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MEDITATION

Gods Eeuwige Ontferming

"Hij zal zich onzer weder ontfermen, hij zal onze ongerechtigheden dempen, ja gij zult alle hunne zonden in de diepten der zee werpen."

—Micha 7:19

Micha profeteerde ten tijde van de koningen Jotham, Achaz en Hiskia, en ten tijde van groote afval van Gods verbondsvolk. Zijn profetie is daarom gelijk aan die van Jesaja. Er was groote zonde, en dat wel onder alle rangen en standen van het volk. En daarom spreekt hij van de straf Gods die aan 't komen is: Assur komt! is de noodkreet doch tevens de waarschuwendende stem van den profeet Gods. Die straf wordt geschetst in schrille kleuren. En toch, er is steeds het overblijfsel der genade, en daarom is er ook vermelding van Gods groote ontferming over het volk, dat altijd in de handpalmen van den Verbonds-God gegraveerd is. Groote ontferming want Jezus Christus, de Messias Gods en de Messias Israels zal zeker komen. Groote ontferming, want de zonden zullen vergeven worden. God is een God die de zonden voorbijgaat. God kan Zichzelf niet verloochenen: Hij is de Getrouwe van eeuwigheid en tot in eeuwigheid. En zoo houdt Hij Zijn toorn niet in eeuwigheid. Hij heeft lust aan goedertierenheid, aan het overblijfsel Zijner erfenis.

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Laat ons eens zien. De voorwerpen van de wonderontferming Gods Zijn de zondaars en de ongerechten. Leest het maar in den tekst. Mijn tekst heeft niets voor de goeden en rechtvaardigen. Het is een echo van Jezus' woorden: "Ik ben niet gekomen om te roepen rechtvaardigen, maar zondaren tot bekeering." Lucas 5:32. Hoe zou het ook? Dat soort

mensen hebben immers geen behoefte aan de groote ontferming? Zij zijn geheel en al tevreden met hun staat en toestand. Zij vragen zichzelf nooit af: Hoe zult gij rechtvaardig verschijnen voor God! Neen, mijn tekst is voor mensen die niet alleen zondaars en ongerechten zijn, doch zij kennen zichzelf als zoodanig.

Laat ons die twee vreeselijke namen eens van nabij bezien. Een zondaar, naar de oorspronkelijke betekenis van het woord, is een mensch, die het groote hoofddoel van zijn leven mist. Zulk een mensch mist God! Ziet ge: God stelde den mensch Zichzelf ten doel bij de schepping. Alleen dan zou de mensch aan zijn doel beantwoorden en gelukkig zijn, als hij, namelijk, alles deed ter eere van God. Deed hij dat niet, dan werd hij zondaar, dan miste hij het groote doel des levens. En ongerechtigheid is zich losscheuren, losrukken van God en goddelijke zaken. Het is rebellie, opstand, revolutie. Nu is dit van toepassing op alle mensen in alle tijden. We hebben ons in Adam van God losgerukt en zijn tegen Hem opgestaan. We hebben den krijg aangeboden met God. En na Adam keuren wij dat allen goed, en bij onze geboorte vechten we direct mee tegen God en Zijn Gezalfde. Nu wordt dit van nature nooit zoo toegestemd.

De mensch heeft vele vonden gezocht. En als hij zich als opstandeling tegen God in namelooze ellende ziet, dan geeft hij ook God nog de schuld. En dan vloekt men God. Ziet het uiteindelijk in de Openbaring van Johannes. Als God met Zijn rechtvaardige oordeelen komt, dan vloeken en lasteren zij rechtstreeks den God des hemels en der aarde. Evenwel, sommigen onder die opstandelingen ontvangen het licht van Gods eeuwige genade in hun diepste hart. En die genade verlicht hen door en door. En de eerste vrucht is wel, dat zij zichzelf zondaren en onrechtvaardigen noemen. En dat volk wordt hier bedoeld. En dan beginnen zij te treuren over hunnen staat en toestand. Zie vers 9: "Ik zal des Heeren gramschap dragen, want ik heb tegen Hem gezondigd;

totdat Hij mijnen twist twistte en mijn recht uitvoere: Hij zal mij uitbrengen aan het licht, ik zal mijnen lust zien aan Zijne gerechtigheid."

De tekst zegt verder: Hij zal zich *onzer* ontfermen! Onze tekst is zeer particulier. Het ziet niet op alle menschen, doch op *ons*, zegt Micha. Leest vers 18: "Wie is een God gelijk Gij, die de ongerechtigheid vergeeft en de overtreding van het overblijfsel Zijner erfenis voorbijgaat?" Het overblijfsel Zijner erfenis! Die zijn de voorwerpen van dezen troostrijken tekst.

En als ge blijft vragen naar de beteekenis van die benaming, dan zou ik U willen wijzen op Deut. 4:20, en daar lezen we dit: "Maar ulieden heeft de Heere aangenomen en uit den ijzeroven, uit Egypte, uitgevoerd, opdat gij Hem tot een erfvolk zoudt zijn, gelijk het te dezen dage is." Daar hebt ge het. God verloor niet Egypte of Babel, doch Hij verloor Israel, Zijn bondsvolk. Ziet ge, God heeft een volk. En Hij heeft dat volk eeuwiglijk in Zijn hart. Nooit vergeet Hij dat volk. Schoon zwaar getergd door dat volk in hunne zonden en ongerechtigheden, gedenkt Hij ten slotte altijd aan Zijn genade, Zijn eeuwige genade. En buigt Zich tot dat volk neder als het in de slavernij van het geestelijke Egypte verkeert, en verlost hen met een sterke arm. En daarom zijn de voorwerpen hier, en overal in de Heilige Schrift, het Israel der eeuwen. Ook vandaag gaat het om het ware Israel. Zij zijn eenvoudig weg de uitverkorenen Gods.

En ge kunt het ook weten of ge tot die uitverkorenen behoort. Als ge tot dat volk behoort, dan spreekt ge in Uw diepste hart als dat volk. Dan noemt ge Uzelf de zondaar en de ongerechtige man. En ik verzeker U, dat dit almachtige genade neemt om dat toe te stemmen. Welnu, over dat volk gaat het in mijn tekst. Zij zijn de voorwerpen van een eeuwige ontferming.

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Er is veel ellende in de wereld. Deze aarde wordt terecht een tranendal genoemd. Er is een onuitsprekelijke smart die alle menschen doet zuchten. Er is een smart des lichaams en een smart der ziel. En de oorzaken zijn legio. Leest Uw couranten en tijdschriften, en zij zullen U vertellen van den weedom der wereld. Evenwel, voor Gods erfvolk is de grootste oorzaak hunner ellende de zonde en de ongerechtigheid. Zoo spoedig het licht van Gods genade in hun hart nederdaalt schreien ze tot God en roepen om Zijn ontferming. Dat is de droefheid tot God die een onberouwelijke bekeering werkt tot zaligheid. Paulus spreekt ervan tot de Corinthiërs. En de bron van die droefheid is de liefde Gods die door den Heiligen Geest

in hunne harten is uitgestort. Die liefde geeft hun de begeerte om volmaakt voor God te leven. Dat nu kunnen zij niet. Zij zondigen elken dag, en daarom is er een gedurige ervaring van smart en droefheid. Ze gevoelen zich ellendig. Als de wereldlingen spreken van hun smarten vanwege allerlei ervaring in dit leven, dan zeggen zij: dat is niet de oorzaak van mijn tranen. Ik ween omdat ik zondaar ben voor God. Dat maakt al het verschil.

En die ellende nu is de toestand die roept om Gods ontferming. Als de wereld ook droefheid heeft, doch een droefheid die door Paulus genoemd wordt de droefheid der wereld, dan werkt die droefheid niet dan de dood. Maar als ge bedroefd zijt vanwege de zonde die ge bedreven hebt, dan verkeert ge in den toestand die roept om Gods ontferming. En Gods volk weet dat. Want hun vertegenwoordiger Micha zegt: God zal Zich onzer ontfermen.

En als ge nu vraagt: maar wat is de ontferming Gods? Dan is ons antwoord: het is die deugd van den DrieEenigen God die Zich uitstrekt tot Zijn volk, dat zoo weent in hunne zonde, met het Goddelijk verlangen om hen uit die vreeselijke toestand te verlossen. En, let wel, dat verlangen van God wordt steeds vervuld. Ziet het maar aan die ontelbare schare van uitverkorenen die nu al in den hemel zijn. Ze hebben erbarmelijk geschreid op aarde. Doch nu juichen ze voor den troon. Van alle eeuwen werd dit verlangen Gods vervuld. Beide in het Oude en in het Nieuwe Testament. Al het erfvolk dat klaagde over de zonde en de ongerechtigheid is nu al in den hemel, of zal er zeker aanlanden. Want hunne zonden en ongerechtigheden verdwijnen. Dat zegt de tekst immers? Onze ongerechtigheden worden door God gedempt.

Wat beteekent het? Dat beteekent dit: als schuld worden die ongerechtigheden uitgewischt. God heeft een gedenkboek voor Zijn aangezicht. En elke keer dat ge zondigt komt er een inboeking van die daad in dit boek Gods. En God slaat niets over. Het staat er van U beschreven van de wieg tot den laatsten snik. De eerste post die ingeboekt is, is de schuld van Adams zonde die U toegerekend wordt. En die post wordt gevolgd door de ontelbare posten van Uwe dadelijke zonden. Maar God wischt ze allen uit als ge tot Zijn erfvolk behoort. Dat hebben we U immers voorgelezen uit het verband? Hij gaat de zonde van Zijn erfvolk voorbij. En de tekst zegt duidelijk, dat Hij de ongerechtigheden dempt. Dus ze zijn weg. Die gedachte wordt versterkt door het tweede deel: alle hunne zonden worden in de diepten der zee geworpen!

Wat een onuitsprekelijke lieflijke gedachte! Daar in ligt de idee van een eeuwige vergetelheid. De zonden van Gods volk zijn dan weg, weg voor eeuwig. Wie zou niet zingen? De ongerechtigheden die ons

zoo deden weenen werden gedempt. Hier schijnt het beeld van een gat dat volgemaakt wordt met aarde ten grondslag te liggen van het eeuwig Evangelie. En de zonden worden door God geworpen in de diepten der zee. Dus daar zien we ze nooit meer. Zij zijn voor eeuwig weg. Wat verrukkelijke gedachte, want beide de ongerechtigheden en de zonden waren oorzaak van een niet uit te spreken smart. Doch ziet nu dat volk: ze juichen; ook zingen ze.

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Wat mag de grond zijn voor zulk een ontzaglijk ontfermen? Hoe kan een rechtvaardig God zoo handelen met die bergen van ongerechtigheden en zonden? Is Hij geen rechtvaardig God die straffen moet den zondaar? Behoort het niet tot Zijn heilig Wezen om steeds den zondaar te straffen? Staat er niet in den Bijbel, dat de ziel die gezondigd heeft sterven moet? O zeker, dat is allemaal waar. En hier is het diepe van het Evangelie: dat straffen van alle zonden is ook van toepassing op het erfvolk. God maakt geen uitzondering met hen. O neen. God kan zoo maar niet de zonden wegwerpen in de diepten van de zee. Hij moet alle zonden straffen. En alle zonden, ook van de uitverkorenen, worden ook daadwerkelijk gestraft. Als we den oordeelsdag achter ons hebben, dan zal de gansche wereld zien, dat alle de zonden en ongerechtigheden van de kerk gestraft zijn.

Maar hier is het Evangelie van God: God straft al die ongerechtigheid aan een ander. En toch ook weer niet een ander. Ik heb het hier over Jezus Christus, onzen Heere en Verlosser. Hij is eigenlijk geen ander. Want God heeft Hem één gemaakt met Zijn volk. Gelijk Adam ons eerste verbondshoofd was, zoo is Jezus het tweede of laatste Verbondshoofd. Gelijk we allen in Adam sterven, zoo worden we allen in ons tweede verbondshoofd levend gemaakt. Jezus is onzer één geworden: vleesch van ons vleesch, en been van ons been.

