

THE *February 15, 2007*
STANDARD
BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

In This Issue:

- ◆ *When Afraid, Set Yourself to Seek Jehovah* **218**
- ◆ *Evil Fruits of the
Conditional Covenant (1)* **220**
- ◆ *Covenant of Sovereign Grace (5)* **223**
- ◆ *Hormones and God's Governing Hand* **225**
- ◆ *Erasure of Baptized Members (2)* **227**
- ◆ *Servant of All That I Might Gain the More* **230**
- ◆ *Reformed Baptist View of
Baptism and the Covenant* **232**
- ◆ *Bringing Forth Children
in an Age of Selfishness* **234**
- ◆ *Book Reviews* **237**
- ◆ *Report of Classis East* **238**
- ◆ *News From Our Churches* **239**

Volume 83 ♦ Number 10

When Afraid, Set Yourself to Seek Jehovah

"And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah."

II Chronicles 20:3

The sheep of the Good Shepherd face many frightening experiences in the course of their earthly pilgrimage. After all, the path of the sheep leads through the valley of the shadow of death. Many and varied are the occasions in which the sheep are afraid.

Jehoshaphat feared! With good reason! A great army of Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites had joined forces and marched secretly against Jerusalem. Together they were a "great multitude."

Jehoshaphat and all Judah were caught by surprise. Notice the placement of "behold" in the message brought to Jehoshaphat. Yes, it was a surprise that such a great

army would be against Judah at this time, but it was especially a surprise where they were discovered. They were already in Engedi, which is approximately fifteen miles from Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat had an army, but it was scattered throughout the kingdom. Those detached in Jerusalem certainly did not match in number that of the foe, which was poised to attack Jerusalem.

Militarily, Judah and Jehoshaphat were already defeated. The situation was hopeless. There was no time to prepare the city for adequate defense, nor was there time for Jehoshaphat to gather his army from the reaches of Judah. The enemy could not lose, in terms of numbers, preparation, surprise, and initiative.

The devil is always at work, striving to deceive God's elect. We ought not be surprised at the attacks of the evil one. Yet we often are. Here Satan was attacking the nation as a whole on especially two

fronts. (He was, at the same time, working to discourage spiritually each individual elect in Judah.) First, the devil was seeking to destroy the line of David in Jehoshaphat in order to prevent the coming of the Son of David, the Messiah God had promised. And secondly, the devil was seeking to tempt Jehoshaphat and Judah to despair of God's mercy and care. He always wants God's children to think or feel that God has forgotten them and that His mercy is gone forever.

The possibility of despairing of God's mercy was real for Jehoshaphat and Judah. Not only did defeat seem to be a certain eventuality (just a matter of time), but what was especially confusing and hurtful for Jehoshaphat and Judah was who was opposing them. Their attackers were their physical relatives. Moab and Ammon were the sons of Lot, and the inhabitants of Mount Seir were descendants of Esau. When something is said or

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: dykstra@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: (616) 457-5970
FAX: (616) 457-5980
(e-mail: tim@rpa.org)

Postmaster:

Send address changes to
The Standard Bearer
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: cpraudiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Editorial Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Website for RFFPA: www.rpa.org
Website for PRC: www.prca.org

done by a relative, it hurts much worse than when said or done by a stranger. Historically Judah and Israel had only treated these nations well. Israel went around these very same nations “when they came out of the land of Egypt,” for “they turned from them, and destroyed them not” (10). This hurt! And in their hurt, Jehoshaphat and Judah were inclined to think that God had forgotten His mercy toward them.

God was certainly present in this surprise attack. He was subjecting His children to a great difficulty in order to test and to strengthen their faith. It is worthy of noting that this trial was not occasioned by a specific sin on the part of Judah or Jehoshaphat. Sometimes that is the case, but not this time. In fact, Scripture is clear that, under Jehoshaphat’s good spiritual leadership, Judah was doing what was right in the sight of the Lord. Jehoshaphat began his reign by seeking Jehovah, which was at the very same time that Ahab was instituting Baal worship in the northern kingdom (17:3, 4). As a leader who was concerned for those under his care, he sent Levites throughout Judah to give instruction in God’s law (17:7-9). Later he sent judges into parts of the kingdom, admonishing them to do right in the fear of Jehovah (19:4-7, 9-11). And then “it came to pass after this” (20:1).

God does not want His children to be spiritually at ease. So He tries His own. His trials are opportunities for us to seek Him and to learn not to lean on our own understanding. By means of the trials He calls us to be urgent and constant in our cries for help from Him because we see Him as our rock, shelter, strength, high tower. God gives us His blessed friendship, and He calls us to return it by looking at Him, seeking and calling upon Him—by loving Him.

While we often seek only to be delivered from His chastening trials, God’s goal in all of His chas-

tening is our seeking Him in the midst of the trial. He tries us so that we, at every moment of the trial, look up to and at Him.



Jehoshaphat responded to the news of the near presence of such a great army by being afraid (3a). This is very understandable. When faced with such an enemy and such hopelessness, it is normal to be afraid. Jehoshaphat looked around, and his fears increased as he imagined what would be the inevitable death of all the children in Jerusalem. His initial thought about God made him think that God was angry. Jehoshaphat feared.

Jehoshaphat’s fear was the occasion for him to “set himself to seek” Jehovah (3b). He was not paralyzed by his fear. Instead, his fearing spurred him to the grace-enabling activity of a living faith. Notice that Jehoshaphat did not merely seek the Lord, but he “set himself” to seek the Lord. This means that the king became firmly resolved to focus on one thing. This is a holy determination that would allow nothing to distract him.

The activity that Jehoshaphat was determined to do was to “seek” the Lord. While this Hebrew word speaks of a seeking with care, or enquiring with diligence, it also refers to the activity of frequenting a place. Jehoshaphat was determined to look only to and on “Jehovah.” Instead of calling his generals together in a counsel of war in order to scheme a way out of this trouble, Jehoshaphat was resolved to do the continual action of looking up to the unchangeable, ever-faithful God, who had revealed Himself in the promised Messiah. Those whom God chastens are to turn to Him. It is from the hand that holds the rod that we are to expect deliverance. So Jehoshaphat called all Judah to turn to God in fasting and prayer.

We seek Jehovah by praying.

Seek the Lord while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near (Is. 55:6). When God calls us to seek His face, then our soul responds, “Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek” (Ps. 27:8). Every test that God sends His people is so that we learn to seek Him. Instead of trusting in ourselves or seeking the help of man, we are to be on our knees seeking only Him and His grace. That is how Jehoshaphat began his prayer: “O Jehovah God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven?” In the names Jehoshaphat used to address God (“Jehovah” and “God of our fathers”), he was reminding himself and Judah of the relationship God had established with them. This was very assuring. Then he directed their thoughts to what it means that God is God: “art not thou God in heaven?... and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?” (6). What a way to begin a prayer!

The activity of seeking the Lord means that we are considering the promises He gives His children in His Word. Learn from the Scriptures the promises that God has made to His children and then pray them. In his prayer, Jehoshaphat recalled how God had driven out the inhabitants of the land of Canaan and given it to Israel. How, therefore, could God let them be driven out of the land now (7, 8)? He also recalled the promise made at the dedication of the temple (I Kings 8:37) that “when evil cometh upon us” and “we stand before this house, and in thy presence ... and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help” (9). Jehoshaphat also prayed about the history of Israel in not destroying Moab, Ammon, and Edom when they were entering Canaan (10, 11). To seek Jehovah is to pray His own Word.

When we seek Jehovah, then “our eyes are upon thee” (12). This is the best way to respond to the trials He sends. When we feel surrounded by the enemy, then we

must look up to our covenant God in prayer, for prayer puts us into covenant fellowship with the living God. When we seek Jehovah, then we see the unchanging, ever-faithful God, who never ceases to give mercy.



The people of Jerusalem and Judah who could respond did so immediately. They “gathered themselves together, to ask help of Jehovah.” They “came to seek Jehovah” too. During Jehoshaphat’s reign, he and the people had been sincerely seeking God, striving to do what was right. Now, under trial, they knew that they ought not

do anything less. They were called to do the same thing they had been doing—but with greater fervency. Not despair. Not think that it would do no good. Rather, the same grace that drew them to seek the Lord before the trial is what they now seek of the Lord so that they might respond properly.

They gathered together in the court of the temple, looking to Jehovah. What a striking sight: a pleading king, a quiet, humbled crowd of people! And not just men, but “their little ones, their wives, and their children” (13)! Most touching was the presence of their dependents and their little children, making their silent appeal to their heavenly Father. They all

stood in humble and submissive expectancy.

This is the result God was seeking in this trial. While we want deliverance from a problem, God wants His children to seek Him, to put their eyes on Him, to look up! While we are pleased with answers to our prayers, God is pleased with our praying.

Jehoshaphat set the tone by setting himself to seek Jehovah. He made a resolution to respond to God’s rod by seeking God. And when we set our eyes on Jehovah, then we have every reason to sing His praises: “Praise Jehovah, for his mercy endureth for ever” (21). Pray! And then sing! 

Evil Fruits of the Conditional Covenant (1)

The doctrine of God’s everlasting covenant of grace is a uniquely Reformed truth. That uniqueness is not due to discovery, as if the Reformed church was the first to discuss it. That is obviously not the case. The church of God has long recognized the importance of the covenant. The church labeled the two parts of Holy Scripture the Old Testament (or covenant), and the New Testament (or covenant). Theologians have been writing and preaching about the covenant from of old. Yet it is uniquely Reformed in that this doctrine received its due, and was developed, after the great sixteenth-century Reformation.

The all-wise and sovereign God determines when in the history of His church each doctrine will receive much attention and consequently will be set forth clearly.

Surely God has many purposes and goals known only to Him for determining when the doctrine of the covenant would be developed. From our vantage point we can see some of the wisdom of waiting with the doctrine of the covenant until after the Reformation.

First, the Reformed doctrine of the covenant ties all of Reformed theology together. Thus it was God’s plan that this crucial doctrine come into its own after most of the other doctrines had been explicitly defined.

Second, God’s covenant of grace is inseparably related to the doctrine of salvation. Even the name (covenant of *grace*) indicates the tie to the doctrine of salvation by grace. In one of the most striking events in the history of the church, the Reformed church world gathered together in 1618-’19 in

Dordrecht, the Netherlands, to set forth the Reformed doctrine of salvation. The Canons of Dort explain, defend, and affirm salvation by sovereign, particular grace. Thus, the Reformed doctrine of the covenant developed out of the theology expressed in this Reformed creed.

