:

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

These verses focus our attention on the marriage bond itself—what it is, and the proper way of viewing it. This subject is of extreme importance in the society and world in which we now live. Our society has willfully rejected and forsaken the proper view of marriage. The woeful immorality of our present society can be attributed to the rejection of marriage. No longer do men and women view marriage as a permanent bond between a husband and wife, but marriage has become disposable. Marriage can be enjoyed for a short time, and then be discarded as if it is an empty water bottle. In fact, men and women in their sin enjoy, outside of marriage, the sexual privileges God gives to be used only within marriage. Men and women today, in defiance against the law of God, fornicate with one another, then mock those who desire to remain pure outside of marriage. This, in turn, has led to sexual sins that are too heinous to mention. All because of the unbelieving rejection of the God-ordained institution of marriage. Even many Christian churches openly reject what God's Word teaches about the permanent bond of marriage.

In opposition to the popular trend of sin in our land stands the clear, uncompromising view of Scripture itself. Marriage is a lifelong bond. The Word of God before us today cannot be changed or misinterpreted without the result being immorality and sin.

Paul, in verse 31, quotes what God Himself said when creating the institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. Such, of course, is the commentary that Jesus Christ Himself adds in Matthew 19:5 when

addressing the marriage bond with the Pharisees. “What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Obviously this truth is expressed three different times in Scripture: once by God, once by Jesus, once by Paul. And it is an important truth not to be ignored. What is that truth? A young man leaves the home of his parents in order to marry a wife. When a young man comes of age, when he is mature and responsible spiritually and otherwise, then he leaves his father and mother. That is, he moves out of their house. He strikes out on his own in order that he might make his own way in life independent of father and mother.

But this verse also includes the reason this young man leaves the home of his father and mother. He separates himself from his parents in order to cleave to his wife. Now, there are perhaps several legitimate reasons a young man may leave father and mother to start a life of his own. But there are also many vain reasons a young man can have for leaving the home of father and mother. Usually the one that lies at the heart of it all is the desire to get out from under the authority of parents, to be free to live a frivolous and sinful lifestyle. The most serious and praiseworthy reason for a man to leave his parents is to cleave to a wife.

But there is something else that is evident in this statement of our text. Notice that it says that a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. It does not say that with regard to a woman. Whenever the Bible speaks of a young woman marrying, it does so in terms of the fact that she is given by father and mother to the young man who seeks her hand in marriage. The idea expressed here then is this. The young man goes out and he actively seeks a wife for himself. When he finds one, he seeks, when possible, the permission of her parents to marry her. If they approve, the parents of the woman then give their daughter to him in marriage. That is the first truth that is taught here in this verse.

The second is found in the term “shall be joined.” Paul uses this term rather than the term “cleave” that is used in Genesis 2 and that is used also by Christ when He quotes this verse in Matthew 19. The two words have a lot to do with each other. They have the same idea. The term “cleave,” which is used in Genesis 2, means to solder. I do not know how many of us are familiar with the skill of soldering. When a man solders two wires together or two pipes or two sheets of metal it is for the purpose of making them into one—one wire, one pipe, one piece of metal. The term “joined” in Ephesians 5 has a similar meaning. It means “glued together.” But the idea is the same as that of soldering. Glue is applied to two pieces of paper or a plastic model or wood for the purpose of making them one. The intent is to bind two pieces together inseparably.

Such is the idea applied by Scripture to marriage. When a man and his wife enter into marriage, they are glued or soldered together into one. They who were two have now become one.

Neither do the man and his wife do the gluing or the joining. Notice the passive use of this term here in verse 31. They are joined together. Someone else does the joining. As we know from Genesis 2, it is God who joins two into one. God uses the vows spoken in marriage, as well as the marriage bed, to bind two people together into one. He glues them or solders them with the intent that they should be one. And God’s glue, God’s solder, is permanent. It cannot be broken.

This passage here in Ephesians teaches us plainly of the permanency of marriage. Paul simply teaches us what Jesus teaches us in Matthew 19:6: “What God has joined together, let

not man put asunder.” Paul says this in Romans 7:2, 3 as well. God so binds a man and his wife together in marriage that it is only death that will separate them. At death God, who has done the binding, literally rips the husband and wife apart. And that in a very painful but also permanent way.

This all-important truth about marriage is reinforced at the end of verse 31, where Paul writes: “And they two shall be one flesh.” In Genesis 2 we read, “And they shall be one flesh.” Christ and Paul both emphasize: “They two shall be one flesh.” Then Christ adds, as we notice, “they shall no more be twain but one flesh.” The idea is a beautiful one. Up until the moment of marriage a man and woman are solitary, they are single. They live their own lives and walk their own paths. The woman is her own and the man is his own. They did things on their own, went places on their own, followed after their own interests. They were two, not one, two separate individuals, two distinct people. Then, providentially, God brings the two of them together and they marry. The moment they marry, they are no longer two but one flesh. One flesh. They are no more two, but one.

That does not seem to be very true, does it? I mean, they still are two people, are they not? They still have their own thoughts and desires. They still oftentimes have their own way of doing things. And yet, Paul says that now they have become one flesh. How could that possibly be true? Obviously, they remain two distinct people. That cannot change. One is a male and the other female. But remember that God has so created these two that they can become perfect complements of each other. They can be joined in such a way that they, given their physical and psychological makeup, can be blended together by God into one organism. That is exactly what happens at the time of marriage. They become one.

Physically they become one. In fact, this is the center and core of their oneness—the sexual union unites the two of them together into one flesh. But also, as they live together in love together, God unites them into one flesh from an emotional and psychological point of view, too. And even from a spiritual point of view they are bonded together—whether that be a bond of unbelief or a bond of faith. Even if a man and his wife, by reason of sin, may never discover the joy of being one flesh, nevertheless, God has made them one. So the Word of God teaches us of the permanency of the marriage bond—what God has joined together, let not man put asunder.

Paul does not stop at this point, either, in this instruction concerning marriage and its permanency. We read in verse 32, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” The binding together of a husband and wife in marriage is a great mystery. And it is so because God created it to reveal in an earthly way the intimate relationship between Christ and His church.

There are many passages of Scripture that speak of Christ and His church as a marriage relationship. Christ refers to Himself as the Bridegroom, and to the church as His bride. In the Old Testament we read of God as the Groom and the church as God’s bride. Let us look into that relationship just a little more closely.

