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**THE
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Volume 83 ◆ Number 11

Zion, A Safe Refuge

What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.

Isaiah 14:32

In order to understand the comfort given to God's people in this text, we must understand a little bit of the background of these words from the mouth of the prophet Isaiah.

First, beginning with verse 4 there is the proverb that God's people take up and sing about the destruction of Babylon. Babylon at the time was small, but the prophecy looks ahead to the time when it becomes a world power.

Secondly, there is the announcement of judgment that God shall accomplish upon Assyria. Their might would be broken upon the mountains of Israel (vv. 24-27). This was literally fulfilled under Sennacherib and Rabshakeh.

Finally, there is the judgment against the Philistines (vv. 29-30).

Palestina sometimes refers to the whole land, but here it refers to the land of Philistia. In this light we can understand the rod that smote her, referring to David, Judah, and Jerusalem. Under Ahaz that rod was broken. Later that rod was again strengthened in the days of Hezekiah. These victories of Judah ultimately point to Christ, who overcomes the world through His suffering and death and presently shall judge all the enemies of His people.

However, there is still another judgment upon the Philistines (v. 31). From the north shall come a mighty army—first Assyria, then Babylon, followed by the Medes and Persians, the Greeks, and finally Rome. What will become of Philistia? It will be completely trampled by its enemies.

But now the real question, in light of this, that concerns God's people. What will happen to Jerusalem, which dwells in the same land? What do you answer these messengers? The answer is, "Jehovah has founded Zion, that the poor of the people may trust in it." This answer may be applied to us as well when it becomes dark in the world, when God's judg-

ments come upon the ungodly world. We may well ask, what will become of us, Zion, in the midst of that world?

The answer is in that the church is Zion. It is the church as a whole as she exists from the time of Adam to and including eternity. It is the peculiar treasure that God has chosen in His eternal counsel. This Zion was manifested in different forms throughout the ages. In the old dispensation it pointed, first of all, to the holy mountain in Jerusalem upon which was built the temple of the Lord. It was a sign of God's presence as He dwelt among His people and a sign of the covenant of God as He had fellowship with His people. Upon this same mount was built the palace of the king, from which God typically ruled His people through an earthly king. This mountain was the heart of the city of God, Jerusalem, and therefore often included the idea of the whole city as well as the residents of the kingdom of Judah.

In the new dispensation Zion is the church of God as the body of Christ. No longer is it limited to one nation, but now includes both Jew and Gentile from all nations, tongues, and tribes. God's presence

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and power are now represented in one Person, His only begotten Son, who is the head of the church, King and Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.

Finally, there is the Zion of heaven. "But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels" (Heb. 12:22). Here God eternally tabernacles with His people in Christ.

This Zion is our safe refuge. It is where one puts his trust for one's safekeeping. Stronger yet, it is an actual dwelling in that place of trust. Hence, one dwells in peace and quiet, perfectly assured of his safety.

A refuge from what? At the time of the prophecy it was safety from the world powers, Babylon, Assyria, and Philistia. Judgments are announced against them. These were prophetic of the final judgment. Zion is God's church, a church that is in the midst of a world that comes under God's judgment. In general, all are under the curse because of sin. More specifically, these judgments are seen in the flood and in the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Jerusalem. In addition, there are wars and plagues. All are forerunners of the final judgment of the entire world power and the destruction of all things. But Judah is safe because they receive the comforting answer that "Jehovah hath founded Zion; there the poor of His people shall be safe."

How can this possibly be? Because she is founded by Jehovah! The I AM THAT I AM is the Almighty Builder, apart from whom no creature has any power. Zion's power was of God. He was her Defender. "For the LORD of hosts hath purposed it, and who shall disannul it? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" (v. 27). As the unchangeable One, He neither increases nor decreases. Therefore His work is a reflection of Himself. A work is

no stronger than its builder. Therefore the work is eternal, the foundation of Zion shall never be destroyed, the sons of Jacob shall never be consumed (Mal. 3:6).

All this is rooted in God's eternal counsel, for God chose Zion to be a foundation. "For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation" (Ps. 132:13). From this we see that Zion is the work of God alone. He laid the foundation, in which is the strength of the building. Zion has a foundation that can weather the storms of all ages. Instead of being destroyed by judgment, Zion is saved through judgment. All the storms and judgment are sent for the glory of God's Zion.

By now you can surmise that the foundation is Christ, a foundation that was first of all laid in eternity. God chose and ordained Him to be such. From that point of view, the foundation is firm, strong, solid, unchangeable, unmovable, because He is the eternal Son of God.

This foundation was also laid in time, when the triune covenant God sent His Son in the flesh to be a foundation. In order to save us, Christ had to assume our human nature, be born of a woman, under the law. God so formed and fashioned Him for a foundation of His righteousness in His death. God is just, and the punishment of sin has to be satisfied. Christ died in order that we might live.

God formed Him for a foundation in the resurrection, ascension, and glorification. Christ imparts His life to us as the resurrected Lord of life. There is no salvation possible outside of Christ. Through the bond of faith by grace flow the benefits of salvation.

And now the Word as preached by the apostles and prophets is the foundation of which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. We, the church, are built upon that foundation unto a holy habitation of God. Not even the gates of hell can prevail against it.

It is clear that there is no salvation in that which has no foundation and is ultimately destroyed. God's people do not trust in or seek refuge in the things of this world. Nor do they seek it in human wisdom or in the powers of the world. The people of the Lord seek refuge in Zion, in that which has its foundations made by God and defended by Him.

This was true of Judah in the old dispensation. Zion was a citadel and stronghold, surrounded by high walls, towers, and deep ravines. Of it the psalmist wrote, "They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever" (Ps. 125:1, 2).

This is true also of the church in the new dispensation. Salvation is not possible outside of the church. Christ saves us. The church is the living body of Christ, who is its head. Only in the church does Christ work with His Word and Spirit. God only calls and delivers through the Word in the church.

And finally this is true of the church in eternity. The redeemed shall live on Mt. Zion under the protection of the Lamb of God. All nations shall have been subjected under His feet.

This is not for everybody. No, it is for the poor of His people. This is not to be understood in the sense of earthly, material poverty, although this also may be true. By poor is meant oppressed—oppressed by the world, for they have no place here on earth. They are pilgrims and strangers. They are pursued and persecuted because of their righteousness. Oppressed are they also by sin, by which they increase their guilt day by day. They are conceived and born in guilt and in unrighteousness. They are still of the earth earthy. Sin works in them. They will not what they do; and they do not what they will.


Being so oppressed they cry out for final redemption in the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Zion is a refuge for them. The oppressed flee there with their guilt, sin, and death, with respect to the power of the enemy and to the judgment over the whole world. Here they find safety and refuge over against the attacks of the wicked world. Here is preser-

vation in the midst of judgments.

People of God, this is our comfort, for our God is a gracious God who will not forsake the work of His hands. We will be preserved through all dangers. "So shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for Zion, and for the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing

over he will preserve it" (Is. 31:4b, 5). We will be saved by the judgment of God against the wicked, not destroyed. God is a covenant God who is faithful to His promise.

What shall one then answer? "The LORD hath founded Zion." Therefore it is a safe refuge for all God's oppressed people. Zion shall stand forever! 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Evil Fruits of the Conditional Covenant (2) Unbridled Divorce and Remarriage

The doctrine of a conditional covenant makes the covenant of grace to be some sort of agreement between two parties—God and man. According to this view of the covenant, God promises to be the God of the covenant people and to bless them with salvation. However, God makes demands upon His covenant people. The people must believe God's Word and obey His law. This is the condition they must fulfill in the covenant, either to ratify the covenant or to maintain it (that is, cause the covenant to be continued with them).

Such a conditional covenant is established with every child of believers. It is said that God personally seals His promise to each child at baptism. Ordinarily, this view of the covenant maintains that these children receive grace equipping each to face the demands of God and to accept or reject the covenant promises. Election is excluded from any discus-

sion of who receive the gracious covenant promises. Election does not govern a conditional covenant.

From the above it is plain that a conditional covenant is also a breakable covenant. If a man does not keep his part, he is denied (loses?) the covenant blessings. If he does not believe God's promises to him, or if he rebels against God's law, he becomes a covenant breaker. Such a view of God's covenant insists that God made a covenant with the likes of Esau and Judas Iscariot. They had a real covenant with God, a covenant of friendship and love, but because they rejected God and His covenant, God rejected them.

This conditional covenant is sometimes described as an unbreakable covenant, in the sense that God forbids man to break it. Thus it *should not be broken*. However, the sad reality is that man *does* break the covenant by refusing to believe and obey.

Recall that our intent in these articles is not to refute the doctrine of a conditional covenant as such. Rather, the purpose is to show that the conditional covenant is bearing evil fruit, which fruit is corrupting

the body of truth. For all truth is related. An error in one doctrine will inevitably produce other doctrinal errors, spreading first to those doctrines most closely connected with the error.

With regard to the doctrine of the covenant, one of the closest and most obvious relationships is its connection to marriage. For clarity's sake, it would be good to define that relationship. Some have described marriage as a *symbol* of the covenant of grace. Since a symbol in Scripture is an earthly object that points to a heavenly and spiritual reality, this would be an appropriate characterization of marriage.

It is less correct to speak of marriage as a *type* of the covenant relationship between God and His people. For a *type* is an Old Testament person, institution, place, or event that foreshadows a future spiritual reality. The future reality pictured in a type belongs to the age of fulfillment—the new dispensation, leading into the new heaven and earth. Thus the Old Testament types are pictures or shadows that are fulfilled in the coming of Christ.

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2007, p. 220.

With the coming of Christ, the church received the reality and the type fell away. After Christ suffered and died on the cross, the believing Israelite no longer brought a lamb or bull for a sin offering—the reality had come, namely, Christ’s atoning death. After Christ ascended into heaven, the church no longer insisted that the temple was the only place where God dwelt and must be worshiped. They had the reality to which the temple pointed—Christ and His body.

Thus it should be plain that the institution of marriage is not a type, in that technical sense of a type. For already in the Old Testament, Israel had the reality to which marriage pointed, namely, God’s covenant of grace. God established His covenant with Abraham and his seed, and with Israel. Besides, marriage did not fall away with the coming of Christ. It remains yet today as a creation ordinance.

