

DAILY MEDITATIONS ON THE BELGIC CONFESSION

by pastors of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America

MIC (P) 178/07/2013



JAN
Articles 1-6

January 1 - Introduction to the Belgic Confession by Prof Hanko

The Belgic Confession is one of the four best known Reformation-inspired confessions: The Belgic Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, The Canons of Dordrecht and the Westminster Confession of Faith. It is part of the credal basis for Reformed Churches around the world.

The Belgic Confession was written by an itinerant preacher named Guido de Bres. He had left Roman Catholicism and preached the truths of the Reformation with great courage in the Lowlands, comprised of what is now Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg. The date of the Confession is 1561, a date that places this confession first of the four mentioned above.

The occasion for the Confession was the bitter persecution of Protestants in the Lowlands by the cruel Roman Catholic Church. The Spaniards especially, under whose rule the people in the Lowlands lived, were the agents of persecution. The excuse for persecution was that the Protestants were rebels in the kingdom and enemies of the authority of their rulers. The confession was written to prove this charge to be false: that the Protestants were no rebels guilty of treason, but lowly people of God who would obey their rulers in all things except what was contrary to the will of God revealed in the Scriptures.

They were determined to be faithful to their God and were ready to “offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire, well knowing that those who follow Christ must take His cross and deny themselves” rather than deny the truth of God’s Word, expressed in this confession. The confession breathes the spirit of martyrdom.

Guido de Bres wrote the confession to show that those who opposed the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church were not guilty of treason, but were only being faithful to Scripture, and therefore, their persecution was unjust. In 1562, a copy was sent to the Spanish king with the hope and prayer that persecution would be eased. But King Philip II paid no attention to the plea. Guido de Bres himself was a martyr; he was publicly hanged when he was forty-seven years old.

The Confession treats the truths of Scripture systematically, following the order in the six loci of Dogmatics: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology.

It is a living testimony of the power of faith in the lives of the people of God, and a living record of the truth for which they died. May that same courage of faith be

Article 1: There is One Only God.

We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that He is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.

January 2 - Our Faith In The One True God by Prof Hanko

Read: Isaiah 40:21-28

The Belgic Confession properly and importantly begins with the truth concerning God. All the faith of the believers begins with God and ends with God. It begins with God because all the truth is only what God Himself has said about Himself: His divine being, His attributes, His works that He performs. And all the truth ends with God, because all the truth is revealed by God so that God may receive all the glory that is due to Himself alone.

The world is full of theologies, but they are theologies that are about many things other than God. Arminianism is man-centered and talks only about what man can do to save himself, thus robbing God of his glory. A social theology is concerned with making this world a better place to live, a sort of heaven here on earth. A prosperity gospel is interested only in telling people how to become rich in this world's goods. And so the list goes on. The truth that is confessed, if it is based on Scripture, is God-centered. It is about God.

Calvin was accused of being drunk with God. He never considered that remark to be an insult, but readily acknowledged that he was interested only in God and his glory. *Soli Deo Gloria* was his motto.

Only if we begin and end with God will we also be guarded from error. If one has the doctrine of God correct, as that doctrine is taught in the Holy Scriptures, he will never stray from the path of truth. But the opposite is also true: if one strays in any doctrine of Scripture, one says something wrong about God as well.

Although the Confession deals with many different doctrines – in fact, with all the doctrines of Scripture, all these doctrines are only different aspects of the truth concerning God. The Bible is, after all, the infallibly inspired record of the revelation of God who seeks always and only the glory of His great and holy name.

Let us also seek the glory of God in our thoughts as we contemplate the wonders of what God has done and as we seek to understand the truth revealed in the Scriptures. Many, not understanding well the central truth concerning God, plead for less doctrine and more practical teaching. This is wrong. The knowledge of God is eternal life, and therefore, everlasting blessedness. The Belgic Confession is intended to say to all the world: "These truths are the truths of Scripture and of our salvation. For them we are ready to die."

January 3 - Confessing and Believing the Truth of God by Prof Hanko

Read: Romans 10

What the church confesses to be the truth of God, the church also believes with its heart and confesses with its mouth. The reference here is to Romans 10:9. The truth of God is what “we all believe in the heart and confess with the mouth.”

We believe this truth, not as we believe a history book; that is, that the facts in the book actually happened; but we believe **in our hearts**. We believe such that we know the God revealed in the Scriptures to be our God and covenant friend.

We know God through Jesus Christ, for God has given us an infallible record of His revelation in Jesus Christ. God is revealed therefore, as the God of our salvation in His own Son.

But when we know Christ through the Scriptures, the infallible record of God’s revelation in Christ, then it is not as if we know **about** him, as we would know about a famous person from a biography of him; but we know Jesus Christ personally and experientially so that we have fellowship with Him, and through Him, with God.

Believing the truth of God’s word, we confess it with our mouths. We cannot be silent about that which we believe with our hearts, for such a belief is more important to us than anything else, and we want all the world to know about it.

It is true that the Belgic Confession was written to prove to the Roman Catholic persecutors of the churches in the Lowlands that what they believed was Biblical doctrine and not treasonous propaganda. But the fact remains that the believer cannot help but bear witness of his faith. He is excited about it, moved by the wonder of it, thankful that God has, through Christ, saved him, an undeserving sinner.

We may very well ask ourselves the question whether this excitement and wonder are true of us, for frequently we take what we believe for granted.

But the believer also knows that he is called by God to be a witness to the world, of the faith he holds dear. And so he confesses that truth. He confesses it with his mouth and with his life.

Even when he knows that the consequences of his confession will be persecution, he does not waver in his confession.

⁴May God give us all the grace to be faithful witnesses.

January 4 - God is One God by Prof Hanko

Read: Deuteronomy 6:1-6

Article 1 of the Belgic Confession speaks of all of God's attributes. The first attribute is found in the words: "there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God.

God is first of all a **spiritual** being. He is not **material** as is this world in which we live. Nor is he spiritual in the sense that heaven and all the creatures in heaven are spiritual. Heaven is not made up of material substance nor filled with material creatures. We cannot see heaven nor can we see angels. We cannot see heaven even if we were in heaven, unless we are changed. Angels could be seen only when they **appeared**, that is, took on a form that made them visible to us men.

But God is not even spiritual in the sense of heavenly things. While this is totally beyond our understanding, God is pure Spirit. Even those in heaven cannot see God though they are spirits too. God is seen in heaven only when He reveals himself in Jesus Christ. "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (I Tim 1:17).

John 4:24 teaches us how we must worship in such a way that the greatness of God is preserved in our worship: "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. (It is better to translate the first four words: "God is spirit.") We are able to know him because we are created with a spirit (I Thess 5:23).

The article also mentions God's attribute of simplicity: "There is only one simple and spiritual being." God's simplicity means, first of all, that he is the only God. This was written against all polytheism, which teaches that there are many gods; or that there is one god, who becomes many different gods.

But if God is all-powerful, there cannot be two gods, for there cannot be two all-powerful beings.

Further, God's simplicity means that God is not composed of parts and cannot be divided into parts. God must not be defined as being three in person, with each person possessing 1/3 of the divine being. Nor are God's attributes characteristics of different parts of God. God's attributes are one. His mercy is his justice. His love is his grace. He is one simple being.

No wonder when we pray to such a great God, we bow in reverence and fear before Him.

January 5 - God is Eternal
by Prof Hanko

Read: Isaiah 40:12-31

When I was attending a grammar school, my teacher was trying to teach us the difference between time and eternity. She drew a circle on the blackboard and said that the circle represented eternity because the line that composed the circle was without beginning and without end. But, when she explained time, she drew two lines through the line that made a circle, and said, "This is time for the arc has a beginning and an end".

I didn't like the illustration very much when she used it, and I like it still less now. Time is not a segment of eternity. Eternity is fundamentally different from time. It is true that eternity is without beginning and without end, while time has a beginning and an end. But God is the Creator of time and is not bound by time. We are creatures of time who cannot escape from it.

God, the eternal One, is changeless, while we, creatures of time, change. "Time as an ever-rolling stream bears all its sons away" we sing in Psalm 90. Or, to quote an old poet: "Change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me."