From eternity, in His eternal plan for all things, God chose or elected the church in Christ. We cannot even conceive of the church apart from Christ. Christ was sent into this world on behalf of that church. He was sent for the salvation of His bride, the church. The church was lost, together with the entire mass of fallen humanity. In order to deliver His church from God’s wrath and condemnation, Christ died and earned for her the righteousness necessary for communion with God. Through that death of Christ, believers are bound together with Christ.

The church, and we as believers in the church, are viewed by God as one body with Christ. We are in Christ and He in us in such a way that we have become one living organism with Him. He is the head; we are the members of His body. That is the mysterious union that exists between Christ and His church. We cannot see it. But it is real. How can we begin to explain that living union we have with Christ to an unbeliever? It is beyond comprehension, it seems. All we can do is explain to that unbeliever that something miraculous took place in us. We were lost in sin and darkness. And God, through Christ, has saved us unto Himself. And now we are one with Him.

Why are we so loyal to Christ and His cause in this world? So loyal that we would be willing to die for Christ—why is that true? Because by means of our salvation, Christ has become our husband. And the church has become His wife. We are married to Him. There is a mysterious work that has gone on in us, calling us out of darkness into God's light. We have been joined with Him, glued, soldered spiritually together with Christ and never will that bond of love and fellowship with Christ be broken. God has sworn to us in His great love that He will never leave us and will never forsake us. Has that not been true of us, believing saints? God preserves His church. God guards the righteous well. How often we sin. How often we stumble along life's pathway. How often we rebel against our Husband. Has Christ ever left us? Has our Husband ever forsaken or abandoned His wife, the elect church? Has not Christ always been there in our greatest needs, even though we at times would stray from Him?

And is it not true that we are preserved by Christ in our love for Him, too? Because Christ is faithful to us, we have remained faithful to Him. We persevere, even though at times we may have walked in sin.

God has created the institution of marriage as a picture of this relationship between Christ and His church. Now I realize we must be careful at this point. This does not make marriage a redemption ordinance, you understand. It is not simply the marriage of two believers that is a picture of Christ and His church. It is true that only two believers can discover the true beauty of marriage. But marriage, as an institution, is made to reflect the bond that exists between Christ and His church. Marriage is a creation ordinance that was purposed by God, in the very making of it, to show forth the permanent bond that exists between Christ and His church.

Throughout Scripture God's covenant with His people, the bond of friendship and fellowship, was meant to be entered into by a husband and his wife. That is the goal of marriage. All marriage. And even insofar as the unbeliever discovers this friendship in his relationship with his wife, he can live a happy outward life. Marriage is, therefore, a picture, a reflection, of a permanent bond. And for that reason it is meant by God as a permanent bond. Such is the nature of marriage. That is the very character, that is the very essence, of marriage. And that, Paul tells us, is a great mystery.

We have already considered the mystery that Paul speaks of in this letter to the Ephesians. The mystery is this, dear friends: the church of all ages, Jews and Gentiles alike, saints of the Old Testament together with the saints of the New Testament, are all united together in one inseparable body with Christ. The mystery of marriage that is discovered and enjoyed by the believer is just the taste of the blessed unity we share with God, with Christ, and with all fellow believers. The union of a man and wife in marriage is a mystery. We do not see that union with our eyes. We cannot see that a man and wife are one flesh with the eye. How God does this we can but marvel at and wonder. But the oneness of the man and his wife is there. God has made it so. And the husband and wife are to seek out just exactly what that means for them in their marriage.

The unbeliever cannot begin to imagine the beauty of marriage. He in his sin despises it. And it gets worse in our society as sin develops. Unbelief blinds the eyes of the unbeliever. Because man does not seek God's will for him in marriage, the blessedness of marriage eludes him. Men and women have become so self-centered. They enter marriage to see what they can get out of marriage for themselves. They do not give, but they are always taking. Marriage then becomes one of heartache and pain, and there is no peace in the marriage. So the world seeks to get out of marriage by means of divorce.

But divorce itself is painful, bitter, and hurtful. Why? Because it is against the very nature of marriage itself. One or both in the marriage are attempting to rip apart what God has glued together. The husband and wife cannot divide asunder what God has joined together, no matter how hard they try. And that is why God hates divorce. He says so in Malachi 2:15 and 16. The bond of marriage, the beauty and blessedness of marriage, must be found and searched out. It is not something that will simply fall into our laps. It is not even ours just because, perhaps, our marriage started out in the Lord. The mystery of marriage must be *practiced*. It must be *lived*—in order to understand the blessed union that a man and woman can share together.

When that is discovered, then in a real way husbands and wives begin to think alike. They begin to reason alike. They begin to discover that they enjoy the same things, and the same things repel them. They laugh together. They cry together. They become one flesh, striving in perfect harmony for the same goals. They will discover the mystery of marriage, and their life together will be blest. I have seen it. I am experiencing it. Marriage is a wonderful union, a wonderful bond. Let us strive to find its beauty and blessedness. It is a mystery. A wonderful mystery. But I speak of Christ and the church.

Let us pray.

Our gracious Father in heaven, we come before Thee and we thank Thee that Thou hast instituted the ordinance of marriage into which a man and a wife can enter. And we pray that Thou wilt work in our hearts by Thy Spirit and grace that we might know of our salvation and of our intimate relationship with Christ in order that we might strive to know that in our marriages, too. Sin cleaves to us in that marriage bond, we realize. We pray, forgive us of those sins. But make that bond sure, so that we might indeed reflect that relationship of Christ and the church. For Christ's sake we pray this, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*December 16, 2012 God's Command to Husbands and Wives
No. 3650*

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Paul has laid out the mystery of the church. God has graciously blended the Gentiles into the church together with the Old Testament saints. They became fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God.

That was a matter of great joy to these Ephesian believers. But Paul reminds them that their lives now were different from what they were when they were yet lost in their sin. They were a new people. And that required of them new behavior. They must now view the wicked world, and the place God now had given them in His church, through enlightened eyes, through the eyes of faith. This means that all their preconceived notions about marriage had to be discarded too. We studied that in our last broadcast, if you recall. Marriage is a bond into which a man and his wife enter for a lifetime. It must be honored highly as an institution of God. God instituted marriage to picture the intimate union of Christ and the church.