The Protestant Reformed Churches have been convinced, through much study and controversy, that the only doctrine of the covenant that is in harmony with the doctrine of sovereign grace is an *unconditional* covenant. Throughout its history, the *Standard Bearer* has persistently proclaimed the twin truths of sovereign, particular grace and the unconditional covenant of grace. In the issues of February 1, 2006 and following, the treatment of the Declaration of Principles was intended to demonstrate

that the unconditional covenant is in complete harmony with the Reformed creeds, while the conditional covenant is not. However, more needs to be said about the dangers of the doctrine of a conditional covenant.

The doctrine of a conditional covenant is not so easy to define. This is partly due to the fact that very few proponents of a conditional covenant will offer a clear definition. In addition, it comes as no surprise to anyone that there are variations of thought among those who hold to a conditional covenant. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a number of central elements of the conditional covenant. Let us recall some of them.

First, the most obvious element is found in its name—the conditional covenant insists that God requires man to fulfill a condition. The covenant is usually described as an agreement between God and man, where God promises to give to man the blessing of eternal life on the condition that man does his part. That ‘part’ is faith—he must believe the promises, and sometimes the condition of works of obedience is explicitly added (or “faithfulness” in the covenant, as it is described by some). Several answers are given to the question: To what is man’s part a condition? This condition might be a prerequisite to entering the covenant. It might be a condition needed to ratify the covenant. It may be merely to obtain the blessing of the covenant. Those who want to maintain a conditional covenant, but also affirm that salvation is all of God, will add that the condition is fulfilled by God’s grace.

Second, a conditional covenant is two-sided, or bilateral. Some hold to a bilateral covenant throughout. Others teach that the covenant begins unilaterally, but becomes bilateral. According to this, God comes to man with the message that God established His covenant with the man. God places man under the obligations of the

covenant. At that point, the covenant becomes bilateral, as man is required to believe the promise (the condition) as a prerequisite to receiving the promised blessings. Corresponding to a promise of blessing for obedience is a threat of punishment for failure to meet the condition.

Third, the covenant, as conditional, is presented as the way that God saves. God makes a covenant with many, in order to save some of them. The covenant serves the purpose of bringing salvation to those who fulfill the condition.

Fourth, under a conditional covenant, the promises of the covenant are given to every child of believing parents. The glorious promise of Genesis 17:7 to Abraham and his seed is understood to refer to *all* Abraham’s physical children and grandchildren, etc. Accordingly, every believer is assured that all his children are in the covenant, and all have the promises from God.

Fifth, most often, the doctrine of a conditional covenant includes the concept of a common, non-saving grace given to every child of believers. Such a grace enables the child to make a decision on whether or not to accept the promises of God.

And finally, the conditional covenant also ordinarily *excludes* sovereign, particular election from any consideration of the covenant. All the children of believers are in the covenant of God, not merely the elect. Election’s only connection to the covenant is that it will serve to explain, after history is ended, who were saved and why, namely, because they were God’s elect.

Many objections can be raised against such a view of the covenant. We limit our criticisms to the following:

First of all, the doctrine of a conditional covenant compromises God’s sovereignty. The mighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, comes to puny man with a proposal and waits on man’s accep-

tance of it? And if man accepts it, then God will proceed to bestow the blessings? Is that not contrary to all of Scripture and the Reformed confessions, which emphasize God’s sovereignty over all things, but especially in salvation?

The Bible’s clear testimony is that the covenant is God’s and that God sovereignly establishes His covenant. This is God’s Word in Genesis 17:7—“I will establish my covenant....” God established that covenant with Abraham and his *seed*. Even though the seed are not yet born and cannot fulfill any conditions, they are included in the covenant. And concerning that “seed,” the Spirit teaches us, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). The “Seed” is Christ and all those in Him, namely, the elect.

To be sure, God demands of His people that they live in loving obedience in this covenant. To His covenant people God speaks: “I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Gen. 17:1). And God shows that those who live in the sphere of the covenant (due to their organic connection, namely, they were born in families of believers), but despise God’s covenant, manifest the fact that they are not God’s covenant people, and He cuts them off from any connection to the covenant (Gen. 17:14).

Nonetheless, the covenant of grace is unilateral throughout. God not only establishes it, He powerfully maintains it. Psalm 89 teaches that though the seed of the chosen will transgress the covenant, that is, will sin, will transgress God’s covenant law, yet God promises, “My covenant will I not break” (Ps. 89:34). Thanks be to God, the maintenance of the covenant does not belong to us!

Our second main objection against a doctrine of the conditional covenant is that it is

Arminianism applied to the covenant. Reading Arminius himself, one cannot but be struck by the similarity of his theology with the conditional covenant teachings. I do not refer merely to the fact that Arminius made much of conditions, and taught an election conditioned on man's faith and obedience, though that is significant indeed. But consider what Arminius wrote in response to William Perkins.¹ Against Perkins, who taught that the promise of the gospel relates to the elect alone, but the command to believe pertains to the elect and to the reprobate, Arminius wrote, "I reply, that the promise, as made and proposed by God, relates not to the elect only, but to the wicked, whom you place in opposition to the elect" (p. 327).

In harmony with a universal promise of salvation, Arminius insisted that Christ had made atonement for the sins of every person, otherwise forgiveness could not be offered to everyone. The same implication holds in the doctrine of a conditional covenant. If the promise of salvation is made and given to every baptized child, then the implication is that Christ must have died for each baptized child.

Arminius also taught that God gives a non-saving grace to all those who hear the gospel preached. Wrote Arminius, "[God] determined to give to them faith and repentance by sufficient grace, that is, to bestow upon them those gifts in a manner in which they may be able to receive them, by the strength given them by God, which is necessary for their reception. God has, therefore, ordained, by the decree of Providence, by which external preaching is addressed to those whom God foreknew as persons who would not believe, to give to them...sufficient grace and the strength necessary to their faith and conversion to God." Arminius distinguishes this "sufficient grace" from "effectual grace," which God does not give to the reprobate (p. 336).

And, it should be noted, Arminius also taught that man fulfills conditions by God's grace.

Arminianism applied to the covenant yields a conditional covenant.

More objections could be raised about specific aspects of a conditional covenant, such as the denial of Christ's Headship as the Mediator of the covenant; the notion that the essence of the covenant is an agreement rather than friendship; and this serious, but often overlooked criticism: the conditional covenant makes the covenant to be merely a means to an end (and thus limited to time), rather than the eternal goal of God, namely, to live forever with His people in perfect covenant friendship.

However, our purpose is not now to give a thorough critique of the concept of a conditional covenant. Rather, it is to set forth some of the consequences of this doctrine. Since the covenant is the heart and soul of Reformed theology, the conditional covenant has many serious implications, both doctrinal and practical. In past editorials, Prof. Engelsma demonstrated clearly that the conditional covenant is the root cause of the latest denial of justification by faith alone.² He went beyond that to demonstrate that the conditional covenant denies all the doctrines of sovereign grace.³

The above demonstrates once again the reality that the truth is one truth. It is a complete whole. Reformed believers speak of the "body of the truth." Exactly because of this unity, when one aspect of the truth is corrupted, the whole body is affected, and that for evil. Eventually all of the truth is corrupted by an error—witness the spread of the lie in the medieval church, resulting in the false church of Rome.

This article begins a series that intends to set forth other grievous errors that are based on the false doctrine of a conditional covenant. Now it is plain that when false doc-

trine enters, the other doctrines that will be first affected are those most closely related to the false doctrine itself. This is true also with the conditional covenant. For example, the two sacraments instituted by Christ are also signs and seals of the covenant of grace. If the conditional covenant view is not correct, one would expect that it will eventually affect the doctrine and practice of the sacraments. In fact this is the case. Admitting children to the Lord's Supper (paedo-communion) and baptismal regeneration are being defended and promoted on the basis of the conditional covenant.

Additionally, all Reformed believers know that marriage is a picture of God's covenant relationship to His church. Does a conditional covenant affect the teaching and practice of marriage? Indeed it does. The conditional covenant is the theological justification for divorce, not only, but also for remarriage under all circumstances.

These are evil fruits.

Not everyone who holds to the doctrine of a conditional covenant is partaking of these evil fruits. Not yet. Some are battling the errors, even while maintaining a doctrine of a conditional covenant.

They fight an impossible battle. It is like a doctor trying to treat only the symptoms of cancer instead of attacking the root cause.

The point of the articles, therefore, is to help those who reject the evil fruits, but do not yet see the root cause. 

1. "An Examination of the treatise of William Perkins concerning the Order and Mode of Predestination," *The Writing of James Arminius* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids: 1956), trans. W. R. Bagnall, vol. III. This is the source of all the quotations from Arminius.

2. "The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary Debate," *Standard Bearer*, Jan. 1-April 1, 2003.

3. "Covenantal Universalism: New Form of an Old Attack on Sovereign Grace," *Standard Bearer*, Apr. 15-June, 2004.

The Covenant of Sovereign Grace (5) or The Decisive Influence of the Reformation Gospel upon the Orthodox Doctrine of the Covenant in the Netherlands

Covenant and Election in the Canons

Contrary to the accepted wisdom in the Reformed churches, the Canons of Dordt do not leave it an open question whether election governs the covenant. It is not an open question, therefore, about which Reformed theologians and churches may debate until the world ends, whether God graciously establishes His covenant with all the children of believers alike, *conditionally*, or whether He establishes the covenant of grace *unconditionally* with the elect children.

Although they mention the covenant only rarely, and although the doctrine of the covenant is certainly not a major theme in the creed, the Canons of Dordt (1618/1619) are conclusive, that God's eternal decree of election governs the covenant of grace with believers and their children.

The Canons of Dordt are the second authoritative document, with the "Form for the Administration of Baptism," that has bound upon the Reformed churches from their earliest beginnings a doctrine of the cov-

enant that has the covenant governed by, and serving, election.

Election and Covenant Grace

The Canons teach that election governs the covenant inasmuch as they confess that election is the sole fountain of God's (saving) grace and the only determiner of those who are the objects of this grace.

Canons, I/9 teaches that election is the source of God's grace in Jesus Christ and of all His saving works: "Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good; from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects" (this and the following quotations of the Canons are taken from Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, Baker, 1966, unless otherwise noted).

