

THE STANDARD

Bearer

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MEDITATION

De Herders

"En het geschiedde als de engelen van hen weggevaaren waren naar den hemel, dat de herders tot elkander zeiden: laat ons dan henengaan naar Bethlehem, en laat ons zien het woord dat er geschied is, hetwelk de Heere ons heeft kond gedaan. En zij kwamen met haast, en vonden Maria en Jozef, en het kindeke liggende in de kribbe. En als zij het gezien hadden, maakten zij alom bekend het woord dat hun van dit kindeken gezegd was. En allen die het hoorden, verwonderden zich over hetgeen hun gezegd werd van de herders. En de herders keerden wederom, verheerlijkende en prijzende God over alles wat zij gezien en gehoord hadden, gelijk tot hen gesproken was." — Lucas 2:15-18, 20.

Van alle feestdagen is toch Kerstmis de lieflijkste. En het is duidelijk waarom dien dag ons zoo bijzonder aanterkt. In dien dag, of liever, in dien nacht staan we in verrukking bij de aanschouwing van het grootste wonder van alle wonderen: de *vleeschwording*. In dien nacht heeft de Heere God gedacht aan Zijn eeuwige genade, zijn trouw aan Israel, nooit gekrenkt. Toen is God met den mensch getrouwd, want Hij nam ons vleesch en bloed aan. Aangenomen zijn wij toen, alle Christenen zijn in dien nacht historisch aangenomen. De profeten van dien dag spraken van het heuglijke feit, dat God zijn volk bezocht had. Inderdaad. zoo is het. We lezen in de eenvoudige, nuchtere, en toch zoo schoone geschiedenis, dat de herders wakende waren en over de kudde, nabij Bethlehem; en het was nacht. En plotseling stond daar bij hen een Engel Gods predikende een groote blijdschap. En nadat die hemelsche gezant zijn boodschap gebracht had, zien de bevende herders een heirleger van hemelsche troongeesten die een wonderschoone zang aanheffen, een zang die tot ons gekomen is vanuit het grijze verleden, een zang die zijn schoonheid en aantrekkelijkheid nooit ver-

liezen zal, zoolang er mensen op deze aarde zijn die den lieflijken naam dragen van menschen des welbehagen Gods. De Engelen zijn uitgezongen, en alles wordt weer stil, en duister, alsof er niets gebeurd is. En toch, die herders kunnen niet bij de kudde blijven. Ze gaan: Laat ons zien het woord dat geschied is.

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Er lijdt geen twijfel aan, dat deze eenvoudige herders kinderen Gods waren. Dat is overduidelijk, zooals we willen aantonen. Het staat niet met zoovele woorden in den tekst, maar wel indirect. Ge kunt dat geloof hooren in hun sprake: Laat ons dan henengaan naar Bethlehem en laat ons zien het woord, dat er geschied is, het welk de Heeren ons heeft kond gedaan. Dat is de taal des geloofs. Ge merkt op, dat een ieder toch op het woord eens engels heengaan zou. O neen, dat zou juist niet een ieder doen. En we hebben Gods Woord tot bewijs. Al stond iemand op uit de dooden zoo zouden ze zich toch niet laten gezeggen. Herinnert ge U de gelijkenis van den rijken man en Lazarus? En hoe gemakkelijk was het om uitvluchten te vinden voor deze herders. We hebben gedroomd. We hebben het ons verbeeld. Of ook, ze zouden allerlei hinderpalen kunnen zien die hen weerhouden konden om te gaan naar Bethlehem. Daar was immers de kudde schapen waarover ze gesteld waren en waarvoor ze verantwoordelijk gesteld waren? En dan: slechts een kindeken, in doeken gewonden en liggende in een kribbe? Daar is niets schoons en niets om zich te haasten. Doch de herders gaan *nu*, aanstonds. Niets belet wanneer de geloovige ziel Jezus vindt.

Wat geloofden zij? Ze geloofden het eeuwig Evangelie, daar lijdt geen twijfel aan. Laat ons zien het woord hetwelk de Heere ons heeft kond gedaan. En dat Evangelie was wel kort, maar het was desniettemin compleet. Een Zaligmaker, de Christus en de Heere. Dat is genoeg, eeuwig genoeg en voldoende. Vergeet niet, deze herders hadden Mozes en de pro-

feten, en het is duidelijk uit alles, dat ze uitzagen naar de vervulling der belofte aan de vaderen geschied. En dat Evangelie was voor hen, zeer definitief voor hen. Het was niet slechts een historische geschiedenis. O neen. Ze ontvingen de verkondiging van *hun* Jezus. Ze beseften Israel's ellende, hun eigen ellende, en verwachtten Israel's verlossing. En daarom was er groote blijdschap in hunne harten. Het staat er toch duidelijk, dat dit alles voor hen was? *U* is heden geboren de Zaligmaker welke is Christus de Heere!

Dit Evangelie was zeer particulier, zooals het steeds is. Het was voor hen, en voor al den volke, voor al het volk van God. Wat een blijdschap om zóó naar Bethlehem te gaan. Verloren te zijn in zonde en dood, en dan vanuit den hemel te hooren, dat ons geboren is een Zaligmaker, Christus de Heere.

Hij is Jezus, d.w.z., betaling van onze schuld, verlossing uit de banden des doods, verkrijging van het eeuwige leven, inwoner in de hemelsche stad! Dat is Jezus.

En Hij is Christus, d.w.z., de Gezondene des Vaders om ons profeten, priesters en koningen te maken Gode en den Vader: wat zaligheid!

En Hij is onze Heere, d.w.z., de Gezondene des Vaders om alle dingen uit de macht Satans te rukken en Zijn koninkrijk der hemelen op te richten, het koninkrijk dat staan zal tot in eeuwigheid.

En zoo kwamen ze met haast, een haast geboren uit het zaligmakend geloof. Ze waren niet bezorgd aangaande aardsche dingen. Daar waren hun schapen die ze noodig hadden voor hun broodwinning. Hoe konden ze die schapen zonder wachters achter laten? En later nemen ze er ook hun tijd voor. Teruggaande haastten ze niet. Ze namen tijd om te prediken en te zingen, te zingen van gena. Maar die haast vertolkt hun geestelijk verlangen en hunkering naar de vervulling der belofte. Een werkelijk hongerige ziel haast zich naar Jezus henen. En zoolang dit niet zoo is zien we om naar verontschuldigen. We zijn nog jong en daarom hebben we tijd en te over. We zijn verslaafd aan aardsche dingen, naam, positie, weelde, zondige vermaken. Maar wanneer we bezocht worden door de groote blijdschap, dan verliezen alle die dingen hun beteekenis—we moeten dan Jezus zien en hebben voor het hongerige en dorstige hart. Zoo was het met de herders. Ze hadden op de troost Israels gewacht, en nu het eindelijk gekomen was, moeten ze zich haasten naar Bethlehem toe. Daar was de vervulling van het Woord van God. Daar was een groote zaligheid te zien. Daarom: en ze gingen met haast.

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Op zichzelf was er niets ongewoons in die stal.

Ze zien een verlaten stal en riekende kribbe. Er was geen plaats voor hen in de herberg. Eeuwige schande, eeuwig wonder, eeuwige heerlijkheid. Als we slechts zien door het oog des geloofs. Anders zien we niets bizonders.

Bethlehem wist niet wat er dien nacht gebeurd was. Hier is een arme timmerman van Galilea, een jeugdige, arme moeder, en een klein kindeke, dat dien nacht geboren was. Meer niet. Neen er was niets bizonders te zien in dien nacht. D.w.z., niet voor het natuurlijk oog des zondigen menschen. Jezus? Christus? De Heere? Een almachtige God? Onbeschrijfelijke zaligheid? Het grootste wonder der wonderen? Neen. Een denkende moeder, en stille vader, een gewoon kindje, ellendige armoede: geen lintjes en strikjes, en zachte kleertjes, geen mooie wieg met zachte dekentjes; niets van dat alles, maar een vunzige kribbe en een vuile stal. Er is niets hier voor het natuurlijke oog.

Maar, let wel, dit was juist het teeken, dat door den Engel Gods hun was kond gedaan. En we lezen, dat ze zouden gaan *zien* het woord! Het Kindeke in doeken gewikkeld en liggende in een kribbe was het teeken Gods.

En dan ook, dat er geen plaats was voor Hem, dat Hij aan het randje der wereld geboren werd, klaar om er afgeworpen te worden, dit alles behoorde tot het teeken. En het was juist aangelegd op het geloof. Het geloof weet te spreken van armoede, van onze armoede. Onze armoede is de armoede die over ons gekomen is vanwege onze zonde. We zijn vanwege de zonde en de zonde-schuld geheel en al berooid, uitgekleed, naakt, ellendig geworden voor Gods aangezicht. En het zal al erger worden. Er komt een armoede in de hel die onuitsprekelijk is. Van alles beroofd zullen de verworpenen in groote smarten ter neer liggen in het vuur dat brandt van vuur en sulfur. En het geloof weet dat. Het zaligmakende geloof ontving waarheid in het binnenste, en dat geloof wordt gevoed door het Woord, hetwelk spreekt, ter eener zijde, van onze schuld der zonde; en ter anderzijde, van den toorn Gods over die schuld der zonde.

O, we zijn zoo vreeselijk arm van nature. En we worden al armer door de eeuwen heen. We zijn arm aan recht en gerechtigheid. Arm aan alle deugd van goedheid en lieflijkheid. Stelt U Adam voor in den staat der rechtheid, en weent over Uwe armoede. Nu zweten we en zuchten, nu schreien we en lijden, nu schreeuwen we het uit in alle weedom des harten en der ziel. En onze woning, onze aarde is een tranenden. O, we zijn zoo ongeëvenaard arm geworden door de zonde en de schuld. En dat weet het geloovige hart. En dat wisten die herders, want ze waren geloovigen.

En zoo zien ze geloovig. Ze zien en herkennen

hun eigen armoede in die vuile stal. Ze gelooven dat Hij kwam die om onzentwil arm moest worden opdat Hij ons een rijkdom schenken zou die den hemel zal doen ruischen van ongekend geluk en zaligheid. Door het geloof hebben die herders gezien dat er geen groote plaats voor Hem moet gegeven worden door de wereld, doch dat Hij desniettemin, juist door Zijn groote armoede, die wereld zal overwinnen. Als Zijn armoede niet meer uitgesproken kan worden op dat bange kruis, waar Hij geen voet grond meer heeft om op te staan, waar Hij naakt uitgetogen is voor het oog van God, menschen, engelen en duivelen, dan zal Hij daar juist het fundament leggen voor een rijkdom der zaligheid die ons zal doen zingen tot in der eeuwen eeuwigheid van gena en ontzaglijke ontfermingen Gods.