O zeker, God heeft het schoon uitgedacht en besloten in Zijn raad. Van eeuwigheid is Jezus onzer één. Jezus heeft daarvan getuigd in Zijn hoogepriesterlijk gebed. Daar zegt Hij immers: Zij waren Uwe, en Gij hebt Mij dezelve gegeven! Zoo stond en zoo staat het in Gods eeuwigen raad. Er zijn slechts twee partijen: God en Zijn volk. En wie is dan Jezus? Hij is beide partijen vereend in den persoon van den Zoon van God. De eenigheid van God en mensch in Jezus is in den Persoon van Jezus. En zoo komt die Jezus in de geschiedenis. Zoo komt Hij Gods Raad uit om al Gods welbehagen te doen. En dat welbehagen komt tot openbaring in de kribbe van Bethlehem, in

Zijn leven en lijden, in Zijn kruisdood en begrafenis. En in Zijn nederdaling ter helle. Hij was één met het erfvolk van God; en Hij was ook hun Vertegenwoordiger. En zoo komt Hij voor God te staan met al de ongerechtigheid en al de zonden van Gods volk op Zich geladen. En dan gaat God Hem verbrijzelen. Zijt nu heel stil! Want er geschieden vreeselijke dingen daar op het kruis van Golgotha. God is de ongerechtigheid van Zijn volk aan het dempen. God is aan het wegwerpen, in de diepten van de zee, al de zonden van Zijn volk. Maar o, wat wondere mirakelen Gods! Jezus, onze Jezus wordt medegedempt. Jezus wordt weggeworpen in de diepten van de zee van eeuwige Godsverlating. Terwijl God aan het dempen en wegwerpen is schreeuwt de Borg in helsche smarten van een eeuwigen donkeren nacht: Mijn God waarom hebt Gij Mij verlaten!? Ik moet hier vreeselijk werken met hoofdletters. Want het is al uit God, door God en tot God.

Let er toch op: Jezus is met al Uwe zonden in de diepten van eeuwige smarten geworpen. Dat is het Evangelie. Dat is de grond voor de ontfermingen van Jehovah. Dat God de zonde niet aan U straffen wilde, doch aan Uw Verlosser en Zaligmaker Jezus Christus. Dat Hij een weg verkoor door het bloed en sterven en hellelijden van Jezus, opdat gij op dien weg wandelende aan mocht komen in Zijn hart. Verstaat ge nu dien vreeselijken psalm, waar Jezus in de profetie kermt: Alle Uwe baren en alle Uwe golven zijn over Mij heen gegaan? Het is Jezus die den grond aan 't leggen is voor het dempen van Uwe ongerechtigheden en het wegwerpen van Uwe zonden. Zingt nu blij te moe, God den lofzang toe! En doe het eeuwiglijk!

G. Vos.

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As pants the hart for cooling streams,
When heated in the chase,
So longs my soul, O God, for Thee
And Thy refreshing grace.

For Thee, my God, the living God,
My thirsty soul doth pine,
O when shall I behold Thy face,
Thou Majesty Divine?

Why restless, why cast down, my soul?
Hope still, and thou shalt sing:
The praise of Him Who is thy God,
Thy health's eternal spring.

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EDITORIALS

The Closing of Concordia

The article that appears below, "Reply to the Rev. Kok", was written and sent before *Concordia* was closed.

I think it very strange, to put it mildly, that *Concordia* first allows the Rev. Kok to attack me, permits him to announce to all our people that he intends to ask me some questions, and thereupon closes its columns so that I cannot reply.

This, as far as I can remember, happened to me only once before. That was in 1923-24, when the Christian Reformed Church closed its papers to the discussion of our part on the issue of "common grace."

In the meantime, it will be evident that I cannot allow *The Standard Bearer* to be filled with all sorts of controversial articles on the question of conditions as long as *Concordia* remains closed. And as soon as I am allowed space in *Concordia* I will answer the Rev. Kok's questions.

Here follows my reply to the Rev. Kok. It is an answer to the last article of his that appeared in *Concordia*.

REPLY TO THE REV. KOK

Esteemed Editor:

The Rev. Kok, at the close of his article in *Concordia* of Sept. 25, 1952, promised a list of questions to me, to be answered publicly. This, of course, I am willing to do: for I always like to answer questions. The brother sent them to me, and I already took cognizance of them. But in an accompanying letter he asked me to answer his questions in the *Standard Bearer*. I replied to him that I would be glad to answer his questions, but in *Concordia*, and not in the *Standard Bearer*. You will realize, Mr. Editor, that it wouldn't be fair to answer those questions in the *Standard Bearer*, for the whole discussion concerning "conditions" was started by the Rev. Kok not in the *Standard Bearer*, but in *Concordia*. It was in *Concordia* that he announced his intention to send me certain questions. And therefore in *Concordia* I must answer them. Besides, I understand that not all the readers of *Concordia* read the *Standard Bearer*, although they should, of course, because the *Standard Bearer* is still the bearer of Protestant Reformed truth. Yet, seeing that they do not, I am glad to accommodate those brethren, so that they also read our correspondence. Hence, Mr. Editor, I must ask you

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for a little space in your paper, and to publish my articles, which I expect to make as brief as possible, until I am finished.

The present article may serve, perhaps, as sort of general introduction.

And then I want to say, in the first place, that I find it rather strange, to say the least, that the Rev. Kok so desperately attempted to ascribe to me conditional theology, to which,—as the whole church well knows,—I have never been addicted, but which always I have principally opposed. By this I do not mean an occasional use of the term *condition* (and very occasional, to say the least, in view of my voluminous writing in the past), but the conditional theology as it is advocated in recent years in our churches. This attempt on the part of the Rev. Kok I find very strange. With a fine comb, like a detective that scrapes a carpet for a clew, he (Was it, perhaps, in collaboration with others in our churches?) went through all my writings, to discover whether he could perhaps find a trace of conditional theology in my writings.

The result is indeed meager enough.

Consider that by this time there are, perhaps, approximately twenty thousand pages of my writing in print, including, of course, my articles in the *Standard Bearer*. In all those pages the Rev. Kok found comparatively very few instances in which I used the term *condition*, while in all my writings I always emphasized, and still emphasize, that the promise of God is unconditional and for the elect only. I dare say that everybody knows that whatever use I made of the term *condition* in the past, I never advocated conditional theology as it is advocated in our churches today.

I ask: is this deliberate attempt on the part of the Rev. Kok honest and fair?

I fail to see it.

Consider that the few times when I employ the term theologically occurred in my writings several years ago. Now in the first place, is it honest and fair to cite those few instances apart from the context or all my writings? But above all, is it fair to quote me from my past writings as if in the meantime nothing has happened? Remember that in those years I used the term *condition* very occasionally, without being required to pay special attention to the term, or to attach any special significance to it. My use of the term had nothing to do with our present controversy, and had nothing to do with conditional theology as it is emphasized in our churches in some circles today. At that time there was no cloud in the sky. But since then things have changed. A strange new emphasis is being laid on the term *condition*. And, in connection with that term, a new sound is heard in our churches,

that is, I dare say, certainly not Protestant Reformed. Is it honest, then, to quote me now from articles that I printed years ago, as if nothing had happened, and to pay no attention to what I have written on the term *condition* in recent years?

I think not.

In his last article the Rev. Kok writes: "it is not I that have attacked the good reputation of either the Rev. Ophoff, or Hoeksema, but they have cast suspicions on me, and that because I am defending the very truth which they have always defended, namely the truth of a *general proclamation of a particular or conditional promise*." And somewhat later the Rev. Kok writes: "I maintain that the Rev. H. Hoeksema is speaking Reformed language here, and because of this I must suffer shame as an evildoer. Let me add that by the grace of God I gladly bear this reproach for the sake of the truth."

I ask: is this quite true? Is the Rev. Kok reproached because of the truth that the promise is particular, and therefore only for the elect? I hope to refer back to this statement somewhat later. But I ask: was so much dust raised in our churches because the Rev. Kok did nothing else than proclaim this truth? I am certainly glad that the Rev. Kok subscribes to this truth, provided he rightly understands what is meant by the general proclamation of a particular or conditional promise. This I will explain later. But once more I ask: why raise so much disturbance in the churches about nothing? Did we really so completely misunderstand one another? I, for one, would be glad if this were the case. But in the light of the facts I cannot possibly believe this.

Allow me, therefore, very briefly to relate the history of our Protestant Reformed Churches in recent years. I relate that history from memory. But I trust that as to the main facts it is without doubt correct.

And then I must undoubtedly begin with the visit of Dr. Schilder in 1947. Dr. Schilder visited our shores before, on an invitation of the Chr. Ref. Churches in 1938. Between 1938 and 1947, or roughly speaking, during the war years, Dr. Schilder had radically changed his views. As soon as we could have contact with the Netherlands, in 1945, I wrote him an emphatic letter, in which I expressed my amazement and grief that he had so radically turned about, particularly in regard to his view of the covenant. This was evident from his completely changed attitude toward the Chr. Ref. Churches of the Netherlands. Before these years Dr. Schilder had always been opposed to the standpoint of those churches, and upbraided them because they walked in the way of disobedience by going their separate way in 1892. However, in a

meeting in the Hague in 1944, where the Liberation was decided upon, Dr. Schilder made a plea for union with those same Chr. Ref. Churches. At the same time, as had already been evident from the *Reformatie*, the Liberated, and also Dr. Schilder, embraced the Heynsian view of the covenant, the essence of which is that in baptism God promises salvation to all that are baptized, head for head and soul for soul. As I say, I wrote him a letter, in which I very emphatically criticized him for this change in attitude. This letter he never answered. Instead, he asked me whether I would not make arrangements for him to come to these shores and to explain the Liberation to our churches. This I did; and the result was that Dr. Schilder again visited us. This time our churches, and not the Chr. Ref. Churches, in 1947. I understand that especially in the West and in different conferences he made a strong plea for his covenant conception and for the conditional promise to all.

In the meantime, we must remember, the Lord had put me down, so that I was quite helpless for a long time. Nevertheless, when Dr. Schilder returned here from the West, I defended, in two conferences with him, our own covenant view in 13 propositions,—this in spite of the fact that at the time it was far beyond my strength to do so; nor was I as alert as I might have been at the time, and as, thanks to God, I may be again at the present time.

Soon it became evident that the seed which Dr. Schilder had sown, particularly in the West, had struck root, and began to sprout. *Concordia* began to write about "conditions" as indeed a very important element in our theology. Only on the basis of conditions could the responsibility of man be maintained. Only if we maintained conditions, could we preach a full-orbed gospel. This was the beginning of our controversy. All of us began to pay very sharp attention to the meaning of the term *conditions*. The Rev. Ophoff discussed the term in the light of Scripture. And I, as it will be remembered, began a series of articles on the meaning and use of the term *condition* in our confessions.

At the Synod of 1948 it was decided very carefully to take steps in the direction of correspondence with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Art. 31). I say *carefully*, because in our letter addressed to the Synod of those churches in the Netherlands we clearly expressed that we did not expect that their Synod should immediately decide to establish the relation of sister churches between them and us. Nor, we said, must they expect this of us. However, we asked that their committee of correspondence would contact our committee, that the matter could be discussed between us, and that after such a discussion we could advise

our synod what steps to take in regard to correspondence.

In the meantime, however, the Rev. J. de Jong and B. Kok went to the Netherlands. They met with the committee of correspondence of the Ref. Churches (Art. 31) of the Netherlands in unofficial capacity, which, however, had the result that even the most pronounced opponents of the Prot. Ref. truth, such as Van Dijk, Van Raalte, Holwerda, etc., were satisfied, and were willing to have full correspondence with us. No further discussion between their committee and ours was evidently deemed necessary. Nor was a meeting between their committee and ours ever held. Proof of the fact that no further discussion was considered necessary is that, on his return from the old country, the Rev. de Jong had a letter in his pocket asking for full correspondence.