Believers are given to know what marriage is. The Spirit works that in them. The simple command of Christ is heeded: "What God has joined together, let not man divide asunder." Marriage is for life. And believers are willing to work at their marriage to make it last. Even if that marriage may not be all that happy, the tie that binds holds firm.

But this mandate taught us in Ephesians 5 is couched in other instruction. That instruction is given to believing husbands and wives as well. It speaks of the place and calling of husbands and wives in marriage. In other words, to *be* one flesh, and to *live in the joy* of being one flesh, are two things. God binds. He glues together into one. But husbands and wives are also called to *live* as one flesh. And if they live as one flesh, they will discover the joy of marriage.

The instruction given in the verse we consider today is a summary of what Paul teaches about marriage. That verse is Ephesians 5:33, where Paul writes:

Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Husbands are called to love their wives, and wives are called to submit to husbands. The world laughs at that. The world mocks. The feminists burn up inside. Who listens to this instruction any more today? We live in a modern society; it is an enlightened one! These are all culturally-conditioned commands of a bygone era. The prescription given in this verse is null and void today, they say.

No, it is not. It is God's Word. And God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His Word does not change. If we want to be happy in marriage, we must follow what God tells us to do in marriage. Otherwise our marriage is doomed before it even starts.

You see, our God is a God of order. As the highest authority, God establishes in the various institutions of life a chain of authority that must be followed. This chain is set forth for us in I Corinthians 11:3. There we read, "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is

Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” In this chain God triune has authority over Christ, who exercises His authority over man, who exercises his authority over the woman. This does not mean that every man has authority over every woman. Neither does it mean that all women must submit to every man. There are certain spheres of life in which a man is given by God to rule over the woman. One such sphere is the home and in the marriage. The husband is given by Christ the authority to be head over the wife. This is explicitly mentioned by Paul when addressing the wife. We read in verse 23 of Ephesians 5: “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.” The husband is given by Christ to be the head of his wife and of his family. He must govern and rule his wife and family. We find in I Timothy 2:4 and 5 that a man who is able to do this well in his own home and family also shows good qualifications for an officebearer in the church.

The term “head,” of course, implies authority. A head is one who rules over others, that is, makes decisions for himself and others. He has the right to tell a person what to do or not to do. He is given the authority by Christ, his head, to lead and guide others in the way he believes is best for them. In short, a head is given by God the responsibility of leading, protecting, and caring for those placed under his rule. Since Christ is head of man, and God is head of Christ, ultimately a man who is made head over his wife is held responsible to God for his actions. The head must give answer to his head.

I understand that it is argued that the rule of the husband over the wife and family was very much a part of the Greek and Roman culture. Men did not have to be prompted in that society, it is said. They had the rule over their wives. But life in a wicked society was little different then than it is today in our own society. The proper headship of a man over his wife was not being exercised properly. Men were not exercising authority over their wives and children in the way that they should. In fact, men in the Roman culture, just as today, were tyrants in their homes. Wives were being treated with very little respect. Men ruled their homes selfishly, for themselves alone, and not for the welfare of their wives and children.

This is why the instruction here in Ephesians 5 was new to recent converts to Christianity. They had not been taught the proper rule of a husband over his wife. They were not taught in their heathen homes how to be responsible in their rule. They were taught by unbelieving fathers only how to use the institution of marriage to serve their own ends and their own gratifications. There was no true rule, no proper authority exercised in the home, even though fathers may have forced their wives and children into obedience.

To the opposite extreme, the media today makes husbands out to be major bunglers when it comes to headship. Husbands and fathers are portrayed in the media as wanting to take the lead but bungling it all up so that the wife has to take over and straighten everything out. Men are idiots who do not deserve the place of head in the relationship, since the wife can do so much better than he. So much influence does our wicked media have, that husbands and wives actually begin to think in this way. And husbands simply relinquish their headship to the wife. The feminist movement today is not dead.

Scripture corrects us in this way of thinking. It admonishes the woman: the husband is the head of the wife; he rules over his household. And whether he is willing to take the lead in this or not, God will, in the day of judgment, hold the husband responsible for what takes place in his marriage. The husband must lead and guide his wife. He must care for her and nurture her. He must protect and provide strength for her to depend on. Such is the husband’s calling. And every godly husband must exercise himself in that in his own marriage.

This is done in one way. It is not done by force or coercion. It is not done by yelling or by physical abuse. Proper headship is not dependent on one's being the stronger of the two. Headship of a husband over a wife is accomplished in one way: love. Verse 33: "Let every one of you in particular so love his wife...."

Every husband in his own particular relationship must see to it that he loves his wife even as himself. That is the key to proper respect and honor as head in marriage. Love. That is how a husband exercises his headship. Amazingly simple, is it not? It is given that we are to rule over our wives, husbands. But that does not mean that we are mighty rulers in the home. The fact that we rule over our wife does not make us more respectable in the eyes of God. God places a husband over a wife in marriage in order to show her His love and the love of Christ toward her. We all know what it is to love. If we are believers, we know. Love is both knowledge and affection. It is not one to the exclusion of the other. It is both.

This is what God's Word tells a husband in I Peter 3:7: "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them [that is, your wives] according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered." That is the knowledge we must have of our wives. Number 1: my wife is a vessel that is given to me by God. She is a precious vessel. She is a priceless vessel. The worth in gold cannot even be measured. Number 2: she is a weaker vessel than I am. She is fragile, a fragile vase, that can easily be broken, even when she wants to leave the impression that she is rough and tough. I can hurt her easily enough. And I can break her in spirit and in body. Number 3: I know my wife to be an heir with me unto the grace of life. She is so precious to me because she is a believer together with me. We pray together. We seek God together. We make decisions together. I know all these things about my wife, and as a proper head I am called now to lead her spiritually. I take headship over the spiritual welfare of my own. I take the responsibility that I might direct my wife in the ways of God. That is loving my wife.

And I show to my wife proper affection, too. We know what that is all about, do we not, men? When we dated our wives, we did everything to make them happy. We went out of our way to show our girlfriends our affection. We were on the best of behavior when we were with them. We spent hours looking into their eyes and talking with them. We showed our affection in so many different ways. Well, that does not change, or it ought not to change, after we are married. We must love our wives. And although that affection may mature with age, nevertheless, the affection must still be there. This knowledge and affection of love must be given in all faithfulness. Husbands, by all means, we must be faithful to our wives. Unfaithfulness spells instant failure—instant! Adultery takes an axe to the marriage relationship. Love means trustworthiness, devotion to our wives alone.