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Ze hebben zich gehaast door het geloof; ze hebben door hetzelfde geloof het teeken gezien. Ze zagen immers het woord dat geschied was? Welnu, dan zullen ze ook verder gaan. Ze zullen door hetzelfde geloof gaan prediken en God verheerlijken. Het geloof moet spreken. Ge kunt het ware geloof niet tot zwijgen brengen. Neen, zelfs niet door het vuur van den brandstapel. Het geloof moet zich uiten en het zal zich uiten. Waarom? Omdat door het geloof het hart vol van vreugde is. Hadden de engelen niet gesproken en gezongen van een groote blijdschap? Welnu, de aanvankelijke vervulling is in de harten van die eenvoudige herders. Waar het hart vol van is loopt de mond van over. Hoe zouden we toch stil zijn als we Jezus, den Christus, den Heere gevonden hebben? Wat had de Engel gezegd van het object van die blijdschap? Het zou al den volke zijn. Welnu, die herders hebben dat verstaan, en ze zagen in die verkondiging hun bevel. Ze gaan Gods volk opzoeken. Het geloof vindt het volk waaraan het zijn hart kan uitstorten. Want het wil den Zaligmaker groot maken, den Zaligmaker die ons van de hel verlost en ons zal brengen tot de hoogste heerlijkheid. En zoo zien we de eenvoudige herders die plotseling veranderd worden door middel van Gods genade, tot verkondigers des Goddelijken Woords. O, die mannen wisten direct tot wien ze zich moeten richten. Ze gaan in dien nacht van deur tot deur, en ze verkondigen kerstmis preeken. En ze hadden een waardeerend gehoor. We lezen immers in den tekst, dat men zich verwonderde over hetgeen hun gezegd werd van de herders? God wrocht mede met deze predikers, er was een gehoor, en er was vrucht beide deze herders en velen van hun gehoor zijn nu in den hemel bij Jezus. Benijdenswaardige

toestand. Maar wij zullen wachten, wachten op God, totdat Hij ons hale om dien Jezus in den hemel te zien.

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En, eindelijk, zien we, dat deze herders terugkeerden naar hunne kudde. Doch ze waren nog niet klaar, ze verheerlijkten God. Let daar op. Godsdienst is theologie. Het gaat alles om God. Op het kerstfeest moogt ge niet in Jezus eindigen. Hij is slechts middel Gods om Zijn glorie en heerlijkheid te toonen. Dat hebben die herders gezien door het geloof. En daarom is hun einde de verheerlijking van God. Die herders hebben goede leermeesters gehad. Toen die groote heirlegers der engelen rondom hen in de atmosfeer van dien nacht aan 't zingen gegaan zijn, toen hebben die herders het gehoord: Eere zij God! Dat was de hoofdtoon. Dat is de hoofdzaak. Dat was het motief, het doel, het alles in hemel en op aarde. Verheerlijkende God! Bij Hem waren immers van eeuwigheid gedachten des vredes? Hij verwerkelijkte het wonder te Bethlehem. Straks zal Hij het wonder te Golgotha toonen, en de verrijzenis van Jezus. Dan het wonder van het Pinksterfeest. En het wonder in onze harten. En het is God die het wonder van een nieuwen hemel en een nieuwe aarde toonen zal. Het is alles uit God, door God en tot God. Zijns is de glorie en de heerlijkheid tot in der eeuwigheid. Dat hebben de herders door het geloof gezien en betracht. Luistert naar hen als ze zich heen wenden tot de kudde in dien nacht. Hebben ze sommige van Davids schoone psalmen gezongen? Ik weet het niet. God weet het.

Laat ons zóó naar Bethlehem gaan. Geloovende, haastende, ziende, predikende, en verheerlijkende God en den Vader. Als we dat mogen doen door Gods lieflijke genade, dan zullen we een zalig Kerstfeest vieren, en dan zullen we hier en nu een beginsel van hemelsche vreugde genieten, om Jezus' wil.

G. Vos.

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CLASSIS EAST will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 7th at First Church.

Matters for Synod should be brought to this meeting.

—D. Jonker, S.C.

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EDITORIALS

Why We Should Read the *Standard Bearer*

In the present editorial I wish to furnish a few cogent reasons why all Protestant Reformed people should support the *Standard Bearer*, should be subscribers, and, what is more important, should read it from cover to cover.

One reason for writing this editorial is that in recent years there have been several cancellations of subscriptions for our paper.

I am very much afraid that the *Standard Bearer* is not supported as it deserves to be and as it used to be supported in the past.

In former years practically all our people enthusiastically supported the *Standard Bearer*. I remember the time when in our own congregation in Fuller Avenue, Grand Rapids, anybody that was known not to read the *Standard Bearer* could not be considered for the nomination of elder and deacon. In family visitation the question was always asked whether the party visited was a subscriber and reader of the *Standard Bearer*.

I am afraid that this enthusiasm is fast declining.

I am also afraid that one of the chief reasons for this decline is that a clear knowledge of, interest in, and love of the Protestant Reformed truth is on the wane.

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

That all our Protestant Reformed people should read the *Standard Bearer*, I personally base on the following reasons.

The first reason is that the *Standard Bearer* is the only publication in the world that has always maintained and still maintains the pure Protestant Reformed truth. And not only has it always maintained that truth, but it also developed it and displayed it as far as it was in the power of the editors in all its riches. Moreover, it defended that truth consistently and faithfully over against all gainsayers. If you will take the trouble to peruse the pages of the *Standard*

Bearer from the very beginning of its publication, you will certainly have to admit that this is true. The same "sound" is heard throughout. Fundamentally the *Standard Bearer* has never changed. It has never produced a new sound. It has never struck a false note. It was always faithful to its purpose, the development and maintenance of the Reformed truth as it was first defended by Danhof and Hoeksema, and later by the Rev. Ophoff. It has defended that truth over against the false doctrine of common grace, both Kuyperian and Arminian, as this false doctrine was officially expressed and adopted in the Three Points of the Synod of Kalamazoo, 1924. In a sense, therefore, one of the purposes of the *Standard Bearer* from its very inception was negative and controversial. It was challenged to show cause why the doctrine of common grace was neither confessionally nor Biblically Reformed. And this false doctrine as it was adopted by the Synod of Kalamazoo, 1924, implied not only the Kuyperian theory that God is gracious to all men in bestowing upon them the things of this present life, that by a certain grace which is not regenerating sin is restrained in the individual and in the community, and that therefore man is able by common grace to perform good works and to live a tolerably good life in this present world; but also, and even more emphatically so, the Arminian or Heynsian theory that God is gracious to the reprobate in the preaching of the gospel and that the preaching of the gospel is a well-meaning offer of grace and salvation on the part of God to all that hear, the offer being conditioned on faith on the part of those that hear it. In other words, from its very inception the *Standard Bearer* had to combat the false doctrine of common grace within the covenant, and the equally false doctrine that the promise of the covenant is an objective bequest to all that are baptized, on condition of faith and obedience.

But the realization of this negative and controversial purpose by no means exhausted the contents of the *Standard Bearer*. In fact, those contents were always and chiefly devoted to the positive instruction of our protestant Reformed people in the Reformed truth, the truth of Scripture and of the Confessions. Also this you will find to be the truth, if you will take the trouble to peruse the pages of the *Standard Bearer* from the beginning. I can refer you to many articles of the Rev. H. Danhof and the Rev. Ophoff, and later of the Revs. Verhil and Vos and others, to prove my point. And I also may humbly refer you to articles written by myself. I would refer you to hundreds of meditations, to my articles on the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, to my exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism, which, by the way, is used even by many ministers in the Christian Reformed Churches

as a guide in their preaching on the Heidelberg. I can refer you to many other articles, such as "De Geloovigen en Hun Zaad (Believers and Their Seed)", to the articles on the Gospel, on the truth that grace is particular, etc.

This Protestant Reformed contents of the *Standard Bearer*, both positive and negative, is maintained to the present day.

This is my chief reason why all the Protestant Reformed people should certainly subscribe to, but also read the *Standard Bearer*.

My second reason why all the Protestant Reformed people should support the cause of the *Standard Bearer*, and read it, is that our paper has been the sole means through which our Protestant Reformed truth and our Protestant Reformed Churches have become known and respected, even in and by the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

This purpose was accomplished not only through the fact that the *Standard Bearer* itself was sent and read in the Netherlands, but no less through the reprint of several of the articles that appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, such as "Genade Geen Aanbod", "De Geloovigen en Hun Zaad", "Het Evangelie". Thousands of these reprints were sent all through the Netherlands. Copies were presented to the consistories, with the request to express their opinion. Other copies were sent for review to several of the church papers in the old country. They were read; they were studied; they were reviewed in several papers. And although some of those reviews were favorable and others were not, the influence was unmistakeable. I dare say that it was largely through the *Standard Bearer* that many Reformed leaders in the Netherlands began to question the theory of common grace.

The result was that not only our paper, but also our churches became known, and, in spite of the fact that the Netherlands theologians did not always agree with our stand, were nevertheless respected as a strong Reformed group. Witness the fact that from the Netherlands we received the invitation to be represented at the Reformed Ecumenical Synod in Edinburgh, 1953. Witness also the fact that from the same Reformed Churches in the Netherlands we received the invitation to cooperate in the revision of the Church Order. And finally, witness the fact that literally hundreds of books of a theological nature are sent regularly to the *Standard Bearer* for review.

I do not hesitate to maintain that no other group of churches as small as ours has had so much influence in the Reformed church-world as the Protestant Reformed Churches. And this influence is almost exclusively due to the propagation of the Protestant Reformed truth by the *Standard Bearer*.

And this I consider another reason why all Protestant Reformed people should faithfully support and read our paper.

A third reason, and that too in close connection with the preceding, is that our calling as Protestant Reformed Churches is to be very specific, and that the *Standard Bearer* is the sole representative in print of this specific calling.

We may not be satisfied with a sort of general gospel. We may not even be satisfied with a vague and general confession of the Reformed truth. It is very evidently our calling as churches to be very specific, to cross all the *t*'s and to dot all the *i*'s of the Reformed truth. This specific character of our Protestant Reformed faith must especially be found in the strict maintenance of the Protestant Reformed conception of the covenant, which, according to it, is not the promise of the gospel, nor a way of salvation, nor a contract between two parties, but is the everlasting relation of friendship and intimate fellowship between God and His elect people, according to which He is their eternal Friend, and they are His friend-servants.

Perhaps if we emphasize this specific truth we will never become large as churches. But it is not our calling to be big, but to maintain the truth. It may be very tempting to our open the doors of our church to others that differ with us principally in respect to the truth of the covenant, but we must certainly resist that temptation. Otherwise we will be unfaithful to our specific calling, and soon it will be found that we have no specific reason for existence as a Protestant Reformed church.

To this specific calling the *Standard Bearer* has always been faithful.

And this is a third reason why all our Protestant Reformed people should support and read the *Standard Bearer*.

My fourth reason is the controversy that is carried on in the *Standard Bearer*, both with those that are without and with those that are within.

"What?" I hear someone say, "You suggest that the controversy is a reason why we should read the *Standard Bearer*? It is exactly because of all the controversy that I do not like the *Standard Bearer*."

That someone is mistaken.

