

The Standard Bearer

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The Lord My Rock

The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

Psalm 18:2

This is a very important Psalm. The Holy Spirit had already said the same thing in II Samuel 22. Surely, when the Holy Spirit repeats a word of God we know that He wishes to emphasize a truth.

These words were written and sung at a very important juncture in the life of David the servant of God. The time was near the close of his life, a life that for the most part was a life of war. David composed this Psalm after he had victory over all his enemies, even over his most bitter enemy, Saul. So at the end of his life he turns to God in praise and adoration and says, "I love thee," and then gives his reasons, which compose the rest of the Psalm.

David was a humble man. That is why he is called a man after God's own heart. He was king at a time when kings did whatever they pleased. Yet he humbly confesses that God alone gave him the victory. There is nothing

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that he reserves for himself. It was not David; it was God.

Thus this Psalm is also Messianic. David is Christ, and Saul is the devil, and all his enemies are the hosts of hell that set themselves against the Lord and His anointed. This word of God was given to us to confess because Jesus Christ lives within the church.

A rock! In nature it has a strange and tremendous speech. It is a speech of power and strength, stability and endurance, whether that is on the dry land, in the mountain ranges, or at the edge of the sea. Caesar looked upon the rock of Gibraltar, and now twenty centuries later we can do the same. More than likely it will still be there when Christ returns.

A strange speech. The Bible says its works are perfect. It just stands there. There are many powers, mighty creatures, and great elements, but the rock just stands there. It does not say anything; it does not do anything; nor does it move. It stands stock still. The stiller it stands, the more it deserves the name of rock. It is its very nature to stand still. Tons and tons of water that sweep away everything in its path are broken asunder when they hit a rock. A huge oil tanker weighing many tons, combined with its speed, advances upon a rock. There is a terrible

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impact. You know the result. The rock stands, but the ship is gone, broken and crushed. The rock is a speech of strength, stability, immovability, and endurance.

No wonder the rock is often chosen for a high tower and a refuge. It serves as a foundation, so that men may dwell safely. The rock in nature spells safety from tornadoes, storms, winds, and floods. None prevail against it; the rock stands.

No wonder that God is likened to a rock. In relation to God, it speaks of strength, might, and terrific power. God is the Rock; He is the Almighty. He has all the power from everlasting to everlasting. There is no power outside of Him. His work is perfect. He does not need to labor and hurry; to start, fail, and start again. He is the immovable, always perfect Rock.

It speaks also of endurance. As the rock in nature, there is in Him no shadow of turning. From as far back in eternity as you can imagine, to as far as you can imagine in the future, He is always the Rock, always standing, always perfect.

He is the Rock in all His adorable virtues—in His love, in His wisdom, and in all His wonders and praises. Whatever virtue of love, goodness, and might that you find in this world is not of this world, but is a manifestation of Him, the Rock. He reveals Himself as such to His people.

We find this revelation in His Word: “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). This word you will find on every page in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation—“I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” When that word of God is revealed to your heart by the Spirit of Christ, then your first reaction is, “I will love thee with my whole heart, mind, soul, and strength,” just as David did in this Psalm. God has always revealed that He has a chosen people, engraved in the palms of His hand. This is a certain number, which cannot be increased or decreased. This people has all the love of His heart.

In the beginning, at the time of the creation, God gave Adam and Eve their being in that wondrous garden of Eden, the garden of delight. This was the first manifestation in history of His eternal love. But then the whole

world sank into darkness. His beloved church, Adam and Eve, fell into sin and corruption. Instead of looking into the eyes of Jehovah, they turned their backs to Him and sought the devil. Yet God is the Rock, and His eternal love is, humanly speaking, tested. He revealed that love in the test, that He is yet the Rock.

In this we are confronted with two difficulties. First, how can Jehovah God take His church to His bosom? That is impossible because of His righteousness and justice, which demand that His church go to hell. Secondly, how shall that church go to heaven, when she is the enemy of God? The church shakes its fist at God and says, “We will not that Thou be King over us.” By nature we would sooner serve the devil.

The revelation of His love is in Christ Jesus. Isaiah 64:5 speaks of these realities. “Behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned.” And then, “in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.” The church lies in darkness and is

the enemy of God. He is wroth with them for that sin. Now in *these*, that is, in the wrath and in our sins, eternity enters. That means that the eternal, covenant Jehovah enters our sins and enters into His wrath. This is Golgotha—Jesus. This is Jesus entering our sins, penetrating our guilt,

uniting Himself with our sins and guilt so intimately that when Jesus hangs on the cross God beholds in Him all the sins of His church. That is the revelation of the Rock of our salvation.

God enters His own wrath in the Redeemer Jesus Christ. There is the Rock of Ages on the cross, and all the waves of God’s wrath pass over Him. A great storm passes upon that Rock, who is the substitute for the church. When the storm is over, there is the dawning of day, no more sin and condemnation. The Rock has exhausted the wrath of God, and there is nothing left but sunlight and warmth and the cherishing heart of Jehovah for the whole of the church in Christ.

That has its own effect. We make a personal confession. We say, He is *my rock*. It is the expression of love for God that the church has as she gazes upon that Rock and its perfect work of salvation. That is the reaction throughout all history. It was the reaction already of Adam and Eve, at the dawn of history, when men began

*..look unto the rock
whence ye are hewn.*

to call upon the name of God. So also the whole church, when she surveys that wondrous cross, cries, "O my God," with her whole heart, mind, soul, and strength.

We partake of that Rock. This is seen in Scripture in Isaiah 51:1: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." In Deuteronomy 32:18 is recorded, "Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee." That is regeneration. When we are begotten of the Rock, part of that Rock enters us. The Rock-like quality of that new life enters us. This we call repentance, the power to know and see the Kingdom of God, the knowledge of God and Christ, eternal life.

This creates a life of sanctity, and certainly of perseverance. Each child of God becomes so much like the Rock that he will never forsake it. He says, "Take the whole world, my wife, my child, my life, my everything, but I will never forsake the Rock."

The conclusion of the whole matter is, "In Him will I trust." When you experience the Rock, you also say

that He is your fortress, He is your deliverer, He is your strength, He is your buckler, your shield, and the horn of your salvation.

What does it mean to trust in that Rock? The answer is in Matthew 7 at the end of the sermon on the mount. "Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock." The other side of the coin is, "And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not is likened unto a foolish man which built his house upon the sand."

We are all building a house, whether we are elect or reprobate. At the end of time the Rock will come and as such: "The rain descended, the floods came and the wind blew and beat against that house." We know the end: the first house stood; the second did not. So we must go on building on the Rock. If we do not, then our houses will not stand, for they are built on nothing less than sinking sand.

Let us put our trust in Jehovah, the Rock, and we will persevere to the end in Christ Jesus. 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

The Manhattan Declaration: Document of Ongoing Controversy (3)

As we pointed out in our previous article, although a good number of evangelical notables affixed their signatures to the *Manhattan Declaration*, expressing their solidarity with Roman Catholic clergy and all other citizens of goodwill who oppose the various anti-Christian evils be-

ing sanctioned in our day, a number of their colleagues (Dr. John MacArthur being one such representative) refused.

As MacArthur and others pointed out, by signing the Declaration evangelicals granted Rome and the Eastern Orthodox the right of claim to being valid representatives of the apostolic gospel and biblical tradition.

As we concluded last time, as serious as MacArthur's and others' criticism of the document was (and in our

judgment, valid), the problems with the document go even deeper. This has been pointed out by a certain Richard Bennett in an article entitled "The Roman Catholic Agenda Embedded in the Manhattan Declaration."

Bennett's name is not unknown to the *SB*. We had occasion to quote him in a previous series of editorials dealing with Rome and evangelicals coming together (cf. *SB*, Nov. 15, 2008, p. 77ff.). Ben-

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2010, p. 461

nett, a former Romish priest who was converted from Catholicism in the 1980s, knows the mind and craftiness of Rome like few others. In a masterful exposé of the Declaration, which he calls a most “cunning document,” Bennett lays bare how the whole document is governed by Romish terminology throughout and is one more step in Rome’s on-going strategy to bring her “separated (protestant) brothers” back into her fold—the “One Ring to rule them all” mentality. Bennett points out that the carefully chosen vocabulary in crucial sections of the document demonstrates that all the concessions have been made to Rome once again.