Now the covenant is a "covenant of grace." The work of God in the covenant is a work of gracious salvation. The very establishment of the covenant with someone is gracious on God's part. But this grace and this saving work, according to the Canons, have their fountain in God's election. It is true that the Canons do not specify that election is the fountain of God's grace and saving work *in the covenant*. Why should they? Wherever God's grace in Jesus Christ is directed towards men, wherever God's grace is communicated to men, and wher-

ever God's saving work is found in men, whether on the mission field or in the family of believers, the fountain is election.

Are we to suppose that, whereas God's grace and saving work on the mission field are due to and governed by election, in the covenant there is a different source? Do the enemies of the truth that election governs the covenant really suppose, and want us to suppose, that the Canons' clear, emphatic teaching that election is the fountain of God's grace and saving work in Christ *excludes God's grace and saving work in the covenant*?

And if it is indeed the case that God's eternal decree is not the fountain of the grace and saving work of God in the covenant among the physical offspring of godly parents, what, pray tell, *is* the source of grace and salvation in the covenant?

According to the Canons of Dordt, binding document for the churches in the Dutch Reformed tradition (the glorious tradition that has made more of the covenant of grace than any other), covenant and election are tightly linked. Election governs the covenant.

"Out of the common mass" of the Offspring of Believers

In closest connection with the teaching of the Canons that the grace and saving work of God, in

Prof. Engelsma is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Previous article in this series: January 15, 2007, p. 177.

the covenant as on the mission field, are due to election, Canons, I/10 makes election the determiner of the objects of the grace and saving work of God: "Gracious election...doth...consist herein... that He [God] was pleased out of the common mass of sinners to adopt some certain persons as a peculiar people to Himself."

In proof and demonstration of this assertion, Canons, I/10 immediately quotes Romans 9:11-13: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil," etc., "it was said [namely, to Rebecca] the elder shall serve the younger; as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." This passage proves that election determines the objects of the grace of God *in the sphere of the covenant*, for Jacob and Esau were not heathens on the mission field, but twin sons of godly parents. In determining which of the two (as yet unborn) sons of Isaac and Rebecca would be the object of God's grace and saving work—Jacob—election determined the object of God's *covenant* grace and *covenant* salvation. As a discriminating decree, the same decree—as reprobation—determined which of the physical offspring of Isaac and Rebecca—Esau—would not be the object of God's covenant grace and saving work, but the object of His covenant wrath and curse.

According to Canons, I/10, God is not gracious to "the common mass of sinners" born to godly parents. God is not pleased to adopt all of the children born to godly parents. Not all the physical children alike are "a peculiar people to himself," even though all are baptized. Which of the children of godly parents are the objects of God's covenant grace, are adopted as His children, and become His peculiar people is determined by election.

According to the Canons of Dordt, authoritative creed of many Reformed churches everywhere in the world, the eternal decree of

election is so closely related to the covenant that election determines who are, and who are not, the covenant children of God.

In addition to the clear, forceful testimony of the Canons everywhere to the truth that the Mediator, His death, the regenerating Spirit, the promise of the gospel, grace, blessings, and salvation have their origin in and are governed by God's eternal election of grace, *which testimony applies to the covenant with believers and their children, if the covenant has anything to do with the Mediator, His death, the regenerating Spirit, the promise of the gospel, grace, blessings, and salvation (which, of course, it does)*, there are two specific statements in the Canons that relate covenant and election, and relate them in such a way that election governs the covenant.

Election and the Salvation of Covenant Infants

The first is Canons, I/17:

Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with the parents are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.

With explicit reference to the covenant of grace, with explicit reference to the infant children of believers, and with explicit reference to the salvation of these infant children of believers in the covenant of grace, the Canons explicitly declare that the covenant of grace is related to election: "election and [covenant] salvation." Still more, the Canons explicitly teach that the relation between election and covenant salvation is this, that election governs the covenant: the salvation of infant children of believers is due to the election of these infant children. Believing parents

have no reason to doubt of the "election and salvation" of these children, that is, the parents may believe the salvation of these infant children, because of God's election of these children.

In light of Canons, I/17, it is nothing less than astounding that Reformed churches and theologians, who have the Canons as their creed, deny that election governs the covenant, insist that this denial is in harmony with the Reformed confessions, and condemn those churches that teach the relation of election and covenant as outside the stream of the Reformed tradition.

I note in passing that the election that governs the grace and saving work of God in the covenant, according to Canons, I/17, is not the conditional, changeable decision of God in history of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") theologian Benne Holwerda and of the men of the federal vision. But it is the eternal, unconditional, and unchangeable decision of Canons, I/7: "Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He hath, out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen," etc.

It is true that Canons, I/17 refers specifically to those children of believing parents who die in infancy. The fact remains that, concerning these children, election governs the grace and salvation of God in the covenant. Those Reformed theologians and churches that deny the relation of covenant and election oppose the teaching of Canons, I/17.

And the teaching of Canons, I/17 regarding the salvation of a certain category of covenant children, namely, those who die in infancy, implies that God's salvation of the other covenant children, namely, all those who grow up to believe in Christ and walk in God's ways, is likewise governed by, and due to, election.

... to be continued. 

Hormones and God's Governing Hand

We believe that the same God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment" (Belgic Confession, Art. 13). Everything in the creation ought to draw our attention to the almighty power of the sovereign Creator and His absolute control over all things. Yet, the world attempts to explain all of the wonders observable in the creation in terms of "natural selection" or "probability" and "chance," and we would do the same if not for the grace of God. Our sinful natures attempt to suppress the truth of a sovereign Creator, and desire to invent an explanation based on our own thinking. But, thanks be to God, by His sovereign and irresistible grace, our blind eyes have been opened and our hard heart softened so that we can look at the creation and begin to see the handiwork of the Creator. Now that we have eyes to see, we see a creation singing the praises of God. Now we see a creation that leads us "to contemplate the invisible things of God" (Belgic Confession, Art. 2). We do well to contemplate the sovereign con-

trol of God as we consider in this article one of the means God uses to direct functions within our bodies—a small but glorious reminder of His sovereign governing Hand.

Chemical Messengers

In addition to the nervous system, which controls the activities of the body with the use of electrical signals, the endocrine system also is highly involved in controlling functions and activities of the body. The endocrine system is a system of chemical messengers (hormones), secreted from specific glands, that are distributed throughout the body—the pituitary gland in the brain, the thyroid gland in the neck, the adrenal glands by the kidneys, and the reproductive glands, to name a few. These glands secrete unique chemicals that rush through the bloodstream communicating important messages to various cells of the body. Interestingly, these glands do not distribute their hormones through tubes *directly* to the targeted cells or organs, but simply distribute the hormones to the cells by way of the bloodstream.

This endocrine system is extremely fascinating for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that God uses chemicals—tiny groups of atoms (those tiny building blocks of matter that we have examined previously in this rubric)—to communicate necessary messages to various body cells. The chemicals, or hormones, are capable of communicating with

specific cells because the target cells were designed to receive and recognize only the particular chemical that will cause the necessary changes in that cell.

A simple analogy may help us understand this. Every conscientious homeowner has locks on the doors of his home. He uses these locks when he leaves the home. Only one set of keys will fit the lock and unlock the door. So it is with the hormones of the endocrine system. One might consider the hormone to be like a key to a lock. The hormone may try to fit into every cell with which it comes in contact, but because of the wisdom of God, the hormone will "unlock" only the particular cell God has designed it to "unlock." The "unlocked" cell is now able to accomplish the task it is called to do. In the wisdom of God, cells are constantly "unlocked" by specific chemical messengers so that particular bodily functions can be controlled and regulated. What an amazing design God has made, in that cells communicate through the use of tiny groups of atoms! God's intricate design is further illustrated in that cells will respond only to specifically "shaped" groups of atoms and simply "ignore" the other hormones that pass by! Truly we see the hand of an omnipotent, divine Creator, who created of nothing all things by His Word—not the outcome of some evolutionary process of development. Our God is great and greatly to be praised!

Mr. Minderhoud is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

The greatness of our God and His providential government is demonstrated in how He uses the tiny hormone molecules to regulate and control activities of the cells of the body, and thereby *literally* control the many functions of the body itself. Time and space prevent discussing the multitude of body functions that are intimately regulated by the endocrine system. To come to a better appreciation of the greatness of our God, let us examine more specifically one of the myriad of hormones God has placed within the body—the antidiuretic hormone—and how God uses this simple hormone to control the bodily function of urine production.

Control of body functions

Urine production occurs in the kidneys, governed in part by the antidiuretic hormone. The antidiuretic hormone is secreted from the pituitary gland in the brain, and though passing many cells in its journey within the bloodstream, it communicates only with the cells of the kidneys, directing them in their work of producing urine. Kidneys filter out impurities and toxins from the blood that are by-products of body metabolism and convert these wastes into urine. Besides removing these toxins, the kidneys also filter out or absorb water from the blood. As the blood passes through the kidneys hundreds of times per day (1.2 L per minute), it produces an amazing 180 L of filtrate. (Imagine 90 2-L pop bottles of filtered fluids and toxin.) About 90% of this filtrate is returned to the blood by various processes in the kidneys, but the other 10% is either converted to urine or returned to the blood at the command of the antidiuretic hormone.

This antidiuretic hormone (ADH) causes the kidney cells to put water back into the bloodstream, thus decreasing the amount of water in urine. Consequently, ADH reduces the amount of urine

produced in the course of the day. When ADH is found in the *proper levels*, approximately 17 L of water are reabsorbed into the bloodstream from the kidneys, producing only 1.5 to 2 L of urine per day. When ADH is *under-secreted*, the kidneys will return very little of the water to the bloodstream, producing an enormous amount of dilute urine—up to 24 L per day (equivalent to passing a liter of urine every *hour!*). In the presence of *excess* ADH, the kidneys will return almost all the water back to the bloodstream, creating extremely concentrated urine—as little as 0.5 L per day. This concentrated urine has been known to precipitate tiny salt crystals, which slowly and collectively combine into tiny pebbles or stones—called kidney stones. In the providence of God, the delicate balance of water removed from the bloodstream is governed by the amount of ADH that communicates with the kidney cells. This hormone is one of many examples of how God, in His wisdom, has chosen to use these marvelous means to accomplish His purpose in the governing of our daily activities and bodily functions.