I can readily understand that one dislikes controversy when it becomes a matter of personalities and wrangling, and when the tone and contents of the controversy is such that it can hardly be called ethical and Christian. I also admit that when sinful men engage in controversy, the danger is always present that it degrades in tone and content into personal strife

and debate. Nor will I deny that in this respect the *Standard Bearer* has sometimes been guilty. At the same time, I nevertheless wish to emphasize that on the whole the *Standard Bearer* was evidently and very plainly motivated by the truth and by nothing but the truth, as it is maintained in our Protestant Reformed Churches. I challenge anyone to deny that the controversy that was carried on in the *Standard Bearer* from its very inception is motivated by the love of the truth and by the desire to maintain the truth over against all gainsayers.

Others object that the *Standard Bearer* in its controversy is too one-sided.

I will admit this, if by onesidedness is meant that the *Standard Bearer* defends only the Protestant Reformed truth, and nothing else. Moreover, I want to call the attention of the readers to the fact that in its controversy the *Standard Bearer* has never approached its reader with a "*Papa dixit*, the pope has spoken", but has always motivated its contentions with sound and logical arguments from Scripture and the Confessions. Such, I dare say, has ever been the method of the *Standard Bearer*; and I challenge anyone to deny this.

But if the contention that our controversy is one-sided is supposed to imply that we bar others, who differ with us, from writing in our paper, I maintain that this contention is utterly false. The *Standard Bearer* has always been wide open, frequently even has left its proper space to others, in order that they may express their opinion, though that opinion differs radically from ours. We have gone the length of translating long articles from Dutch into English, written by those that were opposed to our conception. We have taken articles that were so poorly written that they could not possibly have been published as they were, and rewrote them on our own typewriter, in order to give to those that differ with us the opportunity to express themselves. No, the contention that the *Standard Bearer* is onesided in this respect is utterly false. And if you will peruse the *Standard Bearer* from its very beginning, you are bound to admit this.

But controversy we must have.

The Scriptures are full of controversy.

The Confessions devote a large part of their contents to controversy.

As long as we are living in a sinful world and in an imperfect church, as long as the truth is attacked by those that oppose it, we certainly need controversy. And no lover of the truth, and certainly no Protestant Reformed man or woman should refuse to read the *Standard Bearer* because of its partly controversial nature.

You must become acquainted with all the arguments, pro and against the truth of God.

And this is my last reason why it is certainly necessary for all the Protestant Reformed people to read and support the Standard Bearer with all their power.

H.H.



THE TRIPLE KNOWLEDGE

An Exposition Of The Heidelberg Catechism

PART III
OF THANKFULNESS

Lord's Day 33

4

OF GOOD WORKS

In Question 91 the Heidelberg Catechism discusses the Scriptural truth concerning good works. Briefly it tells us that good works are "only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory; and not such as are founded on our own imaginations, or the institutions of men." This answer is at the same time a transition and introduction to the discussion of the law of God, that follows in the succeeding Lord's Days.

As has been said before, it is certainly the calling of believers to live from the principle of regeneration in the midst of the world, antithetically, and therefore to walk in all good works. It is hardly necessary to quote Scripture in proof of this statement. The Lord teaches us in Matt. 5:14-16: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." And again, in John 15:8: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." In Rom. 12:1 the apostle writes: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." And in Gal. 5:13,14: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto

liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." And in Eph. 2:10: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

The last quoted passage is especially significant, for it emphasizes the truth that our good works are the fruit of the grace of God, and that they are ordained by God evidently from all eternity, that we should walk in those works. God's workmanship we are. He made us new creatures in Christ Jesus by the wondrous power of His grace. This wonder of grace He performed in us in order that we should do good works. But even these works were ordained for every one of us before the foundation of the world by God Himself. For the believer it is a God-given privilege that he may walk in those good works. To understand how and in what sense this is possible, I have used the illustration of a grand chorus rendering Handel's *Messiah*. And I will use it again in this connection. If such a rendering is to be successful, every member of the chorus and each voice, tenor and bass, soprano and alto, as well as the soloists, the orchestra, and the accompanist at the organ, must know and perform his part so as to blend into the grand harmony and beauty of the whole. But in order to attain to this harmony they must strictly follow their music. The whole of the performance by the chorus, as well as the several parts, have been "before ordained" by the artist that composed the oratorio. And the members of the chorus only "walk in" the parts that have thus been ordained for them. This may be applied to the good works of all the saints in Christ. We must remember that the church is not a mere number of saved believers: it is a grand whole, it is a body, a unity. And the purpose of the whole is that they may show forth the glory of God in Christ. This one theme all the saints sing and develop in their good works, each in his own position and performing his own part. And the great Artist ordained and prepared all the several parts of this glorious theme for every one of the saints, just as He by grace prepares them for all the parts they are to perform. He created us in Christ Jesus exactly unto those good works which He prepared for us, that we might walk in them.

This is also the language of our confessions. Art. 24 of the Netherlands Confession speaks of sanctification and good works. It tells us: "It is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man: for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith, which is called in Scripture, a faith that worketh by love,

which excites man to the practice of those works, which God has commanded us in His Word. Which works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by his grace: howbeit they are of no account towards our justification." In Article 12 of Chapter V of the Canons, which speaks of the perseverance of the saints, we read: "This certainty of perseverance, however, is so far from exciting in believers a spirit of pride, or of rendering them carnally secure, that on the contrary, it is the real source of humility, filial reverence, true piety, patience in every tribulation, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering, and in confessing the truth, and of solid rejoicing in God: so that the consideration of this benefit should serve as an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works, as appears from the testimonies of Scripture, and the examples of the saints."

Of good works, as motivated by gratitude, and therefore, as rooted in faith, and as having their purpose in the glory of God, we already treated in our discussion of Question and Answer 86. Here, therefore, we can be brief, and confine ourselves to the discussion of the question, "What are good works?" The answer is that not we, but God determines what is good. They are not works that are based on our own imaginations or upon the institutions of men, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, but that are in harmony with the law of God. As far as their material is concerned, therefore, good works are always those that are in accord with the will of God as revealed unto us in Scripture and as briefly expressed in the moral law. God alone is good. And His will is good. And He alone has the prerogative and is able to determine what is good. Good works, therefore, are first of all characterized by unconditional and unquestioning obedience to the will of God. When God speaks, we are silent. When He commands, we obey without murmuring, without objection, and without reservations. We never assume the authority to determine for ourselves what shall be called good. It implies too that the utility principle may not and cannot possibly determine what is good or what is evil. In the world this is frequently done. The question is asked whether a certain action or course of action or law or institution of man works, whether it pays. If it does, regardless of the question whether it is according to the will and law of God, it is simply adopted and followed. A glaring example of this method of determining what is good is found in the way the divorce problem is solved in the courts of our land. Sinful man, rather than submitting himself to the law of God, by his darkened understanding judges what

is expedient for him, and tramples under foot the precepts of the Most High. The result is, of course, that he works out his own destruction. Nor dare one appeal to his good intentions to decide that an act that in itself was contrary to the law of God is good. It may seem possible to a sinful man to tell a lie with the best of intentions, but that does not justify the lie. Good works are those, and those only, that are strictly in harmony with the will of God as revealed unto us in His Word.

But we ask: what is included in a work of man? When can an act performed by man be called good in the sight of God? Is any deed as such, any outward act, as we observe it, as it appears to us,—suppose that in its outward appearance it is perfectly in harmony with the law of God,—necessarily a real good work in the sight of God? Suppose a man rescues a child from a burning house, endangering his own life by performing that act, an act which is certainly praiseworthy before men. Is such an act necessarily a good work in the sight of God? Or suppose a man offers prayer in public, and the contents of his prayer are in accord with the will of God. Does it follow that he performs a good work? Or again, suppose that a man is a preacher and that he proclaims the gospel and the full counsel of God according to the Scriptures. Does that outward act of preaching necessarily constitute a good work? Or, say that a church member drops a thousand dollars in the collection plate for the cause of charity or of missions or for some other good cause. Is that outward act sufficient to determine that it is good before God?

The answer to this question must be negative.

We will readily understand this, if we remember, in the first place, that the law of God is a law of love; and in the second place, that the outward appearance of a deed is but a very small part of the entire act as it is witnessed by the living God.

When you see a man endangering his life by rescuing a child from a burning house, you see only the outward part of his deed. When you behold a man drop a thousand dollars in the collection plate, you observe but the outward appearance of the act. Back of that hand that drops the gift there is the mind of the giver that contemplated it, the desire that motivated the act, the will that finally determined upon the act; and back of the mind and will and desire of the giver there is the deep heart of man, whence are all the issues of life. Before he drops his money in the plate, the man has been thinking about it; and that too belongs to the deed he performs. He has been desiring something. He placed before his mind a certain objective, a purpose that he wished to attain. And by this purpose he was motivated, urged to per-

form the act of giving money. His whole inner man was in action before he dropped the money in the collection plate. And all this inner action belongs very really to the deed itself in the sight of God. Besides, we must consider that the law of God concerning our life and walk is, as we said, a law of love. This means that it does not merely cover the outward activity of man, but also his inner life, his mind and will and all his desires. If the law of God were satisfied with the outward appearance of the deed before men, so that it would call a man's work good if only he conforms himself in his external deportment to God's will, the matter would not be so serious. If the law of God simply meant that outwardly a man must not swear, curse, commit adultery, steal, murder, and slander; that outwardly he is a man that treats his fellow man well, that faithfully attends church on Sunday, sings and prays and gives alms, the matter would seem rather simple. But this is not the case. The law of God is this: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength." It is the law of love. This implies that in all our works we shall be motivated by the love of God. It covers not only the outward appearance of the deed, but also the hidden part that is in the mind, the will, the desires, that has its origin in the heart of man. It demands that a work shall be good and perfect in the sight of God from its very beginning, from its deepest root in the heart, to its ripened fruit in the external act. And unless a work of man is in full accord with that law of love of God from its very first contemplation, yea, from its hidden origin in the heart, to the outward deed, it is evil in the sight of God and may be very abominable to Him indeed, no matter how it appears to us. We must never forget that the very sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah. Prov. 15:8.

All this stands in close connection with the question: what must be the purpose of good works? The Catechism answers: all true good works must be to the glory of God. This truth we have already expounded under Lord's Day 32. Nevertheless, a word may be said about this purpose of good works in this connection. We must remember that purpose and motive are closely connected. Purpose denotes the end we have in view in performing a certain deed. And motive is the will, the urge and the desire that spurs us on from within to seek that end. Now God's purpose is His own glory. That purpose must be ours if our works are to be good in His sight. Hence, good works are motivated by the will and the desire to reach that purpose, to glorify our Father which is in heaven. Therefore, in order to determine whether

or not a certain act on our part is good, we must not merely ask what we did, but also why we performed it, and what was the purpose we had in view. Suppose that you are an honest businessman, and that in all your dealings you treat your customers fairly. The question arises: why are you honest in your dealings? If your answer is that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and that it is your desire to serve and to promote the glory of your God even in your business, all is well. Then indeed your honest dealing is a good work. But suppose that upon honest and thorough self-examination you come to the conclusion that your honest dealing is motivated by the desire to establish and maintain a good business and by the realization that honesty pays. In that case you do not perform a good work at all. Your reward is gone. You are in your deepest heart seeking self, a good business, worldly gain. And you are not seeking God's glory. You are really motivated by covetousness. And although you are honest in business outwardly, you are no different from the man of dishonest dealings that is motivated by the same desire for profit. All that is not to the glory of God is sin.