That is why the document, when describing the gospel that the signatories hold in common, describes it as “the gospel of *costly* grace,” rather than as “the gospel of salvation by grace and grace alone (*sola gratia*).” That is why it talks of a “speaking to and from our *communities*”—because Rome refuses to acknowledge Protestant congregations as *churches*. There is but one institute holding that apostolic right according to Rome, namely, herself, the *one* true church.

The same goes for the recurring phrase “justice, human rights, and the common good,” a phrase used to express the social ideal to which all the signatories were committed. As Bennett points out, whatever the evangelicals might like those words to mean, these “are all buzz words for Roman Catholic far left doctrine as spelled out in the ‘Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the [Roman Catholic] Church.’”

That it is a commitment to the social issues of our day rather than to the authority of Scriptures that serves as the basis for the alliance forged must not be overlooked. Bennett reminds us that, back in 1970 (*Vatican Council II*), the Romish prelaty devised strategy to reach out and draw all of Christendom back to its bosom and under its authority again. When opportunity for ecumenical dialogue arose, Rome instructed its representatives to focus on the social issues of the day, because the ensuing ecumenical dialogue

...is not an end in itself.... Rather... it serves to transform modes of thought and behavior of those communities [non-Catholic churches]. In this way, it [ecumenical dialogue] aims at preparing the way of their unity of faith in the bosom of a Church one and visible: thus ‘little by little’...as obstacles to perfect ecclesial communion are overcome... all Christians will be gathered... into the unity of the one and Only Church again.

Talk about craftiness and laying open the heart of Rome. There it is. How men like J. I. Packer and Dr. Mohler can make common cause with Rome, while being fully aware of the above strategy of Rome, is troubling indeed.

And all of this in the context of the Declaration’s opening words.

Christians are heirs of a 2,000-year tradition of proclaiming God’s word, seeking justice in our societies, resisting tyranny, and reaching out with compassion to the poor, oppressed and suffering.

Rome is to be numbered with the faithful who have a 2,000-year tradition of proclaiming God’s word?

Papal Rome?

Why then the Reformation?

Yet, such those evangelicals who signed the document conceded at the very outset.

Rome must be smiling ear to ear.

And then to speak of a 2,000-year history of “seeking justice in our society [and] resisting tyranny.”

Papal Rome?

This in the teeth of “...the six hundred year reign of terror by the Roman Catholic Papacy enforced by its murderous Inquisition”? To use Bennett’s term, an irresponsible “whitewashing” of Rome’s history.

And add to that the “ethnic cleansing” of the Bible-confessing Albigenses in A.D. 1203, the slaughter of the Waldensians in the 1600s, and the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre leading to the slaughter of some 70,000 Huguenots in France, to name but some of the blood on Rome’s hands!

In light of the above, as Bennett bluntly puts it,

For Catholics, including Robert George [one of the three co-authors of the Declaration—kk], to claim a 2,000-year tradition of “seeking justice in our societies, [and] resisting tyranny” is simply a blatant lie.

But Bennett’s strongest reproofs are for evangelicals who cooperated with Roman Catholics in settling on such wording.

It is an outrage and utter disgrace that Timothy George (the evangelical co-author—kk), in particular, and Robert George, an educated man, allowed such whitewashing of the Roman Catholic Church-State's bloody history be touted here.

By implication the same reproof must be aimed at all those leading lights who claim a Protestant and even Calvinistic background, and yet have affixed their signatures to the document.

Bitter fruit for the members of those churches who follow their leaders down this road is sure to ensue.

It did in the days of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, who thought he needed Ahab and apostate Israel for safety against Judah's enemies. The fruit of that misbegotten alliance? The armies of Judah and Israel were defeated and scattered across the hills like sheep without a shepherd (as the prophet Micaiah foresaw). And do not forget Athaliah, who was brought into Jehoshaphat's (and David's) house to seal the newfound spirit of cooperation between spiritually weak Judah and thoroughly apostate Israel, leading to a royal line being nearly exterminated by that she-devil as a consequence and as the judgment of God.

And then there is Abraham Kuyper, who thought he needed Rome's Catholics to further a Reformed political agenda in a Netherlands increasingly hostile to all things biblical in his day. No, he did not compose a document in concert with Roman Catholics that

was quite so blatant as the *Manhattan Declaration*, acknowledging Rome and her 'gospel' as a valid brand of Christianity. But over a six-year period he did write a series of editorials in his denomination's magazine to justify this necessary and proper alliance between Calvinists and Catholics to meet the social and political exigencies of his day, which articles were collected and published as a book entitled *Gemeene Gratie*.

What we find noteworthy is that Charles Colson, one of the three co-authors of the Declaration, makes regular references in his writings to that "great Calvinist theologian" Dr. Abraham Kuyper, but in almost every instance it is to the Kuyper of common grace in order to encourage Christians of a Calvinistic background to join with those of other faiths in political activism in seeking to stem the tide of state-approved lawlessness and in the interest of redeeming culture and society for Christ.

That is precisely the danger of a theology that in the end is dominated by this *Gemeene Gratie*. It posits the possibility of 'redeeming' for Christ our corrupted, anti-Christian society by political activism, a redemption, mind you, without having hearts addressed and changed by the gospel and its truths.

As if such a thing were possible.

But, more importantly, where such a spirit prevails one may be sure that in time it will be the gospel itself that will be compromised and betrayed.

Why?

Because in such a climate, if one were to maintain the gospel with all its distinctives, those others whom you want (think you *need*) on your side

will be offended! And then where will one's cause end up?

The sad reality is that from *Gemeene Gratie* to the *Manhattan Declaration* is not that big a jump.

Be that as it may, in both above-mentioned instances, namely, of Jehoshaphat and of Abraham Kuyper, however well-meaning they may have been, the 'wisdom' that prevailed was, safety in numbers at the *expense* of doctrinal integrity.

Now the question, did either attain for Christ's church and righteous cause the desired end?

For God's kingdom victory, seeking safety in numbers at the expense of doctrinal integrity never works. Church history has proved that again and again. When will Christian men ever learn!

Lest we be misunderstood, let us make clear what we are not saying by our criticism of the *Manhattan Declaration* and its signatories. We are not promoting world flight and isolation from society, politics, and life itself, though that charge is likely to be leveled at us.

We do not teach that believers are to be passive and silent when it comes to laws that sanction the wickedness of abortion and homosexual lifestyles, laws that in time will even forbid the church from publicly calling such activities sin and denying us the right to call to repentance those who practice such things lest they fall under the judgments of God both in this life and the wrath to come.

It is John the Baptist who is to be our model in Christian political activism (not Martin Luther King, who is cited by the Declaration

as being the sterling example for twentieth-first century Christians and the religious conscience). John the Baptist, that man of God, boldly addressed none other than King Herod for marital unfaithfulness, the sin of taking another man's wife, and suffered imprisonment and death as result.

John the Baptist was certainly interested in the sanctity of marriage, and in calling the attention of the magistrate to its importance.

And that, of course, raises a whole new issue, namely, until the leaders of and spokesmen for the Christian faith clean up the unbiblically-allowed divorce and remarriage mess in their own churches (reaching scandalous proportions amongst professing Christians, as ungodly society itself well knows) what weight can their charge that the *State* is threatening the *sanctity* of marriage carry?

Because modern-day Christendom has basically adopted the 'no-fault divorce' policy of our adulterous society (not that of God's Word by any stretch of the imagination), evangelical leaders are in the unhappy position of giving criticized politicians occasion to respond, "Before you instruct us to clean up our house, perhaps you should tend to your own!"

And not without reason.

Be that as it may, we do not discourage speaking against various social evils. It is to be known where we stand. It is to be declared from pulpits and taught in the schoolrooms. And one is free to write one's representative and to sign petitions to place propositions on

the voting ballots that seek to outlaw legalizing wickedness of various sorts.

Nor are we opposed to the church, as an institute, represented by its broader assemblies, addressing magistrates on both the state and national levels when legislation is being proposed that is certain to have adverse effects upon the life of believers and our liberties in this country. The PRC did that back in the 1940s. Our synod addressed a petition to the President himself in connection with legislation that favored closed

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(union) shops, as well as legislation that proposed that factories require their employees to work on Sunday in the interest of greater productivity for the war effort (cf. *SB*, vol. 17, August issue, p. 460 for the letter).

Today what is at stake for the believer is even more far-reaching, laws that threaten the very freedom of the practice of biblical religion itself.