Then came the letter of Prof. Holwerda to the Canadian immigrants. And in that letter he reported that the Revs. Kok and de Jong had told him personally that in our churches the sympathy for the Liberated was great also in the matter of the doctrine of the covenant, and that for the conception of the Liberated there is ample room in our churches. Remember that the doctrine of the Liberated is principally opposed to the doctrine of the covenant which had always been maintained in the Prot. Ref. Churches. Their doctrine is briefly that the promise is conditional, for all. Our doctrine is that the promise is unconditional, for the elect.

Next came the trouble in the church of Hamilton, caused by the fact that they wanted to throw the church doors wide open for the Liberated and their view, while we demanded that they must first be instructed and promise not to agitate against the Prot. Ref. conception.

The result of the trouble with Canada was that the Mission Committee asked for a synodical declaration on the basis of which they could organize churches. Again, the result was the Declaration of Principles, which maintained, on the basis of the confessions, the truth which had always been held dear in the Prot. Ref. Churches. I ask again: why was so much dust raised about the Declaration, if by the use of the term *condition* the Rev. Kok meant nothing else than the general proclamation of a particular promise?

But even after in 1951 the Declaration was adopted, the Rev. Kok did not cease to agitate against it, but used the name of Dr. Schilder to oppose it. In *Concordia* he translated and strongly recommended an article by the late Dr. Schilder, in which the latter not only attacked the Declaration, but also incorporated his erroneous view of the promise of God. And again, he attacked the Declaration of Principles through

the means of offering to our church public a brochure which Prof. Schilder wrote against the Declaration.

Those are, very briefly, the facts.

I ask: is it surprising that those who love the Protestant Reformed truth received the impression that the Rev. Kok rather favors the Liberated view, and is at least in favor of throwing open our church doors to the Liberated and their conception of the covenant?

The Rev. Kok complains that he suffers reproach. But I claim that he is to blame himself. He and others have been raising the dust about conditions. He and others have been leaving the impression that they favor the Liberated view, and prefer it to our Protestant Reformed conception. He and others have been attempting to throw open our church doors to the Liberated and their conception of the covenant.

This is the history of our churches in recent years. And no one can deny the facts.

H.H.

IN MEMORIAM

The Ladies' Society of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church hereby expresses its sympathy with its fellow-member Mrs. James Miedema in the loss of her mother,

MRS. PETER BOONSTRA

whom the Lord took unto Himself at the age of 75 years.

May the God of all comfort give grace to our bereaved sister, and may she be comforted in the thought that mother's life was Christ and therefore her death gain.

The Hudsonville Prot. Ref. Ladies' Society
Rev. Gerrit Vos, Pres.
Mrs. Peter Lubbers, Secr.

O Lord, make haste to hear my cry,
To Thee I call, on Thee rely;
Incline to me a gracious ear,
And, when I call, in mercy hear.

Guard Thou my thoughts, I Thee implore,
And of my lips keep Thou the door;
Nor leave my sinful heart to stray
Where evil footsteps lead the way.

O righteous God, Thy chastisement,
Though sent through foes, in love is sent;
Though grievous, it will profit me,
A healing ointment it shall be.

Brought nigh to death and sore distressed,
O Lord, my God, in Thee I rest;
Forsake me not, I look to Thee,
Let me Thy great salvation see.

THE TRIPLE KNOWLEDGE

An Exposition Of The Heidelberg Catechism

PART III

OF THANKFULNESS

Lord's Day 33

3

Mortification and Quickening

Conversion we defined as the work of God whereby the regenerated sinner through the Spirit and Word is efficaciously turned about from the way of sin to the way of righteousness, from the service of the devil to the service of God, the fruit of which is that the converted sinner hates sin, eschews it and flees from it, and walks in the way of God's precepts with his whole heart.

This definition we must bear in mind even when we treat of the mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new.

According to this definition, regeneration is first. It is true that in our confessions no clear distinction is made between regeneration and conversion. But this distinction is certainly Scriptural and proper; and in the development of theology subsequent to the composition of our confessions, this distinction was maintained. A man must be born again before he can even see the kingdom of God. And he must be born of water and Spirit before he can enter it.

Besides it is evident from the definition that we ascribe the entire work of conversion to God. There is nothing of man in it.

And finally, the definition also maintains the truth that God in the work of conversion never treats man as a stock and block, always deals with him as a rational and moral creature. And therefore, God's work of conversion bears the fruit that we turn, that we eschew evil and flee from it, and that we love God's precepts and keep them.

This work of conversion is most beautifully and accurately described in the Canons of Dordrecht, III, IV 10-12, part of which we already quoted before.

In Article 10 we read: "But that others who are called by the gospel, obey the call, and are converted, is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will, whereby one distinguishes himself above others, equally furnished with grace sufficient for faith and conversions, as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains; but it must be wholly ascribed to God, who as

he has chosen his own from eternity in Christ, so he confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of his own Son, that they may show forth the praises of him, who hath called them out of darkness into his marvelous light; and may glory not in themselves, but in the Lord, according to the testimony of the apostles in various places."

We may note here that the article ascribes the whole of conversion to God. There is nothing of man in it. To say that conversion is the work of man, or partly the work of man, is Pelagianism. We may also note that while the article emphatically speaks of conversion as the work of God, it nevertheless also speaks of the fruit of that work in us, the fruit being the same as the purpose for which God works conversion in His people, namely, that they may show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light, and may glory not in themselves, but in the Lord. Further, it is also evident from this article that this work of conversion by God is rooted in, or based upon, eternal election. God chose them whom He converts. And none but the elect are ever converted. It is the work of God's sovereign grace, bestowed only upon those whom He has chosen in Christ. It consists in this, that God bestows upon His elect both faith and repentance, and that He translates them from the power of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son.

To Article 11 we already referred in a former connection. Nevertheless, it may be well to quote it once more. It describes the manner of conversion by God as follows: "But when God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by his Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man; he opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, he quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions."

From this article, and also from the article that follows in the same chapter of the Canons, it is very evident that no distinction is made between regeneration in the narrower sense and conversion. In other words, if we make the distinction which was made in a later period between regeneration and conversion, the article very plainly teaches that conversion is

rooted in the work of regeneration. The regenerated are called and converted. Here too, as will be evident to all, the whole work of conversion is ascribed to God. Man is passive, not active. In conversion God opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, infuses new qualities into the will and quickens it. That will is by nature evil, disobedient, and refractory; but God renders the will pliable, good, and obedient. He actuates it and strengthens it. But even this does not mean that conversion treats a man as a stock and block. On the contrary, it renders him truly free, and responsible in the highest sense of the word, so that "like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions."

In Article 12 it becomes especially very clear that the Canons make no distinction between regeneration in the wider sense, and conversion. It teaches as follows: "And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture, and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead, a making alive, which God works in us without our aid. But this is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation, that after God has performed his part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted, or to continue unconverted; but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the author of this work declares; so that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner, are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe. Whereupon the will thus renewed, is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received."

It is especially to the last part of this article of the Canons that we wish to direct your attention. By the work of God's regenerating Spirit man is converted. Nor is it in his power or choice to remain unconverted. Nevertheless, again it is emphasized that through the work of conversion man does not become a stock and block, but by the continual influence of God upon him becomes himself active, so that he repents and believes.

This is emphasized once more in Article 16 of the same chapter of the Canons: "But as man by the fall did not cease to be a creature, endowed with understanding and will, nor did sin which pervaded the whole race of mankind, deprive him of the human nature, but brought upon him depravity and spiritual death; so also this grace of regeneration does not

treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor takes away their will and its properties, neither does violence thereto; but spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it; that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed, a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign; in which the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consist. Wherefore unless the admirable author of every good work wrought in us, man could have no hope of recovering from his fall by his own free will, by the abuse of which, in a state of innocence, he plunged himself into ruin."

I call attention to this beautiful and thoroughly Reformed description of the work of conversion because it plainly reveals how absolutely unconditional the application of the promise of God to the elect is. Neither to attain to the promise, nor to remain in the possession of the blessings of that promise, are there any prerequisites or conditions which man must fulfill. It is God that regenerates the sinner by the efficacious and sovereign grace, according as He chose His people in Christ Jesus. It is God that converts the sinner principally, so that he is translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, so that he is turned from darkness into light, from the way of iniquity unto the way of righteousness. And there are no prerequisites and no conditions which man must perform in order to receive this grace of conversion. But even after he has so been converted, he does not of himself turn, repent, mortify the deeds of the body, and walk in a new and holy life. It is not so that the continued conversion of the regenerated and converted sinner is the work of man. Still less is it thus, that his striving is a prerequisite for him to continue in the kingdom of God. Also this is Arminian: for they teach indeed that our act of perseverance is a condition for God's grace of preservation. But this is quite contrary to the teaching of the Canons in this chapter. Even after the will is renewed, it must be actuated and influenced by God. And only in consequence of this continuous influence does the will itself become active. Never is our activity a condition of a prerequisite for the reception of God's grace. The very opposite is true. For according to the Canons, "man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received." Our active turning is never a prerequisite, but always the fruit of God's grace of conversion.

This must be plainly understood in order to obtain the right conception of what is meant by the mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new.

The word of God frequently speaks of the conversion of man. It employs different terms to denote

this wonder of grace. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament a term is used that simply means "to turn". Sometimes it is translated thus, and in other passages it is translated by the English term "convert". Thus in Psalm 19:7: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." In Ps. 51:13 the psalmist vows: "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee." The house of Israel is called to turn themselves from idols and from all their abominations. Ezek. 14:6. And in Ezek. 33:11 we read the well-known words, also quoted by the Synod of 1924 of the Chr. Ref. Churches to support their theory of common grace: "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" The people of Israel are exhorted to turn to their God and to keep mercy and judgment. Hos. 12:6. They are called to turn unto Him with all their heart, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. Joel 2:12,13. In all these passages, and many more in the Old Testament, the same word is used in the original for the idea of conversion. The New Testament employs two different terms, with slightly different connotation. The first word means approximately the same as our English word "conversion" or "convert", and denotes a complete turning about. The second term signifies a change of the mind, that is, of the whole inner man, and is translated "repentance". Thus, the Lord says to His disciples: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 18:3. John preached the baptism of repentance, that is, of an inner change in the sinner. Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3. The apostles come to the people with the exhortation: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted." Acts 3:19. And they preached that God hath exalted Christ to be a Prince and Savior, "for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Acts 5:31. The church in Jerusalem glorifies God, acknowledging that He "also to the Gentiles granted repentance and life." Acts 11:18. And Paul was sent to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," and that "they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." Acts 26:18, 20. Moreover, conversion in the broader sense of the word is called "sanctification, cleansing, purification, the putting off of the old man, and the putting on of the new man, the mortification of the deeds of the body, etc." Cf. II Cor. 7:1; I John 3:4; Eph. 4:22-24; Rom. 8:13.