A clear illustration of this apparent good work that is nevertheless evil in the sight of the Lord is the Pharisee of Jesus' day. He was indeed very religious. Painstakingly he observed the law. He fasted and prayed and gave alms, and observed the sabbath blamelessly. He went to the temple and offered his sacrifices and paid vows. In the sight of men he was a perfect example of piety, and his good works were numerous. Nevertheless, the Lord calls him a hypocrite: "Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." Matt. 6:2. And again: "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." Matt. 6:5. And again: "Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." Matt. 6:16. In Matt. 23 the Lord pronounces the verdict of a scathing condemnation upon these hypocrites. He characterizes them as those that "bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their

garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi." Matt. 23:4-7. And again: "Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." The purpose of the pharisee was not the glory of God. Nor was he motivated by the love of God. His purpose was his own glory. His motive was stinking pride. He was an abomination in the sight of God. All his praying and sacrificing and giving of alms was in the sight of God by no means less abominable than the act of the highway robber and murderer who openly commits his crimes.

The Old Testament example of Jehu is another striking illustration of the fact that a man may outwardly appear to do a good work, a work that is even approved by God as far as the zealous performance of it is concerned, while nevertheless inwardly he is motivated by mere selfish ambition, and his purpose was not the glory of God whatsoever. Of this we read in II Kings 9 and 10. The summary of these chapters, which characterizes the zeal of Jehu, may be found in II Kings 10:29-31: "Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan. And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin." This example, which is often quoted as a proof of the false contention that natural men can do good in the sight of God by an operation of common grace, shows very plainly that the zeal of Jehu was motivated not by the love of God, and did not for its purpose have the glory of God in view, but was moved by his own sinful ambition to sit on the throne of Israel. He received a special command of God to exterminate the house of Ahab for their wickedness. And he very zealously and thoroughly obeyed the Lord, and did his work well. Yet, although he was so zealous in obey-

ing the Lord as far as the outward deed was concerned, he never departed from the ways of Jeroboam, that caused Israel to sin. Although outwardly Jehu was perfectly obedient to this special command of the Lord, his inner motive was corrupt, and he sought his own glory and the realization of his own ambition to ascend the throne of Israel, rather than the glory of Jehovah. Hence, although he was rewarded by ascending the throne of Israel and by the fact that in a few generations after him his seed might occupy that throne, he was nevertheless condemned and punished for the very good deed which he performed. This is very evident from the prophecy of Hosea, chapter one, verse four: "And the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel." The house of Jehu is punished by the Lord for the blood they shed in exterminating the house of Ahab, the extermination of which the Lord had nevertheless commanded.

It is evident, therefore, that a man may perform an outwardly good act from a very wicked motive. Nor dare we say that these outwardly beautiful works, that are inwardly corrupt, are due to an operation of common grace by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit certainly does not attach good fruit to a corrupt tree. Nor does He call such fruit good. But how then must be explained what is often called civil righteousness, or the natural good that sinners perform? We would answer as follows. The natural man discerns the relationships, laws, rules of life and fellowship, as they are ordained by God. Moreover, he observes their propriety and utility. He adapts himself to them for his own sake. If in this attempt he succeeds, the result is an act that shows an outward and formal resemblance to the laws of God. As our Canons express it, they have a regard for virtue and external deportment. If this attempt fails, however, as is frequently the case, civil righteousness disappears, and the result is exactly the opposite. The fundamental error, however, of the natural man is that he does not seek after God, nor aim at Him and His glory, even in his regard for virtue and external deportment. On the contrary, he seeks himself, both individually and in fellowship with other sinners and with the whole world. And it is his purpose to maintain himself in his sin over against God. This is sin in the sight of God, and certainly cannot be denominated a good work. And in reality his work also has evil effects upon himself and his fellow creatures. For all his actions with relation to men and his fellow creatures are performed according to the same rule, and with similar results. Thus it happens that sin develops

constantly, and corruption increases, while there still remains a formal adaptation to the laws ordained by God for the present life. But the natural man never attains to any ethical good. His acts and works are always sinful.

However, when the Holy Spirit takes hold of a man, He does not polish his outward appearance, but He takes hold of his inmost heart, regenerates him, makes him a new creature in Christ Jesus, unites him through faith with Christ, and remains in him, to dwell in him, to sanctify him, to fill him with the grace of the Lord Jesus. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God before ordained that we should walk in them. This is also the reason why the root of all good works is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. All that is not of faith is sin. Rom. 14:23. By faith we are in Christ Jesus, one plant with Him, so that we live out of Him. He lives in us, and operates through us. As the vine bears its fruit in the branches, so the Lord Jesus Christ bears the fruit of His grace in all His saints. Hence, there is nothing to boast. Good works are no gift of us to God. But on the contrary, they are a gift of God to us. And for the privilege of walking in those good works, which God has prepared and ordained for us, in which we have the privilege of walking as rational, moral creatures, we may and will give thanks forever to the God of our salvation, Who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

H.H.

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We will be pleased to send *The Standard Bearer*, gratis, to all your young men that are in the Service. Please send us their names and addresses and *be sure* and keep us informed of changes in their addresses and also if and when they are discharged from the Service as we have no way of knowing this fact unless we are notified directly by you. Quite often young men are discharged from the Service and the copies of *The Standard Bearer* are still mailed out to them because we are not notified accordingly.

—THE BOARD

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O Thou Who art Thy people's shield,
Their helper and their guide,
Upon them let Thy grace and peace
For evermore abide.

OUR DOCTRINE

God's Providence

(6)

GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND SIN

Continuing our discussion of God's Providence and sin, we concluded our previous article with the observation that the moral-rational nature of man is also the basis for the moral-rational character of the gospel also as far as the wicked are concerned. The sovereignty of the Lord never annuls the responsibility of man. We do not merely confess that a calling goes forth from all the works of God's hands to all men, but also that the preaching of the gospel confronts its hearers with a Divine calling and demand. The truth itself does this. The Word of God itself places man before the inexorable calling to serve Him and Him alone. Whenever the Word of God is truly proclaimed the wicked are surely called and commanded to forsake their way of sin and darkness, to flee unto the Lord, and to love the living God with all that is in them. It is exactly because I am a moral-rational and therefore responsible being that repentance and faith and hope and love are conscious acts on my part. The ungodly has surely no right to love sin, hate God, and he is certainly called to flee sin, to cleave unto the living God, confess his guilt and condemnation; and it remains his calling, in the way of repentance, to seek his salvation in the way of the cross of Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son.

It is also exactly for this reason that the Word of God is exclusively particular. To be sure, the word of God in Is. 3:10-11 must be proclaimed, and we quote: Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him." This eleventh verse, however, must be rightly understood. How often does it not occur nowadays that woe is proclaimed to the wicked and the impression is left that the Word of God really intends their good and salvation! Woe, then, is proclaimed unto them in such a way that it may move and induce them to repent and be saved. This, we understand, is not the meaning of Isaiah 3:11. In these words the prophet emphasizes the truth that all that one can ever say to the wicked who continues in his wicked way is woe.

Primarily, however, the gospel is meant only for the people of God, even as the corn or grain is the

chief concern of the farmer. The Bible is a letter written by the Lord to His elect. It is true that the language of that letter is spiritual and is also read to and by others besides the elect. And it is true that it is the will of God that the Bible be read to and by the reprobates. That the Bible is a letter written by the Lord to His elect is evident from the fact that it is the Lord, and the Lord alone, Who realizes the work of salvation, from the beginning even unto the end, in the hearts of those whom He has loved from before the foundation of the world. If to believe or to will to believe were left to man, then we would be able to speak of a gospel in a general sense of the word. Then all those expressions such as e.g., "if you believe", etc., would refer to an activity which originates in man, and then it would be necessary to interpret them in a general sense of the word. But how different the matter becomes if we proceed from the Scriptural truth that faith is purely a gift of the Lord! For then we realize that the Lord is addressing in the Bible His own and He would acquaint them with the salvation which He has eternally laid away for them and realized for them in Christ Jesus, their Lord. Finally, it is also for this reason that we speak of a particular promise and not of a conditional promise. What a difference between these two expressions! What a difference if I say: "If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be saved", or: "If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you are saved and therefore will be saved". What a difference if I say: "If you believe the promise will be yours", or: "If you believe the promise is yours and will be realized in you in the day of Jesus Christ, our Lord". The former is the proclamation of a conditional promise; the latter is the presentation of a particular promise. The former we reject and must reject; the latter we maintain and must be maintained.

The comfort of this truth

This truth, which maintains the sovereignty of God also in connection with the reality of sin, is comforting for the people and church of God first of all from the viewpoint of the church of God in the midst of the world. For the position of the church and covenant of the Lord in the midst of the world is indeed fearful and dangerous. How the church and the world compare as they appear in the midst of the world! Viewed in comparison with the covenant people of the Lord the power of the world appears tremendously great. The host of darkness is surely greater in number. The people of the living God are surely hopelessly outnumbered. Moreover, this host of darkness is able to reckon among its forces the riches, the honor, and the glory of this earthly life. Worldly power, in-

fluence, riches, men of name and fame and honour are to be found among the forces of those who refuse to acknowledge the living God and His commandments. Over against this promise and fearful array appears the church of God, and that church is terribly small and weak. The party of the living God does not reckon among its numbers many great and many noble, for the Lord has chosen the poor of this world according to His sovereign good pleasure. It is well to bear in mind this comparison between the church of God and the world to understand the comfort of God's providence and sin.

Nevertheless, this small church of the Lord, despised in the midst of the world, may comfort itself with the blessed assurance that it has God on its side, or, as we read in Rom. 8: God is for us. Everything is controlled by the Lord. Who and what shall then be against us? If God be for us, who can be against us? If we are kept and preserved in the power of God, then there is really no hostile power. If God's be all power than there cannot be anything against us. For we must not view this Divine power as standing over against the wicked world, so that the power of the Lord and the host of darkness must be viewed as two mighty armies arrayed over against each other. It is simply a fact that the power of the Lord also includes the forces of evil and of darkness. God's is all the power, hence also the power of the host of darkness. The Lord is not simply preserving and saving His Church over against the forces of evil, but He is realizing His kingdom and gathering His church also through these powers of darkness. This enables us to understand why no forces of darkness and of the prince of the powers of the air can cause the Cause of God any harm, inasmuch as everything is being controlled by our heavenly Father. It is true that man is a moral-rational, responsible creature. But it is equally true that the strength of men or demons is exclusively of the Lord and He operates with all the host of heaven and also of hell according to His eternal and sovereign good pleasure. Then we never need be afraid. Then no evil can possibly befall us. Then the future is sure, for nothing happens by chance but only according to and through the will of our heavenly Father, and all things work together for our good.