A shortage of this tiny hormone molecule has an amazing effect on the body, thereby altering the daily routines of many people. “Diabetes insipidus” is a disorder in which the body does not produce enough ADH. Water that was extracted from the blood by the kidneys is not returned to the bloodstream, since the kidneys were not directed to do so because of an insufficient amount of ADH. Thus, dehydration is the main concern. The afflicted are always thirsty, and they produce great quantities of urine. Without treatment it is very possible for one to die because the delicate water balance needed in the body is not maintained as it should be. In the providence of God, synthetic forms of ADH are being manufactured so that those suffering from diabetes insipidus can get the ADH levels they need

to control properly the amount of water in the body and the amount of urine produced each day.

There are other, less serious problems associated with ADH levels in the body. Although not life-threatening, these other problems nevertheless significantly affect the daily routines of life. For example, more ADH generally is produced at night (resulting in less urine production) than during the day. This design prevents your bladder from filling completely while you are asleep. In some cases, a lack of ADH at night (either because the pituitary gland does not produce enough or because the kidneys are not able to detect the hormone) will result in large volumes of urine being produced while one sleeps. This necessitates regular visits to the restroom, or, for the young child or “heavy sleeper,” a wet bed.

Besides the nighttime inconvenience that accompanies a shortage of ADH, a person with a regular *daily* insufficiency of this hormone may become dehydrated, since water is not being put back into the bloodstream, and therefore is not getting to the cells of the body. Also, chemicals like caffeine and alcohol tend to suppress the secretion of ADH, resulting in less water being returned to the bloodstream, and consequently, a greater volume of urine produced. The use of caffeinated beverages, therefore, enhances the danger of dehydration. This is a serious concern, particularly in the summertime. It is not uncommon for people to drink caffeinated beverages on hot summer days to quench their thirst. This, however, is unwise in that the caffeine will prevent the pituitary gland from secreting ADH. This causes the kidneys to fail to put the filtered water back into the bloodstream, slowly dehydrating the individual.

This illustrates how a simple body function is controlled by a specific hormone. Many more examples of hormones effecting change are found throughout the

body. May we see in all this that it is God who speaks and hormones move, either in amounts that bring “normal” body functions or in amounts that lead to difficulties and afflictions. The endocrine system testifies that God governs and controls all things, and does so in a most wonderful and wise fashion.

God’s Wondrous Works

We began the article confessing that Jehovah God, who created all things, has not forsaken the creation, but is intimately involved in the creation, constantly governing and controlling *all* things. We can sometimes overlook the fact that God governs every tiny creature in the creation—even the molecules that move in the body. These hormones are directed sovereignly by the Word of God each moment of each day in each person of this world. They do not move without His command. And they move where and when He commands. It is by God’s sovereign government that in one person there may be excess hormones, or in another, not enough. God gives us this creation as pictures, or, as the Belgic Confession says, as a most elegant book, in order that we may contemplate the invisible things of

God. As we examine how God governs and controls body functions and specifically governs and controls the very movements of the hormone molecules, we may be sure that God will certainly govern and control *all* the circumstances in our life. We come to this knowledge from Scripture when it commands us to consider the care God has for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. As God cares for these creatures, including hormones, so much more will He care for us (Matt. 6:25ff.). However, we ought not limit the government of God merely to what we can see physically. God controls *all* things—from the minute to the expanse of the heavens, from the “minor” issues to the “major” issues of life, from the physical to the spiritual (read Heidelberg Catechism, LD 1 and 10; Belgic Confession, Art. 13). We ought to take time to examine the beautiful and intricate parts of the creation, observing how God directs all things in creation, and contemplate how God is controlling all things for our salvation. In this His name is glorified!

Our consideration of the work of tiny, often overlooked hormones brings to mind a familiar theme we

find when studying the human body. We notice that God places in the human body all sorts of different kinds of members—all of which have a place and function. In fact, the tiniest of members of the body, often unknown and unseen, like hormones, are necessary—very necessary! It is a beautiful picture of the covenant life of Christ and His Body, the church (I Cor. 12). All the members of the body of Christ are necessary and special, even though one’s place or function in the church may not be as obvious or readily observed by others. Even little children in the church are an important and effective witness to the Truth. Truly, “Weakest means fulfill Thy will, mighty enemies to still.” Never should we take for granted the simple means God uses, nor despise the day of small things (Zech. 4:10). Let us bow in humility before God’s wise ways of executing His good and perfect counsel.

All God’s works praise Him! Whether great or small, God’s creatures—the works of His hands—marvelously shout His praises. May we praise Jehovah for this excellent display of His glory found in such a tiny aspect of creation!



Decency and Order

Prof. Ronald Cammenga

Erasure of Baptized Members (2)

Although not specifically mentioned in the Church Order, Reformed churches from the beginning of their history

Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2006, p. 468.

exercised discipline over members by baptism. Also members of the church who had not yet made confession of faith were subject to the oversight of the consistory. And if such non-communicant members walked impenitently in sin, they were admonished and eventually excluded from the fellowship of the church.

Various Church Order authori-

ties refer to the practice of the erasure of baptized members.

When baptized members, being guilty of the sins named above, have reached the years of discretion, and have shown themselves persistently averse to the paths of righteousness, refusing to listen to faithful and patient exhortation, then they must be excluded from the Church. The

maintenance of the honor of Christ and of the holiness of the Church demands it, as well as the duty to apply this 'extreme remedy' for their salvation. (Prof. Wm. Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons*, p. 253.)

Baptized members who have reached years of discretion and who willfully neglect to make profession of their faith also become objects of discipline. They must be instructed and admonished prayerfully. If they continue to be indifferent and unbelieving the Church finally declares that their relationship to the Church has been severed. Their names are stricken from the rolls of the Church. (VanDellen and Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary*, p. 295.)

In Reformed circles children have ever been regarded as members of the Church, and as members of it they are subject to its discipline. To be sure, discipline in their case must necessarily be only partial since they are not yet members in the full sense of the word. Because children do not have the right to vote or to attend the Lord's Supper, these privileges of course cannot be taken from them. Discipline of children is limited to warning, exhortation, reproof, and erasure. (J. L. Shaver, *The Polity of the Churches*, vol. 1, p. 201.)

Principles Underlying Erasure

There ought to be a clear understanding, on the part of the members of the church, of the principles underlying the practice of erasure. Understanding these principles will insure that this important aspect of Christian discipline is preserved in the churches.

First, baptized members are indeed members of the church. They are not potential members of the church. They are not partial members of the church. They are members of the church. This is the ground for their baptism, according to the *Heidelberg Catechism*: "Q. 74. Are infants also to be baptized? A. Yes: for since they, as well as

the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God...." Our Reformed Baptism Form expresses the same thing in the first question that is asked of parents at the time that they present their children for baptism: "First. Whether you acknowledge that although our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea to condemnation itself, yet that they are sanctified in Christ, and therefore, as member of his church, ought to be baptized?" Since baptized members are members of the church, they are subject to the oversight and discipline of the church through the office of elder.

A second principle underlying erasure is that members of the church who walk publicly and impenitently in sin must be excluded from the church. Open sin on the part of any member of the church may not be tolerated. For the glory of God's name, for the sake of the salvation of the erring member, for the sake of the example and influence on the other members of the church, and for the sake of the church's witness in the world, sin must be dealt with. The impenitent sinner must be admonished, and if he continues stubbornly in his sin, he must be excluded from the fellowship of the congregation. "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (I Cor. 5:13).

In the third place, erasure, although it concerns members by baptism, concerns members by baptism who have arrived at years of maturity. Neither the little children of the church nor even the younger teenagers are the objects of erasure. But the objects of erasure are those who are old enough to know and to be expected to carry out the responsibilities of mature members of the church, especially in confessing their faith and living in the world in obedience to God's commandments. This is not to say that the elders may not work with and admonish

younger children of the church who have fallen into sin. From time to time this is necessary, especially because of the seriousness of a particular sin. In this case, the elders would not labor apart from but with the consent of the parents and ordinarily in the presence of the parents. But this is exceptional. And in this case, the discipline of the elders is confined to admonition. Only those young people who have come to years are the objects of erasure. This would be the New Testament application of the Old Testament requirement found in Deuteronomy 21:18-21. This passage sets forth God's will for Old Testament parents whose son was living stubbornly and rebelliously in gluttony and drunkenness and who would not submit to the correction and instruction of his parents. The parents were to bring their impenitent son to the elders of Israel to be judged and stoned. The New Testament application would be erasure, by which erasure one is excluded from the church and kingdom of God.

In the fourth place, erasure is not to be carried out without the concurring advice of the classis. Although our Church Order does not require this, this is the standing practice in our denomination. This practice was the practice in the Christian Reformed Church at the time of the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This practice has a venerable history in the Dutch Reformed churches. The practice arises out of the responsibility for mutual supervision within the denomination, especially in a matter as serious as Christian discipline. No consistory may excommunicate a confessing member without the concurring advice of classis, according to the requirements of the Church Order, Articles 76 and 77. This safeguard also applies to erasure.

And last, as in the discipline and excommunication of communicant members, the congregation

must play an active role in the erasure of baptized members. The Scriptures emphasize the role of the congregation in Christian discipline in such passages as Matthew 18:15-17, I Corinthians 5, Galatians 6:1, and Hebrews 3:13. In the case of the discipline of communicant members, the Church Order insures congregational participation by the requirement that the consistory make three separate announcements to the congregation. The announcements exhort the congregation to pray for and admonish the erring member. The process of erasure—and it should be a *process*—should do justice to this important principle of Christian discipline. The consistory ought not simply to announce to the congregation the fact that a certain baptized member has been erased, without providing the members the opportunity to carry out their responsibility in admonishing the member before erasure actually does take place.

Distinction Between Erasure and Excommunication

From one point of view, erasure and excommunication are fundamentally the same. They are the same as far as their necessity is concerned: impenitence in public sin on the part of a member of the church. They are the same as far as the process is concerned. Both involve the admonition of the officebearers and of the members of the church, as well as the approval of the classis. They are the same in their outcome. The end of both erasure and excommunication is that the impenitent sinner is excluded from membership in the church and is shut out of the kingdom of Christ. Also, the members of the church treat one who has been erased and one who has been excommunicated fundamentally the same. They break off fellowship with them: "...with such an one no not to eat" (I Cor. 5:11).