From all these different passages of Scripture, and from many others, we may readily gather what is the

Scriptural teaching concerning true conversion. It is a complete and radical turning about in the spiritual, ethical sense of the word. It is a turning from Satan to God, from standing in enmity against God to the love of God in Christ, from darkness to light, from sin to righteousness, from corruption to holiness. By nature we are in the power of darkness. And what this means is clear from Scripture and from all our Reformed confessions. It means, as our Heidelberg Catechism teaches us, that we are so corrupt that we are incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil, unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God. It means that we are by nature carnally minded, and stand in enmity against God: "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, . . . For to be carnally minded is death . . . Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Rom. 8:5-7. It means that we hate God, and that we hate one another: "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." But it means still more: for we are not only in darkness, but, according to Scripture, we are in the power of darkness. Col. 1:13. This implies that we are slaves of sin, that we are in bondage to sin. It means that we have no right in ourselves to be delivered from sin. And it implies that we are so in the power of darkness that we can never deliver ourselves from sin. We must sin not by any outward compulsion, but by the inward impulse of our wicked heart and mind. We are chained to sin from within. As the Canons express it in III, IV, 1, 3, the sinner is one that "became involved in blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment; became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections." And again, "Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation." And as the Scriptures have it in Eph. 2:1-3: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Such we are by nature, in our unconverted state. By nature

the sinner is motivated by enmity against God, and as a result his whole life is directed in the way of darkness and sin. He loves the darkness rather than the light, and can do nothing else. His heart and mind and will, and all his desires and inclinations turn away from God, and are enslaved to the will of the devil. Hence, also his outward life and walk is turned into the direction of unrighteousness. He walks away from God and contrary to His precepts. But when God converts him, he is turned away from all this, in order to turn unto the living God. His hatred of God is changed into love. His darkness is turned into light. His love of iniquity is turned into love of God's precepts. And his members, which he yielded as instruments of unrighteousness, he now yields as instruments of righteousness unto God.

This conversion, this spiritual turning about, is radical and complete. It is a turning about of the entire man, with his internal life as well as with his external walk. It is by no means the same as a moral, external reformation, by virtue of which a man for some reason changes his external deportment, so that he who once was a drunkard now lives soberly, or one that lived in sexual abandonment now walks in chastity. But it is a turning about of the entire man, inward and outward. Or, if you wish, it is such a turning about of our outward walk that is rooted in and a manifestation of, an inward change of the heart and mind, of the will, and of all our affections. It is not a superficial change, but a radical turning about. It is a break with sin as sin, and turning to God for God's sake, a love of righteousness for righteousness' sake. Hence, it cannot be a turning away from some sins, and the keeping of some of God's precepts. It is a hatred of all sin, and a fundamental delight in all the precepts of the Lord our God. This complete and radical turning about of the sinner is conversion.

H.H.



Trust not in man who soon must die,
But on the living God rely;
Most blest the man whose help is He
That made the heaven and earth and sea.

Thy God shall reign for evermore,
Praise Him, O Zion, and adore;
The Lord is heaven's eternal King,
To Him all praise and honor bring.

OUR DOCTRINE

God's Providence

(4)

GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND SIN

The Lord's sovereign government and control over all things a "bone of contention" throughout the ages.

The pelagian and determinist do not face the problem but evade it. The pelagian would "solve" the problem simply by denying the absolute sovereignty of the Lord and maintaining the will of man as wholly independent of the living God. He prides himself in the fact that he gives due place to the responsibility of man and accuses the man of reformed persuasion that he neglects to stress the importance of the truth of man's responsibility. It is well that we bear this in mind, also in our present day. However, the pelagian confuses man's freedom with sovereignty. According to the pelagian conception of things, the will of man is inherently good, is good as far as its root is concerned. He is able to do the good. Moreover, all things are dependent upon this will of man, and it is man, not God, who determines his salvation. Of course, maintaining this conception of things we simply lose God as the Sovereign Ruler over all things, and have no eye for the stern reality that all men sin, are all alike as far as their spiritual condition is concerned, but only few are saved. Why is it, if all men are inherently good, that all become corrupt and that only a few are saved?! The pelagian is surely at a complete loss to explain this phenomenon. He cannot account for the universal corruption of the human race. The pelagian, we understand, denies original pollution, that the corruption of Adam is transmitted to the entire human race, and teaches that all men are born inherently good. One might conceivably understand, upon the basis of pelagianism, that some of the children of men would choose the way of sin and corruption but that the vast majority of men would walk in the way of the Lord's commandments. But, how can the pelagian possibly explain the tremendous phenomenon that *all* are conceived and born in sin, change the glory of the uncorruptible God, and seek, without a single exception, the things that are below? Indeed, the pelagian has no explanation for the universal phenomenon of sin.

The deterministic conception of matters goes to the other extreme and "explains" this problem by the

simple expedient of denying man's responsibility. According to this view man is merely a machine. He is moved by the hand of the Lord without any action on his part. He is merely a pawn upon the chess-board of the Lord. This operation of the Lord simply takes place through the will and mind of man. Man is wholly passive, is simply "pushed about" by the Lord. Such is the deterministic conception of things. Also this presentation we must and do wholly reject, although it is true that our churches have been falsely accused of this heresy by the enemies of God's sovereignty. This deterministic conception has no place for the truth that man is a moral-rational, responsible being.

In Reformed circles we are confronted, in connection with this problem of the Lord's providence and sin, first of all with the weak infralapsarian conception of sin. The word, "infralapsarian," derived from the word, "infra-lapsis," means literally: under the fall. The exponents of this conception place election and reprobation, *in God's counsel*, as following upon the fall of man, prefer to speak of sin as taking place with the Lord's permission, and therefore believe that God has elected and reprobated out of a fallen humanity. It is well to bear in mind that the infralapsarian-supralapsarian controversy is applicable and refers only to the counsel of God. Reprobation, according to the infralapsarian, is therefore merely the Lord's decree to leave people in their sin and death. The motive and purpose prompting this conception is to refrain from making God the author of sin. Recoiling from making the Lord the author of sin (incidentally, the supralapsarian also recoils from presenting God as the author of sin), infralapsarianism would rather proceed, in the counsel of God, from mankind as fallen and makes no effort to explain the phenomenon of sin in the counsel of the Lord. This infralapsarian view of sin and grace, however, is surely quite unsatisfactory. First of all, it does not explain the strong expressions which occur in Holy Writ which touch upon this matter. We will have more to say about this presently. However, we may safely remark at this time that this objection of the supralapsarian against the infralapsarian conception of sin and grace is readily granted by the exponents of the latter view who readily admit that they fail to do justice to these strong Scriptural expressions. Secondly, it fails to answer to its purpose. The infralapsarian purposes to avoid making the Lord the author of sin. But, I pray, what is more cruel: a God Who causes man to fall, or a God Who can prevent the fall but nevertheless permits it to happen and then leaves the sinner in his sin and death whom he is able to save? Do not misunderstand me. Neither the infralapsarian nor the supralapsarian ascribes cruelty to the Lord. God is

never cruel, not even when He plunges the wicked into hell. This may never be confused with Divine cruelty. But, the question is whether the infralapsarian succeeds in avoiding the error of making the Lord the author of sin by the simple expedient of declaring that the Lord permitted sin and then leaves men in their common misery. And the answer is an unmistakable No. Thirdly, infralapsarianism, according to our conviction, is fundamentally dualistic. Dualism, as well as the antithetical conception of things, speaks of light and darkness, life and death, as contrasted with one another. But the antithetical conception of things explains this contrast as originating in the one source, the only true God, whereas Dualism presents them as having a two-fold origin, always opposing one another and with the outcome in doubt. When we say that infralapsarianism is fundamentally dualistic we realize that the infralapsarian does not ascribe sin to another source. He simply does not explain its origin, proceeds from the reality of sin in the counsel of God. However, infralapsarianism is dualistic in the sense that it places sin in God's counsel without explaining its origin and therefore as independently of the Lord. Far better, to be sure, is the supralapsarian conception of sin and grace. This view places, *in God's counsel*, the decree of election and reprobation as prior to the fall of man. Creation and the fall of man are but God's sovereign means to realize His sovereign decree with respect to the eternal salvation and perdition of men. The Lord has sovereignly willed to reveal His amazing love and grace antithetically, in the eternal condemnation of the sinner (whom He has willed eternally) and in the salvation of His own through sin and death into heavenly and everlasting glory.

We are confronted here with a difficult problem. The difficulty of this problem, as we see it, does not lie in the proposition as such: God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Both propositions are clearly set forth and emphasized in the Word of God. God is sovereign and man is a responsible being. We must not confuse these propositions or in any sense of the word detract from them. We must never explain them at the cost of one another and may therefore never explain them as parallel to each other. This surely implies that we must never explain the responsibility of man at the cost of the sovereignty of the Lord. Man's responsibility must be viewed in the light of God's sovereignty and may therefore never be identified or confused with sovereign, determining freedom. The difficulty, however, lies here: how can the holy God direct the actions of men, of evil men, so that we do no injustice to man's responsibility and still maintain that God is holy and righteous. Sin may be *sovereignly* of the Lord, but man does the sin. We now

purpose to call attention to this problem in connection with our present series of articles on the providence of God.

A statement of the issue as such.

First, we need not call attention at this time to the concept: Providence of God. We have already called attention to the truth that God's Providence is His almighty and omnipresent power whereby He sustains and governs all things so that everything must work together unto the realization of that eternal goal and purpose which God has sovereignly willed from before the foundation of the world.

Secondly, we are confronted with the reality of sin. This fact as such we surely cannot deny. Even the most optimistic of human beings must acknowledge the fact of sin. One may refuse to glorify God and have no consciousness of sin in the spiritual and Scriptural sense of the word. But who would have the courage, the brazen effrontery today to lay claim to perfection? Such an one might conceivably be considered beside himself. The daily murders, the ever increasing rumors of war, the constant violations and misdemeanors speak only too emphatically of the jealousy and hatred which governs the children of men. Besides, anyone who is somewhat acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, yea, who has learned by the power of the grace of God what it means to be a sinner surely understands the fact of sin and iniquity. Hence, what tremendous phenomenon is this reality of evil. At the dawn of creation, when all the handiwork of the Lord united in singing praises unto the living God, when not a single defect marred the whole creation, sin entered this world and caused all things to become subject to the curse of the almighty and fearful God. Death and destruction it left in its wake. Sickness and misery, care and sorrows are our lot. Moreover, there is the fact of sin itself. We are all conceived and born in sin. What an iniquity abounds upon the face of the earth! Scripture and also our own experience impress upon us the reality that the powers of hell and darkness are ever attempting to subject this earth unto themselves. And, what is more, it seems that they are permitted to continue unmolested, mocking at God and His Christ, making of His Church the plaything of the ages. Indeed, whoever understands the terrible Scriptural truth that there is none that doeth good, no not one, that all have departed from the living God, that all men, without a single exception, are dead in sin and trespasses, understands very clearly, in all its horror, the fearful phenomenon of sin and its accompanying curse of the living God. Is it not a fearful thing that, following upon the sin of Adam and Eve in Paradise, every person entering this vale of

tears has been conceived and born in sin and death without a single exception? And is it not an equally fearful thing that the entire creation lies underneath the curse of God and that all things have been subjected to the power of death and corruption?

Having now the providence of the Lord and the reality of sin with all its accompanying results clearly before us, we face the question: What is the connection as such between them, according to Holy Writ, without as yet discussing the question how they are actually related to one another. In due time we will attempt to offer an interpretation, an explanation of this relation. Now we are merely concerned with the issue as such. What does Scripture tell us concerning the relation of sin to the providence of the Lord?