Identifying marriage as a type has significant implications because one of the essential truths about types is that a type always fails. David was a type of Christ the conquering King, but he fell deeply into sin. The sacrifices were beautiful pictures of Christ’s atoning death, but they did not pay for so much as one sin. By such failures, God made sure that the people knew—this is only a shadow, not the reality.

On the premise that marriage is a type, it is argued that it must fail. And its failure, it is alleged, is that the bond of marriage is dissolved by divorce. Sin, divorce, remarriage—they are all lamentable, but that is what we should expect, for it is a type, and a type always fails. Though God never breaks His covenant bond with His people, in the type, marriage, the bond often is broken.

This is wrong from many points of view, but especially as it is based on the notion that mar-

riage is a type of God’s gracious covenant.

Marriage is a symbol or picture of the covenant. Herman Hoeksema used the word “reflection” to describe the covenant’s relationship to marriage—“marriage is a reflection of God’s unbreakable covenant.” That captures the relationship best. It reminds us that the reality is God’s covenant, and that marriage is but a reflection of that covenant.

This is so clearly taught in Scripture that a few references will suffice. Ezekiel 16 describes in picture language how God gave life to Israel, established His covenant with Israel, and spoke of being married to her. God reminds Israel that He is her husband (Is. 54:5; Jer. 31:32) and that Israel is betrothed to Him (Hos. 1:19, 20). In the New Testament, Christ is described as the bridegroom, and the church is the bride (Eph. 5:22-33).

The church has long recognized this reality. Swiss Reformer Bullinger wrote a large treatise in which he compared marriage to a covenant. Luther spoke of “the covenant of marriage.” Calvin likewise saw that the union of the husband and wife in marriage pictured the church’s union with Christ. Many books have been written expounding that truth.

Thus, the essence of God’s covenant of grace should be, must be, reflected in what the church teaches and practices with regard to the institution of marriage. When God instituted marriage, He made it plain that the husband and wife were so bound together that “they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:22). Jesus made reference to that, and added, “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matt. 19:6).

The sad reality is that man has disregarded this creation ordinance and despised God’s binding together. And sadder still is that this is commonly found within the

church! Churches that are the heirs of Luther and Calvin are being ravaged by the plague of divorce. Thus one finds marriage, divorce after a couple years, a couple decades, or a couple months—for virtually any reason, and then remarriage, all with the blessing of the church.

But how can divorce and remarriage for virtually any reason possibly be justified in the church?

This certainly was not the teaching of the church historically. One lengthy and scholarly study of the issue demonstrated that the early church did not so teach. The only allowance for divorce was adultery. And the authors concluded:

One thing appears certain from this study: The New Testament and the early church as a whole are *not* vague or confusing when it comes to the question of remarriage after divorce. It is clear that Jesus said that a man may have one wife or no wife, and if someone puts away their partner for whatever reason they must remain single.¹

The problem is that the reformers did not follow this teaching of the New Testament and the early church. Heth and Wenham demonstrate that the reformers followed the Dutch humanist Erasmus in his exegesis of key New Testament passages. Matthew 19:9 reads, “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” Erasmus taught that Jesus was giving a ground for divorce *and* a ground for remarriage, at least for the spouse not guilty of adultery. I Corinthians 7:15 reads, “But if the unbelieving depart, let

1. William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), p. 199.

him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases." The reformers joined Erasmus in taking this to mean that desertion is a ground for divorce, and for remarriage.

This interpretation of the reformers became creedal for Presbyterians. Chapter 24 of the Westminster Confession of Faith is entitled "Of Marriage and Divorce." Article 5 teaches that "in the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead." And Article 6 states that "...nothing but adultery or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage...."

It is not my intent to argue for a radically different interpretation of Matthew 19:9 and I Corinthians 7:15. For that, I refer the reader to the book of Heth and Wenham, David J. Engelsma's books on marriage, and many past issues of the *SB*.

The point I raise is this: How did this rather restricted position of the reformers and of the Westminster—allowing for two grounds for divorce and two grounds for remarriage, for the innocent party—how did that evolve into the situation today where divorce is allowed for any reason,

and remarriage is not forbidden to any?

The key element is found in the wording of the Westminster: "dissolving the marriage bond." The marriage bond is dissolvable by men, through the actions and choices of men. God brings together, and men can put apart, can annihilate the bond that God formed in joining these two into one.

This is a strange phenomenon. Reformed theologians from Calvin to the present write that the marriage bond is indissoluble.² Yet these same men turn around and claim that the marriage bond is dissolved by divorce! Some follow Calvin's literal statements in his commentary on Matthew 19 to argue that adultery itself dissolves the marriage bond, because Jesus gave that as a ground for divorce and remarriage.

This is very strange. Adultery dissolves a marriage bond? The result, if this be true, is that there are people in your neighborhood who think they are married, but are not, because their spouses have secretly committed adultery, dissolving the marriage bond, but the adultery is not yet discovered.


Even if one takes the position that God dissolves the bond, this dissolving is due to the sin of man, and due to his filing for divorce. Man's acts, man's choices, result in the dissolving of marriage.

Stranger still—the dissolving of

the bond of marriage allows only the innocent party, never the guilty, to remarry. That impossibly contradictory position is what the church tried to maintain for a time. But it failed to hold fast the contradiction. This inevitably led to the situation that is found in all too many churches—Reformed (including Presbyterian) churches—that every divorce dissolves the marriage, regardless of the grounds for divorce. Every divorce accomplishes the mighty work of putting to naught God's act of joining together. Any and all divorcees may remarry.

Let us allow a man who once held a contrary position to inform us of how this is justified. William A. Heth, who co-authored the book *Jesus and Divorce*, which demonstrated forcefully the position quoted above, has changed his mind. He now agrees with what he calls the "majority position."

And as we will learn, his theological justification is the doctrine of a conditional, breakable covenant.

But that must wait until next time. 

2. Calvin wrote: "[Christ] states, that the reason why God declared man and wife to be one flesh, was to prevent any one from violating that indissoluble tie by divorce." *Institutes*, 2.12.7. Again, he wrote, "And as he declares that it is not in the power of the husband to dissolve the marriage...." *Commentary on Matthew 19:6*.

Letters

Thankful for the Psalter

I write in response to Rev. Daniel Kleyn's article on "Congregational Singing," as it appeared in the November 1, 2006 issue of the *SB*. I would like to say that I am so thankful that our PR churches are psalm-singing churches. I am thankful, first, because our Psalter is based on the God-inspired psalms, which makes the songs God-glorifying and God-praising. Second, I am thank-

ful that we have a psalm-based Psalter so that we as adults and children may sing and memorize these psalms, which are the most important songs in our spiritual lives. What a blessing to hear our children sing these psalms and also to hear our parents and other aged saints singing these same psalms at home and in the nursing homes.

Let us never lose our love of God-inspired psalms, for we know

what can happen from one generation to the next. It's happening in the churches around us, where solos, choirs, and hymns have become part of the worship service. The whole congregation must sing, as we will sing in heaven one day.

Let's be worthy of the name Christian by singing psalms to our Savior, especially on the Lord's day.

Ed Reitsma
Grand Rapids, Michigan 

■ Religious Freedom and Homosexual Marriage

In our country, we often take freedom of religion for granted. There is no threat to individual safety when we identify ourselves as Christians. We are free to use the Scriptures and all their teachings in speaking to others and in showing them the way of life and the way of sin and death. In our homes we may teach our children from the Bible. As groups of believers we may gather in public worship. There is no fear of intrusion or persecution when we do this.

And what a blessing. We know that this is not the case all over the world. In some countries there is political oppression and persecution of Christians. As the day of the Lord draws nearer, we can expect the same in the affluent countries of the West. There are indications that these freedoms are fast losing their place in our society.

In a series of articles from *Breakpoint* last fall (you can subscribe to this daily news commentary at www.breakpoint.org), this topic of religious freedom was discussed. From the article below, "An Engine of Conflict: Same-Sex 'Marriage' and Religious Freedom," October 19, 2006, it is clear that one of the biggest threats to religious freedom is the push for homosexual rights.

We often take freedom of religion for granted in this country. While Christians in the United States don't face torture and death because of our faith, we do face very real threats to our religious liberty, and we would be fools to ignore them.

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Take for example just one headline issue this election season: same-sex "marriage." As Anthony Picarello of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty has said, same-sex "marriage" in this country is "an engine for religious conflict."

He explains that rewriting the definition of marriage does not just change one law, it changes everything. The legal term marriage permeates every sphere of law: taxes, education, and employment. These laws in turn regulate religious institutions and para-church organizations like schools, hospitals, orphanages, and Prison Fellowship.

There are a variety of cases that already point to this reality. In Massachusetts, where same-sex "marriage" is the law of the land, Catholic Charities announced that it would no longer serve as an adoption agency. Why not? Because by Massachusetts law, organizations that place children for adoption must have a state license. And organizations with state licenses may not discriminate against same-sex couples. So Catholic Charities had to choose: Either obey the law and violate the teachings of the Catholic Church, or get out of the adoption business altogether. It wisely chose the latter.

There are other troublesome legal issues concerning homosexuality besides same-sex "marriage." In California, Governor Schwarzenegger signed a bill into law that makes it illegal for any non-profit organization receiving state funds to portray homosexual or bisexual practices in a negative light—so much for preaching from the pulpit about homosexuality being a sin. In another case in California, a private Christian school expelled two girls for announcing they were in a lesbian relationship. Can the state call this discrimination and demand that the school violate its own moral convictions of right and wrong? Thirty years ago, we

would have called that impossible. Today, it's up for grabs.

Religious colleges might also be forced to extend married housing to same-sex couples, as was the case in a recent court decision involving a Jewish university in New York. Employees who voice dissent over practices that promote the homosexual lifestyle might risk censure or loss of employment, as did a 63-year-old Muslim employee of William Paterson University in New Jersey. He called homosexuality "a perversion."

And even in cases where the government can't compel faith-based groups to affirm homosexuality, it can punish defiant organizations by banning them from using public facilities. A judge in San Diego just ruled against the Boy Scouts of America on this very point, because it refused to allow homosexual scout leaders.

Like it or not, the questions surrounding same-sex "marriage" and special rights for homosexuals are going to force us to deal with religious freedom issues—even what we can preach about from the pulpit.

This is a large, worldwide, issue. In many countries (Canada, Australia, and in Europe) there are already laws in place forbidding any public comment that may be against homosexuality. And just because those laws are not yet in place in the USA does not mean our country is still "Christian" in its values, or that these things are not coming. In the USA legislation is formed and enforced differently than in other parts of the world. For one thing, there are the "first amendment rights." Before legislation that affects religion or speech is put in place, there is a lengthy discussion on freedom of speech and religion. The result is that once a law is in place all the issues of freedom have been dis-

cussed, and the infringing on these rights has been completely justified. And then the law can be rather rapidly and strictly enforced (the opposing issues are dealt with ahead of time). Besides this, there are massive lobbying groups with a lot of clout, and a massive media organization that is busy brainwashing a generation, and, in addition, a rather strict and heavy application of punishment against those who threaten the American way of life. It could be that when laws like this come in the USA they will be applied much more rigorously, judgment will be swifter, and policing will be more meticulous.

The center point in this battle over freedom of expression is becoming more and more the issue of homosexuality. And it is not anymore a discussion over whether their lifestyle is legitimate or whether they may have the same rights as others; rather, the issue is becoming more and more whether anyone may express himself against homosexuality. The tables have turned, and Bible-believing Christianity is being put on the defense. These are signs of the times, and we would be foolish to ignore them.

■ Religious Liberties in Education

Across the pond in Germany, the issues of religious freedom are also hot, only on a little different issue. Children: whose property are they? Yours? Or the state's? Apparently some old Nazi laws that put the right of education in the state's hands and not the parents' are now being enforced. The reports are rather disturbing.

PADERBORN, Germany, September 14, 2006 (LifeSiteNews.com) — German police stormed into the residence of a Christian homeschooling family, and arrested a mother for homeschooling her children, an offense established

since Nazi Germany. Now the woman's husband has fled with their children to seek refuge in Austria, which allows homeschooling under certain conditions according to the Brussels Journal.

The Brussels Journal reports that Katherina Plett responded to a knock on the door from an undercover police woman Thursday morning at 11:00 P.M. Once the Baptist woman opened the door, police officers, hidden outside the house, stormed into her home and arrested her for the crime of homeschooling her children. The female officer insisted that she watch Mrs. Plett as she changed her clothes claiming, "She would arm herself and shoot us all."

German police then hauled Mrs. Plett off to Gelsenkirchen jail, where she is serving a 10-day prison sentence for exercising her right to be the primary educator of her children.

However, on Monday, Mrs. Plett's husband gathered their children and fled to Austria, finding asylum at a Christian family center in Wolfgangsee, Austria. Another homeschooling family from Germany has also taken refuge after a Paderborn court ordered the seizure of their children.

Laws against homeschooling are being enforced, not only by local authorities (police and city governments), but by the state and federal governments. December 22, 2006, LifeSiteNews.com gives this report.

In the most recent installment of Germany's ongoing homeschooling saga, the Director of the Ministry of Education for the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg sent a letter to German homeschoolers that is in effect a declaration of war on homeschooling in the state.

In the letter K. Horstmann, the Ministerial Director, informs homeschooling families that "the Minister of Education does not share your attitudes toward so-called homeschooling."

Horstmann, rather than acknowledging the right of the parents to be the primary educators

of their children, continues to indicate that instead the family must step in line with the ideology of the state, saying, "the education authority is in conversation with the affected family in order to look for possibilities to bring the religious convictions of the family into line with the unalterable school attendance requirement."

Horstmann concludes the letter with a threat, stating, "The education administration in future will also not recognize so-called homeschooling and act in proportionate measure considering the individual case and circumstances."

Some homeschooling families in Baden-Wuerttemberg, however, are already intimately familiar with what the term "proportionate measure" may mean. Horstmann's letter was written in response to concerns expressed by Netz-Bildung Freiheit about the case of the Romeike family, whose children were forcibly removed from their home in October of this year, and escorted to the local state-run school. Similar, and worse, stories abound throughout Germany.

What is disturbing is that this is not a government attack simply on homeschooling per se, but the attack is on Christian education and the right of parents to impart religious values to their children. This is clear from the statements of another government official (WorldNetDaily.com, December 21, 2006).

Brigitte Zypries, who serves as the German federal minister of justice, told ASSIST News Service that the nation "should not place any behavior under the protection of this important basic right."

The 53-year-old said court rulings have produced "a kind of freedom for all sorts of behavior" and those need to be specifically defined.

She also challenged churches' involvement in religious instruction in schools, saying they cannot simply be allowed to claim a monopoly on teaching values.

Subjects like ethics, law — and

of course politics—also could be used to teach values, she noted.

And her opinions are backed by court decisions, not simply within Germany, but also in an international court, the European Human Rights court (WorldNet Daily.com, December 21, 2006).

The Strasburg-based court addressed the issue (of homeschooling) on appeal from a Christian family whose members alleged their human rights to educate their own children according to their own religious beliefs are being violated by the ban.

The specific case addressed in the opinion involved Fritz and Marianna Konrad, who filed the complaint in 2003 and argued that


Germany's compulsory school attendance endangered their children's religious upbringing and promotes teaching inconsistent with the family's Christian faith.

The court said the Konrads belong to a "Christian community which is strongly attached to the Bible" and rejected public schooling because of the explicit sexual indoctrination programs that the courses there include.

The German court already had ruled that the parental "wish" to have their children grow up in a home without such influences "could not take priority over compulsory school attendance." The decision also said the parents do not have an "exclusive" right to lead their children's education.

The court's ruling said that

schools represent society, and "it was in the children's interest to become part of that society." "The parents' right to education did not go as far as to deprive their children of that experience," the ruling said.

And so, what we have in Germany is the local enforcement of what is becoming international law against Christian education by parents in their homes. This is another sign of the times that we would be foolish to ignore. The goal is international standards for the religious education of children, and the physically forced separation of children from parents who refuse to comply—or, to put it more simply, persecution. 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Modern Heresies: Errors in Covenant Theology

Introduction

Our concluding study of heresies that have appeared in the history of the church of Christ is a brief survey of more modern heresies that are present in the church in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The task of choosing which ought to be included in these articles is not an easy one, and the

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choices we have made are, admittedly, somewhat arbitrary. The difficulties are especially two. The first is that heresies are without number in post-Reformation times. If we were to describe and refute them all, we would have to write a number of volumes. Because of the sheer number of heresies, I have chosen to discuss, though briefly, those heresies that have had an impact on the church of Christ, especially as represented in our own Reformed tradition. By "impact" I mean to limit our discussion to those heresies that have constituted a threat to the doctrinal integrity of the church and that had to be warded off; but also to heresies that

were, themselves, the spur to further doctrinal development in the truth.

This choice led to another problem: there are many heresies that have had an impact on the church, but concerning which much material and many books have been written. I refer, in a broader sense, to such heresies as post-millennialism and preterism; and in the narrower sense, to such heresies that have produced a large amount of literature in the history of our own Protestant Reformed Churches. Examples of such heresies would be the gracious and well-meant gospel offer and a conditional covenant. Whether to

write on all these heresies or to refrain in the light of the wealth of material is a question not easy to answer.

In the interests of being as complete as possible, I have decided to say at least a few words concerning most of these heresies on which much has already been written.

The Doctrine of the Covenant

Some History

The doctrine of God's covenant of grace had its origins in Switzerland. The reformers Zwingli and Bullinger were especially involved in the early development of the doctrine, for they were opposing the error of Anabaptism, and they found that the scriptural truth of the covenant was the foundation upon which the doctrine of infant baptism could be maintained.

The difficulty was that, from the inception of the doctrine, the covenant was defined in terms of an agreement between God and man. Why this definition became the accepted one is not known with certainty. It may be because the Latin term used for covenant, *foedus*, means treaty, compact, agreement. Thus the biblical idea of the covenant that God establishes with His people was spoiled by the meaning of the Latin word for covenant.

However that may be, the truth of the covenant was, not that long after the Reformation, combined with what has become known as federalism. The basic idea of federalism concerns the legal relationship between Adam, our first father, and the human race, which came from him. In his position of federal head of the human race, Adam's faithfulness or transgression had legal consequences for the entire human race. If Adam remained obedient, his obedience would be imputed to all who followed. If he sinned, the guilt of his sin would be imputed to the entire human race that he represented.

This federal idea was first ad-

vanced by theologians in the Palatinate somewhere between 1560 and 1590. Our readers will be reminded that our own Heidelberg Catechism was written during this period, for the date of its publication is 1563.

The combination of the covenant as a pact or treaty plus the federal relationship in which Adam stood to the human race led rather naturally to the idea of the covenant of works. One of the chief promoters of this view was Zacharius Ursinus, who with Caspar Olevianus was the author of the Heidelberg Catechism. We may very well take Ursinus' view as typical of the general idea of the covenant of works.

Ursinus defined a covenant in his *Catechesis Religionis Christianae*.

Question 18. What the covenant of God is. A. A covenant in general is a mutual pact between two parties, where one obligates the other to certain conditions for doing, giving, or receiving something, employing signs and external symbols for solemn testimony, as a confirmation that the promise may be inviolable. From here certainly the definition of the covenant of God is deduced. For it is a mutual pact between God and men.

This general idea of a covenant was applied to the relation in which Adam stood to God before he fell.

D. A. Weir writes:

The *foedus* made with Adam before the Fall is a covenant which deals with creation and nature. Through it, man stands before God on his own merits (*The Origins of the Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century Reformation Thought*, D. A. Weir, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 62).

He goes on to say:

The distinguishing feature of federal theology is the application of covenantal status to the

paradise state, with Adam as the responsible federal or covenant head who makes a decision for all of the creation (Weir, p. 99).

The elements of the covenant with Adam, and by implication with all men, are as follows.

1) The conditions: The command not to eat of the forbidden tree, and the command to rest on the seventh day; thus, obedience to God.

2) The parties, which are God and man.

3) The conditions controlling both God and man. Ursinus believed that the covenant of grace was unconditional: man did not keep the covenant, but God keeps the original covenant in Christ.

4) The covenant was binding on Adam and his descendants, whether Adam sinned or remained obedient.

5) The sign of the covenant with Adam was the tree of life. After the fall, the sign was first circumcision, then baptism.

6) The promise of God to Adam, upon condition of obedience, was eternal life.

This view of the covenant dominated for centuries, although from time to time some differences in emphasis and/or ideas appeared. It was quickly adopted by Presbyterian theologians in the British Isles, Germany, and the Netherlands. It is basically the idea referred to in the Westminster Confession, and we may be thankful that it does not appear in any form in our Reformed creeds.

A more recent view of the covenant of works differs very little from that of Ursinus. Louis Berkhof describes the covenant of works as including:

The Covenanting Parties. A covenant is always a compact between two parties. In the case of the covenant of works there was ... the triune God.... And, on the other hand, there was Adam, the representative of the human race....

The Promise of the Covenant. The great promise of the covenant was the promise of life in the fullest sense of the word, that is, not merely a continuance of the natural existence of man, but life raised to the highest development of perennial bliss and glory....

The Condition of the Covenant. The promise in the covenant of works was not unconditional. The condition was that of perfect, unconditional obedience....

The Penalty of the Covenant. The penalty that was threatened in case of transgression was death....

The Sacrament of the Cov-

enant.... In all probability the tree of life was an appointed symbol and pledge or seal of life... (Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Reformed Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1933, pp. 131-133).

To sum up the doctrine, we conclude that the idea of the covenant of works includes the following elements:

1) It is always related to the federal headship of Adam in his relationship to the whole human race.

2) It is based on the idea that any covenant between God and man is an agreement, contract,

pact, or treaty.

3) It is always a conditional covenant; that is, it is established and maintained only on the condition that man agree to the provisions of the covenant and remain faithful. Unfaithfulness carries with it the penalty of death.

4) The promise of God to Adam is that, after a certain period of time, conditioned on Adam's obedience, Adam and his posterity would have gone to heaven.

We postpone a further discussion of this idea to our next article.



Traditions and Your Boat

Here in Grace Life we want to help folks steer a straight, honorable, and happy course through life. And that, before they have gone too far out to sea, and before they are tossed to and fro, or lost, run- aground, or sunk.

So. You guessed it. We want to float your boat here. No leaks. Straight. To Christ. To godliness. To joy. To Grace Life. To heaven. Full speed ahead.

But the boat has to be built right, and have the right equipment. And of that we therefore speak.

Many-a-boat has, in fact, begun putt-putting along in life's journey missing some things very important for the survival of its passen-

gers and crew. Things like keels. Rudders. Sails. Too often boats and even ships are made, then launched, without these things. And theirs is not a bon voyage. All the courage of all the fearless crews cannot prevent their disaster.

The identity of the keel, the rudder, and the sails we have as believers might surprise. For they are these: traditions. Yes, indeed! Traditions. We could also say they are the ballast of our boats. For they prevent our boats from capsizing. And even the navigational system. For they keep us on course in life, and running before the wind. Our SNS. Spiritual Navigational System. Traditions!

Traditions are all that. They do all that. They are the things making our boats beautiful. And seaworthy. In calm seas and tempest. For smooth sailing in sight always of a certain Rock and of heaven. Precious, heaven-sent, heaven-crafted traditions!

Now does not that sound odd? Even writing it I thought: Now, couldn't I say this some other way? Isn't there some other word, other than that "T" word? What ever will people, especially young adult sorts, readers regularly in high gear and used to hockey at midnight and work and school and coffee with friends at Applebees before hockey again...want hearing...of those...traditions...again?

For here you are (and I know it!): young Grace Life believer, wanting a speed boat. Maybe thinking of sailing into uncharted waters. And the Reverend says your boat must be made of traditions. You were thinking Donzi. But now this. He says it has to be a traditional boat. Maybe the kind old folks drive on calm little lakes. With the three pontoons and the measly thirty-five horsepower Mercury. Putt putt. And pass the prunes.

Fact is, I can hardly blame you.

You have been shot at. You probably hardly even know it. Harvard, San Francisco, democrats, rebumblings, the media, and all the world have given "traditional" *anything*, and especially traditional Christianity, a bad rep. That's why you chafe at the thought of wearing a tie. And that's why you go clubbing, or date, or dream of it, on the sly.

Long ago even churches stopped building their boats with and of traditions. Society seems to have persuaded many-a-church that traditions, rather than helps, are either so many unwanted barnacles crudding up the hull, or just so much irrelevant cargo moldering in the hold. Folks, even Christian ones nowadays, seem convinced that the old traditions impede their progress in today's world, hinder their evangelistic and culture-war success in contemporary waters, and interfere with their ability to maneuver in the shallows, approach the shores, and meet the needs of modern men, women, and especially young people.

Captains everywhere (and who knows from whence they are receiving their orders!) abhor the traditional keels, have hoisted new-fangled spinnakers, and ordered all hands to swab the decks and empty the holds of whatever thing traditionally Christian remains. Heard now, from many-a-bridge and poop deck: Traditional Reformed doctrine! Traditional Puritan morality! Traditional worship! Walk...*the plank!*



Shame.

And a mutiny. For the Savior Captain, Jesus, would equip, safeguard, and guide His Queen fleet of the seas, the Church, the way He always, traditionally, has. Now that churches will have different boats, not according to the traditions of Jesus, they will have a different Captain. They have Jesus walk the plank. Or, as the Bible

says: they "crucify the Son of God afresh."

But we will not. And thus we want to hold the traditions. And float by them!

This is precisely what the apostle tells the Thessalonians, and what the Spirit tells us today, in II Thessalonians 2:15. "Therefore, brethren," the text says, "Stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or our epistle."

There you have it. Traditions, to continue our boating metaphor, were to float and guide and speed along Thessalonian boats. Traditions were! And I dare say the apostle meant that the traditions were for young Thessalonian boats too!

So for us.

For traditions are just these: *truths*. To this the apostle refers. They are all the truths he preached and wrote about. They are the whole counsel of God. To the Thessalonians the apostle wrote especially of the end times. For all of us at all times the truth of the whole Bible is our "tradition," and the various truths are the "traditions."

They are traditions of the truth of God and His greatness, His eternal counsel, His wonderful creation, His heaven, and His hell. They are the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth as it is in Him. They are the truths of sin, of grace, of covenant, of holiness, of church, of worship, of godly homes, of responsible parenting, for young and for old, for covenantal marrying, for loving, for living, for dying, and of glory.

Truths! Truths one must love, says the apostle, in order to be saved (II Thessalonians 2:10)! Truths one must believe in order not to be damned (v.12), but instead to be sanctified and preserved to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 13, 14)! Truths one must hold in order to stand fast (v.15)!

Truths, these, called *traditions*. Ever wonder why?

Well it is simply because truth is something "passed on" and then "received" and then "passed on" to the next generation. That is what the word "tradition" means. That is what the truth is: traditional.

I think, don't you, it is all to remind us of God. Truth is. And the fact that it is traditional, that truths are "traditions." Truth as this "traditional," un-invented, passed on, good for grandpa, good for me, good for my sons and daughters, same old same old wonderful thing...is to teach us of God.

Of the wonder of God eternal and unchangeable, and that you just don't invent God. Of the fact that God is with us in a great big family way—backwards to our ancestors, forwards to our offspring, and all around in every nation. Of the gospel of Jesus Christ, same, yesterday, and forever. Of the faith of our fathers living still. Of us still thrilled to sing of it, and to ask for it, and to live by it.

That is the gospel that traditions tell. One Word, always, for all time, for all people, young and old: the Word of the God who once for all has sent His Son and delivered Him up for our salvation. God with us in Jesus, our truth, the tradition of our traditions.




For the seven seas, sailor readers! For your seven seas!

We want to sail here. Big time. For a regular regatta!

But I want to warn you. There is a certain rock. And a whirlpool. These have splintered and sucked down *many a boat and even entire fleets* whose voyage in life started out in the good old traditional way.

Next time.

Till then: Hoist the sails. Man the tiller. All young Grace Life hands on deck.

Godspeed. 

A Reformed Response to the Reformed Baptist View of Baptism and the Covenant

That circumcision is the Old Testament counterpart of Christian baptism some Reformed Baptists will acknowledge. The two signs, they will admit, seal the same covenant promise concerning salvation from sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. But they then say that there was another covenant promise that came only to Israel, and that does not come also to the church today. This, they say, was a promise of blessings that were “earthly, material and temporal.” In other words, they teach that Israel had a promise of both material blessings and spiritual blessings, while the church today has a promise of only spiritual blessings. This, they say, is the fundamental difference.

Then they proceed to apply this distinction to the two covenant signs—circumcision and baptism. The earthly, material blessings, they say, could be received without faith, and were promised to all the *natural* children of Jacob, whether they had faith or not. And since all the *natural* children received this promise, they all received also the sign of that promise. But baptism, they say, is different. The promise of the new covenant is only of spiritual things. And these things must be received by faith. Therefore this covenant promise is only to the *spiritual* children of the church—the children

who have faith. This, they say, is the reason why today one must first give evidence of having conscious faith before he may receive the covenant sign of baptism.

There are a number of important questions to consider in evaluating this argument of a Reformed Baptist. Let us begin by considering the following: Did the old covenant really include a promise of earthly blessings to all the natural children of Israel? In other words, did all those who were circumcised actually receive God’s grace? Did the sign of the old covenant seal a gracious promise to every single child that received it? To these subjects we now turn.

No earthly, material blessings

It is not uncommon to hear Reformed Baptists—or other Baptists for that matter—accuse Reformed believers of “reading the Old Testament as though it were the New.”

All Christians, of course, read the Old Testament in the *light* of the New; but it is another matter to read the Old Testament as though it *were* the New, as though the terms “old” and “new” had no theological significance. Yet this is what the Paedobaptists¹ do when they argue that circumcision, like baptism, signified and sealed spiritual blessings exclusively.²

We are accused of reading the Old Testament as though it were the New simply because we disagree with the Reformed Baptists as to how to distinguish the two. We do

not say that “old” and “new” have no significance. We recognize and teach that the old dispensation, unlike the new, was a dispensation of many types and shadows that pointed to the coming Christ, and that now have gone away since Christ has come and has accomplished all that was necessary for our salvation. We do indeed confess that Scripture distinguishes the two, but we reject what the Reformed Baptists say the distinction is.

Similarly, we would admit that there is a distinction between circumcision and baptism. Circumcision involved a shedding of blood, but baptism does not. This is because Christ put an end to all symbolic bloodshedding when He shed His blood for us. So we do indeed confess that there is a distinction between the sign of the old covenant and the sign of the new. But we deny that the distinction is this: circumcision sealed material blessings and spiritual blessings, whereas baptism seals spiritual blessings exclusively.

The Reformed Baptists fall into error when they speak of “material blessings” in the days of the old dispensation. It is true that in the old dispensation God gave His people many earthly things that pictured heavenly realities. But

1. A paedobaptist is one who believes that infants of believers are to be baptized. The prefix “paedo-” comes from a Greek word that means “child.”

2. Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, repr. 1980) p. 93.

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these earthly things were not blessings in themselves. There were many who received only the earthly things, and not the blessing of God to which those things pointed. For an unbeliever, the earthly things they received were certainly *good gifts*, but not *blessings*.

Also in the days of the old dispensation, God taught His covenant people to distinguish between these good earthly things and His blessings. In Psalm 106, for example, we read about the occasion when God gave quails to His people in the wilderness, after they complained and were not satisfied with the manna He had given them. Verse 16 of this Psalm says:

And he gave them their request;
but sent leanness into their soul.

God gave them a gift in the quails, but without the Word of His blessing. Those who walk in unbelief do not receive God's blessing. It was not God's blessing, but leanness that entered their souls. And this was not something that God merely *allowed*. Rather, He Himself *sent* this leanness into them.

God's gifts and God's blessings: distinguished in both dispensations

The situation concerning earthly things was the same in the old dispensation as it is now in the new. The earthly things themselves did not profit them, nor do they profit us. They profited them, and they profit us, only when received with the Word of God's blessing.

We confess this truth in Lord's Day 50 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which explains what is meant by the petition "Give us this day our daily bread." There we confess that this petition means:

... be pleased to provide us with all things necessary for the body, that we may thereby acknowledge Thee to be the only fountain of all good, and that neither our care nor

industry, nor even Thy gifts, can profit us without Thy blessing....

Take note how our Reformed confessions clearly distinguish between God's gifts and God's blessings. To speak of "material blessings" is to blur this distinction. The gifts by themselves do not profit. God's blessing is what profits us. The gifts by themselves are not blessings, and must not be referred to as such.

Now someone may respond, "Even though God's gifts and God's blessings are to be distinguished, God always gives the two together." But such is not the case. It is not the case now; nor was it the case in the old dispensation. And God's people have been aware of this. This is why, both then and now, God's people have called upon God to bless their food before partaking of it. It is important that we understand that this prayer is actually a confession of the truth stated above in Lord's Day 50. The food by itself is not a *material blessing*. It is just *material*. It cannot profit us without the Word of God's blessing. This is what we confess, or at least what we ought to be confessing, when we ask God to bless our food.

Old Testament pictures of famine and prosperity

Someone may respond to this and say, "But did not God promise in the Old Testament that He would bless His people with earthly prosperity if they obeyed Him, and would give them famine if they did not? And does not this indicate that in the old dispensation God's blessing went with earthly prosperity?" Perhaps one would cite a verse such as Deuteronomy 7:12, 13:

Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers: And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless

the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee.

Does not this speak of earthly prosperity as a covenant blessing in the old dispensation?

Understanding the answer to this question is very important. On the one hand, it is true that earthly prosperity indicated that God's blessing was upon the people, and famine indicated that it was not. Nevertheless, this earthly prosperity was still but a *picture* of the blessing of God. There were certainly many Israelites who received only the picture of God's blessing, without receiving the blessing itself. Nabal, for example, was extremely rich. Yet it was God's curse, and not God's blessing, that was upon him.

We must never confuse a sign with the reality to which it points. Baptism, for example, is a sign of God's blessing. Yet many receive only the sign, and not the reality to which it points. The same was true in the days of the old dispensation. Even though they had many more signs than we do today, those signs were still only signs. They were not in themselves blessings from God.

But did not these signs benefit the people of God? Indeed they did, but only those who received them by faith, clinging in their heart to the promise to which these signs pointed. The believers profited from them; but the unbelievers did not.

Particular grace also in the old dispensation

The Reformed Baptists are actually teaching that the promise of the old covenant included a promise of common grace. This is clearly what they are saying. They say that God promised "earthly blessings" to all the natural children of Israel, whether they were believers or unbelievers. But this


is another way of saying that the old covenant included a promise of common, non-saving grace to all the Israelites. That, to them, is the difference between the old covenant and the new. In their view, the new covenant included a promise of saving grace to the believers, but the old covenant included two promises—a promise of common, non-saving grace to all Israelites, and a promise of saving grace to the believers.

The truth, however, is that God's grace has always been particular. In the old dispensation there were pictures that indicated whether God's blessing was resting upon the people as a whole. But even when this was the case, that blessing was not upon each individual within the nation.

It is today as it was then. When a congregation today bears the marks of a true church—the pure preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the proper administration of Christian discipline—these marks indicate that God's blessing is upon the congregation. But this does not mean that God's blessing is upon *every individual* within the congregation. Scripture clearly testifies that when a hypocrite in such a congregation (i.e., a confessing believer who unbeknown to the congregation is actually an unbeliever) partakes of the Lord's Supper, he eats and drinks God's judgment to himself (I Cor. 11:29). It was the same in the days of the old dispensation. When God sent prosperity to His people, the unbeliev-

ers who partook of it were not blessed. Rather, by partaking of it in unbelief, without giving thanks to God, their judgment was made the heavier.

God's grace is always particular. It was particular then, and it is particular now.

Next we must apply this truth to circumcision and baptism. The Reformed Baptists say that infants were circumcised because the old covenant included a promise of common grace to them all. But this, we have pointed out, was not the case. So why were they all circumcised, if they did not all receive a promise of grace? And why then are all the children of the church baptized today, if they do not all receive a promise of grace? Lord willing, we will turn to this subject next. 

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Arie denHartog

A Servant of All, That I Might Gain the More (2)

The great missionary journeys of Paul are the amazing and awe-inspiring biblical example of the beginning of the preaching of the gospel to the nations. What great zeal was manifest in the ministry of the apostle of the Lord! What an example for all preachers! Paul went to the ends of the earth. He endured great hardships and persecution. He faced fearful enemies, who often threatened his very life. He knew very little ease and luxury in life. He did not take regular vacations or live in a palatial house. He

counted not his own life dear to him. So precious was the gospel to Paul that he would rather die than in any way compromise its truth. So great was his zeal for those who were Christ's that he labored night and day for their salvation.

In the course of accomplishing the work of Christ and with the authority of Christ, Paul condemned wicked heretics and false preachers who withstood the cause of Christ and threatened to overthrow it even at its beginning. In his ministry Paul could challenge the philosophers of the world and contradict the pride of the greatest wisdom of the world. He could also speak to the poor and destitute and ignorant. At the end of his life Paul was willing to offer himself up as a sacrifice, a martyr for the cause

of Christ Jesus, his blessed Lord and Savior. Having fought the good fight and kept the faith of Jesus Christ, having run the race for the great prize, he looked with eager expectation to the crown of life the Lord the righteous judge would give at His appearing.

Paul was ready to deny himself, to make all kinds of personal sacrifices, and to spend all of his energies truly for Christ's sake. He at times even did not insist on certain rights that belonged to him. Read about this in the first part of I Corinthians 9. There were times when, rather than insisting that the church support him as they should have, he labored with his own hands, so as to be chargeable to no man. If in any way an exercise even of the rights that belong to all Christians would hinder the

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preaching of the gospel, Paul would rather give up these rights than give an occasion of offense to the gospel or hinder the progress of the preaching of the gospel for the salvation of God's people, that he might gain the more, that by all means he might save some.

The principles that Paul sets forth have broad applications. The "all means" of which Paul speaks refers certainly to those means that, according to the Word of God itself, must be used in the service of the preaching of the gospel. The chief means of grace is the preaching of the gospel. This was centrally what we might call pulpit preaching. Paul did this sort of preaching all the time, wherever he went. This preaching, if it is to be true preaching, must by all means set forth the truth of Christ and of His salvation. It must be based on the careful and sound exposition of the infallible Word of Christ now recorded in the Scriptures. The apostles, by the Spirit of Christ, have recorded His Word infallibly.

The statement "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel" implies that the minister of the gospel today must spend many hours in his study to prepare his sermons carefully. He must labor with all the intelligence and understanding that God has given him, enlightened by the Spirit of Christ to discern the meaning of the Spirit of God in the words of Scripture, so that when he goes to the pulpit he is ready to declare faithfully the Word of Christ alone and not the wisdom and philosophy of man. Woe is me if I preach not the gospel of Christ!

The preaching of the gospel must be addressed to men who are in themselves sinful and depraved. They must be called out of the darkness and ignorance of their sin to the marvelous light of the knowledge of God. The rebellious hearts of men must be broken by the hammer of the Word of Christ. Men must be called to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The preaching of the gospel must not be done

in such a way that men are left to continue in their sinful and wicked way of life without rebuke and without an urgent call to repentance. The preaching of the gospel does not have the purpose to entertain men or interest them with opinions of men and the latest new and popular perspective sweeping the churches.

The preaching of the gospel must bring penitent sinners to the cross of Christ and comfort them with the mercy and forgiveness of God. The preaching must serve Christ in declaring the good tidings to the meek, binding up the broken hearts, comforting those who mourn, and proclaiming liberty to the captives. Woe is me if I preach not the gospel. God's people, who are delivered by the power of Christ from the bondage and corruption of sin, must be called to a new and holy life. Those who refuse to repent must be warned that they stand condemned before the judgment seat of God for their great wickedness.

The preacher who refuses to call men to repentance from sin because he fears offending them or losing them from the membership of his church will be responsible for their souls. He will be guilty of not having warned them in their sins and he will have become responsible for their apostasy from Christ. The sound doctrine of the Word of Christ must be preached to convince the gainsayers, in order that they might be turned again to the truth. "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive at his will" (II Tim. 2:24-26).

The mouths of wicked and deceitful men must be stopped before they lead others astray by their false teaching. Strong warnings must be

sounded, condemning error and false teaching. Paul did this all the time. This too must serve in order that some might be saved. The preacher who fails to do this is not faithful to his Lord and will bring the blood of his hearers on his own head when members of his church are led astray by the devil and his evil devices.

The servant of Christ must be prepared also to step down from his pulpit to live and walk among those to whom he preaches the gospel. He must be willing to go even from house to house. He must be able and willing to speak with men in a very personal way. He must show his heart of compassion for the sorrows and troubles of men. He must be ready even to address circumstances in the life of people who have thrown their whole life into chaos, confusion, and despair. He needs to know how to bring the comfort of the Word of Christ, sometimes in great tragedies. It happens in the providence of God that such times can be some of the greatest opportunities for the servant of Christ to bring the powerful, comforting Word of Jesus Christ to deliver from depths of sorrow and hopeless despair. He must reveal the heart of Christ Jesus, full of mercy and compassion, strength and hope, in the most difficult days of the lives of God's saints.


Woe unto those who in such a day cannot or neglect to bring the Word of Christ. The apostle gives us many great examples of how to bring the word of Christ at times such as this. In Acts 20 he speaks of warning God's people night and day even with tears, so that if at all possible he might keep them from going astray, and by all means lead them back to the truth of Christ and His way of salvation.

At the end of time there will be days of great apostasy. Many shall depart from the faith. Those who remain faithful will be few in number. Scripture prophesies that these times will come. Some of God's people will be cast out of

apostate churches. Others will leave and be scattered and be left desperately searching for the truth of Christ, which is no longer to be found in their own churches, which have become apostate. Some of these must be called out of such apostate churches by being shown the seriousness of the errors and gross wickedness that are tolerated in these churches. New and ever more subtle and ungodly heresies will arise with every new age. Many will be deceived in the last day. But even in those days shortly before our Lord returns, His Word must be preached. Also from those who have once heard the Word of Christ, Christ will be pleased in the last days to gather a small remnant. The love of Christ must constrain us to preach faithfully the Word of Christ for their salvation.

The members of the true church of Jesus must not be complacent or self-satisfied. Certainly they must labor to maintain the gospel in their own midst and instruct the generations of the covenant growing up in the midst of the church. To neglect the latter for the sake of preaching the gospel on the mission field would be very seriously wrong and have disastrous consequences. Each generation must labor earnestly to raise up a new generation of the covenant through faithful instruction in the word of Christ.

But in the days of apostasy we must not forget those who must yet be saved, who have for various reasons been left outside of the walls of the church. We must look for these in the communities surrounding our churches. We must break

down every sinful barrier that might hinder them from joining our fellowship and hearing the preaching of His Word in our midst. Our churches must have a warm and inviting atmosphere of love and concern and humility to support the preaching of the gospel among us. The love of Christ must be extended to those who do not now have the blessed word of the truth of Christ, which He has preserved in our midst and given to us and our children. The members of the faithful church of Jesus Christ must lay hold on every opportunity to encourage the remnant of the Lord's people to return to His church among us and to hear the blessed gospel of His salvation. God help us to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ to the end, when He shall come in glory to save His church. 

When Thou Sittest In Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

None of Thy Kindred

Family

Your home naturally opens itself to two classes of people. There are two kinds of folks who mingle in your narrower environment. There are two groups of persons which, though they do not belong to your immediate family, are inseparable from the family-life: first, your *kindred*, and in the second place, your *intimate friends*.

Such the Scripture calls these two groups, and when Captain Cornelius, who was in garrison with the legion *Italia* at Caesarea, as the first convert won from the heathen

world, received the holy apostle Peter from Joppa in his house to get instruction in the gospel of Jesus, it was not with wife and children alone that he welcomed the apostle, but in company of many others, consisting of "his *kinsmen* and *near friends*" (Acts 10:24).

By two links your household is connected with the broader life outside. The one of kinsmen and blood-relatives, and the other formed by sympathy of spirits.

Your kinsmen you *find*, your close friends you *choose*. But both circles are woven in with the circle of your own life. Something which is at once evident, in that you have other "acquaintances" and to some extent other "friends," but with whose family you are not intimate, while on the other hand with your kinsmen and close friends it is the rule, that of itself *their* children associate with *your* children, and the

common intercourse of the households establishes something more than a personal, something different from an individual, if you please a sort of household-relation.

Yet, although these "kinsmen" and "close friends" mingle not infrequently on a footing of equal confidence with your family, the relation of the two to you and to your household is an altogether different one.

The tie of "kindred" was laid without your cooperation, that of intimate friendship alone by the *choice of the heart*.

Thereby the tie of kinship lies more in our *natural*; the tie of close friendship more in our *spiritual* sphere of life.

Result of this is that, so long as life in your circle moves along a lower level, kinship is more strongly emphasized, while, the higher the spiritual life becomes,

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the more highly the more particular friendship is esteemed.

Almost everyone has uncles and aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces, even he who himself is nothing; but to have intimate friends, one must himself be something, something that attracts, something from which a spiritual tie can be woven.

From biographies of great men, you rarely learn anything of their uncles and aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces, but all the more of their *spiritual* kinships, of their bosom-friends, of the Jonathans who were permitted to associate with their Davids.

And among those who as God's children stand higher the case is the same. They honor indeed the ties of kinship, but they have their closest ties with the brethren in the kingdom.

According to rank, *kinship* precedes, but, weighed spiritually, "special friendship" wins.



In the face of this, would you assert that the tie of kinship *is from God*, and your friendship's tie *from yourself*?

Then you make a separation which is false, and you oppose the teaching of Scripture as well as the experience of life.

For shall not he who is rich in both, thank his God for a sympathetic kinship, and for finely attuned friendship, and honor Him as the Fountain of all good, from whence came to him this tie of blood, as well as the relation of the heart of a friends?

And as regards Scripture, is it not implied already in the paradise-word: "A man shall leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife," that the tie of *blood* may not discard the tie according to *choice*, yea, that, where the two clash, the tie of blood must recede?

Is not the call that went out to Abraham: "Get thee out from thy country, and from thy kindred," the parole whereby spiritual calling, spiritual environment of life,

and so also the spiritual tie, is put above the natural?

And when Jesus says that he that doeth the will of His Father who is in heaven is to Him a brother and a sister, and elsewhere tells us that he who cannot leave father or mother or child for His sake is not worthy of Him—does not this same divine ordinance express itself herein, that both the natural and spiritual ties have rights, but that, as often as difficulty arises, the lower tie of nature must lower the flag before the higher spiritual tie?

When the infant John was born, both came out at the same time.

First the tie of kinship, which spake from the family when they said: "There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name John" (Luke 1:61). And then the spiritual tie, when Zacharias wrote: Apart from all kinship, with an eye to his spiritual calling, his name must be John.

Not Zacharias, but *John* would be his name!



In our Christian households, at times, this twofold tie occasions difficulty and conflict when we have a family behind and a family around us who do *not* seek with us the service of the Lord.

If in your house you serve the Lord, and if His service stands equally high in the households of your kindred, the tie of kinship is not weakened by the spiritual tie, but rather strengthened.

But if from a not-believing family, by wonders of grace, you yourself have been drawn to the service of the Lord, then there is not the same tone of life in *your* house and in *theirs*. Involuntarily a certain coolness arises. And the spiritual antithesis between you and them of itself introduces a certain *tension* in the mutual attitude.

This gives rise to a twofold tendency, which both can go too far.

On one side the tendency, insomuch as spiritually one stands

over against the other, to discount the tie of kinship. And on the other side the tendency, for the sake of the family-ties, not to let the spiritual be heard.

The latter then goes at length so far that, being among one's own, for dear peace's sake, one shamelessly denies his Savior. While the former can lead to such inexcusable hardness that, in the end, one counts for nothing even the tie of one's own mother or child.

Against both these sins you have to watch.

The tie of kinship has been laid by God. And therefore you have to honor it, so long and for so far as you can possibly do this, without in anything denying your Savior. But this same tie of kinship is, by God Himself who laid it, made absolutely *subordinate* to the tie that binds you to Jesus, and therefore you sin against your Savior when, in associating with your family, the family-tie gets the better of your heroic love for Him.



Which way you have to take depends therefore upon the attitude which your family assumes towards *your faith*.

This attitude can be of threefold kind. With self-conceit and mockery one can look down upon your faith; one can treat it with cold respect; or with interest one can envy you.

When you notice that your faith creates interest among your kindred, the way of itself is open before you. Then you let your light shine, that at length they too may glorify your Father who is in heaven. Then you join yourself closely to them, and try to make yourself an instrument of salvation to them or to their children.

If, on the other hand, they show no interest, because they have no part in your confession, even though they may profess respect for Jesus, the glorious propaganda of your faith among your kindred is truly difficult. Yet there

is no cause of breach. And it must become more and more the sacred art, without too free an approach, to make it evident in an unobtrusive way that He who is in you is stronger than he who is in them, and at the proper time the proper word of confession can be spoken.

But when your kindred take their stand over against your conviction and confession; when they drive their spirit in opposition to the spirit of your household; and conceitedly look down upon you as backward obscurantists and fanatics; and, in your presence or even in that of your children, allow themselves expressions that are offensive to your devout feeling and insulting to your Savior—then you *must* contest the tie of kinship its right and, without giving offense, carefully see to it that no corruptive influences go out from your kinsmen upon your children and upon your own heart.



This becomes particularly painful when joy or sadness in the family brings you together with those

kinsmen who are your spiritual opponents, on such occasions as weddings and funerals, at which in all sorts of ways the higher questions of life come to order.

No one may then say that, *because it concerns your family*, at such happy or sorrowful solemnities, for the time being you are to lay aside your conviction. “Let the dead bury their dead,” said Jesus, “you preach the kingdom of God.” And therefore he who for the sake of family takes part at funeral or wedding, after modernistic ceremonial, commits sin. For though you have no right on such occasions to make your confession the rule of procedure, or place it in the foreground, neither have you the right, for the sake of the family-tie, to assume the appearance or the attitude for one moment as though for that time being your tie to Jesus is consigned to non-activity.

A redeemed one of the Lord who knows that it will come to this, however close the family-tie may be, stays away from such solemnities.

Nowhere and at no time may the tie of kinship enter claims


against the tie that binds you to your God.

And then...think of your children.

Or are they not to be pointed out by name, baptized children from Christian homes, who, estranged from the faith, are now abroad in the paths of unbelief, because no one took it to heart that, while young and inexperienced, with dear uncles and aunts and cousins, they came unobservedly under worldly, Christ-denying influences?

This went on over the signature of the family-tie! One should not and could not keep his children away from their relatives! And one did not notice or see how by this very thing he kept his child away from his God.

He who loves his child and consecrated it to God will be on guard to avert *every* wrong influence from his darling, knowing how easily the young are lured astray.

Wrong influence is never more strongly seductive than when it comes from one's kindred. 