Nevertheless, there is a distinction between erasure and excom-

munication. The distinction is an important and necessary distinction. It is a distinction that must be recognized and honored. It was the concern to maintain this distinction that fueled the lengthy debate in the Christian Reformed Church over the adoption of a form for erasure, as I pointed out in the previous article.

The distinction is not between immature and mature members of the church. Only mature members of the church may be erased or excommunicated from the church. Although both erasure and excommunication concern mature members, there is a distinction in membership between those who are erased and those who are excommunicated. From the point of view of this distinction, erasure is not excommunication. The two are not identical.

The distinction between erasure and excommunication, first of all, concerns confession of faith and the vows of confession of faith. The individual who is erased is a non-confessing member of the church. The individual who is excommunicated is a confessing member of the church. This individual has publicly confessed his faith and has willingly assumed the vows of a confessing member of the church. Although both individuals are walking impenitently in sin, and both, on that account, are cut off from the fellowship of the church, the sin of the person who has been excommunicated is the greater. His sin is aggravated by the fact that he gives the lie to his public confession. His sin is aggravated by the fact that he breaks the vows of his public confession of faith. His judgment, apart from the intervening grace of God, will be the greater. The greater seriousness of the sin of a confessing member of the church is preserved in referencing his expulsion from the church as "excommunication."

In close connection with this, the distinction between erasure and excommunication is also that

the process of excommunication includes the revocation of communicant membership privileges, especially the privilege of participation in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The one who is excommunicated is barred, prior to his excommunication, from the Table of the Lord. Before this he partook of the elements of the Supper and freely used the sacrament along with the other members of the congregation. That the excommunicated person was one who previously partook of the sacrament aggravates his sin. His impenitence in sin is a desecration of the Lord's Table. In the case of the person who is erased, there has been no such participation in the sacrament. For this reason also the distinction ought properly to be maintained between erasure and excommunication.

The distinction does not take away from the fact that one who is erased is set outside the church and kingdom of Christ. Neither does it take away from the seriousness of the outcome of erasure. One who is erased, who dies impenitent in the sins for which he was erased, dies outside of Christ and outside of salvation. The outcome is that he perishes everlastingly in hell. This is the utter seriousness of the erasure of baptized members.

At the same time, erasure itself may be the means of God to bring the impenitent sinner to repentance. This, in the end, is why the church proceeds to this extreme remedy in the case of her baptized members. This is what the church prays for as the outcome of the painful process of erasure. And this, under God's grace, is the result when the members of the church honor the action of erasure. For this reason, as well as the greater reason of the glory of God, the churches must continue to take seriously their calling in the Christian discipline of baptized members. 

A Servant of All That I Might Gain the More

The apostle Paul was the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. He begins almost all of his letters reminding his readers of this important truth. Christ is the crucified, resurrected, and exalted Lord. He now rules over all the nations of the world. This sovereign and glorious Lord called Paul to be a preacher. The man who was once an enemy of God and a persecutor of the church was saved by the power of the Word of Christ and made His lowly and obedient slave. At the very same time he was called to be the instrument of Christ to bear His name and declare the gospel of His salvation for the saving and gathering of His church. When this happened. Paul asked with fear and trembling, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?!"

Paul was called to be an ambassador of Christ. The ambassador must boldly and faithfully declare the Word of Christ. There is no word like the Word of Christ. By this Word Christ would be glorified and His sovereign purposes fulfilled in the earth. The glorious name of Christ must be declared through all the earth until every knee shall bow before Him and every tongue shall confess His name to the glory of God the Father. The servant of Christ must never be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the wonder-working power

of Christ by which He saves His people chosen unto eternal life. The calling to declare the gospel of Christ throughout all the earth is a mighty and glorious calling! No other earthly occupation can compare with it. None accomplishes a purpose as great and wonderful. None has a duty more urgent and serious. The whole church of Jesus Christ must be interested in this work. She must be concerned about raising up preachers from her sons, supporting seminaries where they can be properly trained, and sending them out into the world to do their mighty work. She must pray for them daily, and support their work through sacrificial giving. This work must be continued by the followers of the apostles. In I Corinthians 9:16 Paul speaks of the compelling nature of his calling, "necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel."

The faithful preacher is Christ's own chosen vessel. Christ qualifies him with the necessary gifts of His Spirit and the special knowledge and understanding of His Word. The preacher of the gospel is clothed with the authority of Christ and sent into the world by Him. The ambassador of Christ has the solemn obligation to declare the Word of Christ with absolute authority. He may not change the Word of Christ or by any means bring his own word. He must declare only the Word of Christ. He is sent where Christ sends him. Wherever he goes he must bring only the Word of Christ

his Lord. He must teach men the true doctrine of salvation without the mixture of human opinions. The whole counsel of God must be declared, nothing must be kept back that is profitable for the salvation of God's people.

When the content of the gospel is changed and substituted with the enticing words of man's wisdom, the man who does this becomes a false preacher and leads men astray. He may have a large following, but those who follow him will not be made to follow Christ. Instead they will be made followers of a weak and helpless man and one who seeks his own glory rather than the glory of Christ. This preacher, in spite of all his boasting, is powerless to save. He seeks only to enrich himself by robbing from those he has called to come to him. For this the false preacher will receive the most severe condemnation.

The Lord is pleased to gather and defend and preserve His church through the means of the preaching of the gospel. Those who are redeemed and called by Christ must be made members of His church, where they can be built up in the faith and worship the true and living God with their fellow saints. There they must submit themselves to the discipline of Christ. Men who do not bring the Word of Christ may be managers of a large and glorious institution, having grand church buildings able to seat thousands and equipped with all the latest electronic marvels, but this institution is not truly

Rev. denHartog is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

the church of Jesus Christ. This institution may provide popular entertainment programs attracting even many young people, rivaling modern rock concerts and boasting all sorts of humanistic ministries for every group of troubled persons in our modern society, but it does not serve the purpose of Christ and His salvation. Woe unto the managers of these institutions, who care neither for Christ nor for His church.

As the servant of Christ, Paul confesses that he has made himself a servant of all. Though he was by Christ made free from all men, as a preacher of the gospel he became the slave of all men, that "he might gain the more" (I Cor. 9: 16). He was willing to become all things to all men, that by all means he might save some (I Cor. 9: 22). Such was the love of the servant of Christ for those who must be saved by Him. The idea of this statement is not, as some foolishly teach, that even the gospel itself must be compromised so that the preacher might gain a large following. Neither does it mean that all sorts of unbiblical means for merchandizing the gospel may be employed in order to give it popular and mass appeal. Losing the truth of the gospel is fatal. When a man does that, he has lost all. He no longer glorifies Christ. He no longer preaches a gospel that is the power of God unto salvation. He no longer brings the Word of Christ that alone is able to build up men unto the knowledge of Christ and a perfect man, unto the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ (Eph. 4: 13).

Not all men will be saved through the preaching of the gospel, not even the majority of mankind. The gospel is not an offer of God to save all. Many will be offended by the preaching of the gospel. They will be condemned in their sin, and their hearts will be hardened even by the preaching of the Word of Christ to them. They will turn away from the

truth, showing that they love the lie and darkness rather than the glorious light of salvation. The ministry of Jesus Himself had this result in Galilee. Jesus made this evaluation of the rejection of the gospel in Galilee: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matt. 11:25, 26). The apostle Paul declared this same truth in his second letter to the church of Corinth:

Now thanks be unto God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved and in them that perish: to the one we are a savour of death unto death; and to the other a savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ (II Cor. 2: 14-17).

Even when many reject the preaching of the gospel, the cause of the gospel will always triumph and fulfill the purposes of God in Christ. Though many will perish in their sins, the remnant according to the election of grace must be saved.

The mighty and glorious positive purpose of the preaching of the gospel is the salvation of God's elect. These are those for whom Christ died. Their sins were atoned for at the cross. When the true gospel is preached, they will come to Christ, and He will receive them and save them, and will cause them to become citizens of His glorious kingdom.

This work of Christ must be accomplished in heathen lands to the very day of the return of Christ. The work of Christ's ambassadors will always be a very

difficult work and challenging work and often even a dangerous one. The world in which the gospel must be preached hated and crucified the Lord of glory and will also hate those who follow Jesus today.

The true gospel of salvation is hated just as bitterly today and opposed just as fiercely. Men who are called to this great work, at least in the past, had to be willing to leave the comforts of their homes and the peace and safety of the land in which they lived. They had to be prepared to go to a strange culture and to an ignorant, uncivilized people, living in abject poverty. Often they first had to learn the language of this people, to be able even to understand them and preach to them. As the day of the Lord approaches nearer and nearer, there are only a few of these areas left in the world where the gospel has not yet been preached. But the church must always ask whether there are still such lands where the Lord's name must be made known and His people saved.

Those who are sent to do this work must be ready to leave family and friends behind. In times past, they would have to go to areas of the world where communication with home was difficult and often impossible. But many have gone before us in this work, and the cause of the gospel has gloriously triumphed in many lands. The modern world has changed radically. The kinds of circumstances that face the preachers of the gospel today are quite different, but no less difficult than they have been in the past. Even heathen peoples today may be highly educated and live in the most modern societies and highly developed cultures. Are we ready boldly to face the challenges of our modern world and continue the work of preaching the gospel of Christ to the end of the world before our Lord returns? 

The Reformed Baptist View of Baptism and the Covenant

There are the Reformed and there are the Baptists, and then there are those who call themselves Reformed Baptists. This latter group professes to hold to the truths of the Reformed faith, with the exception of the teaching that infant children of believers are to be baptized. They argue that they can reject the practice of infant baptism and still be Reformed.

This, however, is not true. Since baptism is a sign of the covenant, a wrong view on baptism will be rooted in a wrong view of God's covenant. In other words, one who rejects the Reformed practice of infant baptism necessarily rejects the Reformed doctrine of the covenant. But one may not reject the Reformed doctrine of the covenant and still rightly call himself Reformed. One can be Reformed or he can be a Baptist, but he cannot really be both, since the two differ radically on God's covenant of grace—a fundamental truth of the Reformed faith. Nevertheless, I will refer to them as Reformed Baptists, seeing as they are commonly referred to as such.

Although the truth concerning infant baptism over against the error of the Baptists has already been considered, it is worthwhile to spend more time looking specifically at the position of the Reformed Baptists. This will lead us to consider the truth concerning baptism and the covenant in more detail, that we may also be better

prepared to defend the truth on this subject, and to witness to those who are either leaning toward this error or who have already fallen into it.