We too are convinced that true-hearted Christians are called to declare to the powers that be that "...we

will not comply with any edict that purports to compel our institutions to participate in [matters that are condemned by the Word of God]" (cf. conclusion of the *Manhattan Declaration*). With the apostles we publicly declare, "We will obey God rather than men, and we will not cease to speak in that one, only name by which men must be saved" (cf. Acts 5:29).

The question is not whether believers ought in the name of the Lord Christ to testify against the legalization of the abominations of our day. The question is, with whom will the Reformed believer identify himself, and with whom will he make common cause in the name of Christ? And will the primacy and purity of the apostolic gospel be maintained or compromised?

What is God's Word to beleaguered believers? "Not by might, nor by power, but by [what is produced by] my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

How difficult it is actually to believe that, when the hideous strength of the Adversary is gaining the advantage on every hand.

But such is the test that faces every true-hearted believer who is committed to living by faith in these last days.

As we have stated previously, all the ecclesiastical tributaries these days are heading back to the Romish See. Due to the overwhelming evils being loosed on society today and the powers that would impose them, that current is proving hard to resist.

The *Manhattan Declaration* is one more proof that this is so. 

■ The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

We knew this was coming. Rev. Gise Van Baren reported on the proposed merger of the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in the March 15, 2006 edition of the *Standard Bearer*. On June 18 the merger was ratified. For the *Grand Rapids Press* Paul R. Kopenkoskey reports:

An estimated 400 delegates approved Friday at Calvin College a constitution that merges the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council into the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

The new union represents 80 million Christians from 108 countries, in nearly 230 denominations worldwide.

In 2006 Rev. Van Baren shrewdly assessed the proposed alliance between these huge “Reformed” alliances. “It becomes clear from the documents available,” he wrote, “that the drive to unite WARC and REC is in order to promote social improvements and activities. Doctrine and Scripture seem to be rather irrelevant.” There are many indications that the newly established WCRC is indeed concerned about social rather than doctrinal issues. Before the merger was ratified, a change was made to the constitution stipulating that “when a church sends four or more delegates [to General Council meetings] half shall be women.” This change was made by members of WARC who were concerned “that the organization’s longstanding commitments to racial and women’s justice go forward” (quoted from www.reformedchurches.org/wcrcborn.html, June 22, 2010). Social issues were also the main focus of WCRC’s agenda after the merger was completed. “Issues that remained to be tackled,” according to Kopenkoskey’s article, “include women’s rights, economic oppression and environmental degradation. Special attention will be devoted to the Accra Confession that rejects ‘profits before people.’”

Rev. Spronk is pastor of Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois.

Nowhere does one read that the new Council has the goal of promoting the spread and defense of the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ alone as set forth in the historic Reformed confessions. The WCRC does not have the stated goal of promoting the historic Reformed faith because it is an enemy of the Reformed faith. Previous to the establishment of the WCRC, WARC openly and vigorously sought unity with the Roman Catholic Church (WARC has completed three phases of discussions with the Roman Catholic Church). Though the WCRC has not yet stated its intentions with regard to establishing ecumenical ties with the Roman Catholic Church, a question comes to mind: “Can a leopard change its spots?”

■ Tattoos

Tattoos are all the rage. Watch a basketball game on TV and you will see tattoos on arms, legs, necks, and maybe even faces. Go to the mall and you will see bodies of males and females of many ages stamped with permanent ink (often accented with various body piercings). Like it or not, this worldly fad affects the lives of Christian families. Under the influence of the world, perhaps seeing tattoos on their favorite basketball player, some young people may desire to get inked. Parents of these young people may be faced with the question, “Can I get a tattoo?” After the parents have wisely said “absolutely not!” they may be faced with the more difficult question, “Why not?” Charles Colson, worthy of sharp criticism for many of his doctrinal positions, offered a helpful commentary on tattoos on his radio program, *Breakpoint*, on May 26. What follows is the full text of his comments entitled *Would Jesus Get a Tattoo?* (found at www.breakpoint.org/bpcommentaries/entry/13/14534 on June 22, 2010).

In Herman Melville’s classic novel, *Moby Dick*, a character named Ishmael is forced to share lodgings with an unknown man. When he awakens in the night, he is terrified at the sight of his roommate—a savage, covered head to toe in tattoos.

As S. M. Hutchens writes in *Touchstone* magazine, readers in Melville’s day did not have to be told that this man was a pagan; his tattoos made it obvious. Readers

understood that tattooing one's body was not a Christian practice.

Especially was this true among Calvinist-leaning Christians of New England, who stressed the continuing applicability of Old Testament law, which, in Leviticus, forbade tattooing marks upon one's body.

But today, 160 years later, even some conservative Christian authorities don't think the ban on tattoos applies. This law, they declare, has been superseded by the coming of Christ. They consider tattoos an area of Christian freedom. Well, maybe they're right—I'm not a legalist.

But as tattoos proliferate in the Christian church, we ought to begin to think a little more seriously about them.

First, let's remember that God forbade the Israelites from tattooing their bodies because this was a practice among the pagans. God wanted His people to be set apart, and not mimic the customs and behaviors of the gentiles. And the New Testament tells us to treat our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. They are not raw material on which we simply carve graffiti.

Second, tattoos today point to the principal things in which people locate their identity—membership in the Navy, for example, or maybe a gang or a tribe. Even young women who mark their bodies with flowers or butterflies are aspiring to a certain identity. Hutchens writes, "These things, however, are in fact *not* principal things and through which we are *not* meant to mark our identity."

Christians need to ask themselves as well an important question—that is, what are (or should be) the marks of a Christian?

According to the New Testament, the marks of believers are faithfulness, patience, kindness, fortitude, and love. Hutchens writes these marks alter, not the skin, but the countenance of believers—so much so, he says, "that the faces of the saints can be distinguished by those who look upon them."

In other words, the marks of the Christian ought to be spiritual—etched into our souls—not etched onto our bodies.

Some believers argue that there's nothing wrong with a Christian-themed tattoo, like the cross. And Christians who get them do so out of love of Christ. But believers ought to ask themselves which sort of mark God would prefer. Tattoos last a lifetime—unless they are painfully removed. But the spiritual marks of a Christian last through all eternity.

In the end, Hutchens writes, many Christians reject

tattoos, not because the Old Testament prohibits them. Instead, an "understanding of the higher and the lower, the superior and the inferior...[keeps] Christians from emulating what remains for that reason a pagan practice."

And this is what we are going to remind our friends and our kids if they're thinking about getting a tattoo or, even worse, a body piercing—God would prefer us to carry the true and visible marks of a Christian: faith, hope, and love.

Young people may latch on to the fact that getting a tattoo is not a clear violation of God's law such as fornication or stealing. Nevertheless, Colson's arguments are weighty, and they are sufficient to convince those who are spiritually minded to refrain from getting a tattoo. In light of Colson's comments, parents can say to their children, "There is a vast difference between saying *God does not forbid tattoos* and *God has a favorable attitude towards tattoos*." Perhaps parents can make a comparison and ask, "Does God forbid playing video games every night? Of course not. Do you think it would please God if your father played video games every night?" The point is that there are some things Christians do not do, even if God has not explicitly forbidden them.

The point made by Colson (and Hutchens) that getting a tattoo is a pagan practice is also an important argument for Christians to consider. Throughout history the church has sought to distinguish herself from the world. The emphasis, of course, falls upon sinful practices. The members of the church are not perfect. They do fall into sin. However, faithful Christians seek to avoid the sins found in the world around about them. In order to give a clear Christian witness, members of the church have also often refrained from practices that are considered "of the world," though they are not sinful in the sense that they are worthy of church discipline. Getting a tattoo, as Colson contends, has historically been viewed by Christians as an "of the world" practice. So parents can tell their children, "No, you will not get a tattoo, because that is what heathens do, not Christians."

Colson's argument can be bolstered at this point by referring to the communion of the saints. The communion of the saints is one of the great blessings of salvation God has graciously given to the members of the church through Jesus Christ. Christians, including young

people, ought to think about the communion of the saints in everything they do. Practically this means that Christians ought to be motivated to do whatever they can to strengthen the bond that exists between believers and to refrain from doing anything that may weaken this bond. Christians should ask, “How will this action affect my relationship to the church?” If a particular action will drive people in the church away, then one should refrain from that action. Applied to the issue of tattoos, Reformed Christians, especially Protestant Reformed Christians, know that getting a tattoo is going to bother other members of the church greatly. Getting a tattoo won’t make the communion of the saints impossible, but it certainly has enough potential to do damage to make

spiritually-minded people say, “I am definitely not going to get one.”