The love we will show our wives is the love that has been shown to us by God. There is the key. That is the key to all true love. When we were lost in unbelief, all we cared about was self. We loved ourselves. But God in His grace so loved us that He sent His Son into this world to die for us. And that love of God Christ revealed to us in that He laid down His life for us. He gave of Himself completely for His bride, the church. In doing so, He has shed abroad His love in our hearts. We are united to Christ in that living bond of love that cannot be broken. And it is that love we now in turn must exercise in our headship over our wives.

When we do so, then our relationship is established in Christ. We are faithful, even as Christ is always faithful to His bride. Our eyes are focused on the beauty of our wife, the inner beauty that

shines in her as an heir of the grace of life. And we are firm, strong, wise. Oh yes, we are. Yet at the same time we are kind, gentle, and patient heads.

When this is done, then a wife's submission to her husband is not forced or coerced, but is a willing and happy submission. And that, wives, is now your calling to your husbands in the Lord. Notice once again, verse 33: "And the wife see that she reverence her husband." This is supported by the context of these verses as well. We read in verse 22: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Unbelieving wives make it no secret that they will have nothing to do with this command of God. The feminist movement underhandedly has done a marvelous job of undermining what God's Word teaches us here. An unbelieving woman is not willing to reverence her husband with a meek and quiet spirit. She rebels against God.

But this injunction of Scripture must be taken seriously if we are going to walk in obedience to God. See, wife, that you reverence your husband! Reverence. That word literally means "respect." You are to honor and respect your husband in the place God has given him in your marriage. This means you never degrade him. You do not mock him in the decisions he makes. You do not attempt to rob him of his manhood. You honor him and hold him in esteem in his decisions and let him be a man. And you strive to be his woman. You dwell with him according to knowledge. You must know him. That is how you love him. You must know him to be three things. Number 1: the one that God has chosen to lead and guide you in life. Number 2: an irreplaceable, stable rock in your life. One who is given to be firm and sure when, perhaps, you are in doubt and waver. Number 3: the God-appointed head for you that can lead you in prayer and in devotion to God.

This reverence for husband is revealed in one particular way: submission. This is what must adorn a godly woman, a believing wife. She is willing to submit her will to that of her husband cheerfully and without a gripe.

It is striking, is it not, that the Word of God here does not necessarily demand of a wife obedience. Certainly, when all is spiritually healthy in a marriage, obedience is necessary. But when the husband is an unbeliever, or if he instructs his family to walk in the ways of sin, the wife may not obey him. She must obey a higher head than her husband. If her husband disobeys Christ, she must disobey her husband in order to remain obedient to Christ. At the same time, however, she must quietly and meekly submit to her husband's will. In other words, even in these instances the wife may not attempt to usurp the headship of her husband through rebellion and strife. She must walk humbly before her God in submission to the headship of her husband.

In the inseparable bond of marriage, the wife must live as one flesh by willingly subjecting herself to the rule of her husband. When the husband walks in love toward his wife, that subjection will not be hard to give. A believing wife will walk in happy subjection, just as the church, the bride of Christ, does toward her husband who treats His bride, His church, in love.

This is true because Christ lives in the heart of a believing wife. Christ has bound her to Himself in love. His love has been shed abroad in her heart, just as in her husband's. It is not a matter, then, of the wife having to force herself to subject herself to her husband. Oh, it is true that the fall of Adam and Eve has made every man, by nature, a tyrant, and every woman a rebel. But Christ has, through salvation, overcome our sinful flesh. Sin no longer has dominion over us. As a result, the believing wife willingly walks in subjection to her husband.

“But that’s impossible for me! I’m not that kind of a woman. My husband needs me to be demanding and loud and to take charge.” This command of Scripture does not mean that a wife needs to sit quietly by and let her husband do all the talking while she sits there and listens with eyes fastened on the floor. That is not what we mean by submission. And certainly the wife may join in an animated conversation with her husband—even voicing her disagreements. That is OK. She is a help provided for her husband by God, after all. But this does not contradict the wife’s calling to be of a meek and quiet spirit, and to be submissive to her husband. Wives do well to listen to the wisdom of Solomon in Proverbs 21:9. He writes: “It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.” A brawling, contentious woman is not characterized by reverence for her husband. Your calling is clear in marriage, too, believing wives. See that you reverence your husbands.

When we live as one flesh, then we will discover the joy of marriage. Not that this is the reason we live this way in marriage. We walk in faithfulness in marriage because it is God’s command for us to do that. And we strive to reflect in a godly way that which marriage needs to reflect—the relationship of Christ and His church. We fulfill our calling, our place in marriage, in order to please God. We may not forget that this is the command of God here in the verse before us. God commands love and submission in marriage. But God does this because He knows what is needed to create a happy marriage. When we walk in the ways of God, the result will be a wonderful marriage. Not many in our day, even in the church it seems, discover the joy that can be had in marriage. But when we do, then a husband and wife know there is nothing better than marriage. It is fulfilling, even when times are difficult. There is joy to be had when a husband and wife dwell together in the love of Christ. It gives them purpose and direction in life—something both of them can work together toward. And it gives them the joy of tasting, in an earthly, limited way, the intimacy shared between Christ and His church. This joy of marriage will be made perfect in heaven.

Let us pray.

Our Father and our God, we are thankful for the bond of marriage and are thankful for marriage itself. As husbands we love our wives and as wives we love our husbands. We pray that Thou wilt guard and protect us as married persons. When we sin against Thee or sin against each other, we pray, be gracious to forgive us. And give unto us the forgiving spirit, too, so that we might indeed love each other; that wives might reverence their husbands and that husbands might exercise headship in their love toward their wives. Bless us now and keep us in this important relationship of our lives. For Jesus’ sake we pray, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

December 23, 2012
No. 3651

No Room for Mary's Firstborn
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Bethlehem was as busy as it had ever been. The city was astir with people hurrying here and there attempting to accomplish their business. Houses were filled with people, and the little inn in the town was itself packed to capacity. The townspeople were certainly not used to this busyness. They had a hard time accommodating everyone.