How the Reformed Baptist appears to come close to the Reformed view of baptism

For centuries the Reformed have put the following question to the Baptists: If Israelite male infants were circumcised, why should not infants of believers be baptized? Baptists have often answered this by making a wrong distinction between the old covenant and the new covenant, and between Israel and the church. In their view, Israel and the church are two peoples of God, who are in two fundamentally different covenants. These two covenants are then said to have different covenant signs that seal different covenant promises. Over against them the Reformed have maintained that there is only one people of God gathered throughout history, that the same covenant promise came to the saints in the old dispensation as comes today to the saints in the new, and that the two covenant signs—circumcision and baptism—seal the same covenant promise and thus have essentially the same meaning. Thus the views of the Reformed and of the Baptists have been clearly distinguished.

But then comes the position of the Reformed Baptist—a position that at first may appear to be somewhere in between that of the Reformed and that of most Baptists. They will grant some of what we

say about the truth that there is one people of God who have received the same covenant promise throughout history. They will even go so far as to acknowledge that baptism and circumcision have the same spiritual meaning.

A well-written and thorough work on baptism and the covenant written by a Reformed Baptist is entitled *Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace*. The author is Paul K. Jewett, who served as Professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. In this work he acknowledges a certain oneness of circumcision and baptism. For example, he admits that they both are seals of the righteousness of faith:

As circumcision was the seal of the righteousness of the faith which Abraham had, being uncircumcised, so our baptism is the seal of the righteousness of the faith which we have, being unbaptized. This conclusion appears inescapable, and it establishes the claim of the Paedobaptists that there is a fundamental affinity of meaning between circumcision in the old covenant and baptism in the new.¹

With regard to Colossians 2:11-13—perhaps the passage most commonly quoted to prove that baptism replaced circumcision—Prof. Jewett acknowledges that it does indeed teach what the Reformed have long said that it does. He writes that according to this text:

... to experience the circumcision of Christ, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, is the same thing

Rev. Laning is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

as being buried and raised with him in baptism through faith. If this be true, the only conclusion we can reach is that the two signs, as outward rites, symbolize the same inner reality in Paul's thinking. Thus circumcision may fairly be said to be the Old Testament counterpart of Christian baptism. So far the Reformed argument, in our judgment, is biblical. In this sense "baptism," to quote the *Heidelberg Catechism*, "occupies the place of circumcision in the New Testament."²

"So far," but no further, he is willing to acknowledge that the Reformed are correct. After admitting a certain similarity between these two covenant signs, he proceeds to set forth the difference between them. It is at this point that the error of the Reformed Baptist manifests itself. When a Reformed Baptist speaks about the similarity of circumcision and baptism, he may appear to be one with us who are Reformed. It is when he talks about how these two covenant signs differ from one another that the true nature of his position comes out.

The "Earthly Blessings" of the Old Covenant

One of the main arguments for the Reformed position on infant baptism has been the fact that circumcision and baptism are fundamentally the same. The Reformed Baptists appear to disarm us by taking the passages that prove this and then acknowledging that these passages teach that there is a certain similarity between these two covenant signs. But then they go on to teach that, even though there is a similarity between these two signs, they remain fundamentally different.

To understand their position on this we must consider baptism and circumcision as seals of God's covenant promise. If the covenant promise in the days of the old covenant is the same as that in the new, then these two signs would

be the same. Then these signs would both be seals of the same promise. But if the promise in the Old Testament days is different from the covenant promise today, then these two signs would be different. One sign would seal one covenant promise, and the other sign would seal a different covenant promise. Different promises would be sealed by different seals.

Now we apply this to the teaching of the Reformed Baptists. They maintain that there is a sense in which the promise in the days of the old covenant is the same as the promise today. The promise of salvation in Christ, they will admit, is the same in both dispensations. So circumcision and baptism seal the same covenant promise, and are thus the same in this respect. But then—and this is the key—they go on to say that there was another covenant promise that was only for the people under the old covenant, and is not for us today under the new. This makes for a difference between circumcision and baptism. Unlike baptism, circumcision was a seal also of this other covenant promise.

What was this other covenant promise? This, they say, was a promise of "earthly and temporal blessings." The land of Canaan, a large number of physical descendants, earthly health and prosperity, for example, were all part of the so-called "earthly and temporal blessings" that they say were promised under the old covenant, but not under the new.

To this we Reformed might respond by pointing out the many passages that indicate that the promise in the old covenant was actually a promise of a *heavenly* land, of many *spiritual* children, and of *heavenly* life, and *heavenly* prosperity. We might point out that the book of Hebrews indicates that Abraham looked for a heavenly city, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:9, 10). And we might be quick to show that the believers are "the seed" spoken of in

the covenant promise to Abraham (Gal. 3:16, 29). Passage after passage we might show the Reformed Baptist, only to find that he nods his head in agreement. "Yes," he would say, "the promise in the old covenant was indeed a promise of things that are spiritual, heavenly, and everlasting." "But," he would then go on to say, "included in this old covenant was also a promise of things material, earthly, and temporal."

This, he would say, is a central difference between the old covenant and the new. They had a promise of both spiritual things and material things, whereas we have a promise of only spiritual things. They had a promise of both earthly things and heavenly things, while we have a promise of only heavenly things. The same everlasting things were promised both to them and to us, but they also had a promise of temporal things. This, they would say, is the difference.

All the Natural Children – Recipients of the "Earthly Blessings"

Then they take this position and apply it to circumcision and baptism. An Israelite infant, they say, could be and was a partaker of the covenant promise of earthly blessings, such as earthly food in the land flowing with milk and honey. These blessings could be received without faith, and were promised to all the *natural* children of Israel. Therefore, seeing that this covenant promise was also for the Israelite infants, they could and did receive the sign of the old covenant.

But the new covenant, they say, is different. The new covenant does not include a promise of these earthly and temporal things. It includes only the spiritual and heavenly things, which are received by

1. Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, repr. 1980), p. 87.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

faith. Therefore one must first show himself to have conscious faith, before he can be viewed as a recipient of God's covenant promise and receive the sign and seal of the new covenant, namely, holy baptism.

So now we must consider these questions. Did the old covenant really include a promise of earthly blessings to all the natural children of Israel? And is it the case that now under the new covenant one

must first manifest conscious faith before he can be said to be in God's covenant and to have a right to receive the sign of that covenant? Lord willing, we will turn to these questions next. 

Guest Article

Rev. Allen Brummel

Bringing Forth Children in an Age of Selfishness*

A tremendous challenge faces us as parents in this day and age. We are called by God to train up our children to seek the things of God's kingdom. This is a tremendous challenge primarily because we are so sinful ourselves. We are selfish, greedy, and covetous. We live for the things of this earth. It is only by God's grace that we can be His friend-servants, can seek first the things of His kingdom, and can train our children to do the same.

What does the Bible say about bringing forth children? What place do children occupy in marriage? We start by answering the question: What does the Bible say about the children of believing parents?

Mark 10:13-16 sets before us the fundamental principle of all of Scripture regarding God's attitude toward the children of believing parents. "Of such is the kingdom of God." Children are included in the church and kingdom of Jehovah. Not every child of believing parents is included. That is not what Jesus says. But, of such is

the kingdom of God. This was not a new teaching. That infants of believers are included in the covenant and church of God is taught us in the very beginning of the history of the covenant of grace, as it is recorded in the Bible. The history of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David demonstrates repeatedly that God maintained His covenant in the line of continued generations.

God makes children a blessing for believing families. Psalm 127:3: "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward." Blessings, we know, are not automatically found in things like sun, rain, or even children. God makes rain, sunshine, and children a blessing to His people through His grace. God blessed Job in Job 42:12 by restoring his wealth and giving him ten children.

How are children a blessing? All the children of believers are a blessing, even the rebellious ones. They are a blessing, because they drive us to our knees in prayer. They humble us. They cause us to see how desperately we need God's grace every day to discipline and instruct them. They force us to be consistent and disciplined, and to live as spiritual examples for them. They force us to teach, and in teaching we grow in our knowledge of God's Word. They are a

blessing even when we see our own sins reflected in them, because we are driven to the cross.

God created marriage for the purpose of establishing His covenant in the way of procreation. Genesis 1:28 is the word of God to Adam and Eve who had just been joined in marriage by God and to whom God had given the sexual relationship: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." This command of God was repeated several times. One such time is after the flood in Genesis 9:1, where we read: "And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." God repeats the command later in His words to Jacob in Genesis 35:11: "And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins." In Matthew 19:1-9, Jesus admonishes the wicked Pharisees to go back to the beginning for their instruction regarding marriage and divorce.

The same admonition applies to the purpose of God regarding marriage. Bringing forth children and

Rev. Brummel is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois.

** This is the abbreviated text of a speech given on September 29, 2006 for the Peace PRC Fall Lecture.*

raising them in the fear of God is the will of God for married couples. Those who have no desire for children ought not to marry. They try to separate the sexual union from bearing children, separating what God has joined together. Such is sin against the God of marriage.

“Suffer the little children to come unto me,” said Christ! Do not keep them from Christ! Allow the little ones to come! The disciples held the children at a distance. We live in a day when Christian parents seek to keep children from Jesus by keeping them from even being born! They don’t want children to bring to Jesus. Or they want to bring only one or two or three children to Jesus. They are not concerned about the gathering of the church and God’s promise to gather His church through the seed of covenant parents.

“Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not,” says Jesus! Don’t abort them! The pressure is strong, even on Christian parents and young people, to pursue abortion as a way out of an embarrassing and shameful situation. Don’t abort your baby! That is not the way to bring it to Christ. Don’t seek to keep them from having children. Don’t keep them from Jesus once they are born! Parents claim that they love children and are just trying to decide how many children they can handle. In reality, parents are trying to find a way to avoid having children that God might be pleased to give them. They are trying to limit the number of children they will bring to Jesus.

This is the attitude of the selfish world in which we live. The people of the world enter into marriage for selfish reasons. God is not in their thoughts. Marriage and children are for their own pleasure. This selfish attitude enters into the church as well.

The devil has tremendous influence on our natures. Not only do we live in a selfish age, but we

are by nature selfish. Our flesh looks out for self. We find children a nuisance and a bother at times. Our flesh finds children an interference with our fun and games and our ambitions. Our flesh wants to be god! We will rule our own lives and we will determine how we should live. We will decide whether we want children and, if so, how many.