Finally, Colson’s emphasis on spiritual virtues provides a helpful way to respond to all of the world’s fads. Today, for the world, it is tattoos, and tomorrow it will be something else. Let the members of the church continually focus on “faithfulness, patience, kindness, fortitude, and love.”

Hopefully these considerations will convince members of the church not to get tattoos. If parents find their children are not quite convinced, they could throw in another question for good measure. “How is that going to look when you are sixty?” 

Chapter Four Postmillennialism (9)

A Critique of Hoeksema’s Interpretation of the Loosing of Satan

Herman Hoeksema identified the battle of the nations, Gog and Magog, against the camp of the saints and the beloved city, in Revelation 20:7-9, with the battle of Armageddon, in Revelation 16:12-16. He explained the battle that results from Satan’s loosing for a little season as a physical war between two elements of the kingdom of Antichrist. The pagan nations of the East will make war against the center of Antichrist’s power, the nominally Christian nations of the West.

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Removal of the Church

This explanation of the loosing of Satan and the resulting battle, recorded in Revelation 20, was closely related to Hoeksema’s strange teaching that before the return of Christ and the end of history Jesus Christ will raise all the dead elect, change the living saints into new creatures, and remove the entire church of the elect from earth into heaven. History will continue for some months, or even a few years, without any elect believers on earth.¹

Although this teaching sounds suspiciously like the rapture theory of dispensationalism (and this alone should have warned Hoeksema off from the teaching), Hoeksema’s doctrine of the removal of the church prior to Christ’s coming differs from dispensationalism’s rap-

¹ See the preceding article in this series on the last things.

ture in important respects. Understandably, Hoeksema studiously avoiding referring to the removal of the church as a “rapture.”

Hoeksema’s teaching was not due to the doctrine of an essential difference between Israel and the church. As a covenant theologian, Hoeksema taught the oneness of Israel and the church.

Nor was the removal of the church in Hoeksema’s eschatology the escape of the church from the great tribulation of the last days. Hoeksema taught that the church will be persecuted by the kingdom of Antichrist. The removal of the church from the earth, in Hoeksema’s thinking, will follow the great tribulation, not precede it. The reason for the removal of the church, he contended, will be the church’s escape from the dreadful judgments that God will pour out on the antichristian kingdom towards the very end of history.

Hoeksema read Revelation 16 as teaching that God will devastate and break up the kingdom of the beast with extraordinary judgments, or plagues. These will fall exclusively on the citizens of the antichristian kingdom. He concluded that the church will have been removed from the earth when these judgments fall on the kingdom of the beast. Since the battle of Armageddon is one of the judgments with which God will afflict the antichristian kingdom and since Hoeksema identified the battle of Gog and Magog, in Revelation 20, with the battle of Armageddon, he taught that Gog and Magog will not attack the true church (for the true church will already have been removed from the earth), but the nominally Christian nations that constitute the seat of power of Antichrist.

One Resurrection

Nevertheless, Hoeksema’s theory of the removal of the church from the earth before the coming of Christ necessarily shares one grave fault with premillennial dispensationalism. This is the teaching of more than one bodily resurrection at the end. According to Hoeksema,

the bodies of the elect will be raised earlier than the bodies of the reprobate wicked. Some time, perhaps even a few years, will intervene between the two resurrections. Implied are two comings of Jesus Christ, one of a secret nature for the raising and taking to heaven of the elect and another, of a public nature, for the raising of the reprobate wicked.

This is erroneous, seriously erroneous. There will be one resurrection of the dead, righteous and unrighteous. Jesus Christ will accomplish this one resurrection at His one, public, visible, bodily coming. He Himself taught one resurrection of the dead in one and the same “hour” in John 5:28, 29: “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” One resurrection by Christ at His one, bodily coming is confessional for Reformed Christians: “Our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly...and then...all the dead shall be raised out of the earth.... As for those who shall then be living,

they shall not die as the others, but be changed in the twinkling of an eye.”²

The resurrection of the dead saints, accompanied by the transformation of the saints still living when Christ returns, will be public. The entire wicked world will, and must, see this exaltation of the people of God. The cause of Christ in His ridiculed and persecuted church must be

vindicated publicly. There will be nothing secretive about the resurrection of the church. Hoeksema’s explanation of the removal of the church prior to the coming of Christ is forced to make the resurrection of the elect church a hidden, secret, unnoticed event. Commenting on Revelation 16:15, “Behold, I come as a thief,” Hoeksema wrote: “The Lord will come as a thief...to take His people away from the earth. He shall come and go, and no one shall have noticed that

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of the people of God.*

² Belgic Confession, Art. 37, in Philip Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 433, 434.

He shall have been. The nations shall continue to rage and to blaspheme the God of heaven; but the church of God shall be upon earth no more.”³

Saints Alive at the Coming

A removal of the church from the earth before Christ’s coming also conflicts with Scripture’s teaching that there will be elect believers on earth when the Lord returns. “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (I Cor. 15:51, 52). The presence of some saints on earth when Christ returns is the plain teaching of I Thessalonians 4:15-17: “We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

The warnings of Matthew 24:42ff., as well as other passages of Scripture, that the disciples of Christ must watch and be vigilant regarding the return of Christ imply that some will be alive on earth at His coming. Matthew 25:1-13 teaches that there will be wise virgins on earth when finally the cry goes out, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.”

It is important that there be living saints when Christ returns. Although their numbers will have been decimated by tribulation and although their institutional form will have been destroyed by Antichrist, they will be

³ Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh!: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969), 551. Ominously, this statement of a secret removal of the saints by their bodily resurrection also suggests a secretive coming of Christ towards the end, in addition to and in contrast with His public, visible coming at the end. This may not be countenanced.

the church of Christ, standing fast, courageously bearing witness against Antichrist and all his works and ways, confessing that God is God and that Jesus is the Christ, and watching expectantly for her Lord. The church will persevere to the end—not almost to the end, but to the very end. And her deliverance will not be a secretive thing, but the public appearance on the clouds of Jesus Christ with all the holy angels.

The Two Witnesses

Hoeksema was mistaken in finding the biblical basis of the removal of the church prior to the second coming of Christ in the account of the resurrection and ascension into heaven of the two witnesses of Revelation 11. “And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet...

and they ascended up to heaven in a cloud.” Noteworthy about the resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses is that this glorification will be public. The world of the ungodly will see it, and be terrified: “And great fear fell upon them which saw them... and their enemies beheld them” (Rev. 11:11, 12).

The two witnesses are the true church, as Hoeksema explained. The beast out of the abyss, the Antichrist, will make war against the true church. In this war, Antichrist will kill many

of the members of the church, especially the ministers of the word. He will also destroy the instituted church.

Their resurrection and ascension up to heaven will be the public raising and calling up to heaven of the elect members of the church by Jesus Christ at His coming. All the world will see this vindication and glorification of the elect, believing, confessing, and holy church. The voice that will say, “Come up hither” (Rev. 11:12) will be that of Jesus Christ as He descends from heaven to raise the dead, conduct the final judgment, and make all things new.

History will not continue some months or years after the resurrection of the witnesses. But history will end with their resurrection. At that moment, the climactic moment of history, “the kingdoms of this world [will have

*The church will
persevere to the end—
not almost to the end,
but to the very end.*

become] the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

Battle of Gog and Magog

In light of all this, Hoeksema's interpretation of the loosing of Satan in order to deceive the nations and unleash the battle of Gog and Magog against the camp of the saints and the beloved city must be challenged. The camp of the saints and the beloved city, in Revelation 20:9, do not symbolize nominal Christianity, that is, the nations that constitute the seat of power of Antichrist, but the true church of Christ in the world. The object of Satan's hatred is not the *supposed* camp of the saints and the *purported* beloved city, that is, in reality the camp of the unholy and the hated city, but the *genuine* camp of the saints and beloved city.

Satan was not bound so that he would not deceive half the ungodly world of nations to fight the other half (Rev. 20:3). But he was bound so that he could not, for a thousand years, accomplish the greatest deception imaginable of all the nations on earth. This deception is the befooling of the nations to suppose that the human race can form a peaceful, pleasurable, permanent world-kingdom without and in opposition to the triune God and Father of Jesus Christ. This deception is the lie of Satan that Man is god and that the Lawless One is his christ. This deception is the laughable stupidity that takes counsel together against Jehovah and His anointed saying, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Ps. 2:2, 3). This deception is the consummate folly of thinking that mere human and Satanic force can destroy the kingdom of Christ, the church, and thus frustrate the purpose of God Almighty.

This deception Satan will accomplish, according to the sovereign will of the Lord Jesus, for a little season when the thousand years have reached the goal Christ intended for them. In the world-power of Antichrist, Satan will unite all the nations of the world against the Messianic kingdom, which is the true church. As the Magog of Ezekiel 38 and 39, under Prince Gog, attacked God's covenant people, Israel, so the kingdom of the beast, under the personal Antichrist, will compass the camp of the saints about (Rev. 20:9). The true church will once again be regarded, and dealt with, as "enemy of the human race."

The battle of Gog and Magog of Revelation 20 is not the battle of Armageddon of Revelation 16. Rather, the battle of Gog and Magog is the same as the war of the beast against the two witnesses of Revelation 11 and the war of the beast against the saints of Revelation 13.

Armageddon will be the physical battle in which the world-power of Antichrist will be broken up under the judgment of God. With the other vials of Revelation 16, Armageddon will be the full outpouring of the wrath of God in history upon the Satanic kingdom that has shed the blood of His people and slain His witnesses worldwide, and thus has filled the cup of its iniquity. The nations did not kiss the Son, as the witnesses exhorted, and, therefore, the Son will break the nations with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Psalm 2).

The concern of Hoeksema that the saints who remain on the earth after the great tribulation not share in the suffering of the dreadful judgments by which God will devastate the kingdom of Antichrist can be honored without removing these saints from the earth. Revelation 16 does specify that the judgments of the seven vials will fall upon those that have the mark of the beast (v. 2) and upon the "seat of the beast" (v. 10). In addition, Revelation 16 represents these judgments as comparable to the last plagues upon Egypt, from which Israel was spared.

For the saints to escape the judgments that will fall on the citizens of the kingdom of Antichrist, it is not necessary that God remove them the earth. Just as He spared the Israelites in Goshen from the last plagues upon Egypt, by a wonderful providence, so can He yet once again spare His chosen saints on the earth when He pours out the seven vials upon the ungodly.

It hardly needs to be mentioned that this criticism of one aspect of Herman Hoeksema's doctrine of the last things in his commentary on Revelation does not detract from the worth of this splendid volume. It is the best commentary on Revelation in English, by far. Perhaps it is the best commentary on Revelation in any language.

Hoeksema's *Behold, He Cometh! An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* is the Protestant and Reformed commentary on the last book of the Bible that Luther and Calvin did not write.

I am indebted to it. 

The Fruit of the Spirit (8):

Goodness

So far, we have considered the truth that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and gentleness. Now, we consider that the fruit of the Spirit includes the virtue of goodness.

With the consideration of goodness, we once again can appreciate that the various aspects of the fruit of the Spirit are a blessed unity. For example, where there is the true love of Christ in us, there will also be present the virtue of goodness. One who truly loves his neighbor will also do good to him. Moreover, when one possesses the virtue of gentleness, he will express that gentleness to his neighbor by doing good to his neighbor. Goodness is an honorable virtue that we desire the Holy Spirit to work in and through us by His grace so that we may reflect our heavenly Father, who is “abundant in goodness” (Ex. 34:6).



What is the meaning of the term “goodness”? According to Scripture, the term seems to have two basic ideas. First, goodness sometimes refers to moral purity. According to Psalm 112:5, a good man is one who shows favor. He is also, according to the earlier verses, one who is filled with grace and compassion and who is righteous. Although he is a sinner, he lives daily in repentance and by faith in the way of gratitude to God for salvation. He fights his old nature manfully, and finds deliverance in the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a man is upright in his heart (Ps. 125:4), and one that finds favor from Jehovah (Gen. 6:8; Prov. 12:2). In his godliness, he deals with others in righteousness and compassion. By this descrip-

tion of a good man, we understand that goodness is the spiritual health and wholesomeness of the sanctified and godly believer.

Secondly, the word “goodness” may emphasize the motive and purpose of someone’s honorable thoughts and actions towards another. In that case, “goodness” describes the purpose of the believer’s actions towards another as heavenly oriented and God-centered. That goodness may have the viewpoint of “purpose” or “goal” is based on the use of “good” in Genesis 1. In Genesis 1:31a, soon after the creation of Eve, “God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” God meant by that word “good” not only that His creation originally possessed the virtue of life, order, and righteousness unto His glory, but also that the creation in its design and life was ready to be governed by God to His ordained purpose in Christ (Col. 1:15-20). The creation of all things for the purpose of Christ is good because that in the end will glorify Jehovah, our covenant God in Christ Jesus.

We believe that the goodness of the child of God by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit is the ability to do to others morally pure acts—that is, acts that have a proper and honorable purpose with respect to our Father in heaven and with respect to the person to whom we perform some particular act of goodness, such as giving food or words of encouragement to a poor fellow saint.



Since we are called to be imitators of our heavenly Father (Eph. 5:1) even with respect to this virtue of goodness, it is proper that we remember that Jehovah is good! (Ps. 25:8). We are admonished to praise Jehovah for His goodness, which He bestows upon His people. “O give

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thanks unto Jehovah, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever” (Ps. 107:1). Later in that Psalm we are again commanded to praise God for His goodness (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31). God shows that He is good in His mercy towards His people, a mercy that raises them out of their misery unto the goal of their salvation and blessedness. Although the word “goodness” in Psalm 107:8,15,21, and 31 actually refers in the original Hebrew to God’s mercy and lovingkindness, yet perhaps the Bible translators used “goodness” to reflect the close relationship between God’s mercy and His goodness towards His people. God’s mercy for His elect always works towards the goal of our eternal happiness and peace in Christ Jesus. For that reason we do and must give Jehovah many thanks for His goodness to us miserable sinners. God displays His goodness when in His wrath and for the goal of His own glory He destroys the wicked world whom He hates. Indeed, God is truly good to His church when in His mercy He saves His people out of their sin and misery into the blessedness and life of covenant fellowship with Him in heavenly glory.

We confess this goodness of God when we confess that our God works all things together for good (Rom. 8:28). By this we confess that God works all things together for His own glory as our Father and for our inheritance of eternal glory with Him in the new creation. Every detail of our life is designed and governed for that glorious purpose, so that our life experiences do not come to pass by luck, chance, or fate. As a result of God’s goodness to us, even our light affliction in this present life works for us that sure goal of the far greater weight of glory with Him.

It is unto that goal that God continues to be good to us even though we often are not good to Him and come far short of the glory that we owe Him. Daily God shows that His goodness is unconditional, undeserved, unmerited, and unchangeable towards us in Christ Jesus. God

is good, even to us who often behave so unthankfully and wickedly and who by nature are evil and unthankful. God remains good to His elect and works all things together for their good.

This goodness of God is revealed to us clearly in Christ. Jesus is our Shepherd, full of the virtue of goodness. “I am the good shepherd,” Jesus says to us and our children (John 10:14a). Indeed, His goodness is evident throughout all of His work and all of His treatment of His sheep and lambs. Psalm 23 illustrates to us several examples of the spiritual care that our Good Shepherd exercises over us all the days of our life. He makes us to lie down in green pastures. He leads us beside still waters. He restores our soul with His refreshment and rest. He leads us in the paths of righteousness by going with us. He walks with us through the valley of the shadow death, so that even there He does not

forsake us. He protects us. He keeps us from straying off the path to our complete ruin. He leads us to plateaus above the dark valleys. He cares for us to ward off perilous sickness. He gives us an overabundant supply of all that we need. He is the Good Shepherd towards us because He is faithful, merciful, and committed to the goal of gathering and leading His sheep and lambs to His heavenly fold.

So committed was Christ to that goal, and so committed is He in His love to us and the Father, that He laid down His life for us, and then took it up again as the Father gave Him commandment (John 10:14-18). By that death and resurrection of Christ, we and the other sheep and lambs that yet remain to be gathered shall obtain our place in His heavenly fold. So sure is that goal that no man can pluck any of His sheep and lambs out of His hand of grace. So faithful is Christ unto that goal that, though we stray foolishly into sin, He will rescue us in His sovereign mercy (Luke 15:1-7). He is so good to us that He will always seek our

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everlasting good, so that we may dwell in the house of Jehovah forever.

Do you experience the goodness of Jehovah and Jesus Christ to you?



We must display that goodness towards others and so imitate our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. We must do that because we are living branches, united to the root and tree, Jesus Christ. Because the Holy Spirit has united us to Christ and made us one with the True Vine, our goal and purpose is to bear fruit unto the glory of God (John 15:1-8). The purpose of our life in Christ is to bring forth the virtue of His goodness. And in the performance of that good we may be assured and see that we are the children of God (III John:11).

The exercise of goodness involves the desire for the everlasting happiness of others. Of course we desire the earthly happiness of others. We do not rejoice when a child, parent, relative, or fellow member in the church suffers from sickness or a disease that will lead them over the threshold of death. We desire the earthly health and prosperity of others. However, never may that desire for their earthly happiness interfere or contradict our desire for the goal of their spiritual health and spiritual happiness in Christ Jesus.

Certainly, the goal of our earthly assistance of others must be truly good. It must seek the glory of God and the salvation of others. When we assist fellow believers in the church in their time of earthly need, our goal must be their spiritual encouragement. When the wicked neighbor endures a crisis in his life and we are there to help, our energetic assistance must seek the goal of an opportunity to witness of Christ and seek the ultimate goal of his conversion, the Lord willing.

The exercise of goodness may mean rebuke towards those who walk wickedly in sin. Such work with an erring church brother, family member, or a wicked neighbor in

the neighborhood is not pleasant or easy. Nevertheless, with our heart full of the knowledge of what God has in His goodness done to us (turning us from our sin and setting us by His grace upon the way that leads to everlasting life), surely we will speak the necessary words to rescue, if possible, the erring brother or wicked neighbor from his sinful path down the broad and perilous way that leads to everlasting death.

The exercise of goodness reminds us of what is good for us. Christ was the Good Shepherd because He denied Himself. Even when we were His enemies, He sacrificed Himself for us, the goal of which is our salvation. That self-sacrifice is also good for us. It is good that you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Christ, for the good of your soul. It is good that we deny our will, and seek the will of our heavenly Father in our childhood, teenage years, single life, married life, and widowhood. It is good that we do outward good to others, even those who may seem the least deserving of any assistance and who may be our enemies spiritually, with the goal that they might be blessed and be led

in the paths of righteousness for Christ's sake, the Lord willing.

Even our speech must be seasoned with goodness. Our speech and conversation with others must serve the purpose of spiritual edification. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29). Lest we fall into another extreme, the Lord admonishes us to speak the truth, and to speak that truth in love. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up in him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15). When our speech and conduct are salted with goodness, we avoid the evils of wicked communication and of the radicalism of an unedifying communication of truth.

This virtue of goodness is very honorable and desirable. It is a spiritual beauty that the godly wife must covet

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because it characterizes the virtuous woman: “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life” (Prov. 31:11-12).

One who seeks to enjoy the secret of a truly happy life must covet this virtue of goodness. “For he that will love life and see good days...let him eschew evil, and do good” (I Pet. 3:10-11).

One who must admonish an erring brother needs to be equipped by God with goodness, without which proper rebuke is not possible. The apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14).

Who were the kings of Judah that were highly honored and fondly remembered by the people of God? They were the good kings, such as Hezekiah and Josiah. These two in particular were noted for their goodness towards the kingdom of Judah. We read, “Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his goodness, according to that which was written in the law of the LORD, and his deeds, first and last, behold they are written in the books of the kings of Israel and Judah” (II Chron. 35:26-27). Both Josiah and Hezekiah led Judah by their work of reformation from the wicked ways of sin and idolatry into the godly ways and fear of Jehovah. Their work had both an honorable moral quality to it, and also that good purpose of the proper worship and life of the faithful service of Jehovah.

For what would you like to be remembered? Your sports trophies? Your hobbies? Your skills? How much money or possessions you have acquired and can pass on to your children?

Should we not desire to be remembered that in our life and labor the virtue of goodness shined clearly and brightly through our actions to others unto the glory of God? Should we not desire to be remembered as those who did good, even to our enemies, with the good desire that they might fully enjoy the truth of our only comfort in life and death in Jesus Christ alone according to the standards of the Reformed faith?

Perhaps at some time in your life you have known a fellow saint who was gentle and truly good to you in a memorable way. If we are truly humbled before God, then what impresses us about such people is that their acts were done unselfishly to us, the least deserving, for the goal of our spiritual and eternal good. Why did they do such things to us? The answer is that the Lord works in His children that beauty and sweetness of goodness towards one another for His own glory.

For us and for those saints whom we remember as good, doing good is never easy in this life because of our ever-present sin and selfishness. Nevertheless, by the miraculous grace of the Holy Spirit, what blessedness it is when we bring forth the fruit of goodness to the glory of God and enjoy its sweetness in communion of the saints.

May our Lord mercifully and powerfully continue to call us unto the practice of this virtue of goodness. ☁

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHUCK TERPSTRA, EDITOR

Our Secure Salvation: Preservation and Apostasy, by Robert A. Peterson. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2009. Pp xi + 239. \$14.99. Soft cover. ISBN 9781596380431. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.](#)

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Do you question whether God will certainly preserve you in your faith to the end of your life? Are you afraid of falling away from His saving grace?

Confessing Reformed believers know that, due to God's irresistible grace, this is not possible. But where in the Bible are we assured of this? And what of the Arminian spin on various Scripture texts, making them appear to teach that my preservation depends on my own faithfulness? And what is my answer to Satan, when he

whispers powerfully in my ear that I, for whom Christ died, might not get to heaven after all?

In this book, Robert A. Peterson examines 18 Scripture passages that teach that God preserves His people, and 24 Scripture passages that warn God's people against apostasy. All of these are New Testament texts, except that in chapter 2 he examines the subject of preservation and apostasy in the Old Testament.

I recommend this book to all who struggle with the questions I raised above. I also recommend this book to all who desire to grow in their faith in God's sovereign work of preserving His people and of keeping us from the apostasy of which He warns us. I recommend this book for several reasons.

1. It treats doctrines that are precious to the true Reformed believer.

This is apparent from the subtitle of the book: "Preservation and Apostasy." These doctrines are precious inasmuch as they are part of God's revealed will to us; but they are also precious as they assure us of our salvation.

Of course, apostasy is an unsettling reality, and the suggestion of it frightens some into thinking that perhaps they will fall away. In fact, God teaches His true children about the reality of apostasy, in part to assure them that they *will not* fall away, even when they see others around them renouncing the doctrines that they once claimed to believe.

2. It is doctrinally sound.

While a discerning Reformed reader might find some value in reading a book that is not doctrinally sound, anyone who struggles with his understanding of God's preserving grace will certainly want to read a book that is doctrinally sound. This book gives evidence that Robert Peterson is committed to the sovereignty of God. He sees that God's preservation of Israel as a nation, even when she was unfaithful to Him, was rooted in His "choice of and love for his people" as well as His "covenant faithfulness" (15). Also the faith of the New Testament believer flows from election, rather than being the cause of election (34). Nor is our faith the reason for our perseverance (93). One major conclusion that he draws in the last chapter is that "God's preservation is the cause of our perseverance" (202).

In the section on apostasy, Peterson correctly explains that anyone who today professes the Christian faith, but later renounces that confession, or does not end up going to heaven, never was truly saved (103, 116). He correctly notes that the Spirit's leaving king Saul (I Sam. 16:14) means that Saul lost, not his salvation, but his divine power to function as king (24). And he is correct in teaching that the true believing child of God will never apostatize, so as to lose salvation (175). This does not mean that the warnings against apostasy are irrelevant to us. As a body, God's people might compromise on or minimize the importance of certain doctrines, thus beginning the road to apostasy. So we need these warnings, better to guard against false teachers who would lead us astray.

At this point I must add that I did not agree with every aspect of Peterson's interpretation of certain passages. For example, his idea that Romans 11:20-22 speaks only of judgment on Jews or Gentiles as a *body*, and that Paul does not have *individuals* in mind, is not correct. Nor did I agree with every statement that Peterson made in the book. Some statements the discerning Reformed believer would certainly question as to their doctrinal accuracy.

However, these questionable statements are few. And never do they weaken Peterson's insistence on God's sovereign grace in preservation. Always Peterson's basic understanding of each text, and his use of that text to defend the doctrine of preservation, and his theology of God's preserving work, are soundly Reformed.

3. It not only helps the reader understand the proper meaning of a passage, but it also shows how the passage does not teach the Arminian view.

In treating the various Bible passages, Peterson not only refers to them, but spends time explaining them. Then he answers objections to the Arminian explanation of the text, which answers are also helpful to the reader. Peterson explicitly rejects the Arminian view of preservation, and any interpretation of a Bible passage that supports the Arminian view.

4. It is easily read.

Peterson's goal in this book is to explain the scriptural evidence for a doctrinal truth with appeal to a wide audience. To this end he does not use any Hebrew or Greek terms, and he writes in an easily readable style. It is for this reason that I recommend this book to the readership of the *Standard Bearer*.

5. It includes questions for study and reflection.

At the end of the book, in addition to an index and some additional resources on the topics of preservation and apostasy, one finds a list of six questions regarding the contents of each chapter of the book. Answering

the questions will enable the reader better to digest the contents of the book. This part of the book also makes it useful for pastoral guidance of one who struggles with assurance of his preservation.

Robert A. Peterson is professor of systematic theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, MO (the denominational seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America). This book is part of the series, "Explorations in Biblical Theology," in which other doctrinal subjects are treated on the basis of Scripture and with appeal to a wide audience. The book is available at the publisher's website, www.prpbooks.com, or for a discounted price at www.amazon.com and www.christianbook.com. 

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

ABRAHAM KUYPER

In the Midst of Trouble

Adversity

"Troubled" is such a fearsome word.

Not when one is troubled from lack of courage of faith, but when one feels "oppressed."

Even in a material and physical sense this is true.

When in a room where you sit at work fresh air is exhausted, or becomes overheated, so that it becomes difficult to breathe, the lack of air can give you such a feeling of oppression that the blood rushes to the head. Or when something internal presses upon your lungs, or the throat is swollen, or asthma bothers you, or a cough leaves you no rest, these bodily ailments can make you feel so anxious and oppressed that it seems that you must choke.

Reprinted from When Thou Sittest In Thine House, by Abraham Kuyper, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1929. Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.

And yet, such vitiated air and tightness of the chest are not the worst. Sometimes even a person forsaken of God has purposely sought asphyxiation, to escape another, a far more dreadful, oppression.

No, the most fearsome troubles do not affect the body and not the lungs, but the soul, the spirit that is in you. For while these altogether different troubles may affect you even so deeply that they communicate themselves to your lungs, by pressure on the heart, so that with open mouth you gasp for breath, even then this physical oppression is merely accidental, and the real trouble oppresses heart and soul.

Of course, most dreadful this inner oppression of soul shall be in the place of the outer darkness, when the fire that consumes you shall never be quenched, and the worm that restlessly gnaws at the fibers of your heart shall never never die; but now there is no such *hellish* oppression yet.

Something of such hellish anxiety is sometimes suffered in the struggle of conversion, when for the first time the troubled soul discovers itself in the full light of God's

holiness. But when such is truly the case, Christ at once draws near, with the holy breath of His love to refresh you.

No, what Holy Scripture generally means when it speaks of troubles is those afflictions of soul that can come upon us in our home life, in our business affairs, in our intercourse with people, by reason of our children, by scorn and slander, by financial straits, by wrong done that may be found out, by adversity and constant disappointment, by want of appreciation and by the molestation of people.

Troubles in life, which may be aggravated by all sorts of anxieties of unbelief, but that mostly have an outward cause.

That is why David outlines them as he does in that striking, but always external figure, when he mourns and moans: "O, my God, all thy waves and all thy billows go over me."



Into such troubles in turn comes *every* child of man, but yet, they come upon us in *unequal* measure. With Solomon you hear almost nothing of them, but how dreadful these troubles were for a Job, and how a man like David labored under them.

Also it makes a great difference *who* so walks in trouble. For one is so much better able to bear it than the other. One is overwhelmed by it in a moment, while the other sometimes makes the best of it all too lightly. One is, as people say, *sensitive*, i.e., he makes burdens of things, while the other is wrapped as in an impervious garment that permits no rain to pass through.

Temperament here makes so much difference. He who is pessimistic and somber by nature suffers so much more. Or when in anxious moments dreadful headache comes upon you that renders everything dark before you, paints things black to you, and doubles your afflictions.

One, the moment he falls asleep has all his troubles

taken from him, while the other, even in his dreams, is pursued by them, till he rises almost yet more troubled than when he retired.

To one man trouble is as a humming insect that attacks him for a moment, but which he brushes aside, while the other cannot get his thought away from it, and literally *walks in the midst of it* (Ps. 138:7).

Also one will complain, and make his troubles known to others, and thereby obtain partial relief, while the other will keep it to himself, is silent in the presence of others, and practices self-control. But for this very reason, when presently returned to the privacy of his own room, in the anxieties and fears that overwhelm his soul, will cry the more bitterly.

Also your environment has much to do with it. When a loved one is near who watches over you, who sees your suffering and sympathizes with you, trouble becomes so much easier to bear

than when there is no eye that pities you, and sometimes hardness and reproach is heaped upon you, so as to make the cup already full to overflow.

Of course, God the Lord has knowledge of it all, and when no human eye had pity on us, our God has known our path, has watched over us, and, though we did not know it, He has imparted grace to us and comfort.

Who shall measure the mercies of our sympathizing High Priest, who was tempted in all things like as we?

Who shall say how near God's angels, sent by Him to us, stand by us, to banish in such moments despair from our heart, to avert desperation from our soul?

Never, never, are we alone. And the dreadful result, when in such pains of death the unbelieving heart was no more able to hold out, and then laid violent hands on self, has *always* been a misappreciation of the commiserations of our God.



Also in His Word the commiserations of our God with the afflictions of the soul are so surprisingly great. He who has ever taken the trouble to read consecutively

...in His Word
the commiserations
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what in that Word the Holy Spirit has to say *to* the afflicted, and *of* the afflicted, and *about* the afflictions of our soul, would not have believed beforehand that God the Lord would have kept Himself so constantly engaged and in so importunate a manner with the desolate in their afflictions.

It goes deepest indeed when it says: "In all their afflictions he was afflicted." Especially when there is added: "By the Angel of his presence has he saved them in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Is. 63:9).

And that this is true is the experience and still the certain knowledge of him who in such moments of torment, when the water reached the lips, looked away from self and from every creature, to turn himself solely to his God.

He who did this experienced still, as Isaiah of old, that in such moments the importunate comforting of the Holy Ghost can be so tender and abundant that it seems as though in our own soul's perception we live through with our God the affliction that He suffers for our sakes.

It is so unspeakably tender that in *all* our afflictions He is afflicted for our sakes. For then the Holy Ghost prays in us, because we can no more pray ourselves. And He who searches the heart understands the meaning of the Spirit, and comforts us and pours balsam in the wound of our heart.

You then do not see the Angel of His presence, but that Angel is there. He is close by. He supports us in all our sorrows.

Until that love and pity go out to redeem us. To make the brass gates against which we would have broken our head open of themselves before us. To make a way of escape where there was no more chance. And in the valley of the shadow of death, with His rod and staff to comfort us.

Yea, when at length the Lord our God did with us what

a mother does when she finds her child in tears, and our soul realized and blessedly enjoyed that in such moments of tense suffering our God took us up in His arms and carried us as in days of old.



In such afflictions there is something that *kills* us. They utterly undo us. They make us unfit for our work. They darken our outlook. They shut us up with our anguish in ourselves. And that there truly is a *deadening* power in this you see in those who die under it, or in the frenzy of unbelief lay violent hands on themselves.

And therefore, with those who seek Him, God the

Lord goes in against this destroying power, and from the jubilant urge of soul makes the psalmist sing: "When I walk in the midst of trouble, thou makest me alive."

We then are going under. Wave-beat after wave-beat rolls over our head. And however much we struggle against the stream, we can at length no longer keep our head above water. No sooner has one wave-beat been faced, than a greater one comes along. Then we give up, and worn out we let our arms grow limp, and the waters would have swallowed us.

That is the death that hides in the afflictions, and from them casts itself upon us, takes us by the throat, and aims to stifle in us all desire of life.

Then what you need is that you are made *alive* again. And this, says David, is just what in such moments the Lord does to you.

Even though you have already gone under, His love still draws you back as a drowning man to the shore. And though your life-spirits already seem quenched, He brings you back to yourself. Your God makes you alive again.

In the end you realize that you sank by your own fault. That your imagination had deceived you. That the trouble was not so great as you thought it was. But

*You then
do not see
the Angel
of His presence,
but that Angel
is there.
He is close by.*

this makes no difference. Such and not otherwise was the state of your soul. So darkly did the shadow bend over you. And that now you are revived, lift up your head, and are yourself again, you owe solely and alone to the grace, to the love, and to the comforting of your God.

He saw you sink away, and He went down to you in the depth of your afflictions. And from those very deep waters He drew you up again.



O, the world is so cruel. Not of itself, but because it allows itself to be inspired of Satan. And while this stream of troubles goes on day and night to spread its alarms, now in this home and then under the roof of the next, it takes that glorious Bible out of people's hands. It draws a curtain before the infinite mercies of our own High Priest. And when everything around grows all dark, as night without a single star to give

light, then comes that cruel world and points to a revolver wherewith to shoot oneself dead, or to a cord by which to drown oneself.

This Satan does, though he uses the world for it.

And when the individual oppressed to the point of being stifled stands between these two, between that touching, saving, all else exceeding compassion of his God, and that murderous cry of Satan in his heart, why, why, are there those who yet grieve the Holy Spirit, despise His love, and make choice of Satan?

Alas, why else than that in the day of prosperity they have closed their ear to the commiserations of their God?

Then the God of all mercies still calls, but not they are they who can hear it.

When in the day of their prosperity they forget their God, they prepared for themselves the day of evil, in which, relentless and strengthless, they would fall into the hands of Satan. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Young People's Activities

Our denomination's annual Young People's Convention took place on August 16-20 at the Spring Hill Camp in Evart, MI, about 90 miles north of Grand Rapids.

By our count, this was the 70th annual convention, and the 8th sponsored by the Hudsonville, MI PRC. This year's convention developed the theme, "The Truth Shall

Set You Free," based on John 8:32. Rev. G. Eriks spoke on "Free from Sin's Bondage"; Rev. R. VanOverloop spoke on "Set Free by Christ's Death"; and Prof. B. Gritters spoke on "Set Free to Live Obediently." Overall, the convention went very well, even with a few glitches, like losing power the last night, the death of a fish, and a few who were sick or had sprained ankles, etc. About 360 conventioners and about 40 chaperones, plus Hudsonville's support staff, enjoyed a week of edifying fellowship together, behaved in a godly way, and left Friday morning refreshed spiritually, although very tired. We look forward to hearing

our young people who attended tell about their experiences. It is our prayer that the Lord may use this week to strengthen the bonds of faith and love among our youth.

We should also add here that, the Lord willing, the 2011 Young People's Convention will be hosted by the congregation of the Randolph, WI PRC. The convention will take place on August 8-22 at the Green Lake Conference Center in Green Lake, WI. Visit Randolph's web site for more details: www.randolphprc.org.

The Young People's Society of the Faith PRC in Jenison,

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

MI sponsored their 3rd annual Beach Volleyball Tournament on Saturday, July 17, at Holland State Park. This event was held before the August convention, but was the first fund-raiser by Faith's young people for the 2011 convention. We mention this to remind all of us that fund-raising for conventions has now become a year-round event. So support your young people when you have the opportunity!

The young people of the Calvary PRC in Hull, IA enjoyed what Calvary called a Survivor Camping experience on August 6 and 7. Even though details of the event are somewhat unclear, we are happy to report that Calvary's bulletin, the following week, reported that there were survivors.

Congregation Activities

The Adult Fellowship Society of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA met together on Saturday, August 21, for a time of fellowship and swimming at Huntington State Beach. Lunch was served around 1 P.M., with Fellowship members asked to bring a dish to share, along with lawn chairs and drinks. Water for swimming was provided.

The congregation of Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD sponsored a booth at the Sioux Empire Fair the week of August 10-14. Heritage members were encouraged to get involved in this endeavor by making time to sit at the booth sometime during the week. We also note here that in Heritage's bulletin

the week following the fair we read that the experience served as a powerful reminder that God alone is able to soften hearts, and that any fruit of their labors at the fair is of His grace and goodness alone. Heritage rejoiced that God was pleased to use them in strength and weakness as means to fulfill His will.

The Consistory of the Heritage PRC also recently approved Heritage's hosting a Senior's Retreat in Sioux Falls in 2012, D.V.

The congregation of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI was invited to stay after their evening worship service on August 8 for a potluck supper. After going through the line and getting their supper, the congregation heard a brief update from their India Outreach Committee on their on-going work there and how the Lord alone spreads the precious gospel. The short program also included one special number.

The congregation of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada enjoyed a church campout for three nights on August 2-4 at the Lakeview Group Camping site at Aspen Beach Provincial Park. Even if members could not camp, they were encouraged to join those who could for supper and group devotions around the campfire each evening. The three-day event also provided an opportunity for Immanuel's annual church picnic.

A Men's Bible Study began at the Grace PRC in Standale, MI in mid-July. Plans called for the men to meet on Friday mornings at 6 A.M. at a nearby restaurant. The men started their study in the book of Mark.

The first worship service held in the new church building of the South Holland, IL PRC was on August 22. A dedication service was scheduled for September 17.

Sister-Church Activities

Saints from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Germany, Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, China, the United States, and more, enjoyed the 11th Biennial British Reformed Fellowship Family Conference in South Wales on August 7-14. Profs. D. Engelsma and H. Hanko spoke on the theme, "The Word of God for Our Generation," speaking on topics such as, "The Reformed Believer and Money," "The Sexual Revolution," and "Toward a One-World Government." There was also opportunity for swimming, tours, and trips. May God bless the outreach of this conference for the good of His people worldwide.

Minister Activities

On Sunday evening, August 22, the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI extended a call to Rev. Doug Kuiper to "come over and help."

Rev. M. De Vries preached his farewell sermon on August 22 as pastor of the Wingham, Ontario PRC. He preached from II Thessalonians 2:13, 14 under the theme, "A Secure Church in an Anti-Christian World." 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankful hearts to God, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

PETE and PHYLLIS MIEDEMA, as they celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on September 15, 2010, D.V. We as a family see the wonderful gift God has given us through His constant faithfulness and His ability to provide us with God-fearing parents who have raised us to love His truth. We are so grateful for the years of love, devotion, and sacrifice they have made for us. Our prayer is that God will continue to bless them and use them for His kingdom that is eternal and forever.

“For ever, O LORD, thy work is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.... I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me” (Psalm 119:89-90, 93).

❖ Rick Miedema (in glory)

❖ Joy DeGroot

Jeffry, Cassandra

❖ Brad and Ruth Brower

Austin, Brendan, Alexzandria,

Colton, Danielle, Sammantha,
Annikkah

❖ David and Julie Miedema

Rick, Mitch, Trent

Hudsonville, Michigan

Wedding Anniversary

■ With joy and thanks to God, our parents,

GLENN and BETTY KOTMAN, will celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary on September 19, 2010. We thank God for their Christian example to us. “Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations” (Deuteronomy 7:9).

❖ Matt and Jodee VanOverloop

Collin, Annika, Kenton, Ella

❖ Jeff Kotman

❖ Brian and Trisha Kotman

Hudsonville, Michigan

Notice

■ RFPA Annual Meeting, Thursday, September 23, 7:30 P.M., at Hope PRC.

Bound Volumes

■ With the September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer*, volume year 86 is finished. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the **RFPA office** before the end of October. For additional orders, call Paula at (616) 457-5970.

Wedding Anniversary

■ With much joy and thankfulness to our God, our dear parents,

**JOSEPH and MARGARET
FOLKERTS**,

will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on October 4, the Lord willing. We are grateful for their strength, love, and godly instruction throughout the years. “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother. For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck” (Proverbs 1:8, 9).

❖ Fred and Rose Iwema

Patrick and Margaret Alsum

Allyson, Joseph, Jason

Jared and Mary Van Overloop

Tyler, Logan, Ethan

Sarah Lynn Iwema

❖ Richard and Judith Reyenga

Steven and Suzanne Reyenga

Colten

Joel and Laura Noorman

Madeline Sue

Matthew and Rebecca

Reyenga

Nathan Reyenga

❖ Joseph Folkerts

Schaumburg, Illinois