We cannot comprehend eternity, for we are too bound by the chains of time. We cannot conceive of someone who has no beginning and no end. But the wonder of salvation for us is that we shall be given an inheritance in heaven that is truly everlasting; it has no end – although it does have a beginning.

We tend to confuse eternal and everlasting, but this is a mistake. Only God is eternal; our life in heaven is everlasting.

God created time and God is the sovereign ruler of time. God controls time sovereignly and so controls all that happens in time. Although the Scriptures say that in heaven time shall be no more, this does not mean that we become eternal. "Eternal" is an attribute of God that we shall never possess.

But God's eternity makes him so much different from the creature, that He is worthy of all our praise. We serve and love a God who is not made with human hands, as the idols of the heathen are, but is the only eternal One. He alone must be worshipped and served.

January 6 - God Is Incomprehensible
by Prof Hanko

Read: Romans 11:33-36

Although the sacred Scriptures are the infallible record of God's revelation to us, given so that we may know Him, the Scriptures also constantly remind us that what we know of God is very little, for He is infinitely greater than His own revelation in the Scriptures.

Job says, "Behold, God is great, and we know Him not, neither can the number of His years be searched out" (Job 36:26).

Isaiah proclaims in wonder at God's own word concerning Himself: "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding" (Isa 40:28).

God's word through Jeremiah is: "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? Saith the LORD." (Jer 23:23,24). And Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple: "The heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Kings 8:27)

God is so great that He is in all things, above all things, around all things, beneath all things. He is present with the whole of His being in every atom of the universe, and yet He is infinitely extending beyond his creation.

I recall the pastor of my youth frequently praying after a sermon he preached, "Lord, we have tried to say a few things about Thee. But we have only mumbled and stuttered a bit, for Thou are far, far greater than our understanding of Thee."

Though we shall grow in the knowledge of God into all eternity, we shall never reach an end of our search for the riches of God's blessed being. Everlasting life is not long enough to exhaust the riches of the knowledge of God. Though we know what the Scriptures say of God, our knowledge of God is less than a thimble-full of water in comparison with all the oceans and seas on the earth.

Yet, we know Him, know Him as our Friend, our Redeemer, our covenant God! What a wonder, for He shows us enough of Himself for us to live in warm covenant fellowship with Him.

Let us exalt His holy name.

January 7 - God Is Invisible by Prof Hanko

Read: I Kings 8:22-30

In an earlier article, we touched briefly on God's invisibility. The key text for this attribute of God is I Tim 1:17: "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, **invisible**, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen"

God's invisibility follows from His other attributes. Because God is unique in His being, He is also invisible. He is like no other creature. There is no being like His being. He is "the wholly other One." He is in a class by Himself. He cannot be compared with anything. And so he is also invisible.

We cannot see Him; the angels cannot see Him; the saints in heaven cannot see Him. His greatness is of such a kind that no one can see Him. The only way He can be seen is by His revelation of Himself. He speaks about Himself. He speaks about who He is, what He is like, what great works He does. And He speaks of Himself in a way that we can understand Him.

Calvin spoke of God's revelation as "baby-talk," for He is so much greater than we are that He has to come down to us and adapt His speech to our feeble and imperfect understanding.

It is common today and characteristic of the shallow and superficial religion so many people have that even ministers speak of God and to God as if they were chatting over the backyard fence with a neighbor of equal importance with themselves. They open worship services with, "Good morning, God"; or worse, "Hello, Daddy". They throw mud on God's great majesty.

The believer is over and over again deeply impressed with God's greatness. He comes to God with fear, trembling, humility, awe, wonder, and a deep sense of God's greatness.

God reveals Himself in Scripture and speaks of Himself in such a simple way that we can understand what He says. But Scripture is the record of all that God does through Jesus Christ. When we read the Scriptures, we meet Jesus Christ. We come to know Him as our Saviour and Lord. And when we know Him, we know God.

So it will be in heaven. Though God is invisible, we shall see Him; but we shall see Him in the face of Jesus Christ, for our Saviour is both God and man in one divine person. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

January 8 - God Is Immutable
by Prof Hanko

Read: Hebrews 6:11-20

The confession that we are discussing tells us that Scripture teaches the immutability of God. That is, one of God's incommunicable attributes is his unchangeableness. The classic text in the Bible to prove this is Mal 3:6: "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

It is important that we confess this attribute of God, for many in our day deny it. These false teachers teach that God is changeable, and that, in fact, His attitude towards people in the world changes, because He reacts to their faith or unbelief. This blasphemy of God arises out of Arminianism, an error that teaches that the final decision on the question of salvation rests with man's will. God reacts with happiness and approval or with anger depending on what man's choice is.

God is unchangeable in His own being. All His attributes also are unchangeable. It is not true that although God is just, his mercy and love override his justice and cancel it out.

Because God is unchangeable in His own divine being and attributes, he is unchangeable in His counsel. This is clearly taught in Isa 46:9,10: "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

Because God is unchangeable in His counsel, He is unchangeable in His works of grace and love which He shows to us. Because our Lord Jesus Christ is divine as well as human, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb 13:8). He is unchangeable also in His promises which He has made to establish His covenant with us and our children. And because God is unchangeable, and His promise is unchangeable, we have a strong consolation, who have fled to Christ for refuge (Heb 6:18).

What a comfort this is, for we are fickle and changeable. Today we pray earnestly, tomorrow we do not pray at all. Today we confess our sins. Tomorrow we return to them. Sometimes we are fervent and sometimes we are cold as ice. Sometimes our love is strong and sometimes it turns weak and hardly noticeable. But our God in Jesus Christ is the unchangeable One in all His promises to us.

January 9 - God Is Infinite
by Prof Hanko

Read: Isaiah 44

God's infinity is very closely related to His other incommunicable attributes. Infinity is best understood in contrast to our finiteness.

We are, in all respects, finite. We are finite because we are creatures and completely dependent on God for everything.

To be finite means to be limited. We are limited to this creation and cannot be in heaven as well as on earth. We are limited in being in only one place at a time; we cannot be both in Singapore and in the States at the same time, nor even in Jurong and in Woodlands. We are bound by time. It takes 20 to 24 hours to travel by plane from Grand Rapids to Singapore. We can do only so much work within a given time and we often say, "I ran out of time."

We are more than ever limited with the entrance of sin into the world. We are limited in what we can do because our strength is limited. We are limited in what we can see, because our eyes cannot see very far and cannot penetrate objects in the way. We are limited by sickness and disease. We are limited by old age, and our limitations become very great when we are past eighty years old.

But God is not limited in any way. He is not limited by space, for He is, with the whole of his essence, present in every particle of the creation, but He is still infinitely extended beyond the entire universe. His being knows no boundaries. He is not limited by time, for He is without beginning and without end. He is the eternal One. His counsel is eternal. In His counsel and plan, Cain eternally killed Abel. In his changeless purpose, Christ eternally died and rose again. All history is eternal and without limitation before the mind of God.

We cannot even begin to imagine God's infinity. If we could imagine what God's infinity is, then it would not be infinity any more, for it would be limited by the limitations of our minds.

There are truths concerning God that we must not even try to understand, for in doing so with our finite minds, we destroy the infinite. We can only bow in worship and adoration before such a great God as we have. And our adoration turns to praise and thanksgiving when we believe that this God is our God.

January 10 - God Is Almighty
by Prof Hanko

Read: Job 38

When we pray the Lord's prayer, we conclude the prayer with the words, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (Matt 6:13). We confess that God possesses "the power." That means that all power belongs to God. There can be no power anywhere, except it be the power of God.

God's power belongs to His infinity. If God's power is infinite so that all power is His, then God is also the only God. It is impossible that there be two powers, both infinite, both possessing all power. Therefore God is almighty: all-mighty.

What a great God we have!

God shows His power in the work of creation. He spoke and it came to pass. All things are formed by the word of His mouth. His power is manifested not only in the creation of this universe, but also in the creation of heaven.

God's power is everywhere present in the world every moment, for He continues to give each creature its existence. He not only created an oak tree by the word of His power, but He continues to speak that word, and that is the only reason the oak tree continues to exist.