In connection with this question, we wish to state at the very outset that the child of God certainly demands a Scriptural explanation of God's Providence and sin. I must have an explanation, first of all, because of the fact of the power of sin. We must indeed cope with this power of sin and the accompanying curse of the living God in our lives. Sin and sickness and death are realities in our lives and our hearts surely cry for an explanation. But, we must also deal with the power of sin in the world about us. That wicked world hates God and His Christ and His Church. Seemingly they may proceed unmolested in their wickedness. It is for the child of God of the greatest significance to know whether God is God or whether that world rages against the Lord and His Anointed as having power in itself, and that therefore the cause of God's righteousness must suffer hurt and remain in doubt even until the end. Will the Church of the living God gain the triumph ultimately and at a tremendous cost? Will the Cause of the living God be compelled to pay dearly for its victory? Will we be saved but never be able to forget the scars which were inflicted upon us? Secondly, however, and this is indeed far more important than what we have just mentioned, my soul cries for an explanation because of God. The Name of God and the glory of the Lord are surely at stake. This, we say, is of much greater importance. For He is *my* God, is He not? Him I love, that eternal, only true God. My soul must have an explanation of the fact of sin because of my God. Does the Lord actually delight in sin and iniquity? But, is He not good? Or, if you will, does sin exist independently of the eternal Jehovah? But, is not the Lord the living God and God alone? Or, if God be sovereign, the only Ruler of heaven and earth, how must we explain that the world may continue in its mad iniquity? The Lord loves His Church with an everlasting love, does He not? And He should simply permit the wicked world to

fulfill all its wicked desires upon it? To answer that the Lord simply permits these things to happen does not satisfy. It does not satisfy for the simple reason that the Lord does not simply permit things to happen. He surely works all things according to His alone sovereign will and the counsel of His will. Or, to answer that the Lord does iniquity would be in conflict with His adorable holiness and perfection. Can our hope be stayed upon Him Who delights in sin and evil? On the other hand, to give sin a place independent of the Lord would be a denial of His sovereignty. And because my soul thirsts after the living God, because I desire that God remain God, I must have an answer to the question concerning the reality of sin in connection with the truth of God's providence. Romans 11:36: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen," must surely also be applied to the reality of iniquity. In other words: also the fact of sin must impart comfort to the child, the Church of the living God.

In answer to this urgent question it must be maintained, first of all, that God is really and truly God in all the operation of His providence. We certainly cannot emphasize too strongly that this must be understood in the absolute sense of the word. The Lord does not merely support and sustain all things, but He is also absolute and sovereign in His government of all things. There is simply no exception to this rule. We may and must surely maintain that there is nothing more certain than the word which proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. When He speaks it is and when He commands it stands. All things take place through that almighty word of the Lord. Generally speaking, this truth is accepted by all. I mean that this truth is accepted by all in a general sense of the word. Do not the Scriptures declare it so plainly so as to tolerate no discussion, that even all the hairs of our heads are numbered and that a sparrow does not fall off the housetop without the will of our heavenly Father? We all understand, and this truth is disputed by very few, that the Lord clothes every lily of the field and grants unto every living creature its daily sustenance. Indeed, there is little disagreement on this point. However, in the second place, we must also understand that the reality of sin occurs by and through the Providence of the Lord. And, also concerning this truth the Divine Scriptures do not leave us in doubt. The Word of the Lord speaks very plainly to this effect. Do not we read in the Scriptures that God forms the light and creates the darkness, yea, that He makes peace and creates the evil? Joseph is brought into Egypt through the abominations of his brothers; but when these brothers finally appear be-

fore him in the land of Egypt he declares unto them very plainly that the Lord has turned all their evil thoughts unto good. Repeatedly we read in the holy Scriptures that the Lord hardens the hearts of men. He hardens Pharaoh's heart and even proclaims unto Moses that He will work in the heart of the Egyptian monarch unto that end—in fact, the Word of the Lord uses a language here in this connection which we would otherwise not dare to take upon our lips. The king's heart, we read in the book of Proverbs, is in the hand of the Lord as rivers of water; He turneth it withersoever He wills. Was it not of the Lord that caused Shimei to curse David when he fled from before the face of his son, Absalom? Does not David himself declare that this cursing by Shimei was of the Lord? Again, was it not of the Lord that David counted the people? Moreover, the greatest Scriptural example of this truth occurs in connection with the appearance of the living God in our flesh and blood and at the time of His suffering and death upon the accursed cross. Godless hands nailed the Lord Jesus Christ upon the accursed tree; nevertheless He was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of the Lord. Upon the question whether sin is independent of God, or whether this power of evil occurs alone through the Providence of God, so that the living God is realizing His counsel from moment to moment, there can be but one answer without a single moment's hesitation: There is no evil in the city which the Lord does not perform. He, He alone, also now, is the supreme and sovereign cause of the existence of all things. Every curse, every evil thought, every rebellion of a sinful man is of the Lord alone, not only from eternity, but He alone works it from moment unto moment.

However, confessing this truth of the Word of God, this connection between God's Providence and sin, we are engaged, thus it may seem, in an irreconcilable conflict with the holiness and righteousness of the Lord. We cannot escape the word of God in Job 34:10: "Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: far be it from God, that He should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that He should commit iniquity." Or, turning to Habakkuk 1:13, we read: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest Thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest Thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" And the apostle, John, writes so uncompromisingly in his epistle that God is a light in Whom there is no darkness. Hence, the Lord God and sin must certainly be viewed as excluding one another. There is in God nothing that even faintly resembles iniquity. The Lord is truly a Light: He is Light, the overflowing fountain of all good. How

now can it be harmonized with our God, Who doth not behold iniquity, that nevertheless sin is not to be explained as independent of Jehovah, Who has formed the wicked, note well, the wicked unto the day of evil? To this thought we will, the Lord willing, call attention in our following article.

H. Veldman



IN HIS FEAR

Looking To The Future

CHAPTER 3

We conclude our remarks on the subject of teacher training with a few observations as to the execution of a plan to establish our own facilities for the training of Protestant Reformed teachers. Again we remind you that we have only some suggestions to make, rather than a full-blown plan. In fact, just because we have no actual blue-print, either literally, for a building, or figuratively, for the school itself, with its teachers and curriculum, we can only make a few suggestions,—suggestions which may be borne in mind when it comes to the actual formation of plans and the execution thereof. Our purpose is simply to point to the problems to be faced, to acquaint ourselves with them, and to avoid, if possible, any hasty, ill-timed, and ill-planned action. Because the suggestions we make here are all connected more or less directly with the actual establishment of our own teacher training facilities, we will include them all under the topic:

EXECUTION:

I suppose that from a practical point of view the very first thing that most of us think about in connection with the establishment of a normal school is *the cost*.

It is to be admitted, of course, that practically this is one of the major elements in the execution of any project now days. And I think that in this connection that is especially true, since the project is entirely new for us: we start from scratch. We face the full weight of the initial cost-burden, for the mere establishment of any normal school facilities will cost money. And besides, as far as maintenance costs are concerned, we must realize that we face an added burden,—if burden it may be called,—for we have not ever before faced the necessity of financially maintaining our own

institution for higher education, with the exception of our Seminary, which is supported through the regular ecclesiastical channels of assessment and budget. And because this financial aspect is usually viewed as the foremost problem in the execution of any project,—and I would say quite naturally so; perhaps quite carnally so,—I wish to make what I believe to be some pertinent observations on this score. In fact, it appears to me that one could quite profitably devote more study to the whole subject of the fear of the Lord and our material things in a materialistic age. However, at present we will make only a few remarks, without going into detail. I propose that, if you question them, you seriously study what I here submit in the light of Scripture.

In the first place, we should at all times bear in mind that the cause of the kingdom of God is not a matter of material things, but spiritual. This is therefore also true of all the sub-causes of the kingdom of heaven, which we often call "kingdom-causes". The cause of God's kingdom is not dependent on material things whatsoever. It goes right on too, despite any lack of material things, and despite any lack of financial support on our part. This implies that we should not, as we often do, first of all look at the financial aspect of any kingdom-cause. The question is not, "Do we have enough money?" but much rather: "What is our calling?" In this connection, lest there be any misunderstanding, we may indeed apply the passage from Luke 14:25-35, although not in the sense that it is often applied when the financial aspect of kingdom-causes is under discussion. Often we are admonished to be realistic and down-to-earth when we talk about constructing new schools and new church buildings, etc. For, they say, "Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?" Now it is obvious here that our Lord indeed teaches us to reckon well and carefully the cost. But the cost of what? The cost of being a disciple of Him. And He uses an example of a builder and of a king going to war in order to illustrate His point. What is that point? Does the Lord mean to instruct us that unless we have enough dollars and cents to build the kingdom of heaven, we had better not go ahead? Not at all. He teaches us basically that the kingdom of heaven is spiritual, is therefore a matter of *grace, not money*;

and that discipleship of Him comprehends our whole life, our all. Indeed, then, if we have not the money to forge ahead in any kingdom-cause, let us not lay even the foundation of a school-building. But then let us remember that we cannot lay claim to being disciples. For the Lord says: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." In other words, if you lay claim to being a child of grace, you must necessarily surrender your all to the grace.

It follows, then, in the second place, that the relation is not such, that our finances control the kingdom of heaven, but such, that the kingdom of heaven controls the finances of the child of the kingdom.

In the third place, we should learn as the people of God that to give of our material things for the sake of the kingdom of God is not a burden, but a privilege. If we were more controlled by this attitude of heart and mind, we would not so readily complain and be fearful when it comes to giving for kingdom-causes. And I believe, as a general rule, we would also be more generous. In fact, in the passage from Luke 14 it is obvious that the Lord speaks not merely of giving out of our abundance, but of *sacrificing*.

In the fourth place, we should approach these matters in the childlike faith and trust wherewith we are graced as the people of God. In that trust we may be confident that the Lord will not put His people to shame, but will sustain them and prosper their purposes when they walk in His way, because then their purposes are His very own.

And finally, from the practical point of view, judging things from a purely materialistic point of view, we have no reason to complain, either about a lack of material things or about heavy financial burdens. This is so obvious to anyone who views things honestly, that I need not even substantiate it. And I will not.

This has been a little excursion into the subject of the finances of the kingdom. But I think we can all benefit therefrom, and perhaps rethink our personal position which so easily slips into carnality and faithlessness.

And I believe that on the basis of such a position as depicted above, both those who are charged eventually with actually gathering the material means necessary for starting our own normal school, but also those who are highly privileged to supply those means, may approach the matter with a healthy Christian optimism and confidence,—a confidence not in men, but in the God of His covenant. One more remark in this connection, and then I will turn to other matters. As I have remarked before both publicly and privately, we as a Protestant Reformed people have a most precious heritage, are a highly privileged people.

In the light of that heritage and the consciousness thereof, we ought not to be lax and lethargic, but should be the most active, the most zealous, and the most generous people on the face of the earth. Are we?

Further, without going into detail, I wish to offer a few practical suggestions in this connection. First of all, I think that we could explore the possibility of building in conjunction with our theological school. It already has a building fund. And although we must insist on a non-ecclesiastical normal school, there is nevertheless room for cooperation between the two institutions, especially in regard to physical facilities. Secondly, we need not and must not set our sights too high. We must not look for a mighty institution of learning. We shall have no need of a large educational plant. We are small, and can expect to remain relatively small, especially as we remain true. And certainly we must be satisfied with a humble beginning. But also as far as our educational home is concerned, the saying applies: "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." And yet, in the third place, let us guard against anything amateurish, either as far as physical facilities are concerned, or as regards faculty and curriculum.

But there are other problems, to my mind at least as weighty as the financial problem. We need teachers. We need students. And we need a curriculum, well-organized and suited from the beginning to the needs of our prospective grade school teachers. All this has not even reached the planning stage as yet. And whoever should come into a position of authority and responsibility in regard to the establishment of our own normal school should not give short weight to these latter responsibilities. Capable men should be sought, whether they be products of our seminary or whether they may be found among our present grade school teachers, who have the "stuff" and the ambition to build up a respectable Protestant Reformed normal school. When we have reached our goal, I believe we should from that time on exclude from the ranks of our Protestant Reformed teachers, that is, as far as new teachers are concerned, any teacher who has not been trained in our own normal school.

However, these things belong to the future. I only desire that we go forward, and that we do so wisely, carefully, and in a humble dependence upon our covenant Jehovah. And I know that in this way He will bless us in the efforts put forth.

H. C. Hoeksema

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THE DAY OF SHADOWS

The Reconciliation

Allowing himself to be prevailed upon to recall Absalom, David instructed Joab to bring him again. But the king would not admit him into his presence. "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face." Such was the mandate. "So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face." Let us understand this word of the king. Let us grasp its implications for Absalom. Not alone that it shut him out of the king's presence and excluded him from the palace, but it also shut him up, as a prisoner, in his own house, that is, it took from him all freedom of movement outside the boundaries of his own private estate. This is plain from the sequel.