However, this is not all. In fact, however comforting this truth of God's sovereign and almighty control over all things may be, this is not the only phase, yea, this is not even the most important phase to which we would call attention. O, it is indeed of the utmost importance that the Lord our God governs and controls all things. But the question must arise in our minds and hearts: Why did the Lord will sin and darkness, and how does this truth serve me and the

church of God? God's providence and sin, inseparably and sovereignly connected, but why? We have already called attention to the fact that the reality of sin and death is a tremendous phenomenon in the midst of the world. Surely we are comforted with the thought that all the forces of sin and darkness cannot prevent all things from working together for our good, that my salvation and that of the church of God is absolutely sure. But, would it not have been better had this night of sin and death never been introduced? Would it not have been far better if the Lord would realize His eternal kingdom and gather His chosen church without this phenomenon of darkness and evil?

The comfort of the church of God is not merely a comfort over against the darkness and evil of this world, but it also embraces it. On the one hand we have the comfort that the honour of God, Who alone is God, is maintained. This conception of the sovereign providence of the Lord as it also embraces sin allows the Lord to remain God. To the child of God there should be nothing of greater importance than this truth. We are dealing now with the tremendous phenomenon of sin and darkness. Any conception which presents sin as having its origin in the prince of the powers of the air cannot possibly satisfy us. Principally this view of things deprives me of the living God. And this is eternal life for me and the church of God: to know God, to know Him as the only true God, Who is God alone. Any view which divorces the reality of sin from the wholly sovereign control of the living God must be rejected by us if for no other reason than that it attacks Him Whom to know as the only living God is life everlasting. It must surely be the urge and longing of my heart and soul that that God remain God. We must never permit another power to appear beside Him. The salvation and comfort of my soul demands that He, Whom I have learned to love through the power of Divine grace, is constantly at the controls, and that the government of all things is continually in His hand, also at the dawn of history when the night of sin and darkness was introduced through the sin of our first parents in Paradise. This, I say, we must maintain, in the first place, purely for God's sake and His glory.

However, even this is not all. We cannot pause here. To say that the Lord willed sin and darkness sovereignly is surely not enough. The Lord is not a tyrant. Life and death, light and darkness, the truth and the lie, righteousness and unrighteousness, heaven and hell must not be viewed as parallel and of equal significance. Never must the issue be presented as if Jehovah delights in the one as well as in the other. It is true that our Protestant Reformed Churches have been accused of this gross misrepresentation

of the doctrine of God's sovereignty. Nothing however, is farther from the truth. For although it is true that the Lord is absolutely and wholly sovereign with respect to all that occurs throughout the history of this world, it is equally true that the Lord must remain God, and this means that He must remain God also as the holy and just and righteous and omniscient Jehovah. What does this imply? This surely implies that, although I know that man loves iniquity and walks in darkness because he loves the darkness rather than the light, I also know that Jehovah is too pure of eyes to behold sin and evil. Consequently we declare without the slightest reservation that man is the author of his own evil, but this can never be said of the Lord. An author is one who commits sin because he delights in it and this also establishes his responsibility. But the Lord is never the author of iniquity. He did not will the evil because He delights in it. Eternally He willed sin and darkness as the choice of man whom He sovereignly willed from before the foundation of the world. Also the sinner, we understand, is the product of God's eternal and sovereign will. And the Lord willed evil as the object of His eternal hatred and displeasure and the choice of man.

This truth is of the greatest comfort for the Church of God in the midst of the world. We declare and may declare, without any reservation: We rejoice that it is exactly *that* God Who willed sin and evil. How hopeless and full of despair would be our position if the devil were at the controls! Then we could possibly have no rest or peace for a single moment. How tragic is that presentation of the truth which advocates that an accident occurred in Paradise, that the entrance of sin into the world was something unforeseen or not Divinely determined! Or, how despairing is the thought that the fall of Adam was an event which could have been Divinely averted! For, if this be true, then the entire history of sin and grace is an unhappy and unnecessary interim and the work of Divine redemption in Christ Jesus is merely repair work. How pitiful it is that the Church attains unto everlasting and heavenly glory through the deep way of sin and grace if it could have attained unto the same glory without this night of sin and shame! Such, however, is surely not the case. Are not all the works of God known to God from before the foundation of the world? It is not equally true that the Lord, as the heavenly Potter, has the sovereign right to make of the clay whatever He pleases, vessels unto honour and vessels of dishonour? In fact, is it not true that the sovereign Potter of the universe also actually makes these vessels unto dishonour and unto honour? But, these works of the Lord are known to the Lord eternally, are they not? And this means that they are

known by the Lord as only the Lord knows things, creatively and sovereignly. Hence, we know that the entrance of sin into the world was not an accident. And, we must not hesitate to say this. For, if the Lord willed sin and also realized His counsel with respect to sin and darkness, then I know that all must be well. Then the Lord God is sovereignly over all. Then we know that all things must serve unto the greatest glory of His everlasting Name. Then we know that sin entered into this world because the Lord would realize the highest and greatest glorification of His Name through the deep way of sin and darkness. And then we know that the Lord willed evil not because He delights in iniquity, not for the sake of iniquity itself, but only because that evil must serve the greatest glory of His adorable Name. Sin and darkness do not exist for themselves, but as the Divinely willed background for the manifestation of His light and truth and grace. The Lord does all things only for His own Name's sake.

This truth is of the greatest significance for the child and church of God. O, this does not imply that we shall ever delight in sin. It is impossible again to delight in sin when once we have been called out of darkness into the Lord's marvellous light. The Lord does not delight in evil and neither does the child of God who has been delivered out of that darkness through the grace of God. But it is true that the darkness advances the glory and honour of God (not, of course, from the subjective viewpoint of the sinner), that this entire night of sin and death will have but one result, namely, that God shall be praised as God even into all eternity. Everything shall speak of the virtues and glories of the Lord. Heaven and hell must contribute toward the Lord's eternal Self-manifestation. The unrighteousness of men must serve the righteousness of God and His adorable goodness.

Finally, the question may still arise whether all this would not also be true without the supralapsarian conception of the entrance of sin into the world. The infralapsarian confesses as well as the supralapsarian that heaven and hell shall both reveal the glory of the Lord and that the unrighteousness and eternal punishment of the sinner will proclaim the holiness and justice of our God. This is true. However, the maintaining of the absolute sovereignty of the Lord also with respect to our present night of sin and darkness gives the church of God the unspeakable comfort that the Lord is absolutely at the helm, that our God was "not taken by surprise" when Adam fell from his lofty position. The absolute honour of our God is surely an issue of tremendous significance for the child of the Lord who has learned to adore the God of his salvation. Besides, we must not forget that the pro-

clamation of the truth of the Lord's absolute sovereignty also gives the church the assurance that all is always well in the midst of the world. It assures us that whatever may betide occurs only through Him of Whom and through Whom and unto Whom are all things. Then indeed we may have the unwavering assurance that all things work together for our good, and that, if God be for us, nothing can be against us. What, then, shall we say in conclusion? The church of God may indeed exclaim in all amazement: if the darkness, this darkness, this vale of the shadow of death, this night of sin and death must serve the light, has been Divinely willed for the sake of the greatest glory of His Name, how great shall the manifestation of God's glory be in the new heavens and upon the new earth? Unfathomably deep are the riches of God! No one was God's counsellor and none could have been His counsellor. Everything shall serve to reveal the greatness of the Lord. And the church of God looks forward, with unwavering certainty, to the day when all things shall be made new in the new heavens and upon the new earth.

H. Veldman



BOUND VOLUME 28

Volume No. 28 is now in the process of being bound in book form. Those who have standing orders and reside in the city of Grand Rapids should have their loose issues in order, ready to be collected by the book committee of the Board. Those residing outside of Grand Rapids should forward their loose issues, in order, to Mr. H. Velthouse 1025 Wealthy St., Grand Rapids 6, Mich., or to Mr. G. Bylsma 904 Adams St., Grand Rapids 7, Michigan. *Please!*

—THE BOARD

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MEETING OF CLASSIS EAST

CLASSIS EAST will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 7th at First Church.

Matters for Synod should be brought to this meeting.

—D. Jonker, S.C.

IN HIS FEAR

Looking To The Future

CHAPTER 4

CONCERNING TEXTBOOKS

What Do We Need?

In our last installment we pointed out by way of illustration and in a negative way the necessity of having different textbooks in our Protestant Reformed schools. Granted our own schools and Protestant Reformed teachers and Protestant Reformed pupils, there is still a very serious lack in the classroom that employs non-Protestant Reformed textbooks. And while temporarily such textbooks must be used, for lack of our own, they constitute a tremendous handicap for both teacher and pupil, which must be overcome, as much as possible, in the instruction as such and in actual class-room work. In our illustration last time we referred to the extreme, to worldly textbooks. And we did so partly because the employment of worldly textbooks has been the rule, rather than the exception, in the Christian school movement in this country. It is only recently, through the instrumentality of the National Union of Christian Schools, that textbooks especially designed for use in the existing Christian schools have begun to make their appearance; and even at that the results have been very meager. Furthermore, from our point of view the results are far from satisfactory. Even a casual reading of one of the key works in the National Union's scheme reveals that our Protestant Reformed schools would not long remain Protestant Reformed if they made use of the productions and publications of the National Union. I refer to the "Course of Study for Christian Schools". And therefore, the reader must bear in mind that principally our objection is not only against "worldly" textbooks, but against all non-Protestant Reformed textbooks. And this objection is quite in harmony with all that we have previously written concerning the principle of Protestant Reformed education. We object to the public school. Why? Because the instruction there given is the instruction of the kingdom of darkness and is designed from beginning to end to prepare the child for a life in the kingdom of darkness from the principle of darkness. Ergo: we object consequently to the textbooks employed in the public school, which stand in the service of such thus-worldly education. However, we as Protestant Reformed people object also to the existing Christian schools. Why? Because the instruction from begin-

ning to end is dominated by Christian Reformed principles, is corrupted by the un-Reformed and anti-Scriptural twin principles of common grace and general grace (Kuyperian and Heynsian-Arminian common grace), a principal denial of the antithesis and a principal acceptance of the synthesis. Ergo: we consequently object to the textbooks which have been or will be produced, as they stand in the service of such anti-Reformed education.

Now it is sometimes proposed that the use of non-Protestant Reformed textbooks in our schools might after all be salutary, because such textbooks may be instrumental in teaching the truth by contrast. Our children, it is said, must be acquainted with error, must be trained to defend against the lie, must be taught also how they must *not* live in the midst of the world. And, one of the best ways to attain this goal is to use non-Protestant Reformed textbooks, allow the children to assimilate their teachings, in order then to have the teacher point out the fallacies of this instruction and pump all the corruption out of them.