God's absolute sovereignty is the exercise of His power, and He is sovereign over all, including wicked men and devils. The devils had to ask Christ's permission to go from the man who was devil-possessed, into the pigs (Mark 5:11-13). God is sovereign, although He exercises his sovereignty over the wicked in such a way that they remain responsible for their sins.

God is almighty in his work of salvation. Our Canons of Dordt say that God's power is revealed in the work of salvation just as much as in the work of creation (Canon 3rd & 4th Heads, Article 12). It takes a mighty power of God to make a depraved and blaspheming sinner a praying saint. It takes a power greater than anything man possesses to change a totally depraved enemy of God to a glorious child of God. It takes a great power of God in Jesus Christ to perform the work of atonement, resurrection and ascension by which we are saved.

God can do all things. He can do all things for you and me. He can and will do all that is necessary to make us His people.

¹¹ Praise be to God!

January 11 - God Is Perfectly Wise
by Prof Hanko

Read: I Timothy 1:17, Proverbs 8

The Belgic Confession speaks of this attribute as the first communicable attribute. Historically, the attributes of God have been divided between his incommunicable attributes and his communicable attributes. The former are attributes that belong to God alone; the latter are attributes that are found in man created after the image of God.

But the Confession speaks of God as being “all-wise.” The meaning is that all wisdom is God’s wisdom and all wisdom possessed by man is God’s wisdom.

Wisdom, if we would define it, is God’s determination to seek the best possible goal for all His works, and the best possible way to attain that goal. The best possible goal for God to seek, is the glory of His own name. And the best possible way to attain that goal is to reveal Himself through Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus Christ is called, in Prov 8, “The Wisdom of God.”

In Medieval times, Roman Catholic Scholastics would argue about very strange and wrong things. They would argue about how many angels can dance on the point of a pin. They would debate whether the fact that God is almighty means that God could create two mountains without a valley in between. They would debate whether God’s wisdom means that there are an infinite number of ways in which God could have realized his own glory. Foolish questions.

The answer to all these questions is simply that God’s wisdom is revealed in the **highest and best** possible way, and that is the way of salvation in God’s own eternal Son. None of God’s attributes can be exercised in such a way that their exercise is contrary to his own infinitely perfect being.

God’s wisdom is an attribute of God’s counsel. Therefore, as that counsel is worked out in the history of God’s creation, all that happens in history is wise, the wise works of God, best suited to manifest God’s great glory.

Only God’s people have wisdom. The wicked are fools and all that they do is foolish. But God gives his people wisdom so that they may be wise as they walk in the world. They are able to choose the best possible goal for their lives – the glory of God. And by the wisdom God gives, they are able to choose the best possible way to attain that goal: obedience to God.

¹²And if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God... (James 1:5-8).

January 12 - God Is Just
by Prof Hanko

Read: Job 34

Justice is also a communicable attribute of God.

That God is just means that all God does is in perfect harmony with His goodness. From the viewpoint of its manifestation in creation, God's justice means that God blesses the one who is good as He is, but punishes the one who is wicked and breaks God's commandments.

And so, because God is just, the one who sins against God is punished in this life and eternally in hell.

The Arminians argue that indeed God is just, but that God's grace and goodness overcome his justice. That is, although God could justly put every sinner in hell, he does not do this because he is also a gracious and loving God.

But this heresy is answered by the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 4, in which three objections are raised against God's justice. The last one reads: "Is not God then also merciful?" God is indeed merciful, but also just; therefore His justice requires that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul. (Q & A 11. Read the entire Lord's Day, for it says much about the justice of God).

God is also just in saving His people – in spite of the fact that they are just as wicked as the worst sinners in the world. But because His justice demands that sin be punished, God has punished the sin of his people in His own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. So the suffering and death of Christ reveal both God's justice and His mercy and grace. Justice and mercy kiss each other at the cross of Christ.

God is just in all that He does. He is just when He sends sickness upon men; when He sends catastrophes in the creation that kill thousands; when He sends trouble and grief upon people that disrupts their lives and makes their experiences bitter. But His justice towards the wicked is revealed in all these things because they are the evidence of God's just fury against man for his sins.

But God is also just and **merciful** to His people when He makes all the trials of this present time work for their eternal salvation.

January 13 - God Is Good
by Prof Hanko

Read: Psalm 145

Many years ago, when my father was a minister in a small and very poor congregation, a terrible hail storm swept over the area where he and most of the members of his congregation lived. One man in particular was devastated by the storm. He had a family of ten or eleven children; his wife was in the hospital for many months; he earned his living by growing vegetables, which were difficult to sell, because it was the great depression of the 1930s.

My father thought it good to visit this man whose entire crop was destroyed. He found that man standing at the side of his field. My father came and stood along side of him, but said nothing. The man turned to my father with tears streaming down his cheeks and said, "Pastor, the Lord is good."

Such is the confession of the child of God in the sorrows of life.

God's goodness is closely related to His holiness. He is supremely good in Himself and in all His divine being. He has no moral fault or stain, but is transcendently good as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Because God is good in all His being, He is good in all that He does. He is good in the work of creation and providence. He is good to his creation when He makes the earth produce an abundance of good things. He is good when natural disasters come by His hand, for He defends the holiness of His own name when He punishes sin. He is good and manifests his goodness when He gives the wicked health, food, drink, riches and a long life in the world.

This does not mean that He is gracious towards them. But His gifts are always good; He never gives evil gifts. The very goodness of His gifts increases the sin of the wicked, for they abuse His good gifts and use them for their own pleasure rather than for the glory of Him who gave them.

God is always good to His people in all that he does, even when He destroys the means of their livelihood, for "All things work together for **good** to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).

Let us confess together His goodness towards us in all He does.

January 14 - God Is The Overflowing Fountain Of All Good by Prof Hanko

Read: Psalm 147 & Psalm 116

There are many more communicable attributes of which the Belgic Confessions could have spoken: mercy, truth, grace, lovingkindness, compassion, love, etc. But finally, overwhelmed by the many virtues of the infinite God, the article sums them all up with the words, "He is the overflowing fountain of all good." God's goodness is the one attribute that sums up all the others.

In Psalm 116, the inspired sweet singer of Israel tells us that he was drowning in very severe troubles and sorrows. He does not tell us what his troubles were, but they were grave dangers to his faith and to his fellowship with God. They were "sorrows of death" and "pains of hell" (v3). And all he knew was "trouble and sorrow" (v3).

But he called upon the name of the Lord and made supplication to God, beseeching him for deliverance. The LORD heard his cry and helped him (v6); and so he could speak to his soul: "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee" (v7).

The Psalmist, most likely David, was so filled with gratitude to God for His mercy that he contemplates the possibility of bringing to God some gift to express his thankfulness. "What shall I render unto the LORD for all His benefits toward me?" (v12).

His answer to that question indicates that, upon consideration of the matter, he could bring nothing at all to the Lord, for all things were already His. The cattle on a thousand hills are His. He cannot give himself or anything he has, for even he himself belongs to God and all he possesses remains the possession of God. It was like a man taking a cool and delicious cup of water out of a mountain stream and, after drinking part of it, expressing his thanks by pouring half of the cup back into the river.

But there are two things he can do. The first is to say, "Thanks" for what he has received. That is the meaning of the cup of thanksgiving: the last cup of wine in the Passover feast, by which Israel expressed thanks to God for the salvation symbolized in the Passover.

The second thing he can and will do is "call upon the name of the LORD" (v17). That is, he will go to God to ask for more.

¹⁵That is all he can do, for God is the "overflowing fountain of all good."

Article 2: By What Means God is Made Known unto Us.

We know Him by two means: first, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, His eternal power and divinity, as the apostle Paul saith (Rom 1:20). All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse.

Secondly, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation.

January 15 – We can Know God!
by Rev. Allen J. Brummel

John 17:3 “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

The Christian church rests on the truth that God has made Himself known to us in a manner that we are able to understand and comprehend. We make the distinction between knowing God and being able fully to comprehend God. We cannot begin to fully comprehend the mysteries of the Divine. God is so great and so far removed from us as finite beings, that we can only scratch the surface of His glory. But, what a wonder that God has made Himself known in a manner that we are able to understand!