Why were all these people here in Bethlehem? Was it because of the prophet Micah's prophecy: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel"? Was everyone here in Bethlehem on this particular night in order to look for the birth of the Messiah? After all, Israel knew the Messiah was going to be born here. Or, at least, they should have known. Maybe they were here to watch for His birth. Maybe their eyes of faith were now glued to this village because they were anxiously awaiting the fulfillment of this prophecy. Surely that had to be the reason that Bethlehem was all astir.

But it was not. There was another reason, one not nearly so noble as this, for all these people swarming to Bethlehem. Far away, in a distant country, there lived a great emperor. His name was Caesar Augustus. The empire he ruled over had conquered much of the then-known world. This included the Palestine area. Long before this, this great empire (called the Roman Empire) had subdued the Jews and placed them under tribute.

Now Caesar Augustus and his senators had decided to levy a tax throughout the empire. In order to do this, all the world had first of all to register for the tax. The actual taxing would not take place until a bit later. But now, in Palestine anyway, the way that was chosen for the Jews to register for this tax was by going to the town of their lineage. This was the reason so many people were in Bethlehem at this particular time. It was a time to register for the tax. All those who were of the house and lineage of David had come to Bethlehem to register. As a result, that city was packed with people. Certainly no one was looking for Joseph and his wife Mary, who was soon to give birth to the promised Messiah. In fact, we find this young man and woman making their way to Bethlehem according to the command of Caesar Augustus, too. They were of the house and lineage of David. Therefore they too were coming to register for his tax.

Our eyes of faith are focused in this event on this young couple, because we know that out of Mary would come forth that King in whose birth we rejoice. We look to see the birth of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, who was soon to be born exactly in the place it was prophesied of by Micah.

It was upon their entering into Bethlehem that the words of Luke 2:7 unfold.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

We want to study once again this classic passage of Scripture as it records for us the birth of Christ.

We read in this verse that Mary “brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes.” That fact, in itself, is normal. Mary and Joseph were poor peasants from the village of Nazareth in the region of Galilee. They did not have money to buy expensive clothing. That they wrapped their newborn in swaddling clothes was not sad to them. They had brought these swaddling clothes with them, no doubt. Certainly they were not clothes that could be found in a cattle stall. These were long linen strips used by the poor to wrap up their newborn babies. So this was not a strange occurrence that a woman gave birth to a baby and wrapped him in these linen clothes.

But certainly the place where Mary and Joseph laid their child is a strange one. They laid Him in a manger. A manger? Why, that was the feeding trough out of which animals ate. Why would Jesus be laid in a manger for a bed? That certainly is strange.

To understand why this took place, we must reflect on what had transpired when Mary and Joseph finally reached the end of their journey in Bethlehem of Judea. You see, upon entering this town, they discovered what we were talking about earlier. The town was packed with people. Houses had taken in families of relatives. And, since there was only one inn (which was a very small hotel of sorts) in this little town, it was full, too. This was not unnatural, either. It was to be expected. After all, there were many families in Israel that could trace their lineage to Bethlehem. The town was full of people. Joseph, no doubt, had expected that he would somehow be able to find a place in the inn. There had to be someone there who would take pity on Mary, his wife, who was about to give birth. But, when Joseph inquired in the inn, he found that there was no room for them there. Even though the innkeeper could see that Mary needed shelter, he turned her away without pity. There were others who had come, each with his own story (or excuse), looking for special accommodations that might be made just for them in the inn. And these, too, he probably turned away. Mary and Joseph were no exception to that. So, we read in our text at the very end: “there was no room for them in the inn.”

Joseph, realizing what condition Mary was in, had to seek the best shelter for her that he could. And the only place he could find on short notice was a cattle stall. We say that, of course, because our text tells us that Christ was lying in a manger. There is no other indication that it was a cave or a barn or a lean-to of sorts that became a shelter for Joseph and Mary—other than that He was laid in a manger.

Where this cattle stall was located is mere speculation. Some say it was on the outskirts of Bethlehem. And from this they explain that there was not only no room for Christ in the inn, but no room for Christ in Bethlehem itself. Where this cattle stall was located, however, we cannot say. But we can be sure that Mary gave birth to her son in the lowliest of conditions. While they were in that cattle stall, the time was fulfilled that she should be delivered. So there, in that barn, in that cattle stall, she brought forth her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and then took Him and laid Him in a manger for His bed. That is the account that we have before us today.

All these events seem natural enough in themselves. Even the unbelieving world can believe these events. When unbelievers do this, then they usually do it with an eye of pity—Aw, this poor baby and his parents, how sad! But they do not look beyond these events to see and understand the significance of them.

Believers view this account, however, with an eye of faith. None of these events took place by chance. They were all ordered by God. We believe that this son born to Mary and Joseph was indeed the long-promised Messiah. We believe that He is divine, the Son of God made

flesh. We believe that this child was born into this world to accomplish the salvation of God's chosen people. The world does not believe any of this. Therefore, though some can and maybe even will relate events of the birth of Christ at this time of year, that is all they relate.

Dear radio friends, look closely beyond these mere outward events and see what this account really teaches us. Mary brought forth her firstborn son. That is significant in itself. Again the unbelieving world will say, "Well, there's nothing so significant in this. There was a young married woman who simply gave birth to her first child, that's all." Many, and the sad part is, many in the church too, will say, "Mary probably gave birth to other children before Christ." That is the nature of unbelief, after all. They refuse to examine the testimony of Scripture. And, as a result, they refuse to understand why the Bible at this time includes this word "firstborn" in its account.

Go back once to Luke 1:26-38 and read the announcement of the angel to Mary. The angel appears to a young maiden who was a virgin, one who had never known a man, one who was not married (though she was engaged). The angel tells this young maiden these words in verses 30 and 31:

Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

Mary believes that and yet asks the question: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" To this the angel responds in verse 35: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

What does that tell us about this child that Mary was to bring forth? This firstborn Son of Mary was, in fact, the very Son of God who would be born unto a woman. Do we understand the significance of this verse when we consider that it tells us that Mary brought forth her firstborn son? That term teaches us that this baby that Mary now brought forth into this world is in fact the very Son of God made flesh. His conception and birth is a miracle of all miracles. We behold in the face of this child in a manger the very Son of God. All we need is a reminder once again of the necessity of Christ being divine. Without His being the eternal Son of God, salvation for His people is impossible.