Had David allowed himself to be controlled solely by his sense of justice, he would not have recalled Absalom. On the other hand, had he followed the impulses of the father in him he certainly would have admitted this worthless son into his presence immediately and pressed upon his brow the kiss of reconciliation. Moreover, there was no agreement among the members of his household, to say nothing of the people at large, as to what should be done with Absalom. Some, doubtless, wanted his permanently banished or put to death; others, like Joab, thought it right that he had been recalled and were glad.

David's whole action regarding Absalom was plainly a compromise, a settlement by concessions, a sort of partial reconciliation that could satisfy no one. And to Absalom, himself, it must have been sorely provoking. It was only calculated to add new fuel to the fire of his deep resentment toward his father. But had he only returned as a penitent and acknowledged his guilt, he would have been received and forgiven. And he did have guilt. He had taken the law in his own hands.

By way of introduction to the terrible bit of history that he is now about to relate, the sacred writer enters into some detail regarding Absalom's person and private life. "But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty." This is not the same as saying that on account of his physical endowments he already was the darling of the people. Thus far his countrymen had seen little of him. The meaning is simply that he was the most handsome man in all Israel, a perfect specimen of his kind. There was not a blemish on him "from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head." It partially explains his ability at stealing men's hearts. The charm

of his beauty was hypnotic. Even his hair was something to talk about. It was heavy and strong. From time to time he had it cut, for "it was heavy upon him," and the weight of the severed locks "was 200 shekels according to the king's weight." (Perhaps four pounds. The "king's" shekel was doubtless a different weight from the sacred shekel). But his hair, upon which according to custom he perhaps bestowed so much care, was to be his undoing.

He was married and had three sons and one daughter, whom he had named Tamar probably after his unfortunate sister. The names of his sons are not given. Perhaps the reason is that they had died young. This would explain his erecting a monument to perpetuate his memory (18:18).

Two full years have now gone by. It is certain that by this time Absalom's soul seeths with resentment toward his father, the king. For he is still shut up, as a prisoner, in his own house. And by whose authority if not by that of the king? If to this be added the consideration that in his own eyes he was innocent of any crime, it will be seen that his hatred of his father must be fierce, and that, being a profligate, he is plotting revenge. It may be considered as certain that his resolve to seize his father's throne was made at this time. He must have been toying with the idea ever since his return, but without having been able to make up his mind. For he realized the danger of such a venture. But his mind is now made up. And as consumed by ambition and blinded by rage he lays his plans. He may be counting on the support of Joab, his friend and confidant. But how he is going to learn to his own destruction that he misjudges Joab.

How to get himself straightened out with the king, whom he will destroy, is his first problem. Feigning penitence, he could implore his forgiveness. But that would be too humiliating. Besides, as was just stated, in his own eyes he has no sin and accordingly has nothing to confess. It is the king who should confess to him and restore to him all his rights in full. This precisely is what he now attempts to get the king to do, namely remove from him every restriction, so that he may again come and go as he pleases. How otherwise could he go about the business of capturing the throne.

But he is in the need of a mediator, one to argue his innocence before the king. He sends for Joab. For who has more influence with the king than he? But Joab for some reason refuses to bestir himself even after the second summons. Absalom's anger burns. As he cannot go to Joab, seeing that he is forbidden to set foot off his own premises, he takes recourse to a drastic measure. In his fury he has his servants set fire to a field of barley belonging to Joab and lying contiguous to his own land. Soon Joab is at his door de-

manding an explanation. "Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire?" "Behold," is Absalom's reply, "I sent unto thee saying, come hither." But Joab would not come. So the fault is all Joab's. In the same breath he goes on to state the purpose of the summons. "I sent unto thee . . . that I may send thee to the king to say; 1. why am I come from Geshur," that is, 'why did he send for me? to shut me up, as a prisoner, in my own house. The shame of it,' 2. 'It were better for me were I still there,' implying, 'for there I dwelt among friends, and came and went as I choose.' 3. "And now I *will* see the king's face," meaning, 'I am determined.' 4. "And if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me," meaning, 'I challenge him. But he will not dare. For he knows that I am innocent. Was not the cruelty of Amnon great? And did not the king wink at his atrocity? At least he took no action. And this though the vile deed was crying for vengeance. What I did was but to heed that cry as Tamar's nearest kin. That was not sin. It was duty. This the king well knows. Why does he thus evilly treat me? To please whom?' Principally Bathsheba perhaps. For it can be expected that she is zealous for her son Solomon.

There is all this in Absalom's words. And there is point to his argument, as has before been explained. According to Israel's law, Amnon should have been put to death. We may quote the law here: "The nakedness of thy father's wife's daughter, begotten of thy father, she is thy sister (that is, half sister) thou shalt not uncover her nakedness." See also 20:17; Deut. 27:22. The sin is included in the class of abomination for which the offender or offenders "shall be cut off from among their people." Lev. 18:9, 29.

The godless Absalom holds his god-fearing father in derision for his weaknesses. Without a question he has already convinced himself that his father is not fit to be king and for the good of the nation must be cast down from his throne.

Joab goes to the king and repeats Absalom's argument in his audience doubtless as careful not to reveal that Absalom is defiant but perhaps telling the king that he has repented and longs to be forgiven and to receive from his father the kiss of a full reconciliation. In some such vein the unscrupulous Joab may have spoken. For the king is moved, judging from the reaction. He calls for Absalom come. According to true oriental fashion of the day he bows himself on his face to the ground. And the king kisses him.

STEALING THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE

Absalom is once more on good terms with the king. He has gained his first objective. He is again at liberty to come and go as he pleases. He realizes that

if he is to succeed in his venture he must have the following of the people, so that, when finally he has himself declared king, the people will rally to his banner. So his next move is his attempt to turn the people away from the king and attach them to his own person. And in this he succeeds remarkably well. It is not a wonder. He has youth, personal beauty and great charm. He is a master of the art of political intriguing. And the people are fickle and ungrateful.

Then also there is a class of men in Israel that hate the king for what he is—an essentially good man, who fears God and loves His testimonies despite his sins and weaknesses and faults of character. They are against the king because they are against Christ. That is the essential reason and not David's faults. Didn't these same men in their generations crucify the Son of God when he was come into the flesh? And he was sinless. From this people will come the leaders in the revolt.

Let us now see how Absalom operates.

His first step is to project himself before the public eye. He prepares for himself a chariot (English A.V. has chariots, but not correct) and horses—the horses are for drawing the chariot—and besides fifty men to run before him. He assumes the appearance of a prince of no little importance in order to draw to himself the attention of the people. "And Absalom rose early in the morning," that is, the early mornings find him with his military adjunct by the side of the way of the gate. The reference is to the gate of the king's palace, where come all those who have need of his judgment in matters of law. He calls to every passing litigant on his way to the king's court. He asks him where he is from. Having received answer he speaks to the man flattering words, hangs before his eyes a disparaging picture of the judicial practices in his father's court and concludes with the expressed wish that he were king. Let us quote the text here: "And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right, but there is no man disputed of the king to hear thee." Hebrew: "But there is no hearer for thee from the king." The "hearer" is the court official whose task it is to hear and understand the people's matters and lay them before the king. Doubtless there are several such "hearers," assistants to the king. The criticism that Absalom levels at these "hearers" is that they are seldom on hand, or that they lack the mental and spiritual qualifications for their high office resulting in frequent miscarriage of justice because the king was not properly enlightened. Such is the sad state of affairs in the royal court. And the king makes no effort to correct the evil. What a crying shame! The thought of it cuts Absalom to the quick and stabs at his heart. (So he

pretends). In sheer anguish he cries; "O that I were made judge in the land..." Hebrew: "Oh who will make me judge in the land, that any man who hath suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice."

It is certain that Absalom exaggerates. But at the same time neglect and partiality may have crept in giving Absalom a handle. David is growing old. His life has been strenuous. He is not the man he used to be. "See, thy matters are good." Absalom hears all the cases, and that is always his verdict, so that if thereupon the litigant loses his case in David's court, he will return to his place as wishing that Absalom were king indeed, and as determined to tell his neighbors about it, and every one whom he may contact.

So has Absalom established his own court by the side of the way to the court of the king. And he rises early in the morning to show his zeal and to be on hand when the people start coming. And he does not allow any man to do him obeisance. If any man tries it, he puts forth his hand, and takes him (Heb., siezes him) and kisses him. How remarkably condescending! And he a prince, the king's own son! "On this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel."

Either David does not observe what is going on, which would seem to be incredible, seeing that Absalom operates almost in the shadow of the palace, or if he does know what is going on, he thinks no evil. It simply doesn't occur to him that Absalom might be laying the groundwork for seizing his throne. For looking ahead we see that the revolt overtakes him by surprise. He hadn't been able to imagine that his own son could do to him such a thing. Being himself a man of true nobility, he was too trusting of others, particularly of this profligate son, whom he so loved.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLT

The notice in the sacred text: "And it came to pass at the end of forty years, that Absalom said unto the king..." (15:7) can hardly be taken as supplying us with a cue for determining just how long he was occupied in the manner described above. For this procedure could have lasted at the most but three or four years. The phrase in question "at the end of forty years" must refer to some previous event in David's life only—perhaps to his anointing by Samuel. His anointing was the only previous event in his life that in the point of view of its significance ranked with Absalom's conspiracy. Others pronounce the chronology here uncertain due to an error of the copyist. They read *four years* instead of *forty*. But it is dif-

ficult to conceive of the copyist as guilty of such carelessness.

Absalom believes that he has succeeded in persuading the people that what the land needs is a new king and that therefore the time is ripe for him to strike. And so his next move is to get the king to give him permission to go to Hebron. The reason he gives is calculated to make it appear that he is activated by pious motives. He says to the king: "I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode in Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord." "Go in peace," is the king's reply. The vow could just as well have been paid in Jerusalem. But David is unsuspecting. More than one reason can be advanced to explain Absalom's decision to set in operation the insurrection in Hebron. Here he was born. Here he could count on a large following from the tribe of Judah. He already has sent out spies (Heb.—investigators) to sound public opinion and to prepare in every place the right number of men for the moment when over the whole land the blast of the trumpets will be heard. In that moment they shall shout: "Absalom reigneth in Hebron." He has with him on his journey to Hebron two hundred men. In the text they bear the name of "called," which reveals that they are courtiers such as accompany king's sons on their journeys. "And they went in their simplicity and knew not anything." They have not been told what lies ahead, lest the king learn of it. But everywhere men will conclude that they are friends of Absalom in favor of the rebellion.

"And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices."

Giloh is a town in the hill country of Judah near Hebron (Joshua 15:51,54). Here dwells the man. As the counsellor of David he has acquired fame. The whole plan of the conspiracy may thus have been of his contriving. For his talent for perceiving what ought to be done in a given situation is remarkable. Men are saying that to enquire of him is like enquiring of an oracle of God. (16:23). The two—David and this counsellor—have been close. He has been the king's familiar friend, in whom he trusted, which did eat of his bread (Ps. 41:9). How his treachery is going to grieve David, when he learns of it, is plain from David's Psalm (54: 12-16) in which he projects himself as saying to him: "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it; neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him:

but it was thou, a man of my rank, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked into the house of God in company."

What may be activating Ahithophel? Is it ambition? Or is he, too, of the opinion that David has lived out his usefulness as king? He has a son, whose name is Eliam (23:34). If Eliam of 11:3 is this son, Bathsheba is Ahithophel's granddaughter, she being the daughter of Eliam of 11:3, and then it may be that he is incensed against David for his abuse of this woman now David's wife.

"Absalom sent for Ahithophel . . . while he offered." It is not clear from the sentence whether the pronoun "he" looks back to Absalom or to Ahithophel. It must look back to Absalom. For why should Ahithophel at this time be sacrificing in his place?