Throughout history, saints have at times despaired in the midst of their troubles, questioning whether they could know God and experience His grace and mercy. David in Psa 88:14 cries: “Lord, why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me?” Job, in the midst of his intense pain and sorrow, despaired in Job 23:8 “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him.” There are times when we feel that the heavens are closed up like iron and stone. We do not seem to be able to hear God’s word to us. But, the child of God by God’s grace overcomes those doubts and fears, and rests in the blessed assurance that God makes Himself known through revelation as the God of our salvation.

Revelation means simply that God, as a personal being, actively communicates knowledge to His people in such a way that they are able to understand. God uncovers or makes manifest that which He desires men to know. God created man in His image, and therefore capable of understanding God’s speech to man. All knowledge of God is dependent on His self-revelation to us. Apart from God’s work of making Himself known to us and working in us the understanding of that revelation, we would not be able to know God. Natural man knows about God, but lacks the intimate knowledge that God provides by revelation.

Consider today that God has given you to know Him. Our calling is to hold high His revelation to us, and to search the Scriptures in order to grow in that which gives us the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the hope of everlasting life!

January 16 – God’s Revelation
by Rev. Allen J. Brummel

Romans 1:20 “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse...”

The fact that the Almighty God of Heaven and Earth, the one so great and marvelous that no man hath seen nor can behold Him, the spiritual and invisible One, makes Himself known to us, is remarkable. That He who is so great would come to us and speak our language in the manner in which we can understand is a wonder of grace. God did not leave Adam and Eve hiding in the garden after the fall, as He well could have. God searched them out and came to them and made Himself known to them.

This is the greatest wonder! God makes Himself known to sinners, to those who are His enemies! The miracle and wonder of God’s revelation is closely connected with the wonder of God’s grace in realizing the salvation of His people.

God determined the precise manner in which He would reveal Himself to man. God could have worked in man some inborn knowledge of Himself, but God did not do so. God could have made it so that in some mystical manner, man would be able to know God through personal meditation. Again, God did not do so. God ordained two main means by which He makes Himself known: by means of creation and by means of the Scriptures. There are other ways in which God makes Himself known, such as in history, in the consciences of men and women, and through dreams, visions, and angels in the Old Testament. But, the two main ways in which God’s revelation comes to us is by means of the creation and the Word.

The creation is set forth as a “most elegant book” revealing to us the being and majesty of God as an artist reveals something of himself through his paintings.

It is the revelation of God through the Scriptures that allows us to understand and see Jesus Christ as Savior. The Scriptures serve as the means by which we are able to see Christ in the creation and in history. The Belgic Confession not only guides us to see the important place of the creation, but most importantly, not to neglect that love letter from God, the Bible, in which we read of His revelation to us through Jesus Christ unto our salvation.

January 17 – God’s Revelation in Creation
by Rev. Allen J. Brummel

Psalm 19:1 “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.”

God is the Creator of the heavens, the earth and the entire universe. By His work, He, the Creator, is revealed and known. The course of history reveals His power and government as Psa 33:10,11 teaches: “The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”

God makes Himself so clearly known through the creation that all men everywhere know that there is a God and that He must be worshipped. “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shown it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse; Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God.” (Rom 1:19-21a) In everything found on earth and in the heavens, God makes Himself known. None can deny His matchless wisdom, His great goodness, or His marvelous power except by denying and rejecting the witness that is daily set before their eyes.

There is the witness of God through history by which He governs all things and demonstrates that everything is being operated in an orderly way and with a defined plan. The revelation of God in creation reveals that He is orderly and that all things serve His divine plan.

This revelation in creation is able only to be understood properly through the testimony of the Scriptures which reveal God’s purpose and plan for all things. For this reason, when we think of revelation, we think most fully of the revelation of God in the Word.

For the child of God, the Scriptures open our eyes to creation as the most elegant book. We read of the sunrises, the lilies, the mountains, the trees and the branches. We read of the roots, branches and all the wild beasts as well as the lamb, and we see Christ in all of creation. God reveals His love and grace through all the word-pictures that He incorporates in the creation.

Thank God who has opened your eyes to see today not only evidences of His judgment and power in the creation, but also His marvelous love and grace in Jesus Christ. Pray for grace more and more to see Christ and His glory in the creation around you.

January 18 – Revealed by His Word
by Rev. Allen J. Brummel

John 5:39 “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.”

The chief form of revelation that God has given to His church is that of the Scriptures which reveal everything necessary to know and believe concerning God and the way of salvation.

We must treasure the Scriptures through which God has revealed Himself to us. It is so easy to say that we treasure them, but to give little attention to the Bible throughout the week. The Belgic confession begins almost every article with a “We believe...” or a “We confess...” That believing and confessing is on the basis of the word that God has given to us. So precious this Word of God was to the persecuted believers during the time in which the confession was written, that they were willing to “offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to fire, rather than deny the truth of God’s Word.” The saints knew and loved the Word and lived out of it.

So that the Word will never be doubted or forgotten by God’s children, we have it preserved for us in written form by God so that we can read it regularly and grow in our knowledge and love of God, living in obedience to His commandments.

It is easy to try to twist and distort the teachings of the Bible. We find that despicable behavior taking place in churches throughout the world. And, tragically, it is easy for us to fall prey to the temptation to try to justify our own sins by twisting the Word to favor and allow us to live according to our own pleasure.

The Bible reminds us that we are liars, and we need to submit to the word which has been preserved in written form. In God’s great wisdom He clearly makes known His will so that no man can contest it or claim to have heard it incorrectly. We must have the highest regard for the written Word so that we don’t need to look anywhere else to know God’s will for our lives.

January 19 – A Knowledge for Believers
by Rev. Allen J. Brummel

John 17:6 “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.”

Specifically, this article is talking about how believers, God’s people, are able to know God. By faith, we know God through the Bible, and that Word has priority and explains more fully the revelation of God to us in the creation. Without the glasses of the Word, no one can read the book of creation and understand God as Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God. The unbeliever is not capable of knowing God simply by means of the revelation of God in creation. Even though that revelation of God in His works is clear and unmistakable, natural man is blind and hates God’s evidence and refuses to confess or know God. His depravity prevents him from knowing God by means of His works.

God made use of dreams, visions, appearances, and direct speech in order to reveal His will to mankind. Through miracles and wonders, God displayed His power and His glory, but the most marvelous wonder is that of His Word. The Bible is a miracle from God because it makes known the living and unseen God to us through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. That written word reveals all that is necessary for us to know in this life to God’s glory and our salvation. This written word confronts the believer with the message of his sinfulness and depravity, and the wonder of God’s grace.

It is only through the written word that we are able to know the Word who became flesh, who is the living Word.

We confess first of all the accuracy of the written Word. Although the translations that we have are subject to error and mis-translation, we confess that God preserved His word so that we have the Word of God, and that Word as to its original autograph is inspired, infallible, authoritative, and necessary.

Secondly, we read and meditate on that Word. It is easy to take for granted the treasure that God has given us in the Word. It is easy for us to become lax in our reading of it. May God stir us up not only to a confession of the wonder of His revelation to us, but also the joy of reading, studying and growing in our knowledge of that glorious revelation in His Word so that we can know more fully the glory of God and the confidence of our salvation.

January 20 – Unbelievers Left Without Excuse
by Rev. Allen J. Brummel

Romans 1:21 “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

Can a person be saved through the testimony of the creation? The answer is clearly no. The significance of the revelation of God through the creation is that it leaves the unbelievers without an excuse for their rebellion. The testimony of Rom 1:18-31 is clear. Every person who is summoned before the tribunal of God will know that there was a God and that God required of him worship. No one will be able to say they did not know there was a God.

This revelation then has no saving power. We may not speak of it as a kind of grace. Instead, the Belgic Confession, quoting from Romans 1 makes very clear that this revelation is a revelation of God’s wrath and serves only to leave the wicked without excuse. It is not the case that there are different ways of salvation—some apart from the Scriptures. It is not the case that men can be saved with the Word and apart from faithful preaching of that Word. Rom 10:14 requires not only the Word, but the faithful proclamation of that Word through servants who are called and sent by the church.