Oh, it was necessary that Christ be born of a woman. We do not discount that fact. Christ had to be fully a man. He had to be a human being just as we are. Man is the one who sinned against God, after all, and it was man, therefore, who had to pay the price of that sin. God's justice demands that. How highly unjust it would be for God to punish another creature for the sin that man committed. Christ, as a man, was able to represent us at the bar of God's justice and pay the penalty for our sins. So, no doubt about, it was important that Christ was born of Mary.

But it was equally important that Christ be God—because man himself would be unable to bear the punishment of hell. He would be crushed under the burden of God's heavy wrath against sin. If Christ were merely a man, He would not have been able to endure eternal death and punishment. But Christ is the divine Son of God. He is eternal and therefore He is all-powerful. As the Son of God, Christ was able to pay the eternal price for sin. This is what we must see in this firstborn Son born to Mary. Mary brought forth her firstborn son. In this way God made possible our salvation. This is the wonder of God's grace in which the church of Christ rejoices.

That is one fact this passage of God's Word teaches us about the birth of Christ. Do you see it? Do you understand it, dear listener? If you and I do, then we must realize that it is only by God's grace that we do. Unbelief shakes its head in amazement at what you and I are able to glean out of a passage of this sort. We are able to understand this blessed gospel only because the Spirit has revealed it unto us.

But that is not all we are given to see in this passage of God's Word. The reason Christ was born in a cattle stall is also found in this passage. It may not be overlooked. The reason Christ was laid in a manger was because there was no room for Joseph, Mary, and their baby in the inn. That is what is meant here by "them." It refers to Joseph, Mary, and their soon-to-be-born baby. The spiritual significance of this phrase points to the truth that there is never any room for Jesus in the hearts or in the lives of men. Again one might ask, "Where does this verse say that? You are finding things that are not written here." It is true that this verse does not say that there is no room in the heart of fallen man for Christ. Neither can we say that the reason that the innkeeper did not want Mary or her baby in his inn is because he did not want Jesus. He did not know that Mary was carrying in her womb at that point the long-awaited Messiah. He did not consciously, in this act, reject the Christ. To read this in this verse is saying more than it intends to say.

What we have here in the birth of Christ, however, is a sign. That is all. A sign. The angels who announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds said this about Jesus' lowly birth in verse 12 of Luke 2: "This shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." They speak of the verse that we are talking about today as a sign. And that sign does not merely include these things that would reveal to the shepherds of whom the angels were speaking. But it includes as well why Jesus was to be found in a cattle stall.

Of what, then, is this a sign? That Jesus Christ, even in His birth, was rejected of men. John writes to us about the birth of Christ in his gospel account, in chapter 1, verses 10 and 11:

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

Contrary to what many in our day will claim, wicked unbelieving man does not want Christ. He does not seek after God or after His Christ. When Christ is presented in the gospel, unbelieving man has no room for Christ in his heart. He does not want Christ because he sees no need for salvation from sin. And he sees no need for salvation from sin because he does not view himself as a sinner in need of deliverance. He is willing to admit that he makes mistakes or misjudgments in life. But he does not see these as sin against the most high majesty of God, sin that offends God and incurs a deadly guilt. If placed, therefore, before the choice of whether he wants to continue in this life of sin or to acknowledge his sin and find salvation in Christ, fallen man will always choose the former. And this is true because apart from Christ man is totally given over to unbelief. His eyes are blinded, so that he cannot even see the things of the kingdom of God. His will is enslaved to sin. He is unable to will the good or seek after the good. There is no room for Christ in his heart. Fallen man is totally depraved. As the Word of God tells us in Romans 3:11: "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God," or again in Romans 8:7: "The carnal mind...is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." There is no ability in man to seek after God, to seek after salvation, to seek after Christ. He is enslaved to sin and unbelief—and in such a way that he cannot understand his own spiritual plight.

This is why John writes that when Christ, who is the light, came into this world, then men loved darkness rather than light. They did not want Christ. There is no room in the heart of man for Christ. This is what Christ's lowly birth points to.

But then, how is it that you and I come to God with believing hearts? How is it possible for us to read this account before us and actually believe in what is being told us here? If there is no room in any man's heart for Christ, how have we come to believe? Because, fellow believers, Christ Himself has made that room in our hearts by an all-powerful, irresistible work. It is by means of the work of Christ on the cross that God's people have been given to believe. It is by a work of God's grace that we have come to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Otherwise we would be as so many others, who simply listen to what they believe is just a sad, quaint story. The Spirit of our risen Lord has opened the hearts of believers and has revealed to us these wonders and these marvelous truths, these signs that are given to us in the Scriptures. Christ has removed, through His death, the hardness of our hearts. He has taken away our blindness. He has given us hearts that believe and understand.

All that, He has accomplished by means of our salvation. Now we see and now we believe.

And that, in turn, gives us great joy, the joy that is to all peoples. Believing children who are listening, why does Christ's incarnation and birth make us so happy? Because we open presents? Is it because we have fun with relatives, your cousins, or friends? There is nothing wrong with these things, you understand. But do these things really have anything to do with the birth of Christ? There is no secular way we can celebrate the birth of Christ. The real joy of the child of God, now and always, is "for unto us is born this day in Bethlehem, the Savior who is Christ the Lord." Our joy is found in that our Savior came into our world to deliver us from our sin. And that we celebrate. Christ the Savior is born! Hallelujah!

Now we go to the manger and we bow as did the shepherds. We bow because before us lies the light of the nations. Before us lies the King of kings and Lord of lords, who even now has entered into the heavens and reigns over all. Before us lies the promised Messiah, who is Christ the Lord. We worship at His footstool. We hail Him as our King. And we thank God for the joy of salvation that He has freely given us.

Let us pray together.