It is Absalom who is doing the sacrificing. His sacrifice for the occasion is the burnt offering. It is customary for the armies of Israel to bring this sacrifice when about to engage the enemy in battle. As a symbolical-typical transaction it is a prayer in which the worshippers confess before the Lord that they are sinners, ill-deserving, lost and undone in themselves but yet forgiven of God on the ground of the sacrificing victim that by its dying expiated their sins. Second, it is a prayer in which the worshippers declare that by His grace they are wholly consecrated to Him and His cause, and thus a prayer, finally, in which they implore the Lord for victory over His and their enemies.

Absalom offers sacrifices. He prays this wonderful prayer, with his lips or acts only, to be sure. For his heart is far from God. In sacrificing he simply goes through the motions of prayer. Let this be understood. As feigning contrition he humbles himself before God in the pretended or false confidence that he is received of God and that God will prosper and bless his rebellion against David again in answer to his prayer. And his sole purpose is to inspire his followers with the confidence that his vile cause is just and that he wars God's warfare. And he wants Ahithophel—and Ahithophel by all means—to sacrifice with him, to join him in his prayer. And therefore he sends and brings him to the sacrifice.

Absalom is wicked. He is a consummate hypocrite in his wickedness. Or does he imagine that in his attempt to destroy his father, he is championing God's cause. If so, he is willingly deceiving himself, needless to say. How the Lord must loathe the sacrifices—the prayers—of the ungodly however right these prayers may be as to the form of their words.

G. M. Ophoff

SIONS ZANGEN

Gods Groote Goedertierenheid

PSALM 118; VIERDE DEEL

We beginnen bij het 22ste vers: "De steen, die de bouwlieden verworpen hadden, is tot een hoofd des hoeks geworden; dit is van den Heere geschied, en het is wonderlijk in onze oogen." (We haalden ook het 23ste vers aan.)

Ja, dat is een eigenaardige geschiedenis van dien steen, dien verworpen steen. Het is niet zoo moeilijk om dien STEEN te verklaren, want Jezus en de Apostelen hebben ons heel veel commentaar over dien Steen gegeven. Hij is Jezus Christus. Ook is het niet moeilijk om aan te toonen wie die bouwlieden zijn geweest. Dat waren de goddelooze bouwers in het huis Israels van alle eeuwen, die niets verstaan hebben van Gods bouwen. Zij hebben zich gedurig gestooten aan dien Steen. En hebben Hem verworpen. De verwerping van dezen Steen is de kruisiging van Jezus Christus. Dat is ons alles verklaard in Matt. 21:42; Marcus 12:10, 11; Lucas 20:17; Hand. 4:11; en I Petrus 2:7.

Evenwel is het moeilijk om de oorsprong, de historische oorsprong van deze beeldspraak op te sporen. Er zijn allerlei verklaringen van. Sommigen zeggen, dat het ziet op het weenen der ouden toen ze den herbouwden Tempel Gods zagen in de dagen van Ezra, Nehemia, Zerubbabel, Zacharia en Jozua. De jongen juichten, doch de ouden, die den Tempel Gods van Salomo gezien hadden, weenden. Met andere woorden, zij verwierpen den Tempel dien God na de Babylonische ballingschap had doen bouwen, en die zooveel minder schoon was. Doch er zijn ook overleveringen in de geschriften der Rabbi's die ons een betere verklaring bieden. Die overleveringen zeggen ons, dat ten tijde van den bouw des Tempels ten tijde van Salomo, er een steen was die den bouwers gedurig in den weg lag. Die steen, die een letterlijke groote steen was, werd van de eene plaats naar de andere geworpen, en steeds lag hij in den weg. Men wist niet wat men er mee doen moest. Totdat men toekwam aan het leggen van den uitersten hoeksteen. En toen, o wonder van God! toen zag men, dat hij juist paste voor dat doel.

En nu moet ge weten, dat de uiterste hoeksteen in de Joodsche bouwtrant de meest belangrijke steen was van het geheele gebouw. Zonder dien hoeksteen was het gebouw eenvoudig een onding. Dit weten we, al is het ook waar, dat men het er niet over eens is waar die hoeksteen aangebracht werd.

Nu stem ik toe, dat die oude overlevering geen voorwerp des geloofs kan zijn. Voorwerp des geloofs is alleen het Woord van God. Maar het schijnt mij toe, dat dit zeer wel mogelijk geweest is. Ge gevoelt, dat er een historische werkelijkheid ten grondslag moet liggen aan dezen tekst in den 118den psalm.

Hoe dit dan ook zij, de STEEN is Jezus Christus. Dat is overduidelijk. En het gebouw is het Huis Gods, dat God door de eeuwen heen aan het bouwen is. En de bouwlieden zijn de leiders van Gods volk. En nu is het een feit der historie dat alle bouwlieden van nature dien Steen niet willen, wilden en niet willen zullen in alle tijden. Jezus Christus staat ons steeds in den weg. Wij willen zelf den hoeksteen aanbrengen en leggen. Dat is hetzelfde als te zeggen, dat wij de basis willen leggen tot samenwoning met God in één huis. Het is de werkheiligheid van de kerk, zooals zij van nature is.

En zoo verwerpen wij den uitersten hoeksteen dien door God gegeven is tot fundament van de verwerkelijking van Zijn trouwverbond.

De eerste verwerping was toen Kain Abel dood sloeg. En dat verwerpen is door alle eeuwen doorgegaan. Als God kwam met Zijn hoeksteen in schaduwen, typen, en het Woord dat vast is in profeten, Koningen en Priesters, dan verwierp Israel dien Steen.

Het is te vernederend voor den trotschen mensch. Die wil zijn eigen huis bouwen. Van genade, van de vrije gave der genade willen we niet weten, van nature.

Doch hier blinkt nu de aanbiddelijke wijsheid Gods: juist door de verwerping van den uitersten Hoeksteen wordt het Huis Gods gebouwd. Als Jezus niet verworpen was geweest, zouden we nooit met God kunnen wonen. Doch als Hij geheel en al verworpen is, dan wordt het Huis opgetrokken in den stijl der lieflijke genade.

En zoo is het geschied.

De Steen Gods kwam, zooals we zeiden, in schaduw, type, en door het Woord, dat vast is. Doch in de volheid des tijds kwam Hij Zelf. En gedurig verklaarde Hij Zichzelf. Als de STEEN die moest dienen om het Huis Gods te bouwen. En hoe meer men dit hoorde en zag, hoe meer men Hem verwierp. En die verwerping bereikte haar hoogtepunt toen men Hem nam en aan het Kruis van Golgotha hechtte.

Daar werd dezen psalm toen vervuld. En vervuld op vreeselijke wijze. Alles en allen verwierpen Hem. En het scheen wel alsof de vreeselijkste verwerping Hem van God Zelf aangedaan werd. Een groot mensch heeft eens gezegd, dat Jezus toen door God weggedrukt is in de oneidige diepten van den eeuwigen dood. En dat veroorzaakte de diepste smarten van Messias. En

veroorzaakte dien bangen schreeuw: Mijn God, Mijn God, waarom hebt Gij Mij verlaten!?

Maar, o wonder van God! toen Golgotha tot zijn bitterste einde vervuld was, bleek het, dat toen het Huis van God eeuwig vast gefundeerd was. Dat verder de bouw door kon gaan, totdat alle steenen en juwelen ingezet zouden zijn, en God en Zijn volk intrek konden nemen om verder te wonen, te wonen.

Ziet ge dat nu door het geloof, dan komt er een echo van een mijner teksten op in Uw hart, en dan zegt ge met dezen onbekenden dichter: "dit is van den Heere geschied, en het is wonderlijk in onze oogen!"

O, geliefde lezers, laat die woorden in Uw ziel in-gebrand worden, om er nooit meer uit te gaan. En dan heb ik het oog vooral op het eerste lid van dien zin: DIT IS VAN DEN HEERE GESCHIED! En dat houdt immers alles in: ook de verwerping van den STEEN. Hoort het uit den mond van Petrus op den eersten Nieuw Testamentischen Pinksterdag: "Want in waarheid zijn vergaderd tegen Uw heilig Kind Jezus, welken Gij gezalfd hebt, beide Herodus en Pontius Pilatus, met de heidenen en de volken Israels, *om te doen al wat Uwe hand en Uw raad te voren bepaald had dat geschieden zoude.*"

Ja, stelt U gerust: gij allen die dit leest hebt deel aan de legging van het eeuwige fundament van Gods gunstbewijzen, waardoor het paleis van Zijn liefde eeuwiglijk zal rijzen. Doch huivert en beeft, want Uw deel is dit: gij allen hebt dit deel: de verwerping van den STEEN. Zachtkens ruischt het door mijn ziel terwijl ik dit schrijf: "Ik dacht er niet aan dat ik zelf door mijn schuld, Zijn kroon had gevlochten, Zijn beker gevuld!"

Het is wonderlijk in onze oogen!

Dat zal waar zijn!

God openbaarde, dat Hij een Huis wilde bouwen waar we "gezelliglijk" met Hem zouden mogen wonen. Doch het zou gaan langs den diepen weg van zonde en genade. En de grootste zonde is de verwerping van den Steen.

En als we dan Jezus naar Golgotha zien gaan, nadat we Hem verworpen hebben, dan komt God en opent ons de oogen voor wat we gedaan hebben, en dan gaan we den nacht in, bitterlijk weenende met Petrus.

En van verre volgen we den Joelenden stoet; om het einde te zien, dwazen die we zijn. Het is benauwd voor ons daar rondom de kruispaal.

En dan verdwijnt Jezus in de eeuwige verwerping van den nacht van dien Vrijdag.

Van den Heere geschied?

Gaat met me: we zullen Petrus op den voet volgen. Hij schreit en hij weent. Men kan het zien aan zijn roodbekreten oogen.

Doch plotseling, op den vroege morgen van dien eersten dag der week, omringt hem een glorie van licht, dat hemelsch is. En een lieflijke stem zegt: Petrus! De Heere verscheen aan een der bouwlieden die Hem hielp te verwerpen.

We trekken een sluier, neen, God trekt een sluier over dat tafereel. We behoeven niet te weten wat Jezus tot Petrus gezegd heeft. Gods Woord zegt het niet. En toch weten we het. We hebben het allen immers met Petrus ervaren.

Jezus zegt tot hen die Hem verwerpen: Kom aan Mijn hart! Het zal altoos kloppen van de liefde Gods die in Mij geopenbaard werd.

En Petrus woonde met God. Hij rust op het fundament Gods.

En wij rusten met hem. Hallelujah! G. Vos



PERISCOPE

THE UNION QUESTION

The Reformed Journal recently conducted a discussion on the question of a believer's affiliation with a worldly union. The nature of this discussion one may ascertain from a reply to Dr. George Stob by Mr. Joseph Gritters, the latter representing the C.L.A. Perhaps it is expedient, for a correct evaluation of the reply by Mr. Gritter, briefly to state the position of Dr. Stob. It is principally the same as that of the late Rev. J. Groen. He advocated affiliation with the worldly unions on the basis of common grace, claimed that the Christian may not separate himself from the world locally, but be the salt of the earth even in the worldly unions. Hence, they must become member. The position of Dr. Stob is similar. A Christian must needs live in an evil world. He cannot escape it. He also must necessarily live within certain organizations that are principally unchristian and are sometimes guilty of unchristian practices.

Mr. Gritter's reply, with which I principally agree, is, in part, as follows:

"1. It is true that I am of the conviction that a Christian ought not to be a member of the A.F.L. or the C.I.O. That is a conviction gained not from books or hearsay but from 14 years of activity in the labor field and through direct contact with these organizations and close observation of their activities. Dr. Stob has no right to say that Synods of the Christian Reformed Churches refused to sustain me in that simply because they did not mention these organizations

by name. Organizations that are hostile to true Christian testimony, that foment hostility against employers and hatred of unorganized workers or members of other unions, that will use violence to gain their ends, that justify unwarranted strikes, that desecrate the Sabbath continuously, to mention only some of their un-Christian activities, are the type of organizations that Synods had in mind when they said that membership in them is not compatible with membership in the Church of Christ. The C.I.O. and A.F.L. unions are guilty of all those sins...."