There are important implications of this truth. The revelation of God through creation is the reason why no one will ever be able to claim that they did not know there was a God. There are no atheists as far as the Bible is concerned. God will judge the wicked on judgment day because they knew God, but refused to glorify Him, continued to walk in an unthankful manner, and worshipped the creature instead of the Creator.

This knowledge of God is not capable of bringing a man to salvation, but is “sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse” for their wickedness and rebellion. There are no atheists according to Psa 14:1. The fool says in his heart that there is no God. The fool is one who denies reality; he knows better and yet in his wickedness suppresses the knowledge in unbelief. This means that all who turn away from God and the gospel do so out of rebellion against the true God whom they do know.

We thank God for His grace in rescuing us from that bondage and giving us the mercy to see Jesus Christ as the power and wisdom of God unto salvation revealed through the preaching of the gospel. Pray that God will open the eyes of those with
22 whom you have contact, who remain in that bondage.

January 21 – No Other Revelation
by Rev. Allen J. Brummel

John 10:35 “...the scripture cannot be broken...”

There are many in our day, who insist that the Scripture is broken. They say that the Bible is not able to help us understand what took place in the beginning with the wonder of creation, and the Bible does not give us direction in the realm of the roles of husband and wives in marriage. Further, they believe that the Bible is time-bound and culturally conditioned, and in many areas it is broken. More important in their estimation are the subjective ways in which God reveals himself to individuals personally. By denying the Scripture, and making God’s revelation relative, they not only despise the Word of God, but also lose the assurance of eternal life as Rev 22:18,19 teach.

All that man needs to know for salvation is found in the Bible. Every human opinion, tradition, and law must be judged in the light of the divine Scripture. The anti-Christian spirit is among us, and therefore the calling of believers is to “...believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (I John 4:1) This warning we need to hear today.

The Bible is the way by which our pathway in the midst of the darkness of this world is illumined. The Bible is the way in which we are able to be assured of the salvation that has been earned for us by Jesus Christ. The Bible is the means by which we are able to know Jesus Christ and therefore we must give the more earnest heed to this Scripture! (Heb 2:1)

The light of the Bible will not be seen if you are not reading its pages. You need to use and wear out your Bibles! Read the Bible every day. Study it, praying that God will cause its light to shine brightly in your heart. And, follow that light as God directs and guides your pathway to the glory of His name and for your salvation!

Article 3: The Written Word of God.

We confess that this Word of God was not sent, nor delivered by the will of man, but that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, as the apostle Peter saith. And that afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed Word to writing; and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.

January 22 - God's Special Revelation to Us
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Hebrews 1:1-8.

The one true, living, and glorious God can only be known to man through His own self-revelation. He cannot be known by man's philosophical speculation or scientific investigation. God can only be rightly known when He makes Himself known to us by His wonderful grace and Spirit. According to Rom 1:20, God reveals Himself in His creation. He shows His power and godhead in all the world. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork (Psa 19:1). God reveals Himself in His creation as the sovereign and almighty creator of all, who must be worshipped and glorified. But fallen, sinful man denies God's revelation in His creation. Knowing God, he glorifies Him not as God. Man's foolish heart is darkened. He professes himself to be wise. He rejects the true and living God and creates a god after his own imagination. The god of man's foolish imagination is a mere creature, a helpless and dumb idol, that cannot help or save man from the fall and misery he plunged himself into. The idol god of man's imagination is a lie, even when it is made of gold or other precious materials. The revelation of the true God in creation leaves man without excuse. He is condemned for his foolishness.

In the darkness of this sinful world, God has made known the glorious light of His truth and salvation to His people. The Bible is the written record of the Word of God whereby He makes Himself fully known as the true and blessed God of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. The truth of God revealed in the Bible can only be understood by the Christian through God-given faith and by the Spirit and grace of God in his heart.

How the Bible is regarded by Christians is of greatest importance. If the Bible is not in every part true, then we must forever remain in doubt as to who God is and how we can be saved by Him. Through the Bible, we come to know the true, living, and blessed God of our salvation. The Bible teaches us all that is necessary for life and godliness.

Today, there are many who no longer believe that the Bible is absolutely the Word of God. In the past, these people were mostly outside the church. But today, there are those right in the church world who maintain that the Bible is full of errors. Christians must be on their guard against these false teachers and all their vain

attempts to try to cast doubt on God's revelation of Himself in His Word.

The question of the absolute truth of the scriptures is of utmost importance. The Protestant Reformation taught that the whole of the Christian religion must be based on the Bible. One of the great watchwords of the Reformation was 'Sola Scriptura'. All that we believe about who and what God is, must be derived from the Bible. Every doctrine we confess, every truth we maintain in the church, must be derived from the Bible. False doctrine must be condemned and rejected on the basis of the Bible. The whole of the Christian life is set forth in the Bible. We may not add or subtract anything from what the Bible says about God.

What a great treasure the Bible is when we consider it to be the revelation of God and of His Son Jesus Christ! What a blessing to find in the Bible the glorious and blessed God of our salvation! This God we must worship and serve with godly fear, thanksgiving and praise. To know this God and His Son Jesus Christ is to have eternal life.

January 23 - The Bible is the Word of God
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: II Peter 1:16–21

We cannot prove this by mere human reason. Sinful man exalts his own reason above the Bible and becomes a critic of the Bible. Through his supposed historical research and scientific investigation, unbelieving man claims that the Bible is full of errors.

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, through the testimony of His Spirit in our hearts and through God-given faith. This reasoning might not satisfy the world but it is sufficient for us. We are silent before God's Word, not contradicting it with our own mere human reason.

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God on the basis of its own testimony of itself. There are many passages which speak of the fact that the Bible is the Word of God. In many places in the Bible, we find absolutely authoritative statements that God speaks to us in His Word, such as, 'Thus saith the LORD' and 'the Word of the LORD came unto me saying.' The Belgic Confession quotes a very important passage from the Bible. It is taken from II Pet 1:20-21: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Notice the contrast. The prophecies of scripture came not by the will of man **but** by the Holy Spirit.

A second classic passage which contains scripture's own testimony of itself is found in II Tim 3:16. There we read, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." This passage does not merely mean that the human authors of the Bible wrote with great feeling or on moving subjects, as might be said of the authors of some mere human piece of literature or poetry. What Paul means in II Tim 3:16 is that the scriptures were breathed forth from the mouth of God Himself. The scriptures were produced by the wonderful work of God Himself. Therefore the scriptures are true, as true as God is true.

In the passage quoted above from II Peter, the inspired apostle of the Lord tells us earlier in the same chapter, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables,

when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (II Pet 1:16) After this, Peter says, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:” Jesus Christ is the day star. When He comes, the dark night of sin will be over and the great light of God will shine. The prophecies of scripture all concentrate on the blessed and glorious hope of the coming of Christ for our salvation.

The Christian religion is in no part based on human fables and myths. It is based on the absolute truth of God. In this we have confidence before God and have a certain hope of the coming again of Christ for the final salvation of His people.

One of the great proofs that the Bible is true is evident in the fact that prophecies made thousands of years before the birth of Christ were all fulfilled in Him. What an amazing and wonderful thing!

January 24 – Holy Men Spoke as They Were Moved by the Holy Spirit by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Revelation 1:1-11

How do we know that the Bible is truly the Word of God? The Belgic Confession answers this important question by quoting II Pet 1:21. This passage does not address the question of how we can come to the right interpretation. How we interpret the Bible is of course very important. But Peter is speaking of how holy men of God received revelation from God and how writers of the Bible themselves understood the Word of God. They did not each have their own private interpretation of the prophecies which God by special revelation gave to them. Rather “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”. Literally they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. This was a wonderful work of God. A work that produced an infallible Bible.

God used men to write the Bible. The Bible did not fall down from heaven as is claimed by other religions concerning their sacred books. The Bible was given through the instrumentality of men, who were in themselves sinners but who were holy men of God.