All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee

Mr. Joel Minderhoud

Diabetes: The Struggle to Maintain a Balance

God has ordained that life on this earth requires many creatures or substances working together—multitudes of parts that must be in a balanced relationship one with the other. This harmony is necessary because of the organic interdepen-

dence of all living things. It is a harmony and beauty that bears the mark of its Creator—a Creator who is the one only simple Being, who is His attributes, full of harmony, beauty, and life within the triune Being. The interrelatedness of the creation is seen throughout the creation in creatures great and small. For example, in any particular food web, the entire ecosystem hangs together. When one creature is damaged or greatly diminished in a particular food web, all the crea-

tures that depend in one way or another on that creature are impacted. In physics we note that objects in the creation are stable (or they move) because of the balance (or imbalance) of forces that are applied to them. Whether we study biology or physics, or anything in between, we see God working the same orderly way throughout the creation, keeping all things in proper balance.

When someone or something disrupts that balance, consequences

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are sure to follow. A simple evidence of this was recently observed in Yellowstone National Park.¹ Some complained of the many wolves and their effect on livestock of the surrounding farmers. The wolves were removed, but only with the consequence of an increase in deer population and a corresponding decrease in particular sapling and flower populations that were devoured by the deer. Returning the wolves brought a balance in the food web again. It is a wonder to see the underlying harmony and interdependence among the creatures effecting a delicate balance for life. It is even more amazing to recognize that this is God's counsel, even down to the minutest workings of creation. Spectacular examples of this abound in the human body, to which we now turn our attention.

Homeostasis: Maintaining a Balance

God's government of the human body affords one of the best examples of the delicate balances that exist in the creation. Within the human body many systems work together organically to maintain a balance of internal conditions in order to keep the body working properly and to sustain life. Too much or too little of a particular substance can seriously harm the body. A proper pH level in the blood, a proper temperature in the body, a proper water level in the cells, and a proper blood pressure must be maintained in the human body at all times or serious disease, or perhaps even death, is imminent. God has ordained a marvelous system of checks and balances in the body to ensure that the levels of all substances are kept in line, with only a slight margin of fluctuation permitted. This process—the process of maintaining a specific internal environment—is called homeostasis.

Homeostasis is a term man has assigned to the amazing work of God in the body by which He main-

tains a precise balance among the myriad of chemicals and processes. Every body system, from the circulatory system (maintains blood pressure levels) to the muscular and integumentary (skin) system (maintains body temperature) has homeostasis as one of its basic functions and goals. Each system maintains a balance not only within itself, but also among the other systems, for the good of the body as a whole.

The nervous system and endocrine (hormone) system have the most direct impact on homeostasis within the body since they actively control the other systems. In the past we have considered the nervous system and how it controls the other systems by use of electrical impulses.² In a previous article we noticed how the endocrine system exercised control over many body functions by maintaining a particular level of specific hormones. Not only does God govern and control the many movements of substances within the body, but He does so in a mysterious way, maintaining an exact relationship between them. The endocrine system's maintenance of homeostatic levels with its many hormones is exquisitely beautiful. Time and space prevent us from considering in detail all the many hormones that must exist in a precise balance for the body's existence, but we are well aware that a unique balance must be maintained.

Unless something is afflicting us we hardly give a thought to this amazing harmony effected in our bodies every moment of the day by the providential hand of our Creator. For example, after traversing multi-time zone distances we experience "jet-lag," as our bodies continue to secrete melatonin hormone at its "normal" time, keeping us wide awake when it is dark and our native colleagues are all asleep. Or one may have experienced too much growth hormone prior to puberty and developed into a "giant," while another may have experi-

enced too little of the same hormone during the same developmental time period and developed "dwarf" characteristics. Or perhaps a pregnant mother has had too little progesterone at a particular time of pregnancy, leading to the premature breaking of the bond between the developing infant and the placenta—resulting in a miscarriage. We are all too well aware that many disorders and biological complications arise because of an imbalance in hormonal levels.

This delicate balance of hormones governed by the endocrine system displays the mighty sovereign hand of God. The sovereign God constantly controls in each human the delicate balance of hormones that He uses to accomplish His good purpose in each of us throughout our lives. God's government of these tiny creatures reminds us again that He does not forsake any part of His creation but "rules and governs [it] according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment" (Belgic Confession, Art. 13). This profound truth humbles us! We bow in humility before the sovereign and all-wise God, finding comfort in knowing we are always in His hand.

Diabetes: An example of Homeostatic Imbalance

Perhaps the best way to see God's work of maintaining the proper balance needed in the human body is to consider a disorder that is the result of a disruption of this balance and the effects that it has on the body. "In 2006, according to the World Health Organization, at least 171 million people worldwide suffer from diabetes.... In 2005 there [were] about 20.8 million people with diabetes in the United States alone."³ Diabetes mellitus is found in three forms—juvenile-onset diabetes (Type 1), adult-onset diabetes (Type 2), and gestational diabetes, occurring during pregnancy (Type 3), which will not be discussed at this time. Juvenile-onset diabetes,

usually diagnosed before the age of 20, is the most serious of the three types, but is the least common, accounting for approximately 10% of all the cases. Adult-onset diabetes is the most prevalent form of diabetes mellitus, afflicting generally those over the age of 40. However, it is being diagnosed in younger and younger people who are obese. Type 2 diabetes has been the focus of news media in recent years, as it is becoming apparent that North Americans are generally overweight and higher candidates to develop Type 2 diabetes.

The endocrine system maintains a delicate balance of sugar levels in the blood. Sugar is needed by all cells of the body for their basic source of energy. Body cells, however, need to be “instructed” or “commanded” to take the sugar inside the cell. In the wisdom of God, cells have receptor molecules (like key locks on a door) on their surface that can be commanded (unlocked) to receive the sugar as its fuel by hormone molecules (the keys to the lock). The hormone insulin is the key that unlocks human cells to allow the necessary fuel (sugar) to enter into the cell. It then can be burned, thereby fueling the cell for its functions. After one eats a meal, the food will be digested and the carbohydrates in the meal will be converted to a basic sugar form and will enter the bloodstream. The pancreas, responding to these higher sugar levels in the blood, secretes the insulin hormone molecules into the bloodstream. The insulin molecules make contact with the cells of the body and bind to the receptors on the walls of the cells, unlocking the cells so that the sugar can be taken into the cells. As sugar is taken in by the cells, the blood sugar levels drop, decreasing the need for insulin hormone molecules to be present in the blood to “unlock” the cells. The pancreas responds accordingly, by reducing insulin secretions. Thus, homeostasis is maintained. By a

complex and intricate work, the blood-sugar levels are kept at a constant level.

In the case of juvenile-onset diabetes (Type 1), the body does not produce sufficient insulin. It is believed that the cells from the pancreas that produce insulin are destroyed “possibly by the attack of the body’s own immune system or by virus infection.”⁴ With no key to unlock the body’s cells, the cells do not take up the sugar as their fuel. The blood-sugar levels are high and can be detected with a blood test or with a urine test, which will show high sugar levels. Without treatment, a person with Type 1 diabetes will not metabolize the sugar in his diet, and consequently will not be able to get energized from his food. Without treatment, this afflicted person could eventually pass into a coma or die. The main form of treatment for Type 1 diabetes is insulin injections. Insulin has in the past been extracted from pigs and cows and injected into the diabetic daily. Today, much human insulin is produced from genetically engineered bacteria.

In the case of adult-onset diabetes (Type 2), the body produces plenty of insulin. The problem is not with a lack of insulin, but with the receptors on the cells. The problem seems to be that either the cells do not have enough receptors to detect the insulin, or the receptors are not working properly. Thus, the cells are not able to take in the necessary fuel for its use. It would be analogous either to having damaged locks that will not receive the key, or to not having any keyholes on the locks. “Interestingly, the number of insulin receptors [locks, JM] on cells can be changed by gaining or losing body weight; the more body fat a person carries, the fewer insulin receptors there will be on his or her cells. This explains why... weight reduction is such effective therapy.”⁵ Whereas in Type I diabetes there is no “key” (insulin), in

Type 2 diabetes there is a “key” but a damaged “lock” (receptors). In either case the cell cannot be opened to receive necessary fuel. So, as with juvenile-onset diabetes, adult-onset diabetes is a disorder in which there are high sugar levels in the blood – sugar that cannot be taken into the cells that desperately need it.

Diabetes, whether Type 1 or Type 2, has many side effects related to the high sugar levels in the blood. Cataracts form in the eyes as excess sugar molecules pile up and form long chains that are deposited in the lens of the eye – clouding it. Sugar molecules also damage tiny blood vessels in the retina of the eye (diabetic retinopathy), by reducing the blood flow and oxygen supply to the retina – damaging its ability to receive stimuli – leading to blindness. In a similar way, the tiny blood vessels in the kidneys are damaged by high sugar levels, affecting its ability to filter the blood properly (diabetic nephropathy) – potentially leading to kidney failure. Research indicates that diabetics may develop accumulation of fatty deposits in blood vessels – reducing blood flow and increasing the potential for strokes and coronary heart disease – sooner and more severely than others. Also, because of reduced blood flow, diabetics

1. Robbins, Jim. “Lessons from the WOLF.” *Scientific American*. June 2004, pp. 76-81.

2. See *Standard Bearer*. Volume 79 (January 1, 2003; February 1, 2003; March 1, 2003).

3. West, David. “80 Years of Insulin” *YES Magazine: Canada’s Science Magazine for Kids*. Nov/Dec 2001; pp. 10-11. Found on the Internet at: [www.http://0discoverer.prod.sirs.com.elibrary.mel.org/discoweb/disco/do/article?urn=urn%3A](http://0discoverer.prod.sirs.com.elibrary.mel.org/discoweb/disco/do/article?urn=urn%3A)

4. “Diabetes.” McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology, 1982; p. 154.

5. *Ibid*.

experience a lack of circulation in their extremities and, in extreme cases, may suffer from gangrene, ulcers, and other infections. The afflictions related to diabetes are legion and greatly affect the lives of those who suffer from this disorder. Let us remember to pray for God's people who suffer with various afflictions.

We ought to mention here in passing that disorders such as diabetes remind us again of the consequences of sin. The Fall of Adam, our head, has led to God's curse upon the creation—including our bodies. Though our bodies are an amazing marvel of creation, we readily acknowledge that they have many weaknesses and frailties due to the curse. The creation groans and travails because of the burden of that curse, and so do we. When we consider the grievous effects diabetes has on the health and day-to-day routines of our loved ones, we are reminded of the consequences of sin and that we are of the earth, earthy. Yet, this does not discourage us. In these afflictions God causes us to depend on Him, that we may more rightly know Him. For ultimately in Christ we endure and are set free from sin, death, and disease. We have this freedom now in principle, yet we await the full reality when we shall enjoy heavenly bliss free from sin and the consequences of sin. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!


Delicate Balance in Our Lives

As we've noted, and as can be seen from the preceding example, our physical life is truly moment by moment existing in a fragile balance, sustained only by the word of God's power. It is certainly true that every illness or disease is ulti-

mately a homeostatic imbalance. What a marvel that for many of us the norm is a life with limited disease or disorders. When we consider the complicated delicate balances that must be maintained in our body every day, we marvel that, for example, a baby is born healthy and all is working well. Truly we are fearfully and wonderfully made! Truly we are upheld by the sovereign hand of the mighty God!

As good stewards of God's creation—His temple—we certainly take interest in the delicate balance in our bodies and labor to ensure that it is maintained. We watch our sugar levels, monitor our blood pressure, or examine our cholesterol levels. As diligent as we are to keep our physical levels in check and in balance, so we should labor so that all things in our life are balanced. Scripture indicates that to us often, when it teaches us: "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John 6:27a), or "For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things" (I Tim. 4:8a). Just as all homeostatic imbalances lead to physical disruption in the body, so too improper setting of priorities and imbalances of activities in our busy lives leads to spiritual disruptions—we grow spiritually weaker when we seek for the physical rather than the spiritual. All of this reminds us to strive to keep our lives in a proper spiritual balance.

Finally, the delicate balances we observe in our physical bodies draw our attention to the will of God for us in our lives. God has promised to give us what we need,

not according to *our* standards or *our* measuring rods, but according to *His* will and good pleasure. God controls all the events of our lives and, in doing so, maintains just the proper *balance* for us. Everything comes in the correct amount and at the correct time in our lives. "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ... [God] hath made every thing beautiful in his time" (Eccl. 3:1, 11). There may be times in our lives when we feel things are hopelessly imbalanced. For example, we may feel that we are receiving far too little of a particular blessing or far too much of a certain affliction. But we must humbly acknowledge that as God maintains a proper and delicate balance within our bodies, so much the more will He care for us spiritually. We do not sit in our homes fretting, wringing our hands in fear, worrying what may go wrong at any given second during the multitude of tasks carried out within our bodies. Neither may we fear God's work in the other areas of our lives. Everything that happens to us is part of the delicate balance ordained by God to equip us for our lives here below and ultimately for our life in glory. "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him" (Eccl. 3:14). May we stand in awe of God, humbly confessing that we are not in control, but rather, that God is in sovereign control. In this knowledge may we rest assured that His way is wise and good. We give God our thanks always and in all things, knowing that our lives are in His hand. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

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

262/Standard Bearer/March 1, 2007

Mission Activities

Worship services for the newly organized Heritage PR Fellowship of Sioux Falls, S.D. were held for the first time on Sunday,

January 28. These worship services are under the sponsorship of our denomination's Domestic Mission Committee and will be under the supervision of the Edgerton, MN PRC.

Sunday morning Rev. R. Kleyn, pastor of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI, led the first service, preaching on I Thessalonians 1:5-10, "Sounding Out the Word," emphasizing that for local evangelism to be effective we need faithful preaching and then active witnessing. Paul preached, and the saints in Thessalonica "sounded out" or "echoed" what he preached by what they said and how they lived.

Sunday evening Rev. D. Overway, pastor of the Doon, IA PRC, preached for the Fellowship on the promise of Christ in Matthew 28: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," emphasizing that in the work of missions, Christ goes with us.

As you can imagine, January 28 was a very exciting day for the 25-plus members of the Fellowship. They have great hopes and have been very busy putting things in place for the worship services to begin and for the Spronks to have a place to live.

The Fellowship's worship services are held each Lord's Day at 9:30 A.M. and 4:00 P.M. in the Ambassador Conference Room of the Holiday Inn at 8th and Main in downtown Sioux Falls. Our denomination's DMC has rented a home at 4402 E. 3rd St. in Sioux Falls for Candidate Spronk and his family. The goal of the DMC is to have a work established enough that by the time synod meets this June they can recommend calling a full-time missionary to work in Sioux Falls. Continue to pray for Candidate Spronk and the Fellowship that our heavenly Father may continue to bless and prosper the work there according to His will. If you want more information regarding the work in Sioux Falls, go to their website at www.reformedsiouxfalls.org.

On January 26 Rev. G. Eriks, representing the Contact Committee of our churches, and Rev. R. VanOverloop, representing our Domestic Mission Committee, traveled to Northern Ireland to visit

with the members of the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI; their pastor, Rev. A. Stewart; and their Council. The weeklong visit gave the men opportunity to conduct church visitation, as well as fulfill a mandate of Synod 2006 to investigate the possibility of further mission work by our churches in the British Isles, along with the possibility of establishing a sister-church relationship with the PRCA. Tuesday evening, January 30, Rev. Eriks spoke in Limerick, in the Republic of Ireland, on "Antithetical Living in an Age of Covetousness," and on Wednesday Rev. VanOverloop led a mid-week Bible study at the manse. On Friday the emissaries were able to enjoy a congregational dinner at the Leighinmohr Hotel in Ballymena, followed by a night of Go-Karting at Raceview Karting Saturday evening.

A word of thanks was extended to the members of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI who volunteered a week of hard labor at the newly acquired church building of our Pittsburgh Mission in late January. These volunteers were able not only to build two rooms in the church basement, but also to do major repair work to electrical and plumbing systems of the church and to paint several walls. This has saved the Pittsburgh Fellowship much time and expense in their building project.

Congregation Activities

The Council of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI recently placed, in the mailbox of each of their members, a survey concerning the building of a Youth Building, to help determine the overall interest of the congregation in such a project.

Georgetown's Consistory also recently adopted a new policy of welcoming new members into their congregation. On the Sunday morning in which the new members' membership is announced, they will be asked to follow the pastor out of the sanctuary at the

conclusion of the service and stand next to him to receive the congregation's greetings. The elders believe this will help the congregation become acquainted with the new members, and the new members to meet the congregation.

A special combined congregational meeting/grade school association meeting was held January 16 at the South Holland, IL PRC. At this meeting both the South Holland congregation and South Holland school association voted overwhelmingly to approve proposals from their Council and School Board to proceed with the sale of their church and parsonage and grade school to the Power and Light Evangelistic Church of Roseland, IL.


Young People's Activities

The Young People of the Wingham, Ontario PRC were invited by their pastor, Rev. M. DeVries, to meet at the parsonage recently for a special discussion on the topic of "War and Loving One's Enemy."

The Federation Board of the Young People's societies sponsored a PRYP Convention Basketball Night Saturday, January 20 at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI. At 4:00 P.M. the Junior Varsity basketball team of Covenant played the basketball team from Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, IL, followed by a game of alumni players from Covenant teams of the past.

Minister Activities

Rev. Allen and Crysta Brummel, of the South Holland, IL PRC, were blessed with a daughter, Joanna Mae, Saturday, January 6. Joanna was 4 pounds, 9 ounces at birth and was 7 weeks early. She was hospitalized for a time, in NICU, but is making steady progress, for which we are thankful to God.

Rev. Dick has declined the call he received from Doon to become missionary to the Philippines. 

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Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 17, 2007, D.V., our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents,

MR. and MRS. GARRET FLIKKEMA, will celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to God for them, and for blessing their marriage these 55 years. We are deeply appreciative of the covenant home in which they raised us, and for the God-fearing instruction they gave to us.

May our covenant God continue to bless and keep them in the days to come. "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1).

- * Rich and Marcia Flikkema
Dan and Tammy McHugh
Sean
Mike and Tricia Brummel
Drew and Gerrit
Joe and Heidi Kleyn
Makayla and Caleb
Kyle in glory
- * George and Denise DeJong
Matthew and Stacy DeJong
David and Ethan
- * Bill and Pat DeJong
Nathan and Brenda Dykstra
Kaitlyn and Emalie
Paul and Erin DeJong
Jenna and Evan
Michael and Beth Vermeer
Caleb
Joanna DeJong
- * Jim Flikkema
Munster, Indiana

NOTICE

The Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee is offering scholarship awards to prospective Protestant Reformed teachers and ministers. If you are interested in receiving a packet, please contact Melinda Bleyenbergh at 616-453-8898 or e-mail darylme@altelco.net by April 2, 2007.

264/Standard Bearer/March 1, 2007

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to God for His gracious covenant, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

HENRY AND LEE ANN FERGUSON, who celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary on February 13, 2007. We pray that God will continue to bless their marriage and home. We thank the Lord for His covenant faithfulness, as He grants them the grace to strive always in the work of the church, in the guidance and teaching of their children and in a love for the truth.

"Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts" (Psalm 145:3, 4).

- * John and Ashley Cleveland
Isaac
- * Scott, Todd, Kelsey, Craig,
Matthew, Sean, Kent, Erin and
Seth Ferguson
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2007, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

NOTICE

Bulletin clerk for the Heritage PR Fellowship of Sioux Falls, SD: Candidate Clay Spronk at heritageprf@sio.midco.net.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Immanuel PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Jim and Elly Wierenga and their children, and to Mr. and Mrs. Irwin and Yvonne Tolsma and their children in the death of their mother and grandmother,

MRS. JOANNE STORK.

May they find comfort in these words of Psalter 31:7, a versification of Psalm 17:15, "When I in righteousness at last Thy glorious face shall see, When all the weary night is past, And I awake with thee To view the glories that abide, Then, then I shall be satisfied."

Rev. Richard J. Smit, President
Mr. Paul Linker, Clerk

TEACHER NEEDED

South Holland Protestant Reformed Christian School is currently seeking applicants for the 2007/2008 school year for First Grade. Interested applicants should contact Mr. Ryan VanOverloop, administrator (school-708-333-9197, home-708-825-1716), or the Education Committee chairman, Mr. Ryan Regnerus at (708) 474-6321.

Reformed Witness Hour

Date	Topic	Text
March 4	"I Am the Resurrection and the Life"	John 11:25, 26
March 11	"I Am the Way"	John 10:11
March 18	"I Am the True Vine"	John 15:1-8
March 25	"I AM"	John 8:58