Further, Mr. Gritter writes:

"2. I agree with the official position of the Christian Reformed Church. But, Synod left it to the Consistories to investigate whether local so-called neutral unions could meet the standards set by the Church. The Consistories have failed, almost completely, to carry this out. The enormous task of investigating numerous local organizations, and the economic power of such organizations, have been the two factors that have kept the Consistories from doing so. Dr. Stob's error is this: that he tries to conclude the official position of the Church from the practice tolerated by the local consistories. On the same basis he would reason that since the Synod of 1951 did not in so many words say that theater attendance is in conflict with Church membership, and since it is well known that in many local churches such attendance is tolerated, and that therefore the Church has given its blessing upon theater attendance."

Nevertheless, in my opinion, the position of the Christian Reformed Church in 1943 and 1945, was halfhearted and ambiguous. Mr. Gritter concludes his article:

"...The Synods of 1943 and 1945 declared that members of unions that are guilty of un-Christian practices are corporately responsible, and that Christian conscience cannot condone membership in an organization that persists in its un-Christian practices in spite of protests against them. If Dr. Stob does not agree with these decisions let him overture Synod to rescind them. But as a minister in the Christian Reformed Church he has no right to teach that which is contrary to those decisions.

"4. I am perhaps better aware than anyone else in our Church that this problem offers great difficulties, if we want to face it in accordance with Scriptural injunctions concerning separation from the evil. The easiest way out is, of course, to surrender and then to try to find some justification for it. But that is not the Biblical way. "Let the Church be the Church" using one of Dr. Stob's favorite expressions. Indeed!, let the Church be the Church! That includes unequivocal preaching of the Word, the dis-

cipline of the Word, admonition of those who in their affiliation with un-Christian social and economic organizations are in that part of their life not "for" Christ. I am persuaded that if the discipline of the Word, and admonition, are faithfully exercised sterner methods of discipline will prove not to be necessary at all, in 99 out of 100 cases. Experience has borne that out. It has borne out, too, that when Christian workers really make up their mind to be free from an un-Christian affiliation they will find a way, and live too, albeit perhaps not as luxuriously as before. God takes care of those who obey Him in faith.

"5. In conclusion I quote once again from Dr. Stob: "We are not living in an abstract world where absolutes may be spoken and consented to with ease. We are living in a real world, complex with the problematic, where escape is not easy nor necessarily counseled, and where the Christian is called to exercise loyalty to Christ while sharing the life and task of a common humanity." No, we are not living in an abstract world, but in a real and *very sinful* world, in which adherence to the absolutes taught in the Scriptures, from Genesis to Rev., is necessary above all! That the absolute separation from all that dishonors God is not easy I admit, that it is not "necessarily counseled" I deny with all the power of my conviction. Dr. Stob is leading us on the road to removal of the antithesis, and final loss of the Church in the world. What remains of the suffering and persecution which, Jesus said, His followers will have to endure as loyal citizens of His kingdom, if Dr. Stob's direction is followed? Nothing at all."

Especially with this last paragraph we say *Amen*.

HOW THE OLD COUNTRY KNOWS HISTORY

A very curious example of a distortion of historical facts I found in *De Reformatie* of Aug. 23, 1952. It concerns the history of the former congregation in Hamilton, Ont. and the article was written by Prof. C. Veenhof. It is introduced by the sentence: "Men kent de historie." (One knows the history).

Translated the article reads as follows:

"In Hamilton there was instituted, by those that had been members of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, a Protestant Reformed Church. She united with the Prot. Ref. Churches of the U.S., the Churches, therefore of which the Rev. Hoeksema is the leading figure. When these churches adopted the notorious "Declaration of Principles" the Prot. Ref. Church of Hamilton came into great difficulty. It was impossible for her to accept this Declaration. Hence, she rejected this Declaration and so came to stand outside of the communion of the Prot. Ref. Churches. Part of the church, although also objecting to the

Declaration, remained faithful to the Prot. Ref. Churches, and thus formed a small Prot. Ref. Church of Hamilton. It is a cause of great joy that both churches now have found each other and are united."

When I read this curious illustration of ignorance of the facts and sucking history out of one's thumb, I immediately wrote "Neef Kees" (Prof. Veenhof) a letter, in which I told him: 1. That in this entire paragraph there is not one word of truth; 2. That there could not possibly be any truth in it because when the miserable history of Hamilton occurred and before they separated from our churches, there was no Declaration of Principles, not even in concept.

And I asked him whether the Reformed people (Art. 31) in the Netherlands thus "knew the history."

It is evident that they don't read. Even Prof. Veenhof does not read, as is evident of his gross ignorance of the matter.

I wrote him that he might correct this error in *De Reformatie* if he would, but that I was not concerned about the matter.

Up to date, I did not hear from him.

H.H.

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FROM HOLY WRIT

Exposition of I Peter 1:4, 5

(Continued)

We now stand before the task of inquiring into the meaning of the threefold qualification of this inheritance in heaven.

Of his inheritance, kept in heaven, Peter tells us, that it is: *incorruptible, undefilable* and that it *fades not away*.

Concerning each of these elements just a word.

In general we should notice, that this description of the "inheritance" is in negative terms. The description tells us what this inheritance is not. There is a good reason for this negative description. The reason is that it is only by means of this negative description that we can form a concrete conception of the inheritance. The revelation of God comes to us in our present woe and hopelessness to bring us the glad-tidings concerning this heavenly inheritance. It appeals to our present experience of corruption, defilement and that which fades away, and then points toward the inheritance and says: be comforted, the inheritance has nothing of this pain and disappointment of death and hell. Let your tears be wiped away. Presently this all shall be no more. Beautiful terms

these negative terms! The former things shall be no more! Hallelujah!

We also believe that these three negative terms are exhaustive of all the present woe that is ours in this present life. This means that each term should be studied as to its scope and implication. We should do this not simply for the sake of "word-study", but that we may drink richly from the cup of comfort, and reach out in hope and expectation to that which will be free from our present misery.

Let us attend to these terms in order as they are given in the text.

First we call attention to the term: *incorruptible*. The term corruption (phthartos) is indicative of corruption in the physical world of plants, animals and men. Everywhere corruption reigns as king. All things are subject to the bondage of corruption. Rom. 8:21. Plants grow in beauty according to their nature; soon however they die and corruption and disintegration sets in. Even while they live we must fight the corruption of blight, sickness and death in the plant world. It is subject to the bondage of corruption. So too sickness and death reign in the animal world; the veterinarian has an abundance of works. Be he ever so learned in his field he cannot prevent the Tankage Company from the sad duty of claiming the dead and corruptible carcasses of the very animals he attempted to save from death. And with man it is not different. We too are corruptible from the cradle to the grave. Always we must fight corruption. The food we eat, the air we breathe is all contaminated with corruption. This life in its totality is nothing but a continual death. Soon we too are ill, corruption and death waste our frame till we bow to the grave; we give our last breath, and we are no more. If we are strong we live threescore years and ten, and if very strong fourscore years, yet these years are labor and sorrow; under God's wrath we are troubled and flee away; His heavy hand has bowed us to the grave.

The glad-tidings of the resurrection stands in the midst of this reality and says: the inheritance that is ours hath *conquered* corruption. It is in its very nature such that God's heavy hand no longer bows us to the grave. We lift up our weary heads and exalt: O, death where is thy sting, O, grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ! Death is swallowed up in life!

Secondly, we call attention to the term: *undefilable*. The term in the Greek for "defilable" comes from the verb meaning to stain, to dye with another color. Hence, it comes to mean to defile, pollute, sul-



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ly, contaminate. In the Old Testament it refers to all ceremonial and spiritual defilement; the defilement of the conscience by sin and guilt. In Jude 8 we read of those who defile the flesh, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, while in Titus 1:15 we see that the term "defiled" is contrasted with that which is "pure" and "clean". In the latter passage mention is made of having a defiled conscience and mind; to these latter nothing is pure. In James 1:27 we read about the pure and *undefiled* worship as this is evidenced in visiting widows and orphans in their afflictions.

It is evident that this "defilement" is *ethical* in nature. It is the defilement of sin and guilt. Also this defilement of sin and guilt brings us to the grave under the wrath of God.

In this inheritance in Christ in heavenly places this is no more. For the glad-tidings is that "though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as white as wool". There shall be no sin nor iniquity on all God's holy mountain. The pure shall dwell there, those who overcome in the blood of the Lamb. Jesus was delivered for our offences, and he was raised for our justification. O, death! where is thy sting?

Then too, finally, there is the term: *Fadeth not away*. This is the metaphor that shows that there in this "inheritance" no one shall have a miserable end. We shall not be like the rose that is beautiful in its blooming but most pitiful when withered. Ah, such is life apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ for our justification.

But we have a life of hope that does not bow before death and corruption, not are we defiled by sin, but are virgins pure. Nor is ours a miserable end, but we shall soar upwards on eagle's wings in the strength of our God.

Great and glorious is this inheritance of God in the saints! It only waits the time when it shall fully be uncovered before the wondrous gaze of all the redeemed, when Jesus Christ the Son shall be revealed in glory.

But that is not the entire extent of God's work in this great hope that is ours.

There is more.

Not only is this heavenly inheritance awaiting us, and kept so for us, so that no one can ever take it away from us, but it is also part of God's wondrous grace that we *persevere in the living hope* unto which we have been reborn!

Says Peter "(ye) *who are kept in the power of God through faith* unto salvation ready to be revealed. . ."

Concerning this Divine work and activity of keeping us; concerning this certainty that we shall never

wax faint and fall by the wayside, we would make a few remarks.

First of all, we would call attention to the fact, that what Peter here states very briefly and compactly, he later works out in more detail. Fact is, that this entire epistle is the very Word of truth through which God keeps His church, the Pilgrims and the Strangers, ever reaching out in hope for the final blessedness. Hence, we must not treat this brief statement as an aphorism (a brief, incomplete thought to be analyzed by itself) but we must rather treat it as a compact statement, which Peter himself interprets for us, and is also interpreted by many representative, classic passages in Holy Writ.

Peter tells us here, that it is *in God's power* that we are *kept*; that it is *through faith* that we are kept. The question is, therefore, what we are to understand by this powerful keeping of God, and how this is done by God through faith.

Let us try to understand this.

The term "kept" in our text is the translation of a beautiful word in the Greek language. It is indeed a "word-picture"! The first element in this word picture is that the word in the Greek makes us think not of keeping meat from spoiling in a "deep-freeze", but it is a term which portrays to us *soldiers keeping a city*. It is a military term. It is the translation (the English: kept) of the present passive participle of the verb *phourein*—to garrison. It pictures us the soldiers on the watch, standing as sentinels. This term is literally thus employed by Paul in II Cor. 11:32, where he speaks of the city of Damascus as having been garrisoned shut against him. The king would keep Paul in Damascus.

Now this is here applied to God Almighty, as he keeps us. In picturing us this keeping of God Almighty as the Warrior, Peter employs the imagery of Scripture. For surely God keeps a constant vigil over Israel, His people dispersed abroad as Strangers and Pilgrims. This watchful care, this keeping of Israel is uninterrupted. God never slumbers, nor does He sleep. Wherefore the Holy Spirit employs the *present* participle. It pictures this sentinel activity as *continuous action*.

Of this faithful keeping God's Church always and again makes a theme on their festal days and in the battle-fray. In the most picturesque language Moses sings of this at the Red Sea when he says: "This is my God I will praise Him, My father's God and I will exalt Him. Jehovah is a Man of war: Jehovah is His name! Ex. 15:1-3. Surely if such be our God, we do well to try to understand this sentinel activity of God a bit better. D.V. the next time, then. G. Lubbers