Many would argue that since God used men to give us the Bible, it must follow that the Bible is in part the Word of God and in part the word of men. Since God used fallible men, their human limitations and errors inevitably entered into the Bible. Therefore, not every part of the Bible is the Word of God. Since the men through whom we received the Word of God lived long before the age of scientific investigation and historical research, these men were limited. There were many things that they could not have known in the times in which they lived. Many of these things were discovered centuries later. It is even claimed that the ancient men who wrote the Bible often confused mythology with reality and fact. In our modern times of the amazing knowledge of scientific investigation and historical research, it has been claimed that the Bible contains many errors. It is said that we must change our thinking about the Bible. It is said that the Word of God is ‘in’ the Bible but not all of the Bible is the Word of God. It is being said that the Bible is infallible only in matters that speak of salvation but not in all matters of which it speaks. The work of the church and of the believer when reading the Bible, is to discern what belongs to the truth of salvation and what belongs to science and history. As a result, the Christian is left with hopeless uncertainty and confusion regarding which part of the Bible is to be received as the Word of God and which

part reflects ancient, limited and undeveloped knowledge. The Bible becomes a collection of ancient mythology. Many of these so-called 'myths' were part of a body of mythology which found its way into many other religions besides the Christian religion. While these myths contain spiritual lessons, they do not convey absolute truth. We adamantly reject such a view of the Bible. Our religion is not based on myths but on the absolute truth of God.

The Belgic Confession denies this false teaching that is troubling and confusing so much of the church today. God directed the hearts and minds of the men of God who were used to bring God's Word to His people. They first of all themselves received the very Word of God. They spoke the absolute truth. As God is true, so also the Bible is true and without error. For this reason, we have "a more sure word of prophecy" upon which we as Christians base our undoubted faith in the hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

January 25 - The Word of God was Written Down
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: II Timothy 3:14-17.

There was a time when there was no Bible. The Word of God was given to His people before the Bible was written. God spoke to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob sometimes directly out of heaven. For many years, the Word of God was kept alive among God's people through oral tradition. Parents told their children about the Word of God. For example, the history of creation, the fall and the works of God among His people were told and retold from generation to generation over hundreds of years.

In order to have the Word of God preserved for all ages and for us also, God had His Word written down. The term 'the scriptures' literally means 'the writings.' The writing of the scriptures took place over 1500 years of time from Moses to the apostle John. Many different men were engaged; men in vastly different times and cultures. The Word of God was progressively revealed to man in more and more rich fullness, unfolding God's glorious purposes of salvation. In spite of this, all the men that God used for the writing down of His Word agreed with each other. They did not contradict each other. This alone is one of the greatest proofs for the infallibility of the Bible.

God used men to record His Word for all ages. These men were not mere secretaries to whom God dictated his words, for them in a very mechanical way to record it. Rather, God used their whole person, the gifts of the human writers, their life circumstances, the problem and difficulties they faced in the world at that time. The human authors of the Bible were convicted in their own hearts concerning their own writings. They knew and loved God and were devoted to Him and the declaring of His truth. God ordained and prepared each of the writers of the Bible in the totality of who they were and the circumstances in which they wrote the Bible.

A careful study of this matter will reveal that Jesus quoted from all the major sections of 'the scriptures.' He set His seal of authority as the Son of God on the whole of the Old Testament. At the time that Jesus lived on the earth, the 39 books of the Old Testament were already collected together, and distinguished from all other books. Together, they were referred to as 'the scripture.' Jesus, during His earthly ministry, appealed with finality to the scripture. He often used the phrase,

‘it is written.’ This, He considered to be the end of all argument and debate. What was written, Jesus considered to be the absolutely authoritative and true Word of God. He said that the scriptures could not be broken. In the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus declared that not one jot or tittle would pass from the law of God until all was fulfilled (Matt 5:18). If Jesus is true, and He is because He is the Son of God, His Word is absolutely true.

Later, the apostles of the Lord referred to the word which they preached as being absolutely authoritative. It must not be doubted nor questioned. That word was the foundation on which the church was to be built. Paul boldly declares in I Cor 2:4-5 “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” See also I Cor 3:10-11.

How blessed we are that God has so preserved His Word for us, that we might know Him and the truth that is in Him, so that we might believe in Him for our salvation without any doubt.

Article 4: Canonical Books of the Holy Scripture.

We believe that the Holy Scriptures are contained in two books, namely, the Old and New Testaments, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged. These are thus named in the Church of God.

The books of the Old Testament are, the five books of Moses, namely: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the two books of Samuel, the two of the Kings, two books of the Chronicles, commonly called Paralipomenon, the first of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther; Job, the Psalms of David, the three books of Solomon, namely, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs; the four great prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel; and the twelve lesser prophets, namely, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Those of the New Testament are the four evangelists, namely: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles; the fourteen epistles of the apostle Paul, namely: one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, one to Titus, one to Philemon, and one to the Hebrews; the seven epistles of the other apostles, namely, one of James, two of Peter, three of John, one of Jude; and the Revelation of the apostle John.

January 26 - All Scripture is Given By Inspiration of God
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: John 15:26 and 16:13-14

Article 4 of the Belgic Confession gives a list of the books which the church historically has considered to be included in the 'canon'. The word 'canon' means literally, standard or measure. The idea is that according to a specific measure or criteria certain sacred books were received to be inspired while others were not. This is of course a very important question. Many sacred books have been written over the centuries. Almost every pagan religion has its sacred book or books. Even in the days of ancient Israel sacred books were written. Some of these were included in the canon of scripture, others were not. The Old Testament mentions sacred books, books even of true prophets of God, which did not become part of the 39 books of the Old Testament later referred to as 'the scriptures.'

At the time of the Reformation there were sacred books called the apocrypha, which the Reformers did not consider part of the 'sacred scriptures'. The Roman Catholic Bible wrongly, we believe, contains these books. The Protestant Bible does not contain them.

At the time of Jesus, the 39 books of the Old Testament were already received as 'canonical'. Jesus, with His authority as the Son of God, declared these, and these only to be 'the scriptures'. He quoted with authority from these books and said concerning them that 'the scriptures cannot be broken' (John 6:35).

The New Testament contains 27 books. The early church councils listed these books as the complete canon. No other books were determined to have the same authority. It is possible that some of the other apostles of the Lord wrote sacred books. They were not included in the canon. It is possible that the apostle Paul wrote a third letter to the church of Corinth which was lost and not made part of the canon though written by Paul.

How did all of this happen? It was not because the church as such has authority over the scriptures. In fact, the truth is the opposite. The church is founded on the absolute authority of the scriptures. Jesus promised that after His ascension, He would give His apostles, and later the church founded by them, the Spirit of truth. He would lead and guide the church into all truth. See John 14:26 and John 16:13-14.

When the apostles preached, they were aware of the fact that they had the Spirit of Christ in their office. Therefore they believed that the Word they brought had absolute authority. Paul states in I Cor 2:4-5 "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

Over time, various criteria were used to determine which sacred books were intended to be recognized as the sacred Word of God. Sometimes, it was due to the office which human authors received from God. Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. He wrote the first five books of the Old Testament. The prophets of the Old Testament stood in a special office in which God spoke to them directly, and later they wrote down the Word of God. The apostles in the New Testament time also had a unique office given by the church, to lay the foundation of the Word of God for the whole church. After the so called Apostolic Age, there was no need of new revelation. Rather, the church must be founded on the foundation already laid, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. See I Cor 3:10-11.

January 27 - The Old and the New Testament **by Rev Arie den Hartog**

Read: Hebrews 1:1-3

Article 4 of the Belgic Confession speaks of the two books of the bible. They are the Old and New Testament. The word 'testament' is another word for covenant. The Old Testament contains the history of the covenant promises of God as they were revealed to the ancient nation of Israel. The New Testament records the fulfillment of all of God's covenant promises in the incarnation, cross, resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fact that the Bible has these two books on the covenant is amazing. It teaches us that the central purpose of God's revelation to us is to make known to us His beloved Son Jesus Christ as our Savior. Jesus said concerning the Old Testament "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." John 5:39.

As soon as man fell into sin and rebelled against God, God in mercy revealed the promise of the coming of the Messiah to save His people from their sins. This promise was first made known in Gen 3:15.

Throughout the whole Old Testament given over a period of thousands of years, there are hundreds and hundreds of passages repeating this promise, and many types picturing the coming of the Savior. His birth from a virgin is revealed. (Isa 7:14) His wonderful person was made known hundreds of years before His birth. See Isa 9: 6ff. The mighty and glorious work He would perform to realize His everlasting kingdom of glory is made known everywhere in the scriptures. The thousands of sacrifices and ceremonies of the tabernacle and the temple of God pointed beforehand to the work of Christ. All the prophets, priests and kings were types of the great prophet, priest and king that was to come, who alone could do the great work of God. See John 1:18 and Heb 1:1-3. Jesus was the fulfillment of all the priests of the Old Testament, being made the great High Priest of our salvation. The book of Hebrews speaks extensively of this. Jesus came as the great king from the line of David. He is the almighty and glorious king, the King of kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim 6:15) who has, and will finally conquer all of God's and our enemies, and establish His glorious everlasting kingdom of righteousness in the new earth and the new heavens.

There is much to be gained through the study of the prophecies and types of the Old Testament. The Old Testament should never be considered as mere interesting ancient Jewish history. From beginning to end, the Old Testament speaks of Christ. We should never end our study of a passage in the Old Testament, until we have through prayer and the Spirit found Christ therein.

The New Testament shows that Christ is the fulfillment of all of God's covenant promises. We know that Jesus is truly the Christ when we learn how He is the fulfillment of the scriptures.

The blessed truth of God and of His salvation, already taught in wonderful ways in the Old Testament, is fully and completely revealed in the New Testament. So we know by reading the New Testament, that Jesus is truly the Christ whom God sent into the world for our salvation. And we must believe in Him for our salvation, find our all in Him and glory in Him alone.

January 28 - The Complete Revelation of God.
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Revelation 22:16-21

After God gave His final Word to the apostle John, and commanded him to write it down in the book called “The Revelation”, the scriptures were complete. “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” Rev 1:3. No more revelation is necessary now. We have, recorded in the scriptures, all that is necessary for us to know God truly and for faith unto salvation in Him. John warned at the end of the book of Revelation: “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev 22:18–19).

Attempts have often been made to add to the scriptures. The Roman Catholic Church in the middle ages raised the so called ‘apocryphal books’ to the same authority in the church as the 66 books of the canon. Throughout history, so called Christian sects such as Jehovah’s Witness and Christian Science, and many others have claimed new revelation received in strange ways. These have added books containing this supposed revelation. Modern day charismatics claim they have received new revelations and prophecies besides the Bible. Some private persons claiming to be leaders in Christendom have claimed to have received some new and private revelation which gave them greater knowledge than anyone who went before them. Many have been led astray by false teachers who say ‘here is Christ; or, lo, He is there’ (Mark 13:21). Believe them not no matter how high sounding and dramatic their claims.

Based on the passage from Rev 22, the Belgic Confession declares that only the 66 canonical books contain the special revelation of God to His people. We are not in need of any new or additional revelation. The word of God is perfect and complete for the church throughout the New Testament Age until the Lord returns at the end of the world.

This is both wonderful and perfect. God has spoken His Word. This Word is absolutely final. In His Word, He has revealed to us everything we need to know Him and for a life of faith and godliness. The written Word cannot be added to or

subtracted from. Neither need we anything more. In God's Word, there are final warnings to men to repent, and sure and blessed promises of everlasting salvation and glory for those who believe.

The treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of our salvation as they are in Jesus Christ alone, are given to us in the Holy Scriptures. What we need to do today is carefully and prayerfully search the scriptures daily so that we might more and more know the one only true God and His Son Jesus Christ, whom to know is everlasting life. The Lord Jesus promised that He will continually give to His church the Spirit of truth who will lead and guide us into all truth. Every doctrine that we hold of Christ must be derived from the scriptures alone. If this is true, we will not be led astray but will be in His truth. We will not walk in darkness but in the light of life. We say with Peter that we have a more sure word of prophecy that we can rely on and never doubt unto the day of the coming of our glorious and blessed Lord. In that day, He will give us perfect understanding of all things.

Article 5: From Whence the Holy Scriptures Derive their Dignity and Authority.

We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing, without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling.

Article 6: The Difference Between the Canonical and Apocryphal Books.

We distinguish those sacred books from the apocryphal, namely: the third book of Esdras, the books of Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Jesus Syrach, Baruch, the appendix to the book of Esther, the Song of the three Children in the Furnace, the history of Susannah, of Bell and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasses, and the two books of the Maccabees. All of which the church may read and take instruction from so far as they agree with the canonical books; but they are far from having such power and efficacy as that we may from their testimony confirm any point of faith or of the Christian religion; much less detract from the authority of the other sacred books.

January 29 – We Receive the Bible as Canon
by Rev. J. Kortering

I Thessalonians 2:13, “when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

The Bible, that is the sixty six books of the Bible listed in Art. 4, constitutes the CANON of Scripture. By this we mean that these books form the “rule of faith” for “canon” means “rule”. The idea of rule is the measure of faith, much like a ruler measures out the length of an object. The books of the Bible form for us the measure of our faith. What we believe is expressed in the teachings of the books of the Bible. What we hold for truth is set forth in the Bible. We use the Bible for this purpose.

We draw two conclusions from this fact.

First, the canon is limited to the sixty six books of the Bible. There are no other books than these which we receive as inspired of God and therefore can function as a canon, a measure of faith.

Second, we do receive these AS INSPIRED of God. This is the rock foundation of our faith. We accept the Bible as the authoritative Word of God without question.

Now, this article instructs us how to respond to this beautiful fact.

“We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith.”

We follow the example of the Thessalonians mentioned above. Because the Bible was not completely written at that time, the child-like faith expressed by the church at Thessalonica was their acceptance of the word preached by the Apostles. But now, at this date in history, we have the written Word of God.

When we speak of a proper response to the fact that God has given to us His word in written form, we receive them. We don’t require someone to “prove to me” the Bible is God’s Word. We do not require the church to hold a meeting to decide which books of the Bible is a proper “rule of faith”. No, we receive these books as a proper rule of our faith.

This is faith’s response. I ask you, do you have that faith? Do you receive the Bible this way?

**January 30 – We Receive THE ENTIRE BIBLE as Canon
by Rev. J. Korterling**

II Timothy 3:16, “ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God . . .”

Perhaps you are a young Christian who reads these words. By young, I mean young in age or I may also mean young in faith in that you only recently became a Christian. Either way, your faith is soon challenged by what I have to say in this brief meditation.

If you have not encountered a person who questions the teaching of the WHOLE Bible, you will encounter such a person very soon. You may have heard someone mock the teaching of the Bible concerning the creation of the world. Others mock the teaching of the Bible concerning miracles, laughing at anyone who would be so naïve as to accept the water of the Nile River turned into blood. Still others focus on the teachings of Christian living, they mock the Bible’s teaching on marriage, Christian home and family.

Some of these people are secular (reject all religion), others hold to other religions (Buddhist, Hindu, etc.), some claim to be Christian and hold to the Bible but interpret the Bible differently.

Obviously, they do not “receive all these books and these only as holy and canonical”. If they did, they would bow humbly by faith and ACCEPT the teachings of the Bible.

The historical Christian faith and also what is designated as “The Reformed Faith” because of the teaching of the Sixteenth Century Reformation which includes our Belgic Confession, says clearly and boldly, “WE receive ALL these books...without doubt, believing ALL things contained in them.” We do that because of what Paul led young Timothy to express, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...”

Ah, that God may give to all of us such child-like faith.

As we go along, we will see that this article gives us two reasons why we have such faith.

But for now, I want you to focus on your response to the Bible.

Don’t ask for scientific proof, for historical confirmation, for ecclesiastical agreement, as necessary before you can accept the teaching of the Bible. The

approach of unbelief is, “show me and I will believe” rather than, “I believe because God has taught me.”

This is critical for your young faith.

May God show to you that what He says is true.

January 31 – Role of the Church and the Canon of Scripture
by Rev. J. Kortering

II Thessalonians 2:15, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”

The language of Art. 5 of our Belgic Confession is interesting, “We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical...not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they are from God whereof they carry the evidence in themselves.”

There is some history behind the wording of this article. You may recall that the Roman Catholic Church takes the position that the church determines what the Bible teaches to be truth. They apply the same thing to the canon of Scripture; the church made a judgment on the canon of Scripture and insists that this makes the difference between the books of the Bible and secular literature.

Our Reformed forefathers do not deny the importance of the church selecting and forming a judgment as to which books of the Bible were inspired and therefore part of the canon, part of the 66 books of the Bible. This was done at Councils, such as Carthage in A.D.397. You notice their careful wording, we accept the sixty-six books of the Bible listed in Art. 4 as CANONICAL “not so much because the church receives and approves them”. Rome places ALL the emphasis on this, because this is determinative for them. For us, of Reformed persuasion, we recognize the role of the church as significant, but something is far more important to us. That is, we accept the canon of Scripture for two important reasons: one, because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are the inspired and authoritative Scripture and second, because the books verify that they are inspired by their own testimony, by the contents themselves.

For now we want to focus on the role of the church in this process.

As in II Thess 2:15, we follow the example of the early church which accepted the teaching (traditions) whether by word or epistle. The written content (epistle) was determinative and the word (spoken by the Apostles).

We do not accept the Bible because the church tells us to do this. The moment they were written, they were the Word of God and the church accepted them as such.

How precious that we and believers of all ages recognize the Bible as God’s Word.

February 1 – The Holy Ghost Convicts us that the Bible is God’s Word
by Rev. J. Kortering

Romans 8:9-10, “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you...but if Christ be in you...the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”

In our brief review of Art. 5 of the Belgic Confession, we have come to focus on this point, we accept the sixty-six books of the Bible, not so much because the church has concluded this (and they have) but the first reason is that the Holy Spirit testifies to us that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God.

It is expressed this way in the article, “the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God.” What follows is the evidence or reasons how the Spirit does this witnessing, by the evidence in the Bible itself. For now, let’s just meditate on this amazing fact, I believe all that the Bible says and teaches because the Holy Spirit of God gives me this conviction.

This is important for understanding our own faith and it is important as we deal with others who do not have this conviction.

First, we look at ourselves. We are spiritually blind and dead as much as anyone else. We are born this way into this world. Nothing we do in our personal study or research in the world can open our eyes to see the truth of God’s Word. Romans 8 quoted above explains what it takes. We do not REMAIN in the flesh, but we are renewed in the Holy Spirit. That Spirit is the Holy Spirit of God who is also given to Jesus Christ to open our eyes so we can see spiritual things spiritually. He testifies to us through the Word, the Bible, that it is indeed the complete and inspired Word of God. Isn’t it amazing that we should be so blessed.

Second, we look at others. We understand that without the Spirit working in them, they continue blind to accept the Bible as God’s Word. Besides that, we also know that all the argumentation and reasoning in the world will not convict them. It takes the Holy Spirit to testify in their heart. If you really want this to happen, you know you must pray to God and ask the Holy Spirit to do this. Only God by His Spirit can do this for them.

Let no one take this conviction away from you. Pray daily for the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

February 2 – The Bible Itself Demonstrates it is the Word of God
by Rev. J. Kortering

Revelation 1:11, “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches...”

We learned so far that no man comes to the conviction that the Bible is God’s Word without the testimony of the Holy Spirit in His heart.

Now we learn that the Holy Spirit works this faith in our hearts by means of the Word of God itself. This is a fundamental truth regarding the Holy Spirit, He limits His revelation to the Written Word and He binds that Word to the hearts of His own. This is important today when many claim they hear the voice of God directly.

Art. 5 expresses it this way, “The Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they (canonical books of the Bible) are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves.”

This evidence comes in two ways.

First, the Bible claims this for itself as indicated in the quote of Rev 1:11 above. John received a vision and was instructed to write it down in a book and send that book to the churches of Asia Minor. The churches received these letters as sent to them from the exalted Christ. We have them to this day and read them as the very Word of God.

Second, there is evidence in the Bible that the prophecies were fulfilled. This is mentioned in Art. 5, “For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling.” Think of Isa. 7:14 that Jesus would be born of a virgin mother. Isa. 53 gives such accurate description of the suffering and death of Jesus that we stand amazed. Isa 45:1 mentioned that a Persian king (even named him as Cyrus) would allow the captives to return to Jerusalem. Anyone who reads these beautiful passages without prejudice is convicted that the Holy Spirit of God gave revelation to the prophets and fulfilled them in the appointed day.

Such testimony recorded in the Bible itself is used by the Holy Spirit to convince every child of God that the truths contained in the 66 books of the Bible are reliable and are the very words of God.

Are you so convinced? The importance of this is the gospel itself, it is from God and comes to you with divine authority. Christ Jesus stands at the heart of that gospel.

February 3 – What are the Apocryphal Books? by Rev. J. Kortering

II Peter 1:19-21, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy....for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

In contrast to the inspired books of the canon of the Bible, this article lists fourteen other books which are called, “Apocryphal”. This designation refers to the fact that these books are unknown as to their authors. They were written sometime between 300 B.C. and A.D. 100.

As you may know, controversy over the legitimacy of these books took place almost from the time they were written. Jerome, one of the early church fathers, directed attention to their being called, “Apocryphal” because of their uncertain authority. The Council of Laodicea (A.D. 364) rejected them, finding them as non-canonical. The Church of Rome accepted them as inspired and part of the Bible. They were influenced by the inclusion of them in the Septuagint Bible (Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament). They subsequently were included in the Latin translation and eventually accepted by Rome at the Council of Florence and Trent (A.D. 1546).

Daniel R. Hyde in his excellent commentary of the Belgic Confession entitled, “With Heart and Mouth” (we gleaned much of the above information from this book as well) gives us several reasons why we as Reformed Churches reject the Apocryphal books as canonical. I will list them here:

1. The Jewish church never received them as canonical.
2. Neither Jesus nor the apostles quoted from them
3. They were not received as canonical by the ancient church (this goes beyond our purpose with this brief meditation, but for the interested reader much evidence is given to prove this point)
4. They contain historical inaccuracies and fanciful tales (*Judith* calls Nebuchadnezzar the king of Nineveh which was destroyed years before; *Bell and the Dragon* has Daniel proving that the king’s god was not eating the food offered but a fierce dragon was the culprit).
5. They contain teachings in direct conflict with the biblical faith, the doctrine of purgatory is supposedly proven by II Maccabees 12:43-45 which mentions prayer for the dead
6. At least one apocryphal book admits that it was not divinely inspired, II Maccabees 15:38, “If it is well told and to the point, that is what I myself desired; if poorly done and mediocre, that was best I could do.”

February 4 – The Limited Use of the Apocryphal Books? by Rev. J. Kortering

II Peter 1:19-21, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy....for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

Art. 6 distinguishes the sacred books from the apocryphal, but does much more. It also adds these words, “All of which (referring to the apocryphal books) the church may read and take instruction from so far as they agree with the canonical books; but they are far from having such power and efficacy as that we may from their testimony confirm any point of faith or of the Christian religion; much less detract from the authority of the other sacred books.”

The big difference between the apocryphal and canonical books of the Bible is divine inspiration. Without that, the apocryphal lack authority. The above quotation from II Pet 1:19-21 summarizes this nicely for us. The prophecy which came in old time was not by the will of man but the will of God as the Holy Ghost moved them to write. Hence they are a more sure word of prophecy. The apocryphal books lack this entirely.

Rome differs with us on this. This is a bit understandable because Rome has a more open mind on traditions of men. This is an important issue, especially when Rome quotes from the apocryphal books in support of their errors. This puts them on shaky ground.

Our Reformed fathers did not want to throw the apocryphal books away as of no value. They may have historical value in so far as they agree with the canonical books. Notice, the RULE, the measure for faith and life is found in the holy, inspired canonical books. The apocryphal books must be viewed as written by men, much like any history book or historical novel. They do not stand by themselves with any authority; they must be evaluated in light of the Holy Scriptures.

Let's be practical for a moment.

You probably do not even know of the existence of these fourteen apocryphal books. You probably have never read any of them. Now that you learn about them, you may ask yourself, ought I to read them, are they important to me?

My answer is that they are not important for your faith. If you have curiosity, satisfy it, but read with discretion. More than anything, thank God that your faith is focused upon the more sure word of prophecy, the canonical books of the Bible.

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Christian Literature Ministry

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Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

(圣约福音归正教会)

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