God is sovereign! Not only is He sovereign in salvation, but He is sovereign in our families. He will determine the number of children we will have, despite our attempts to the contrary. He determines the size of our quiver. There are those who actively seek to keep from having children, but the children keep on coming. There are others who do not want children and are more effective in their attempt at limiting the size of their families. How do we explain the fact that couples are able to plan the size of their families today with increasing success? While we cannot judge motives, we can say that, where the motive is selfish, this is evidence of God giving men and women over to their selfishness. God gives men and women over to their love of money and pleasure. If you want only one or two children so you can have a bigger house and a nicer boat, God gives you over to that selfish way. God gives men and women over to their vocations and their pursuit of earthly fame and glory. This is an expression of the judgment of God upon sin and sinners.

It is difficult to have a large family. There is tremendous cross-bearing required of both the husband and the wife. There are many tears and sorrows and challenges. We may never minimize the pain and suffering of a woman who bears a child for nine months and is called to endure tremendous pain and labor to give birth. Never minimize the many years of struggle and prayer required to raise each unique child in the fear of God. The sorrow of motherhood

is a heavy weight that mothers are called to bear. The mother must give her life away for the sake of her children. The father needs to sacrifice his own desires in order to work hard for the support of His family. God blesses them, not in the way of removing the struggles, but in the way of giving grace to bear those struggles, and to know peace with God’s will. God gives that blessing in the way of prayer and submission to God’s will.

What is the solution for the believing mother? It is not in escaping this calling. It is not in seeking fulfillment outside of the home in other vocations. Contentment and happiness come only in the way of obedience and clinging to the grace and strength of Jesus Christ to bear the burden of motherhood. Though the fall imposed painful realities on the woman, God sanctifies childbearing in the church, so that through it, women are saved (I Tim. 2:15). The sorrows and struggles of giving birth and raising sinful children are very real. For the redeemed woman, they are not a curse, but a chastisement God uses to sanctify us and draw us closer to Him. The church, sympathetic to the sorrows of motherhood, must strengthen and comfort such mothers with the Word of God. The answer is not the worldly wisdom of family planning. The answer is in Jesus Christ, our compassionate Savior, whose grace is sufficient to bear all our burdens. Jesus Himself came from a family of at least four brothers and two sisters (Matt. 13:55, 56). He saw his own mother endure the sorrows of motherhood and He had compassion on her, as He has compassion also on us in our need.

We need to get at deeper questions. What are you and I here for? What is your calling on earth? Are you here for pleasure? Are you on earth for your own entertainment? Did God give you life so that you can have a good time? Hear the word of the preacher in Ecclesiastes 12:13: “Fear God, and keep his

commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." Deuteronomy 10:12 states: "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul." Genesis 1:28 states, "Be fruitful and multiply." "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (I Tim. 5:14).

The Bible never promises us that life will be easy, but the Bible does promise, in Joshua 1:8, 9 and many other places, that God will never leave nor forsake us. God promises that He will always provide all the needs of His people in Luke 12:31: "But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you." This truth is stated also by David in Psalm 37:25: "I have been young, and now am old: yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." God promises that He will never require of us more than He will give us grace to bear in I Corinthians 10:13: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Philippians 4:11, 13 states: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.... I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." God promises joy and happiness in the way of obedience. The God-fearing wife confesses, "Whatsoever state I am in, whether that be pregnant almost every year or weeping at that time of the month when it is evident I am not pregnant, I have learned to be content!"

Some common excuses are given for preventing conception. Chief of all the excuses, though of-

ten not admitted, is financial concern. I hope that all of us can agree that financial issues present absolutely no ground for birth control or attempting to space our children. God promises that when we seek first His kingdom, by marrying and bringing forth godly seed, He will provide our every need. You may say, "That is easy for you as a minister to say, when you know you will be provided for!" True enough, but I base my comments not on my experience, but on the Word of God. A large family is a weighty burden upon the father from a financial perspective. He must not only have a good job, but be willing to sacrifice much for the sake of Christian education and the rearing of his children. He is not going to have a lot of time for hobbies, because his free time will be spent with his family. The answer is not to send his wife out to work. God will use the pressing needs to drive him to his knees to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." God will provide, whether that be through the work of his hands, the help of his family, or the mercies of Christ. Who of us, even those of us with large families and significant tuition bills, can say that we are praying to God for daily bread as we ought? We have great wealth in our day. We all have the means to support many children. Are we living as dependent upon Christ as our parents and grandparents did? Even more importantly, are we living as consciously dependent upon God as God requires?

Others say, "My wife and I need a year or two to get to know each other before we begin a family." Children are one of the greatest ways to get to know one another. No husband can take his wife for granted after watching her go through the pains of pregnancy and childbirth. If you think your relationship is not ready for children, you have greater problems that need to be addressed and resolved. You ought not to have married in the first place. Malachi 2:15, adding to the instruction we

have already seen in Genesis, states that God made marriage for the express purpose of bringing forth His covenant seed. "And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed."

Others say, "But this is an evil world we live in and we would not want to bring forth children, or have grandchildren, who would have to live in such a wicked time." That sounds pious. But, let's think about that for a moment in connection with the Word of God. One of the most difficult times for the church in all history was the bondage in Egypt. If ever there was a time when godly parents might justify not having children, it was then. Their children would be subjected to cruel, inhumane labor, or be cast into the water to die. But what do we read? They continued having children! The midwives refused to go along with the wicked king. And, significantly, God caused the nation of Israel to prosper under that persecution. Exodus 1:20 states: "Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty." During this evil time God dealt well with His people by causing them to multiply. Why would God do such a thing? Our flesh would say, God should cause fewer children to be born during this hard time. But God gave even more children. What would seem to us a curse for those parents and their children is described by God as a blessing for His church. During the evil times in which we live, God deals well with His church in causing her to multiply. Such is not a curse, but a blessing for godly parents, as well as their godly seed and the church. The church continues to be gathered in our day in preparation for the final return of Christ in judgment. One of the most important ways Reformed families must advance the church is in the way of bringing forth children.

Others argue, "But we need to use our heads and space our chil-

dren.” Why? So that you can retain your figure? So that you can be better prepared financially? So that you don’t get so overwhelmed with a busy home? So that you can better provide for those children and have more time to spend with them? Again, some of these responses seem pious. But God gives us an answer in the Bible. At heart these concerns reflect our will, not God’s. These concerns are selfish and evidence of a lack of faith. Proverbs 3:4, 5 instructs us that we are to trust in the Lord and lean not on our own understanding.

But, you say, is there no place for any kind of birth control? I would not rule out the possibility in the case of illness or life threatening difficulties on the part of the wife. We must not be legalistic here. There are difficult circumstances and situations in which God’s people find themselves. It

must be only after much prayer and searching of God’s will that such a decision would be made. A couple must stand before God together and be convinced in their own heart that they are not being selfish, but are seeking God’s glory and His will through their actions.

The principle of God’s Word, however, is clear: seek first God’s kingdom by marrying, living godly in marriage, and by bringing forth a godly seed. This does not mean that God will automatically give you a dozen children. But God will give you a quiver as full as He deems necessary for the gathering of His church and for your salvation.

Christ uses our marriages to bring forth children, and in this way He shows us the wonder of His grace. God has seen fit to call many sons and daughters to glory. And that required no small sacrifice. It sent the Son of God to the

horror of the cross. Jesus Christ was willing to make tremendous sacrifice in order that we His children might know the wonder of His grace toward us. He put away all selfishness in order to do the will of His heavenly Father. He gives us His Spirit to guide and sanctify us, in order that He might take us with Him to glory. The fruitfulness of our marriages is a reflection of the fruit of Christ’s work in realizing His kingdom and bringing His sons and daughters to glory.

What is your attitude toward children? Are you seeking to keep them from Christ?

May God give us grace to forsake the selfishness of our natures and humble ourselves before His sovereign, gracious hand, that He might be praised. “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not!” 

Book Reviews



Son of Secession—Douwe J. VanderWerp, by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006). Pp. xxii+209 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

The biography of Douwe VanderWerp by Janet Sheeres is a gem. It is difficult, having begun to read it, to lay it down unfinished. It is one of those books that keeps a man up at night.

The book is No. 52 in “The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, in cooperation with Origins Studies in Dutch-American History.” Some excellent books have been published in this series, this one not an exception.

The book is a biography of Douwe VanderWerp, who was born in the city of Groningen, the Netherlands in 1811, and died in Muskegon, Michigan in 1875 from the ravages of cancer of the mouth. The years during which he lived were eventful years for the church

of Christ both in the Netherlands and in America. VanderWerp was born 23 years before the *Afscheiding* (Secession) from the State Church, led by Hendrik DeCock. He participated actively in the Secession in 1857 from the Reformed Church in America that marked the beginning of the Christian Reformed Church in the area of Holland, Michigan. There VanRaalte had settled with a band of Dutch immigrants, and there VanRaalte had led the immigrants into the RCA.

VanderWerp lived an eventful and busy life during very trying times. Soon after his birth the rule of Napoleon was brought to an end, resulting in changes in the life of the Reformed Church (*Hervormde Kerk*, the State Church). Life was extremely difficult for the people of the Netherlands. Disastrous floods destroyed much land, especially in the northern provinces, where the dikes broke. Heavy rains flooded large areas and made farming (on which most

people were dependent) difficult. Epidemics of flu and small pox brought thousands to an early grave. A potato (the staple of the poor) famine brought starvation to all parts of the country and goaded emigration. People died young, especially mothers, and almost all families with children lost some of them at an early age. Douwe himself was married four times; only his last wife outlived him.

Douwe started his career as a teacher, but, because he was a follower and personal friend of DeCock, he was dismissed from his position in the public and state-supported schools. He became an *oefenaar* (exhorter or lay preacher) in the churches of the Secession. For many years he was very busy in his work of lay preaching and was even instrumental in organizing Secession Churches. His efforts to obtain ordination were, for some time, refused, partly due to opposition from Rev. Scholte.

As a lay preacher he was effec-

tive and well received among the people. Finally he obtained ordination and became a leader among the Secession Churches. After three calls from the same church, all made within a year, he took the third call to the new congregation in Graafschap, Michigan. He labored for many years for the Christian Reformed Church and organized many Christian Reformed Churches.