Our Father who art in heaven, we thank Thee for the birth of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, who came into this world, who has taken upon Himself our many horrible sins, and who has saved us from wrath by paying the price for those sins. We thank Thee that salvation has been made possible through His incarnation and through His birth. And even as we celebrate that at this time of the year, may we not forget, Father, that this is something that we must celebrate every day of our lives. Wilt Thou keep us by this Word and sustain us, even in this season of the year. For Jesus' sake we pray these things, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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Alpha and Omega
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

The verse we consider today is found in Revelation 1:8. “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”

This verse of Scripture does not seem to say all that much. All it really does is give us a name of Christ. He is Alpha and Omega. As we stand at the beginning of the year 2013, we need something to guide us through this year to come. We need a Word of God that will give us good, sound instruction as we walk through this year to come. This verse really does not seem to do that. We just receive a name. What practical good will just the name be to us? This: It will serve to give you and me hope. That is really what we need. The word that we need to hear as the new year dawns must be a word of hope. We need bright hope for today and for tomorrow. And that hope is given us in the name that we receive in this verse.

You see, this world in which we live is always changing. Time is like an ever-rolling stream. In this year to come all of us will become another year older. In this year to come Christ’s coming will be just another year closer. In this year to come there will be new events that take place in our lives. In this year to come God will take some of His people home to be with Him; others will be given affliction and sorrow. Some will be given new joy, a reason to laugh and rejoice. Time always changes things.

But there is one thing in our lives that will never change. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the One who is and was and is to come. And for that reason our Lord and Savior is the rock to which we can cling again in this year to come for comfort and strength. We do not fret about what will happen in this new year because we know that our Lord is here to lead and protect us. He will guard through dangers all; He will not suffer me to fall. He will keep us day-by-day.

All of that is found in a name. What name? Alpha and Omega. This is the name that is unique to the book of Revelation. It is mentioned twice in this chapter, here and in verse 11, and once in chapter 21, and a last time in chapter 22. In all four of these occurrences in Revelation, Christ calls Himself by this name. No one addresses Him as such. No one calls Him Alpha and Omega. It is a name that Christ uses to speak of Himself. And for that reason it is a special name. It is a name that Christ sets aside to encourage us as He does in each verse where He speaks. This name of Christ, then, we wish to have on our lips throughout the new year to come, a name we can call upon for our hope and our strength.

We take special note, then, first of all, that the One who calls Himself Alpha and Omega is none other than Christ. This is obvious from the context. In verse 1 we learn that we receive in this book the “revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him.” The salutation that is given to us, beginning in verses 4 and 5, is from John and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness. In verse 7 we read this of the Alpha and Omega, “behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” That is an obvious reference to Jesus. So when the verse we are studying

informs us that the Lord is the Alpha and Omega, we know that the name refers specifically to Christ.

I make an effort to make this clear because, remember, it is in this name alone that we are going to find hope for this year to come. And to find that hope, we must know exactly, without a doubt, who it is that is going to give us that hope. It is Christ who is the Lord, who calls Himself the Alpha and Omega. The risen and ascended Lord who sits at the right hand of God and rules in the heavens today says, "I am Alpha and Omega." That is the truth that stands out here. Christ is Lord.

You see, Christ was anointed of God to function in the threefold office—that of Prophet, Priest, and King. He was ordained of God from eternity and anointed by the Holy Spirit at the time of His baptism to function as Prophet, Priest, and King. The particular office of Christ that stands on the foreground in this text, however, is that of King. That is why the name Lord is used. A lord is a man having power and authority over others. He is a man of rank and high position. A lord exercises leadership and great power. Those under him must render him honor, service, and obedience. As we enter into the year 2013, it is encouraging to know that Christ is such a lord. In fact, He is *the* Lord. There is no one of higher power and rank, no one of higher authority and honor than Christ. He is the sovereign Lord who rules over all. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

I say here, friends, there is nothing more encouraging in this year to come than to know that! Christ's rank and position is His by hereditary right. He is the very Son of God. And by virtue of His divinity alone Christ rules. But Christ has also *earned* that position and power. He earned it on the cross, where He defeated His enemies and ours. There He overcame sin and death. There He conquered Satan. He did battle against the wicked world and He has overcome these enemies of the church. Because of the work Christ has accomplished on the cross, God has given Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. Christ sits at God's right hand, right now, and He rules over all creatures great and small, in heaven and on earth. And everyone is called to render service, obedience, and honor to Him. Christ sits on His throne at the right hand of God in heaven. And He is Lord.

This gives His chosen people hope for the year to come because this Lord who sovereignly reigns in the heavens is also their Savior. When He went to the cross He did so on behalf of every one of God's people. He conquered sin, Satan, and death for you and me, believing saint. He now sits in heaven and He reigns over all things for the church. In other words, His rule in heaven right now is for our benefit. And that, in turn, means that whatever may befall you and me or the church in the year to come is all in Christ's hands. How often we have to remind ourselves of that! When life does not go the way we want it to, then we can quickly blame it on someone or something that is in our life. We forget that our Lord is sitting in heaven directing our lives and that of the church unto His own perfect end.

So, as we stand at the very beginning of a new year, let us remind ourselves of the truth that is before us. In the year to come, Christ is Lord. He lives, and He reigns over all things—the creation, the governments of this world, and what transpires in the churches of today. He directs our lives and everything in them in His great love for us. If that is true, then we need not fear or worry because He will work all things together for our good.

There are two virtues mentioned here that characterize our Lord, which should give to us great comfort. The first is that He is Almighty. An earthly lord or king may be powerful and

may exert much authority and sway over his people. But there is one thing he is not. He is not almighty. As mighty as he might seem, his authority and power can be challenged and even taken away by another. How many times that has happened in the kingdoms of men. We may have a president now that exerts all kinds of influence in government. But he does not remain president forever. His power and influence are but a breath. He is here today and in a few short years he will be gone forever. As much power and ability an earthly ruler may wield, he is never almighty.

The same is not true of our King, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is all-powerful in His control over all creatures. The heathen may rage, and the kings of the earth may set themselves against God and His anointed to break away from Their rule. These wicked people of the earth even imagine a vain thing, which is that they have somehow successfully broken away from the sovereign rule of Christ over them. But they have not. They have not because they cannot. Unbelieving men have come to believe that they have set their own course in this world. In the year before us, man will go his merry way and increase in his wickedness, ignoring God and His commandments. We have been appalled in the year 2012 to what great lengths man has developed in his sin. We will probably be even more appalled at the further development of sin in the year to come. The wicked will increase in their wickedness, they will mock Christ, they will do what is right in their own eyes, all because of their foolish imagination. They think Christ does not see from His throne in heaven. They think they are in control and not Christ.

But, believers, Christ reigns. He even now, in His power and might, directs the nations and the peoples of this earth. Christ is directing the affairs of this world and of our nation exactly in the way He intends. Natural catastrophes, presidential elections, threats of war—all are under His control. All things take place in order that Christ might bring about His second coming. “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him.” Every man will give account to this Lord of heaven and earth. In the year 2013 we need not fear the wicked. Though he is loud and boastful, though he is filled with rage against God, our Lord is almighty. He reigns over the wicked with a rod of iron and will dash him in pieces.

There is one other virtue of Christ that gives us great comfort in the year to come. Christ is unchangeable. Our Lord is He who is and was and is to come almighty. That means that Christ is ever the same in His might. There is great comfort in that for believers, you know. When we look back across the year that now has disappeared, there are so many things that happened to us and our loved ones. The prospect of another year can be frightening. What will become of me and my family in the new year? It is disconcerting when we really sit back and think about it. Everything is constantly changing. What curveball is going to be thrown at me in the year to come? What will I or my family have to endure? The future is unknown. And so, so uncertain!

But there is one thing we can be sure of in this year to come. Jesus was and is and is to come the same. He is the same in His great love toward us. That love never changes. God has chosen us in Christ from eternity and we have been saved in Christ. Christ is not going to turn away from that love for us. Neither will Christ allow His chosen people to walk away from Him. We might walk in sin for a time, but if Christ has died for us, we cannot go lost. We are His. We are held in His almighty hand. He loves us and will love us in the year to come, too.

And, remember, Christ is and was and is to come almighty, too. That means His power and authority over all things will never diminish in this year to come. He will direct all the affairs of 2013 for our good and our salvation. Even when life seems so chaotic, even when all the events of our lives seem to swirl around us or are upside-down, Christ is there. And He holds these

events of our lives in His hand and they take place with perfect rhyme and reason. We must believe that in this year to come.

It is for this reason He gives us this name: I am Alpha and Omega. That name gives us all the reason to be filled with hope in this year to come. Christ is Alpha and Omega.

These two words are the names of two letters of the Greek alphabet. Alpha is comparable to our "A" and Omega is comparable to our "Z." In other words, these two Greek letters are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet, just like our A and Z are in the English alphabet. By using these two letters of the Greek alphabet as a name, Christ in essence is saying this of Himself: "I am the first and the last." This is further explained by Him in our text when He attaches to this name "the beginning and the ending."

There are several interrelated ideas expressed in Scripture that ought to be applied to this name of Christ. The first is this: Christ is God. Christ is divine. This means that Christ is first, just as God is first. God is from eternity and to all eternity, and the divine Son of God is from eternity to all eternity as well. We read of this in John 1:1 and 2. Christ was with God and is God in the beginning of all things. And since all things are to God, that is, they find their end in God and His glory, so also is this true of Christ according to His divinity. God is not only first but last. So is Christ. That, then, in the Scriptures is ascribed to Christ: He is before all things and by Him all things consist and to Him are all things. That truth, first of all.

But there are two other truths concerning Christ that the Scriptures present that are really on the foreground in this name. The first of these two truths is this: Christ is the first and the last in the counsel of God. Before time began in eternity, God in His counsel willed or decreed Christ as the firstborn among many brethren. Christ is first. He is the beginning of all things. All things in history center, therefore, in Christ. He was the reason all things were created. He was the reason that we were chosen as God's elect people. He is first in the eternal counsel of God with respect to our salvation. And that is why Christ has the preeminence. Christ is the firstborn of the church.

What practical significance does that have for you and me in the year 2013? This. Never, never will God view you and me, believers, apart from Jesus Christ this year. Christ is our Lord. God has chosen us in Him and has saved us in Him. We are always and ever in Him. That we need to know when troubled with our sins in this year to come. Our sins at times can overwhelm us. When we examine ourselves and find so much sin in us, then we can be assured that we are always viewed by God in Christ. When the troubles of this life threaten to take away our joy and our happiness; when circumstances of life threaten to rob us of our contentment and peace of heart, we must remember this: Just as this day is the first of the year, so also is Christ first. And just as this year will end 365 days later, so Christ is the end of it all. All things are for Christ. And if we be Christ's, then all things are for us, too.

That brings us to the final idea expressed here in this name. Christ is the beginning of our salvation and the end of that salvation, too. This truth stares us in the face, so to speak, in the verse that we consider. Christ came in His first advent to bring us salvation. He has accomplished this on the cross and in His resurrection. He began the work of salvation at that time. At the end of time, in His second coming, Christ will bring that salvation to its perfect end. He is the beginning of our salvation; He is the end of it. And He is everything in between, too. He that has begun a good work in us will be faithful to complete that work.

His promise to you and to me is sure. He is coming. And He carries with Him the final work of the salvation of the church. When He comes, He will dispel all night for us and He will usher us into that kingdom where God and the Lamb are the light of it. All sin will be gone! And we will be perfect. No more sin. All our enemies will be destroyed. That kingdom of heaven will be a kingdom of peace and true happiness. That kingdom is coming in 2013. Christ even now is establishing His kingdom in the hearts of His elect people all over the world. And that kingdom will be brought to its completion soon, when Jesus Christ returns to usher in the new heavens and new earth.

That gives us the hope necessary to carry on in this year to come. Our King, our Lord, is coming. He is directing everything that is taking place in our lives and in the church and in the world. He did this in the year gone by; He will do it in the year to come. He is the first of this year; He is the end of this year. He is beginning of time, He will be here at the end of time when the years will cease to exist. We look for Him with a patient waiting for and longing after Christ's return.

That must characterize us as we look for Christ's return. We must be anxious and yet patient. That must motivate you and me in our homes and families in this year to come. That must give us the zeal to carry on the work of the church in the year to come. We may not look at life and become down-cast because of it. We must be zealous. Christ is coming. What great reason for joy in the year to come. Christ places you and me in this world for a reason. We must rejoice, therefore, in this year to come because God will preserve our going out and our coming in. The hope that is ours is given us by God. And it gives us incentive to live and be fruitful in God's kingdom.

Christ is our King. Onward, Christian soldiers! Onward into this new year we go. We fight against all evil and we stand for the right. And when Christ comes again, we will be found standing in faithfulness to Him.

Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, indeed we pray with this hope: Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly. Teach us to look for that coming of Christ in this new year to come. For Christ's sake we pray, Amen.