However, I believe such reasoning to be, in the first place, a bit of sophistry. It is not intellectually honest. It is very difficult for me to conceive of it, that any Christian parent can in his heart really assume such an attitude, especially with regard to *children*. For it is the principle of casting our children to the wolves first, in order then to rescue them from the wolf's mouth; or of letting them be burned by the fire, in order to teach them what fire is. It is essentially not much different than the principle of sinning that grace may abound. On somewhat the same basis parents will at times seek to justify themselves in sending their children to the public school in preference to the existing Christian schools (where we have not our own), or in opposing any activity in behalf of our own schools, in order to choose the existing Christian schools. Let them learn, by experience, what is wrong, they say, in order with the aid of the preaching and catechetical instruction to overcome it.

But not only is such reasoning dishonest, it is also utterly false. It is such, first of all, from a psychological point of view. We read and hear much of child psychology in our day. But what kind of child psychology is it, pray, that would treat a child, tender and young and inexperienced, as yet untaught and with his feet not firmly planted in the right way, in such a fashion? And, secondly, what kind of religion is it that would treat a *regenerated, covenant* child (and it is here, of course, that you have the subjective principle of Christian instruction: see the Baptism Form, and particularly, the questions to parents) in such a fashion? Is it not a denial of the entire founda-

tion of the Christian school when we introduce into it by means of the text books the world's instruction? And is it not a denial, to be specific, of the entire foundation of our own, distinctively Reformed, particularistic Christian schools when we tolerate therein textbooks that are non-Protestant Reformed? Is this not much rather the proper style of Christian education, that we accentuate the positive, that we first of all seek to lead the child in the proper way, instruct him in the positive spiritual principles of God's Word, and that then, from within the safe fortress of the truth we point out to him the other side, and with sound Scriptural reasoning condemn it? And once more, is not that,—because I want to be specific,—also the proper style of a Protestant Reformed education, and that too, over against all (whether that be the world or synthesizing Christianity), absolutely *all*, that is non-Protestant Reformed? Well, then, also in regard to textbooks let us not cast our children, our little lambs, to the ravening wolves first, in order then to try to rescue them. For these tender little lambs may well be consumed, or at least maimed for life, ere ever you succeed in rescuing them.

What then, in brief,—and without going into the more technical aspects of textbook composition,—do we need?

From a formal viewpoint we perhaps need nothing new. I say "perhaps" because it is not always so easy to distinguish in actual life between the formal and the material. I say "perhaps" too, because if you include in this formal aspect of textbooks such elements as *methods*, then to a large extent we need something new also formally: for the world in its spiritual foolishness also becomes more and more blinded and foolish even from a natural viewpoint, so that it even adopts corrupt methods (witness the method of progressive education, so-called). For we must not forget that also as regards child psychology and educational psychology and methods of education the Word of God must certainly be our guide, and is not by any means silent. But if by "formal" we mean the history, the geography, the language, the spelling, the arithmetic, *as such*, then, of course, we need nothing new in this respect. The facts of history as such, the rules of grammar as such, the facts of geography as such, the laws of arithmetic and the rules for spelling as such, are the same for believer and unbeliever. These we need not change, we cannot change, and we must not attempt to change. In fact, positively, as far as these matters are concerned we may certainly, and, I would say, must, take advantage of the research and the learning of the world. For the world, as a rule, knows more about things than the church; by way of illustration we may mention in this respect

just one field of learning: science. And we may well remember that the chaff, the world, also in this respect is present for the benefit of the kernel, the church.

But from the viewpoint of the spiritual, ethical content of the textbook, we must have something entirely different. In this respect we need textbooks that are founded upon the Scriptures, whose every instruction is controlled by the principles of the Word of God, our Reformed, our Protestant Reformed principles. Nor must we deceive ourselves by introducing a little incidental Christianity into the text books, while we retain principally the instruction of the world. See in this connection the sound advice offered in the articles from the *Reformatie* which we translated a couple months ago. Just as we need schools that are fundamentally and principally Christian, founded upon the Scriptures and the Confessions, so we need textbooks that are written with this fundamental and principal bias. The fundamental difference is plain, especially in such subjects as history and geography. But also in the so-called peripheral subjects, the more formal subjects, for example, arithmetic, this fundamental principle must rule.

A difficult task, you say. I agree.

How must this goal be attained? About this question I will have a few remarks next time, D.V.

H. C. Hoeksema



To God for help will I repair,
To God will I direct my prayer,
And surely He will answer me,
His great salvation I shall see.

In weakness I was pressed with fear,
But better hopes my spirit cheer;
Past mercies lead me to rely
Upon the help of God Most High.

Thy deeds, O Lord, will I relate
And on Thy wonders meditate;
Thy way, O God, is just and right,
And none is like to Thee in might.

Thy way, O God, was in the sea,
But, though Thy paths mysterious be,
Thy people Thou didst safely keep
As shepherds lead their helpless sheep.

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

The Rite of Expiatory Sacrifice

We were occupied with showing just how the Old Testament saints were served by their animal sacrifices. To bring the treatment of this matter to conclusion, let us get before us once more the principles of truth imposed upon and symbolized by this sacrifice. We found them to be those of a sacrificing victim, God's own merciful gift to His ill-deserving and condemnable yet chosen and contrite people, paying as their substitute for all their sins by its death, and thereby bearing away their sins, covering, cancelling, obliterating them, blotting them out before the face of God, and thus redeeming them from all their sins by the price of its life rendered to God as a full satisfaction of His justice. Now these are the very truths embodied in the sacrificing Christ. And therefore, though Christ had not yet come into the flesh and was not, as yet, the direct object of their vision, the Old Testament saints, in embracing with their sanctified mind these truths, embraced Him—the Christ—who is the truth (truths) and therefore also the way and the life.

And that He, the Lamb that God in His own good time would bring in, is the Truth, and that accordingly their animal sacrifice was merely a shadow brought into being for the sole purpose of prophetically symbolizing the Truth, the Old Testament saints must have been made to perceive. In other words, they must have been made to understand that they could not depend for their salvation on their animal sacrifice. For, certainly, it cannot be supposed that the gap between their animal sacrifice and the offender whose sins it expiated figuratively was allowed to escape their attention. For this gap was great. The animal is a non-moral and irrational creature devoid of rational awareness of God, moral sense, and conscience and accordingly without sense of sin, thus a creature whose dying could not possibly serve as a payment for sin. Expiation of sin required a being rational and moral, a being endowed with awareness of God and a moral sense. It required moreover a sinless being capable of pouring out its soul in death as activated by a perfect love of God. Certainly, the Old Testament saints must have been given understanding of this.

But if so, were to their minds their sins to remain unatoned though forgiven them of God? This, to be sure, could not have been their imagining. Had God forgiven and saved them with such a notion in their

soul, He would have been denying Himself before their consciousness; He would have been so disgracing Himself in their eyes as to make it impossible for them to revere Him as God righteous and holy. He thus would have been defeating the very purpose of His saving them from all their sins—the purpose of revealing to them in the face of Christ the total of His glories in order that they, as His redeemed people, might declare His praises everlastingly.

And so their firm belief must have been that their sins would surely be expiated. But by whom or by what if not by their animal sacrifices? By the Lamb fully qualified for the task in every respect—the Lamb that God would provide in His own time. And upon *this* sacrificing victim they were pinning all their hopes. Abraham, as was stated, saw the day of Christ and rejoiced.

Such is the fact here. For the believers of the first covenant were living by the promise of a "seed" to gain the ascendancy over the malice of the serpent. For such was the promise. "I will set enmity between thee and the woman," said the Lord to our first parents, "between thy seed and her seed. Thou shalt bruise his heel and he shall bruise thy head." Now this "seed" was Christ. In the prophetic utterance of Noah He appears as "Shem" whom Canaan will serve and in whose tent, sanctuary, house, Japheth will dwell (Gen. 9:26,27). In the communication of God to Abraham He is set forth as the "seed" in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed. In the psalms of David His suffering is described. Of this "seed" the Lord was speaking in saying to David, "And when thy days be fulfilled and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And I will be his father, and he shall be my son. And if he commit iniquity, I will chastise him with the rod of men, but my mercy shall not depart from him." In the prophetic discourse of Isaiah this "seed" stands before us as the "servant of Jehovah" whom the Lord will bruise for our iniquities, and upon whom will be the chastisement of our peace. Isa. 53:5. The Old Testament Scriptures are interspersed throughout with remarkable statements regarding this "seed". He is the Shiloh unto whom the gathering of the people will be, (Gen. 49:1). He is the child born unto us and the son given us upon whose shoulders the government shall be, and whose name shall be called wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the prince of peace. Isa. 9:6.

Now by this promise the believers of the first covenant lived. How it was layed upon the heart of Eve,

the mother of all the (spiritual) living, what comfort she derived from it, is evident from her jubilant cry in the moment of the birth of Cain, her firstborn son. Said she, "I have received a man with Jehovah." And of Abraham Christ said that he saw the day of Christ and rejoiced. Can it be that a people—the Old Testament believers—prepared by the Lord to receive, hold and live by such promises were grounding their salvation on the death of animals? This is not well conceivable. Certainly they were made to perceive that their animal sacrifice was but symbol indeed and as such a preindication of the Lamb that the Lord would provide Him and them. And in their sanctified minds, it must be, this "Lamb," and this "seed," "man with Jehovah" were more or less associated.

This, of course, does not mean that the Old Testament saints had Christ as the direct object of their vision, and that they were confessing: Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, of human nature and divine in union of divine personality. No such confession was theirs, could be theirs. Yet those saints did see Christ not directly but through the glass of the promises of God in association with their sacrifices. Let us quote the Heidelberg Catechism here.

Q. 18. Who then is that Mediator, who is in one person very God, and real righteous man?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ: who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

Q. 19. Whence knowest thou this?

A. From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly, has fulfilled it by his only begotten Son.

Let us take notice, the promise represented, thus preached, proclaimed by the animal sacrifices. So says the Catechism. That precisely was the grand purpose of the institution of the system of animal sacrifices. And that is what those sacrifices must be held to have done: they actually did proclaim unto the believers of that day the promise of the "seed", "the man with Jehovah", the Christ. But to maintain that the saints of old imagined that their animal sacrifices actually expiated their sins is to deny that they proclaimed to them the promise of the "seed". It is thus to say either that this was not their purpose or that it was their purpose, but that this purpose was not achieved. But the Lord, certainly, always achieves His purpose with everything.

Great therefore were the benefits that the Old Testament saints derived from their animal sacrifices. It proclaimed to them the Christ. Second, it served

them as an instrument for the expression of their faith as do the sacraments with regard to the believers of this Gospel period. Hence, every new light shed by Heaven upon the promise was in answer to their sacrificing, to their prayers and confessions of Faith to which they gave utterances through their sacrificing. One notable example. Upon leaving the ark Noah builded an altar unto the Lord and offered burnt offerings. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour (Heb.—smell). The reference here is in the first instance to the Lamb, Christ Jesus, that was slain before the foundation of the world, to the holy zeal, pure love that activated that sacrifice. But certainly the reference here is also to Noah's faith in Christ and through Christ in God of which his burnt offering was the expression. And the Lord smelled it—this faith. And the smell of it was sweet to Him. And on the ground of Christ's atonement and for Christ's sake the Lord blessed Noah. He said in His heart that not again would He curse the ground for man's sake... And thereupon He instituted with Noah His covenant.

G. M. Ophoff

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The Absalom Revolt

The Progress of the Revolt

In our previous article we left Absalom in Hebron. Here, as we saw, he is at work setting his rebellion in operation. As was also observed, he already has sent out spies to sound public opinion.

"And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom."

Heb.—"And the conspiracy was strong; for the people caused to go, and many (were) with Absalom."

Doubtless the "people" of which the text makes mention are the 'spies' in every place commissioned to launch the rebellion over the whole land. On the same day and at the same time of the day they go forth blowing their trumpets and shouting," Absalom reigneth in Hebron." This is the call to all such who are of the opinion that a change of administration in Jerusalem has become necessary to join the demonstration. And the response is remarkable. As the day progresses more and more of the citizenry in each strategic place of the kingdom come forth and rally around Absalom's banner. In the words of the text, "the people—the spies—cause to go and many are

with Absalom." The conspiracy is an astounding success.

What may be the explanation? Well may we ask. For David is a good king. He has done so much for the nation. Instrumentally he is its saviour. At the time of Saul's death the entire land west of the Jordan was being overrun by the Philistines, who had set as their goal the conquest of the whole of Canaan. But the Lord had delivered them into David's hand, and the Philistine menace ended. Besides, David has overthrown all the heathen nations that were spoiling Israel from north to south. On their ruins he founded a dominion equal to that of any of the great kings of the east. It was an immense region that extended to the Euphrates on the east and to the river Nile on the West.

Further, that as king in Israel's throne he symbolizes prophetically the Christ must mean, certainly, that his administration of the kingdom was singularly just. He reigned over all Israel, and executed judgment and justice unto all his people. II Sam. 8:15. The righteous character of his government is well reflected in his psalms particularly in his vow that he made doubtless at the time of his coming to power in Hebron. (Ps. 101). "I will sing of mercy and judgment," he had vowed, "unto thee, O Lord will I sing. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house in a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person. Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, will I cut off: him that hath a high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord." He is a godfearing, just, wise, and benevolent ruler. Tyranny, injustice, oppression, robbery of the poor by the rich are no features of his government.

He was a king who could truthfully say to his subjects, "learn of me that I am meek and lowly. For in the by-gone days when without a cause he was being hunted as a partridge in the mountain by Saul, he patiently endured. He could have destroyed Saul and the throne would have been his. But not willing to make flesh his arm, he forbore as content to receive the kingdom as a gift of grace from the hand of his God. By faith he perceived that, if he wait on the Lord and keep His way, the Lord would exalt him to

inherit the land, when the wicked were cut off, Ps. 36:34. In this respect, too, he prefigured his great successor—Christ Jesus—who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. Heb. 12:2.

Surely, David made the Lord his trust. God was in all his thoughts—God, His righteousness, faithfulness and salvation, His lovingkindness and truth. And he did not, did David, refrain his lips. He did not conceal the glories of his God within his heart. But he preached God's righteousness, declared His salvation, in the great congregation, that is, he put in writing the inspired thoughts of his heart that as his songs—psalms of David—they might be read or chanted by the choirs of the sanctuary in the audience of of the worshipping multitudes. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. . . My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him." Ps. 22:22,25; 40:9,10. And his purpose always was to show how lovely, how adorable, how worthy of the praises of his redeemed people, God is,—God, his Saviour.

Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous: for praise is comely to the upright: Praise the Lord with harp; sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of twelve strings.

Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise.

For the word of the Lord is right; and all his works are done with truth. He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. . . ." Ps. 33:1-5.

Thus he was wont to exhort his brethren in the faith.

And how fully aware he was that by himself he was was a sinner, shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin, and that he had need of God to purge him that he might be clean; to restore unto him the joy of His salvation, and uphold him with His free Spirit, that he might teach transgressors God's ways; to deliver him from bloodguiltiness, that his tongue might sing aloud of the Lord's righteousness; and to open his lips, that his mouth might show forth God's praises. In a word, how aware he was that he was God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works before ordained that he should walk in them.

How could an upstart like Absalom gain a following for his conspiracy among subjects of such a king? That these subjects were Israelites and not heathen makes the question all the more pertinent.

Is the answer David's grievous sins in the matter of Uriah? But certainly every true believer in Israel who was spiritual had long ago forgiven him. For he had deeply repented. And his contrition of heart was genuine. For the Lord had forgiven him. And this was well known. For he had put his confession in writing (Ps. 32 and 51) and given it to the chief musician of the sanctuary.

It was the carnal Israel that went over to Absalom's side. First to be mentioned is the pious godless Israel. Their self-righteousness could not be appeased by any confession of sin. These people couldn't endure David. He was too spiritual, too God-centered in his administration of the kingdom. The theology of his psalms nauseated them. And they used his past grievous sins and his weaknesses and lacks of royal government as pretexts for helping Absalom try to rid the land of him.

Further, this carnal seed would include many a young person. They were thankful for Absalom. It can be explained. They were still small children when the oppressions of the surrounding heathen nations were in progress. They had but a dim recollection of the deliverances that the Lord had sent by the hand of David. They knew not the mighty works of the Lord, and their elders had not instructed them.

Besides, had they followed their impulses they would have been crowding Baal's temples. But they did not dare. For there was a law against it, and with David in the throne that law was being rigidly enforced. What is more, Absalom was young, and beautiful and glamorous and godless. And the report of how he was wont to fraternize with the people in the gate of Jerusalem and how the interests of the people lay close to his heart (apparently) had spread far and wide. What a king he would make them. And so they streamed to his banner.

G. M. Ophoff



NOTICE

In order to maintain its financial support of our three brethren and their families, the board requests that those who intend or are willing to contribute to this cause should send their gifts to the treasurer as soon as possible. Please send your contributions to Don Ondersma, 1131 Chicago Drive, S.W., Grand Rapids 9, Michigan. *Thank you!*

FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of I Peter 1:6, 7

It is a wonderful fact, that salvation is immutably certain for the elect strangers scattered in the midst of this world, both in the days of Peter and in ours. We have only reason to rejoice in God, our Savior. In the death and resurrection of Christ He hath begotten us unto a lively hope. And, we may be certain, this hope never puts us to shame, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through His Holy Spirit. Nothing will ever separate us from the love of God in Christ. We are kept in the power of God through faith unto the salvation which is ready to be revealed in the last day.

Such is the glad-tidings of the Gospel!

In this Gospel-reality of God's grace the believers are exultant with thankfulness; our joy is of the Holy Spirit, and it is a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.

Even our present sorrows cannot and may not dim our joys, but, strange and paradoxical as it may seem, these sorrows of this present life can only enhance the greatness of our joy and final salvation.

Writes Peter in these verses under consideration: *"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief through manifold trials that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."*

These are wonderful words of consolation and encouragement for the sorrow-rejoicing Pilgrim amid the weariness of his pilgrim journey.

How comforting is God's Gospel-design in our lives! Think of it, weary pilgrim, what a great and glorious harvest God designs through the winds and trials of life. Sorrow indeed endureth for a moment, but joy cometh in the morning. When ye see all these sorrows in life come upon you, then lift up your heads in the firm trust, that your final salvation is very nigh. Lift up, therefore, the loins of your mind in spiritual sobriety of faith and hope in God.

Let us attempt to understand the details of this quoted passage, our text.

First of all we wish to remark, that the phrase "in which" evidently refers to the entire former verse. We rejoice in the faith in which we are kept by the power of God. We are indeed weak and helpless in ourselves. But the assurance of faith wrought by the Word and Spirit in our hearts makes us to rejoice ex-

ceedingly. It is a fact, that God's people are a glad people, who love to speak of God's guarding power. Always we rejoice in God's faithfulness and strength.

To be sure, thus understood, our rejoicing is also in our having been begotten unto a lively hope. Furthermore, it ought also to be clear, that our rejoicing is in the hope laid away for us and kept for us in heaven. For truly we cannot rejoice in God's keeping without rejoicing also in the hope unto which we are kept, the glorious and heavenly inheritance. But the central point, the immediate thought and truth that keeps us rejoicing is, according to the text, the *immutable keeping* of God.

Such is the status quo of the believers in this world.

Peter states this as a fact. He evidently employs the indicative mood. At once this statement of this glorious fact is an encouragement for the believers to great exaltation. It is what God has wrought and what He still does that encourages us to press forward. And this encouragement is an aspect of the power whereby He through His Spirit guards us from despair and despondency in our manifold trials and temptations.

What a glorious "status quo" of the church!

This unique character of God's people calls for a special treatment from our heavenly Father. Hence, He sends us "manifold trials". The trials that are our lot and portion in this life are not limited to a few isolated instances, says Peter. They are not few but they are many. Then too these many trials are not all of one sort and one pattern. Nay, they are of manifold and different kinds. Then it is poverty now it is riches, sometimes it is sickness, pain and weariness then again it is war and anxiety of heart. Thus it was in the days of Peter. Some must go to battle, our dear ones are sick or God places us upon a bed of languishing, when the days are long and dreary and when nightfall can be terrifying.

Oh, how manifold are God's trying ways. They are as manifold as life itself.

But do we despair, or do we bless God and die? Do we fall by the way-side in unbelief and in brooding discontent with God and His dealings with us?

Not at all. For we are kept in God's *power* thru *faith*! And this power of God is richly supplied each day anew we need it. God creates such situations in our life—in His paternal providence—that He gives us to taste the power of faith, and of *faith only*! We must learn to simply *walk* in faith; the dross must be taken out of it, and faith must stand forth before our sanctified and believing consciousness, as His great and glorious gift of power through which we are guarded.

This dealing of God with us is His chastisement of us in love. God does not spoil us; He deals with us as with sons and not as with bastards. And the rod of His chastisements strikes us in these "manifold trials". They are not a cause of rejoicing but of sorrow when present. But being exercised thereby they work in our lives the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Wherefore the apostle mentions the design of God, also in our text, exhibited in these manifold trials.

God sends us pain and He makes us to taste sorrow. The purpose? That we shall learn to kiss the rod that strikes us, knowing that it is for our benefit. The unbelievers curse God even upon their beds of sickness and they spend their last breath in cursing God. Oftentimes they literally "spend" their last strength in exasperation with the Most High. But God's people become longsuffering and patient in suffering. The grand truth is that in the elect strangers, reborn by God's power of the resurrection of Christ, are studious unto salvation in the School of God's ways of affliction. They sing: Ere I was afflicted I went astray, but now I search out Thy commandments.

And what do we learn?

We learn more and more in the holy place of prayer, as the searching of faith, that the affliction that came to us was only because we really needed it. God would make us men and women, matured in the Lord. It was simply the all-wise pedagogy of our loving and holy Father. As the mother eagle stirreth up her nest so the Lord places us in the trials of life that on the wings of faith we may soar upwards, placing our hope and confidence alone in Him. And thus we find rest amid life's sorrows in the design of the Architect and Author of our salvation. Thus our hearts are filled by faith with wisdom and prudence. We become wiser than our teachers. Oh, the joy of it; it must be expressed in tens of thousands of tongues.

We were speaking just now of this "design" of God with us.

God deals with us very jealously. Why not? Are we not His peculiar treasure in the earth? All the earth is His, but only we are His peculiar treasure. He has an inimitable glory in the saints. And the riches of this glory must appear. And is God not jealous of our faith, even as a husband is jealous of his beloved wife?

Nothing can compare with the preciousness of the saints.

To demonstrate this incomparable preciousness of God's glory in the saints, Peter draws an analogy. It is the analogy between the attitude of a goldsmith toward His gold, and the attitude of the heavenly Father toward the faith of His children, through which

faith He keeps them in this world unto glory. The Apostle reasons from the lesser to the greater. Gold tried in the fire is precious. It is twice tried. Once to remove the dross and then again to show its approved character, to demonstrate that it is indeed pure and tried gold. Such gold is precious. But even so it perishes. The rust and corruption of time causes the most pure gold to perish; soon it loses its luster, it becomes simply a trinklet that is cast aside as so much useless and worthless trash.

But such is not the case with the jewel, God's gift of faith in its glorious activity. This faith is incomparably greater than gold. And it must become manifested through the manifold trials of life.

Three things must become evident from faith.

The first is that faith must be to "praise". Praise of whom? The text does not express it, but evidently to God whose power and wisdom and might becomes manifest in this faith. "Praise" is expressed recognition of God as its Author and Finisher. The believer more and more sings: All that I am I owe to Thee. Thy wisdom Lord hath fashioned me. I give my Maker thankful praise; whose wondrous works my soul amaze!

Secondly, it must be unto "glory". It must be such that the virtues of God are manifest in the faith that is ours. It must be emphatically seen that it is God's glory in our faith.

Thirdly, it must be unto "honor". Honor is recognition of dignity, God's dignity in the saints.

Now this all must be manifested in the final day of Christ, when He shall be revealed in the Church.

This cannot be revealed now as yet. Now it is the time of trial. In the drama of the history of this world we see the saints live and die in faith, and we read: These all died in faith not having received the promise. But that is not the end of the matter. Presently comes the great day of the Lord, when the "age to come" shall be ushered in. Then shall the great preciousness of faith be seen as the victory that overcame the world.

In this knowledge we are saved in hope. Thus we are kept in the power of God through faith. Thus our hope throbs with life and our faith rests firmly on the rock-bottomness of God's immutable Promise.

Yes, we rejoice with exceeding great joy. And though now our eyes are filled with tears we rejoice in the prospect that God Himself shall wipe all tears from our eyes. This boon He keeps for us in store, and unto this great blessedness He jealously guards us through faith.

Jehovah is a man of war; Jehovah, the faithful God, is His Name!

Geo. Lubbers

PERISCOPE

COMMON GRACE

In recent numbers of *Torch and Trumpet*, a rather interesting discussion is carried on between Prof. H. R. Van Til and the Rev. J. Piersma on the one hand, and a certain Mr. S. Wolters, formerly a member of the liberated church in the Netherlands, now member of the Christian Reformed Church in Houston, B.C.

From this discussion we quote the following:

We can agree with you that a wrong application of the doctrine of common grace can make for a blurring of the line of demarcation between the church and the world. Others in the Christian Reformed Church are also aware of this fact. It might comfort you to read here a quotation from the Faculty Statement which appears over the signature of every full-time member of the Calvin College teaching staff as published in the 1952 Acts of Synod. In order to understand the statement we wish to quote, let us say that the entire document was drawn up because "the Faculty of Calvin College notes with regret the presence among some of our people of perplexity, doubt, and fear concerning our college and its staff. In order to help remove this doubt and to restore, if possible, a general confidence in our work, we wish humbly and sincerely to make the following declaration . . ."

Point 2 of this statement begins by stating: "We acknowledge, and in all our teaching are guided by, certain basic Christian principles," among which is the following:

"d. That there is an inescapable and basic antithesis between the regenerate and the unregenerate and that the doctrine of common grace is no excuse for glorifying 'worldly culture'."

Evidently the common grace problem is recognized by more among us. The dangers of a wrong application of this doctrine are clearly cited in the material quoted above. No doubt the prophetic integrity of the Christian class-room is lost when such a misuse obscures the antithesis between church and world. Again, we accept your point. Whether this fault is as general as your letter appears to indicate is questionable. But the presence of the problem is not to be

denied. May we all resolve to live the Christian life of God's glory out of the principle of regeneration!

We can only rejoice in the fact that "the common grace problem is recognized by more among us." Yet, as long as the leaders in the Christian Reformed Church speak only of a "wrong application of the doctrine of common grace" that "can make for a blurring of the line of demarcation between the church and the world," their position and problem can hardly interest us. Such a blurring of the line of demarcation, in other words, of the antithesis, is inevitable as long as the false position is maintained that God is gracious to the righteous and wicked (in bestowing upon them the things of this present time), to the elect and to the reprobate alike, that by the power of common grace sin is restrained, and that, in virtue of that same grace, the natural, unregenerated man can do good in this present world. The antithesis can be maintained only when we take the position that the righteous and the wicked, the elect and the reprobate have all things in common except grace.

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SMOKING AND CANCER

Recently several papers and journals published articles that deal with the effect of smoking on the larynx and lungs. Investigation seems to show that excessive smoking produces cancer of the lungs. This appears to be the case especially with cigarette smokers, probably because the latter usually have the bad habit of inhaling. The following quotation I clipped from *Signs of the Times*:

Cigarette smoking as a direct cause of cancer of the respiratory tract is getting more and more attention from the medical profession. Roy Norr, author of an article, "Smokers Are Getting Scared!" in the October *Christian Herald*, cites a study published recently in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* which reveals that in 1914 only 442 men and 166 women died from cancer of the larynx and lung. Now the same disease kills 24,000 each year, 5,000 of whom are women. During this period the annual consumption of cigarettes has risen from eighteen billion to four hundred billion, and cigarette smoking has become very common among women.

Mr. Norr points out that "no one questions" the effect of tobacco as an irritant to

the mucous lining of the mouth, nose, and throat, that it aggravates hoarseness, coughing, chronic bronchitis, and tonsillitis, that it may be suicidal in cases of stomach and duodenal ulcers, that it interferes with normal digestion, contracts the blood vessels, increases the heart rate, and raises the blood pressure. An investigation by the Medical Research Council of England and Wales, cited by Mr. Norr, concludes that "above the age of 45, the risk of developing the disease (lung cancer) increases in simple proportion with the amount smoked, and may be fifty times as great among those who smoked twenty-five or more cigarettes daily as among non-smokers."

After quoting numerous authorities who agree on the danger of cigarette smoking, Mr. Norr proposes a four-point "Prevent Cancer!" campaign, which would include alerting the public to the danger, stopping the fake testimonials which so strongly influence the young to begin use of cigarettes, ripping off the mask from cigarettes claims by publicizing, among other facts, that cigarettes contain chemicals both harmful and deadly, and breaking "the stranglehold of the tobacco hucksters" on television and radio.

The figures, I must admit, are rather impressive. How valid the conclusion is, that is drawn from them, I cannot judge. The question is, of course, whether other factors, such as e.g. excessive drinking, must not also be taken into consideration. At any rate, personally I rather stick to my pipe, which I have smoked for sixty years.

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MISSION AND CREEDS

Under this title the Rev. Harry R. Boer has an article in *The Reformed Journal* that is, indeed, worthy of our attention. It is always striking when, in this day and age, someone calls attention to our confessions, but our interest is especially aroused when we read the striking title: *Mission and Creeds*.

The occasion for writing this article may be found in the introductory paragraph:

It has often been observed that the three creeds of the Reformed Churches—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt—do not bear a strong



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missionary character. So much is this the case that a Christian Reformed consistory overtured the recent synod to submit for the consideration of the coming Reformed Ecumenical Synod a proposal that it "draw up a creedal statement concerning Christian missions." The lack of missionary emphasis in the creeds need not wholly surprise us. A number of considerations explain though they do not justify this.

The writer then continues to explain the reasons and mitigating circumstances that account for the lack of proper emphasis on missions in our creeds. And thereupon he offers in a brief paragraph what may be considered the contents of his article:

The creeds are almost wholly concerned with the doctrinal and internal life of the Church. Their look is inward. The first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism is typical—"What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own. . . ." Still, expressions of a missionary thrust are not wholly lacking. In this and in a following article I wish to reflect on the existing data. It should be useful to know just what the creeds do say about the large and necessary missionary task of the Church. There may be a few surprises. One would hardly expect, for instance, that some of the most significant material is found in the Canons of Dordt. We will also find some surprises of a negative kind. The Heidelberg Catechism, so significant for our preaching, omits all missionary references in the treatment of questions which today one would hardly discuss without alluding to their missionary implications. We should not hesitate, it seems to me, to acknowledge the limited vision of the fathers in this score and implement it for the instruction and edification of the Church as opportunity permits.

Thereupon the Rev. Boer criticizes the action of Synod respecting the overture for the Ecumenical Synod:

In view of all these considerations the report of the committee of pre-advice to whom the overture was entrusted for study and action of the synod in adopting this report is questionable to say the least. It is the kind of action that might have been expected three hundred years ago but will hardly do

today. The report of the committee of pre-advice and its adoption is as follows:

B. Recommendation:

Your advisory committee does not recommend acting favorably on this overture.

Ground:

The work of Missions is included in the connotation of the first mark of the Church, namely, 'the faithful preaching of the Word.' Adopted.

Perhaps some member of the advisory committee could enlighten us as to where the statement that the first mark of the Church is "the faithful preaching of the Word" can be found in the creeds. The Belgic Confession states, "If the pure doctrine of the Gospel is preached therein." When synods quote their creeds they should quote them correctly.

Quite apart from this unhappy inaccuracy, it is a pity that this important overture was so lightly disposed of. Since the ground adduced for its rejection is erroneous or, at least, open to question, in particular because the English word "therein" excludes the "connotation" of the "work of Missions," the way for its consideration remains open.

Personally, I would, nevertheless, consider it a mistake to draw up and adopt a separate creed for the task of missions as a sort of a "fourth mark" of the true church. After all, the mission is nothing else than preaching of the Word. And for this, plenty material can be found in the Confessions that can serve as a basis for mission work. The Rev. Boer confines himself in his discussion to the Netherlands Confession, but also in the Heid. Catechism there is material that can serve as such a basis as e.g. Lord's Day 21 and 25. And especially the Canons are rich in this respect. Or how can the truth of election ever be divorced from the preaching of the Word? If anything special must be adopted as a basis for mission work, I would favor another "Declaration of Principles" based upon all our confessions. This might, indeed, prove valuable.

H.H.

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Hope in God, ye waiting people;
Mercies great with Him abound;
With the Lord a full redemption
From the guilt of sin is found.