But the life and work of Douwe VanderWerp is but a story around which is woven many other stories of the *Afscheiding* and the early years of the Christian Reformed Church. The author's ability to do this in an interesting way makes the book the delightful book that it is. We get a look at the *Afscheiding* from the inside, which very few English books give us. From a personal point of view one sees the difficulties and long discussions that preceded the actual *Act of Secession* signed by DeCock and his officebearers; the many troubles the Seceders had, including severe persecution; the internal problems and divisions among the Seceders; and the great dedication to the truth of Scripture that many possessed. The same is true of the early history of the CRC in which VanderWerp played such a significant role. Problems in abundance,

troubles of every sort, hardship and sacrifice, but always deep commitment to the cause of Christ.

One very interesting story in the book is the story of the division among the Seceders over serious doctrinal questions. The Seceders were soon divided between a so-called Groningen Faction (*richting*) and a Gelderse Faction (*richting*). The Groningen faction was strongly orthodox and was intent on maintaining the confessions. It was found chiefly in the northern provinces of Groningen and Friesland. The Gelderse faction was primarily in the south, and had strong leanings towards Arminian teachings. The leaders in the north were DeCock, VanVelzen, and VanderWerp. The leaders in the south were Brummelkamp, Helenius DeCock (Hendrik DeCock's son), and, to a lesser extent, VanRaalte. When the Seceders' seminary was established in Kampen, both factions were represented, the one by VanVelzen and the other by Brummelkamp and Helenius DeCock. The ministers trained in Kampen reflected this division and, both in the Netherlands and America, the orthodox were not always pleased with some of the graduates. From other sources we learn that one of the

issues was the well-meant gospel offer.

Many interesting sidelights are told that give spice to the book. For our present Christian school teachers, the story of the first Christian school is interesting. The school met in a barn with twenty students, with a classroom in one corner, cows, sheep, and chickens in another corner, and feed and hay in yet another corner. VanderWerp was the teacher. It lasted only a few days because the authorities closed it down almost immediately. The reason given by the government was that the children did not have small pox vaccinations, which the government required of all school children. (Many seceders were opposed to vaccinations of any kind.)

While VanderWerp was preaching as a lay preacher or *oefenaar*, he was not permitted to use the pulpit, for the pulpit was higher than the auditorium floor. A podium on the auditorium floor was set up for him—as well as for other lay preachers and *oefenaars*. The reason was that, while a minister was indeed above the people, a lay preacher was on the same level as the people.

But read the book yourself. You will enjoy it and learn from it.



Report of Classis East

January 10, 2007
Hudsonville PRC

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, January 10, 2007 at the Hudsonville PRC. All churches were represented by two delegates. Rev. M. DeVries was the chairman for this session. The church history students from Covenant Christian High School were also in attendance for part of the morning session.

Classis heard the report of the church visitors at this session. The church visitors report peace and unity at the present time in our

congregations. Classis also heard the report of its special committee, which included the church visitors, appointed in October to assist the Covenant PRC should they decide to disband. Part of this report included a letter from the consistory of Covenant informing the classis that the congregation did indeed decide to disband and that their last worship service would be on December 31, 2006. Classis has asked the consistory of First PRC, Grand Rapids, to serve these saints in Wyckoff with any pastoral counseling that they might need.

Classis also dealt with a brother's appeal of a consistory's decision. This appeal was declared to be not legally before classis on the ground that the requirements of Article 30 of the Church Order had not been met, namely, "in major assemblies only such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in minor assemblies."

Voting for synodical delegates resulted in the following: *MINISTERS: Primi:* C. Haak, R. Kleyn, K. Koole, J. Slopsema, R. Van Overloop; *Secundi:* A. denHartog, M. DeVries, D. Kleyn, W.

Langerak, J. Laning. ELDERS: *Primi*: G. Kaptein, H. Langerak, S. Miedema, P. VanDerSchaaf, J. VanOverloop; *Secundi*: H. Boer, K. Feenstra, C. Kuiper, K. Velthouse, J. VanBaren.

In other voting, Rev. J. Slopsema was elected to a three-year term as a *primus* delegate *ad*

examina, and Rev. G. Eriks was elected to a three-year term as a *secundus* delegate *ad examina*. Revs. J. Slopsema and C. Haak were chosen as church visitors, with Rev. R. VanOverloop as alternate. Rev. K. Koole was elected to a three-year term on the Classical Committee.

Classis was in closed session to deal with several matters of discipline.

The expenses of classis amounted to \$406.46. Classis will meet next on May 9, 2007 at the Grace PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Seminary Activities

If you are a parent with children in school, we do not have to remind you of just how quickly a school year can fly by. It is difficult to believe that by now the school year is more than half over. We thought the same thing recently regarding our seminary. How is it possible that their school year is now more than half over? Where has that time gone? By the time you read this, our seminary will be well into its second semester. However, again this year the professors offered an interim course to fill some of the time between semesters. This year's interim course began January 8 and lasted eight days. The interim course this year was taught by Prof. B. Gritters on the subject of Heidelberg Catechism preaching.

Mission Activities

The Covenant of Grace P.R. Fellowship of Spokane, WA, where Missionary Rev. T. Miersma and his family labor on behalf of our churches, met together on New Year's Day for worship. Members of the Fellowship were also invited to stay and enjoy each others' company after the service. Fellowship included a meal together, followed by playing board and other games.

Friday evening, January 12, Rev. A. Stewart, pastor of the Covenant PRC in Ballymena Northern Ireland,

gave a lecture in South Wales at the Rest Convalescent Home in Porthcawl on the subject, "The Baptism in the Holy Spirit." Rev. Stewart promised to answer questions such as, Are the Pentecostals right? What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit? Are there accompanying signs, and are there conditions for receiving the Holy Spirit?

Since our last "News," we can also inform you that three new articles have been added to the language page of Covenant's website (www.cprf.co.uk): Ukrainian—"God's Sovereign Love, Our Comfort," by Prof. R. Decker; French—"The Importance of the Trinity," by Rev. R. Hanko; and Romanian—"Sovereign Election," by Rev. G. VanBaren.

Missionary Rev. W. Bruinsma, accompanied by his wife, Mary, was in Fayetteville, NC Sunday, January 14, to preach for the members of the PR Fellowship there.

Congregation Activities

As many of you are no doubt aware, the Domestic Mission Committee of our churches visited with a group in Sioux Falls, SD last November to consider their request to begin regular Sunday worship services in early 2007. The DMC has secured the services of Candidate Clay Spronk for this work and he and his family anticipate arriving in Sioux Falls in late January. He will preach there under the supervision of the Edgerton consistory.

In the months leading up to this move by the Spronks, Candidate Spronk has been especially busy

teaching weekly catechism classes and providing pulpit supply for the vacant Kalamazoo, MI PRC. Candidate Spronk's last service at Kalamazoo was January 14. For that service Mr. Spronk chose to bring a word of edification from Rev. 2:8-11 under the theme, "Jesus' Word to the Church Suffering Tribulation." After that evening service Kalamazoo had a time of refreshment and fellowship as they bid goodbye to Candidate Spronk and his family.

One week later, Sunday, January 21, the congregation of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, where the Spronks have their church membership, gathered together for a farewell coffee for Candidate Spronk, his wife, Allison, and their family, before they left to take up their labors in South Dakota.

The Council of the Hull, IA PRC gave approval recently for a separate Bible study beginning the 18th of January in the basement of the Iowa State Bank building in Hull, for members who desire to be part of a daughter congregation. The Council also approved separate worship services beginning on March 4, D.V., if pulpit supply can be secured. A request will also be submitted to Classis West at the March Classis seeking appointments for pulpit supply from the first Sunday in April through September. The Lord willing, worship services will be held in the auditorium of the Boyden—Hull High School and will be under the oversight of Hull's Council.

On a sadder note, the following

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

1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

THE STANDARD BEARER

PERIODICAL
Postage Paid at
Jenison,
Michigan

announcement appeared in all our church bulletins in mid-December:

"After prayerful consideration the congregation of Covenant PRC, Wyckoff, NJ, on December 10, 2006 voted to disband. The last worship service will be on Dec. 31, 2006. We are thankful to God and our fellow saints in the PRC for all that has been done for us these 33 years of our existence (I Cor. 12:12). 'For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.' "

Let us remember our brothers and sisters in this congregation at this sad and difficult time.

The Choir of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI presented their celebration of the birth of our Lord on Sunday evening, January 7.

Members of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL were invited to gather together January 19 at one of their member's homes for an informal psalm-sing. Members were encouraged to feel free to come and go as they pleased, and they were reminded to bring their Psalters and a snack to share.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of First PRC in Holland, MI sponsored their annual Winter Conference again this January. This year's conference considered, "The Antithesis: Godly Living in Ungodly Times." All three lectures were held at First. January 12 Rev. D. Kleyn spoke on "Antithetical in a Technological Age," followed on January 19 by "Antithetical in an Age of Covetousness," given by Rev. G. Eriks, and concluded with Prof. H. Hanko speaking January 26 on "Antithetical in an Age of Great Immorality." 

240/Standard Bearer/February 15, 2007

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC extend their sincere sympathy to deacon Wayne DeJong and his wife Becky following the death of Wayne's father,

RAYMOND DEJONG.

We find our comfort in God's Word as we find it recorded for us in Lamentations 3:22, 23: "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

Rev. Steven Key, Pres.
Ike Uittenbogaard, Asst. Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 14, 2007, our parents and grandparents,

ALVIN and MARIE DeYOUNG,

celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. We are thankful for the years of godly instruction and encouragement they have given to us, their children and grandchildren.

We give thanks to our heavenly Father for His faithfulness to them, and pray that He will continue to bless them in the years to come. "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

* Dan and Laura Schipper

Brad, Nick, Erika, Emily

* Todd and Lisa Groenendyk

Ethan, Meghan, Madalyn, Lily

Jenison, Michigan

TEACHER NEEDED

Covenant Christian High School is accepting applications from certified teachers in the Protestant Reformed Churches for the 2007-2008 school year. Anticipated openings are in the areas of English, Foreign Language, Vocal Music, and Computer/Technology. Those interested can contact Rick Noorman at 616-453-5048 or rnoorman@altelco.net, or Bob Faber at 616-942-7038.

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2007 - 2008 academic year should make application at the March 15, 2007 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 15 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary