

THE *August 2006* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

In This Issue:

- ◆ *Avenge Not Yourselves* 434
- ◆ *On-Going Reflections on the Free Offer
and the Charge of Hyper-Calvinism (5)* 436
- ◆ *Mission Awareness Day* 439
- ◆ *Prophecy of Malachi (9)* 440
- ◆ *Deepening Darkness
over Reformed Netherlands (2)* 442
- ◆ *Paul in Athens (2)* 445
- ◆ *Baptism: The Sign and the Grace
Not Inseparably Connected* 448
- ◆ *How He Would Have Him Called* 450
- ◆ *Being Content with What You Have* 452
- ◆ *News From Our Churches* 454

Volume 82 ♦ Number 19

Avenge Not Yourselves

"Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

Romans 12:17-19

We who are saved by grace alone through faith alone without any works are called to live in a way that harmonizes with this salvation. Instead of being "conformed to this world," we are to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (v. 2). When it comes to unkind neighbors, we are to "bless them which persecute you, bless and curse not" (v. 14).

In addition to blessing them, we are to exercise the strength to turn the cheek. We are to "recompense to no man evil for evil." We

must heed the command, "avenge not yourselves." Only those saved by grace alone know how to carry out such a command.



It is our sinful nature to respond in kind to those who hurt us. Instinctively and impulsively we return evil for evil. So our heavenly Father, knowing us so well, comes to us and calls us not to pay back with evil those who do evil to us. Then He repeats this negative admonition: "avenge not yourselves."

People will do evil to us. Since the fall of Adam into sin, the human race is full of hatred and anger, envy and jealousy. Sinful men treat each other evilly. In addition, Christians suffer persecution. Salvation enables us to be lights in the midst of the darkness of this world; and the darkness hates the light. Because we do not conform ourselves to the world, the world hates and condemns us. In their anger, they hurt us. Christians will receive evil in this world.

Our natural desire is to return evil for the evil received. This de-

sire is a seeking of justice and retribution for the wrongs and evils done to us. We do so because we are thinking about ourselves and our hurts. We love ourselves. The root of the desire for revenge is love of self. As soon as we feel that we have been injured by someone, we are ready to respond in kind. Sometimes we even think that God is slow to execute His justice, or it seems that He does not care. We are eager and ready to take care of justice for Him.

The evil we return for the evil done to us can be physical. For children it is almost always that. But the evil can also be words directed to the one who hurt us or about them to others. Or the evil can be harboring a grudge. Resentment burns within as we dwell on the hurt done to us. As a result we think of the evil we want to happen to them, or we delight when evil does happen to them.

God comes to those He graciously saves and calls us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The realization that we are justified by grace alone is a powerful restraint. By thinking about the

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
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@rfa.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 RFA: www.rfa.org
Website for PRC: www.prca.org

fact that God never pays us back with evil for our evil against Him, we will be restrained from recompensing evil for evil. Dwelling on the conduct and example of our Lord moves us more and more to “follow His steps” who, “when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (I Pet. 2:21,23).

God commands us to prepare ourselves for the next time evil is done to us. “Provide things honest in the sight of all men.” “Provide” means to make provision ahead of time; take thought in advance. Aware of our sinful instincts, we are to make preparations, so we can respond in an “honest,” that is, honorable, or good, manner – in a Christian way. We are to take thought in advance and work out a response.

Another reason we are to be careful how we respond to evil done to us is the fact that we live our lives “in the sight of all men.” Others are watching us. When we are treated evilly, we must not think only about ourselves, but also of the effect our response has on others. Remember that others judge our God, the Bible, the gospel, and the whole of the Christian message by our conduct. Let us let others know that we are different, in that we do not return evil for evil. May our concern for the honor of the Christian faith, of Christ, and of God move us not to avenge ourselves.

One wonders whether Paul was remembering the example he witnessed when Stephen responded so graciously even as he was being evilly treated (Acts 7:58-60).

Instead of recompensing evil for evil, those saved by grace alone through faith alone are to “live peaceably with all men.” Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Having this wonderful peace we are called to be and are

enabled to be peace-makers (Matt. 5:9). We have been delivered from sin’s folly and have been given the wisdom that is from above, which “is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits” (James 3:13-17). This wisdom is not first peaceable, but first pure, then peaceable. Thus it is not peace for the sake of peace, or peace at any price. But we are to see that wisdom is at the same time pure *and* peaceable. We learn that, while contending for the truth, we are to be careful that we not contend for ourselves. We are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 5:15), with patience, striving to help others understand.

The calling to live peaceably with all men is further explained: “if it be possible, as much as lieth in you.” Christians sometimes face those who rise up against God and take His name in vain (Ps. 139:20, 21). Because the wisdom that is from above is first pure and then peaceable (James 3:17), the making of peace must not sacrifice the honor of God. So there are times when the Christian must admonish. While this admonition must be given, and even sharply, it must be delivered graciously (Col. 3:6) – those saved by grace alone will seek to live peaceably even when admonishing.

It takes two to fight and it takes two to have peace. Sometimes there are those who are contentious, and it is impossible to live peaceably with them. Let us be sure that if peace is not possible, it is not because of us. If the other refuses peace on our terms, then we are not responsible for the lack of peace. We did everything that lies in us to live peaceably.



Three reasons are given in our text for why we are not to avenge ourselves. The first is that we are to “give place unto wrath.” Literally we read that we are to make room for “*the* wrath.” This is not

our wrath. We may not indulge our wrath. Rather, this obviously speaks to God’s wrath. Instead of executing personal vengeance, we are to make room for God to execute His wrath on those who treat us evilly. “Give place” means that our desire for revenge is to be set aside as we patiently wait for *the* wrath. The wrath will come.

The second reason we are not to recompense evil for evil is: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” This is a quote from Deuteronomy 32:35 (cf. Ps. 94:1). God declares plainly and powerfully that He alone has the right and the ability to execute vengeance.

It is God’s prerogative to judge because all sin is ultimately committed against Him and Him alone (Ps. 51:4). And, as the Creator of all, He alone set the standards for right and wrong. Therefore to Him belongs the right to determine whether His standard is met, as well as the right to execute just rewards upon those who fail to meet His standards and upon those who meet them. He is the Judge of the whole earth.

And God alone is able to execute vengeance. Sinful humans do not have the ability to avenge themselves because they always seek personal vengeance. We are self-centered and biased and very limited in our perspective. True vengeance is the exercise of justice – the giving of just reward and punishment. God’s wrath is always judicious, the execution of perfect judgment. It is never a vindictive passion. His wrath is always just, righteous, and holy. He “judgeth righteously” (I Pet. 2:23). He judges and avenges (Luke 18:7, 8; Rev. 6:10).

God promises that a day will come when He will open all the books and demand payment for every evil done. Those who have troubled and hurt His children will surely pay for all the evils they have done. In the Judgment Day God will avenge all His children

for all the evils done to them. At the same time, God will wipe every tear from our eyes, while escorting us into the kingdom prepared for us. We do not need to avenge ourselves. God surely will.

The third reason we must refrain from recompensing evil with evil is because of who we are in God's eyes. When someone does evil to us, then we are called to remember that we are God's "dearly

beloved." No one even touches one of His dearly beloved without touching God. A desire to seek vengeance is restrained by the knowledge that we are God's dearly beloved.

To live in the knowledge of God's powerful love is to live as more than conquerors. God's dearly beloved are justified by faith alone without works. Any evil

done to one of God's beloved by the ungodly is totally undeserved from God's perspective. Upon those who do that evil to His beloved shall fall the fullness of His righteous and holy wrath. When faith grasps the knowledge of God's love, then faith has the victory – also over the sinful desire to avenge ourselves.

Beloved of the Lord, faith is the victory! 

Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole

On-Going Reflections on the Free Offer and the Charge of Hyper-Calvinism(5)

In earlier issues of this volume year we dealt with the error of the free offer (cf. Nov. 1, Nov. 15, and Dec. 1, 2005 issues). We refuted the charge of the promoters of the free offer that opposing the teaching that God loves everyone (including even those whom He hates from all eternity) makes one a Hyper-Calvinist – as if opposing the free offer and 'God desires the salvation of everyone' makes one 'Hyper' *per se*. We also pointed out the un-Calvinistic language and contradictions to which the Well-Meant Offer (WMO from now on) commits one.

We now continue our discussion on the free offer.

It is not enough to demonstrate to the WMO men the contradictory theological language inherent in the free offer. They acknowledge the same, calling such "a paradox" and "an apparent contradiction." Those who confront them with the contradictory language found in their free-offer theology – positing two, opposite wills in God: He

wills to save all, He wills not to save all (labeled by A. Kuyper as theological "gibberish") – are dismissed as rationalists, guilty of scholasticism, and exalting human reason above the mysteries of faith and of God.

The argument of the WMO men is that, regardless of the contradictory propositions to which the free offer commits one, the Word of God, which is so much larger than man's mind, in passage after passage requires a "free offer" interpretation, which is to say, preaching that asserts a yearning of God's gracious will to save all to whom the gospel comes, even the reprobate. And they say that such must be preached despite its standing in stark contradiction (according to every law of logic) to the doctrine of God's election with its particular, exclusive love and grace. Regardless, they maintain, Scripture speaks of a general benevolence and love, a grace, of God towards all. This general love of God, gos-

pel preaching cannot ignore. Passages such as Ezekiel 18:21,22; 33:11; Matthew 5:43ff., and Matthew 23:37 are quoted as cases in point.

It is not our intention to examine all the texts the WMO men adduce to justify propositions that stand in flat contradiction to election's exclusive, saving love. We will content ourselves with consideration of Matthew 5:43-48, used by the WMO men to justify their gospel practices. We do so, first, because the WMO men commonly take this text and apply it not simply to a common-grace kind of non-saving love (with which interpretation we are so familiar), but to a saving kind of love (though, they admit, not the love that actually saves, but a love found in God that only desires the salvation of those whom He in another compartment of His counsel has determined not to save). You say that what you have just read sounds like double talk? Well, welcome to the world of theological paradoxes. Nothing

is as straight-forward as it first appears.

And, second, we use Matthew 5:43ff. because it lends itself to an intriguing question, a question put to us by the WMO men that amounts really to a charge of inconsistency on our part. We raised the question at the conclusion of the December 1, 2005 article. Are we not commanded to love all those with whom we have contact, to the point even of seeking their salvation? Is this not the implication of Matthew 5:43ff.? Why would God require this of us (in fact, *how could* God require this of us), if He does not do the same?

An intriguing question, worth considering

But, as we said, it is more than an intriguing question. It really amounts to a charge made by the WMO men against us who deny the free offer. The charge is this, that we as 'high Calvinists' end up putting the character of believers at odds with the nature of God – on the one hand, denying God has a love for all those whom He addresses in the gospel, and yet on the other maintaining that what motivates us in bringing the gospel to all and confronting everyone with God's Word is a love for all. Is it not so? But how can this be? "What do you claim, to be even more gracious than God?"

The WMO men are convinced such cannot be, and, in fact, is not. Such, according to them, is the position in which we as 'high Calvinists' leave ourselves, but that's because we misrepresent the character of God. According to the WMO men, the truth concerning God is that God, for all His particular, electing love, is also a God who loves all men. And so the desire of believers is not out of sync with God's will and desire, but squares with His; in fact, our love for all with whom we have contact is and ought to be a reflection of God's love for all. And this supposedly is the teaching of Matthew 5:43 ff.

Is it indeed!

We intend to point out the error of such 'reasoning.'

As an aside, though it may sound a bit cynical, yet it strikes one that the WMO men are willing to use logic and reason when it suits their purpose, pointing out apparent inconsistencies in their critics' positions. But when one uses logic and reason to expose fallacies in *their* arguments and logic, one is suddenly guilty of being of the school of the scholastics and rationalists.

Well, perhaps it is best to leave it with the poet who said, "Ours is not to reason why...."

Be that as it may, first of all, let it be stated *what our objection to the WMO interpretation of Matthew 5:43ff. is not*. It is not this, that we object to interpreting these words of Christ to mean that He calls us to love all those with whom we have contact, even those who will prove to be 'non-elect,' desiring even the salvation of their souls, if God so wills. Rather, our objection is to the WMO assertion that our calling to love all men means that God must therefore love all men, and that this is what Matthew 5:43ff. by necessary inference teaches. With this we take issue.

But, first of all, what we want to make plain is that we want no part of the notion that we are really to love only those whom we think God may love, earnestly desiring the salvation only of those who give evidence of having the Spirit of Christ in them to some sensible degree. Simply put, this is 'practical' hyper-Calvinism. Let no one who names the name of God want any part of such. The reality is, the believer is called to love those who are walking in ungodliness, many of whom God may prove not to love at all. And this love means seeking their repentance and conversion, and doing so even with beseeching supplications and tears.

This, we are convinced, Christ requires of believers in Matthew

5:43ff. After all, Christ speaks of prayer, praying even for those neighbors who spitefully use us. And prayer certainly has to do with these men's souls.

This is not a strange notion. I do not have to go out into the world to come across such neighbors. It starts pretty close to home. Has one never heard of one's own flesh and blood?

We are talking here about believers' own children and grandchildren, some of whom may wander far from home and God, some in the end, as Esau of old, proving to be despisers of God and His promises, having enmity for the saints as well. We love our children, all of them. But not all are Jacobs. We *may* love them all. In fact, according to God's revealed will of commandment, we had better be praying for the prodigals of our number, whether God in His secret will intends to answer that prayer to the saving of their souls or not.

We are not here talking about an "Oh Absalom, my son, my son" mentality, as if our beautiful curly-headed Absaloms can do no wrong, however much damage they are doing to church and to the name of our Lord. But we love with a love of God and for God, which is to say, a love that puts God first, brings strong reproof, and, as pointed out in an earlier article, may mean excommunicating one's own flesh and blood from the kingdom and even from one's own fellowship of life. But for us, even excommunication is, according to our confessions, a step of love, called the extreme *remedy*. By it we are seeking amendment of life and heart. That is our intention and desire.

For instruction and clarity about the Reformed perspective on this issue, we can do no better than to quote from the prayer found in the Form of Excommunication.

O righteous God and merciful Father, the bosom of Thy

church is always open for those who turn away from their wickedness, we therefore humbly beseech Thee to kindle in our hearts a pious zeal, that we may labor, with good Christian admonitions and examples, to bring again this excommunicated person on the right way, together with all those who, through unbelief or dissoluteness of life, go astray.

Notice, this is a prayer for the excommunicated, whom the Form, in fact, has just described as being "cut off from the community of the church," beseeching our God ("O...merciful Father...") to bring such to repentance and to restore them to the bosom of the church. What is this but a love expressed for all without distinction, seeking to prevail upon God to bring the straying sinners back, some of whom will prove to be reprobate seed for all our supplications and prayers. If one has a problem with this, we suggest he read Romans 9:2, 3 and learn to make Paul's spirit his own.

Let us be clear about this.

On the one hand, there are those whom, in answer to prayer and strong words of love and concern, God does retrieve and bring back. Saul of Tarsus comes to mind, as well as Augustine of Hippo, son of tears. Neither wayward, unbelieving son of the church appeared to be elect. In the one instance, God used a mother's prayers and strong letters moved by love to bring a sinning son to his senses; in the other, God used words of the apostles, spoken in their love for the lost sheep of Israel, to stab the heart of a youthful, persecuting Saul and to bring him to his senses as well. Who knows who the true, chosen vessels of God's true mercy may be (Rom. 9:22, 23), even amongst our own seed? We love some very great sinners living in some very carnal ways. We are called to! Who knows whether they may yet prove to be children of God, chosen and beloved.

And our point is, this is true not only for our own flesh and blood who are in bondage to sin at the moment, but for all the "children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2) to whom we bring the Word.

What did the apostle say? "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves: if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (II Tim. 2:25).

At the same time there are those whom God never brings back. For all our love and continued prayers for them, which the Form for Excommunication certainly requires of us, God never brings them back.

But now the question: Why not, despite all our prayers?

For the Calvinistic man, the answer stares one in the face - because God Almighty determined not to.

For the Protestant Reformed believer (and parent) it has to do with the sovereignty of God and reprobation. "... Esau have I hated." And, "hath not the potter power over the clay?" We bow in submission, painful though it proves to be.

For the WMO man, however, the answer is a bit different. They may say, because in His sovereignty God has determined not to bring them back, but they are speaking of those whom He with deepest yearnings sincerely, like a parent, loves.

Consider the implications for God! As a believing parent or officebearer, love means I do all within my power to secure the saving of the prodigal's immortal soul: instruction, embraces, discipline, prayers, rebukes, pounding at odd hours of the night on the wayward son's door and on the door of heaven itself. This in accordance with the demands of God's covenant. But for God, not so. In instance after instance, God's love means He does not do all within His power to bring this or that one back (else they would be brought back!)

Conclusion? According to the free-offer scheme of things, God's love and will to save, flowing from His divine heart, in instance after instance does not begin to compare with our love for sinners. Love, worthy of the name, means we do all within our power to restore the lost; but not so for God.


And this is posited as the Marrow of Divinity?

It's enough to make one weep.

The WMO men can charge 'high Calvinists' all they want with putting the believer's character at odds with God's nature (our heartfelt yearnings for the salvation of many whom God intends from all eternity to destroy), but the fact is, they do not escape the same 'problem.' Their presentation does not actually harmonize our love for sinners and God's love either. Their free-offer position also puts the two 'out of sync'; and it does so in a most troubling way.

Surely, if God indeed loved our wayward, unbelieving, 'non-elect' children half as much as we do (or that Paul did his "kinsman after the flesh"), God without fail would change their hearts and ways. Can it be imagined that the God of covenant promise should love them as the WMO men claim, with "deepest yearnings of love," with a love more profound even than a mother's love, and then not take it upon Himself to bring them back? The kindest thing I can say about such a notion is that it confounds all notions of love, God's love no less, God's love to save.

Next time we will have a bit more to say about Matthew 5:43ff., considering where the WMO interpretation goes astray.

And, having posited the reality that our neighborly love is 'broader' than God's love (but neither as deep nor powerful), we will set forth the scriptural evidence for this reality, and consider why, evidently, God intends it to be so. 

Mission Awareness Day

On June 17, 2006 First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, through a council appointed committee (AIM – Active in Missions), hosted a full-day program that they called “Mission Awareness Day.” The program’s goal was to promote the mission work and evangelism efforts of the PRC and to encourage mission mindedness among our people.

The activities of the day began with devotions at 10:00 A.M. in the sanctuary of First PRC. After Rev. Slopsema, pastor of First, led in devotions, the group of around 300 broke up into five smaller groups and headed over to the nearby and recently constructed Eastside Christian School for a series of informative sectionals related to mission work. From a total of thirteen different sectionals, attendees were given opportunity to attend at least four. Most of the sectionals were repeated at least once, so that if they were missed the first time, there was a second opportunity to attend. There were also special sectionals intended for the children.

The mission work of our denomination was presented in three different sectionals, all of which were repeated once. Rev. Spriensma, our foreign missionary in the Philippines, gave an audio/visual presentation of his work and also spent time answering ques-

tions. Along with Rev. Spriensma’s presentation there was also a sectional for the children by a Filipino member of First PRC on life in the Philippines, as well as a ride in a rickshaw (common transportation in many of the South-east Asian countries).



Because the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) is based in Northwest Iowa, they were unable to send a member of their committee, and so Rev. Daniel Kleyn, a former member of the FMC, spoke in their behalf. Representing the

work of our churches in domestic missions were Rev. VanOverloop (president of the Domestic Mission Committee – DMC) and Rev. Rodney Kleyn another member of the DMC. In these sectionals the speakers made an effort to highlight the biblical reasons for and principles of missions, to famil-

iarize our people with the work and makeup of the mission committees, to educate on the role of the calling church in missions, and provide information on the different fields of labor of the PRC.

Rev. Kortering, who formerly served as PRC minister-on-loan to the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore, was able to share some of his experience and knowledge concerning missions in third-world countries by giving presentations on mis-

sion work in India. While Rev. Kortering was in Singapore he labored on behalf of the Singapore churches in their mission work in India and Myanmar. During Rev. Kortering’s sectionals we found out that Eastside needs bigger classrooms. In another sectional, Mrs. Judie Feenstra, a retired school teacher who herself spent time in Singapore and Myanmar, spoke about her teaching of English and writing to pastors in countries where English is not the first language.

The material of the other sectionals included a presentation on “Witnessing in the Academic World,” from Grace PRC evangelism committee, a presentation on prison ministries, and a presentation from a Muslim convert who is a member of Byron Center PRC on “Muslim Agression Against Christian Converts.” The children, among other things, spent their day learning alphabets, words, and songs from different countries, playing some games common to Asian children, as well as trying their hand at handcrafts that children in poorer countries often learn so that they can use their skill to make a meager living. One of the highlights of the day (at least for me) was the ethnic lunch, at which one could sample many delicious


foods from the Asian countries. The members of the AIM committee of First PRC were the “chefs” listed on the menu.



Rev. Kleyn is pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan and a member of the DMC. Pictures courtesy of Mr. Ed Bos.

The day was beneficial to all who attended, young and old alike. Having information on the various mission activities of our churches

helps God's people to pray more knowledgeably for those activities and encourages them in their sup-

port of missions. First PRC and all those who had a part in the day are to be commended for organizing this conference. 

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanko

The Prophecy of Malachi Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness (9)

The Third Disputation: Chapter 2:10-16

10. *Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenants of our fathers.*

This first verse of the third disputation seems to have little connection either with what precedes or with what follows, but is in fact an important introduction to the new third section of the prophecy. It is, though one of the most difficult verses in the prophecy, the premise on which the following condemnation of divorce and mixed marriage is based.

Many find in this verse proof of the universal fatherhood of God – that God is father of all men, loves them all, and is gracious to all without exception, and that this universal fatherhood is the result of God's creating all. The context makes it clear, however, that this is not what Malachi's words: "Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?" mean. The point in the verses that follow is that the Jews were not allowed to marry heathen wives because those heathen girls and women

were daughters of a strange god (v. 11), *not* daughters of Jehovah. The passage itself states, therefore, that the heathen are not God's children, nor He their Father, but strangers and foreigners. The passage proves the same when it speaks of the "covenants of our fathers." It was not some universal covenant that was being violated by the sins of the Jews. They were not acting against the universal love and grace of God, but against His covenant with the Jews and His very exclusive love for them, revealed in His covenants with them. "We" in the passage is the Jews, and in the Old Testament that did not include the Gentile nations who were excluded from God's covenants with the Jews and from all the privileges of those covenants.

Nor is there any love of God for all or any kind of universal fatherhood of God. The very first verses of the prophecy of Malachi make it clear that God's love for some and hatred of others are eternal and unchangeable. It is only when the doctrine of God's sovereignty in election and reprobation is discarded that one can even begin to speak of a universal love of God, a love that makes Him helplessly dependent on the will of the sinner in salvation, and that vitiates all that Scripture says about His wrath and His judgments against sin.

Instead, the verse is speaking of God's gracious covenant relationship with Israel as something that was violated and profaned by the marital sins of the Jews, that is, by the sins of marrying heathen wives and callously divorcing the wives God had given them. Thus they profaned God's covenant and dealt treacherously against their own brethren.

The sin of marrying heathen wives was an act of treachery against brethren, both because it brought the heathen into a relationship that had been established only with Israel, and because the bringing in of these heathen threatened the very existence of God's covenant with Israel, for those heathen would bring with them their wicked and idolatrous practices. It was a profaning of God's covenant because marriage is supposed to reflect God's covenant relationship with His people, something these mixed marriages could not possibly do.

The other sin – of divorcing – was an act of treachery against brethren because it was an act of violence both against a bosom companion and against a fellow member of God's covenant. It was a violation of the covenant because it broke off a relationship that was a reflection of and a part of God's own unbreakable covenant relationship with His people.

Rev. Hanko is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Lynden, Washington.

Previous article in this series: May 1, 2006, p. 343.

It should be noted, however, that God's covenant with Israel was not with every individual Israelite. Those who were wicked and unbelieving like the heathen were not even counted as Israel (Rom. 2:28, 29; 9:6-8). True Israel in Scripture is not an earthly nation with geographical boundaries, but the spiritual nation of those who believe the promises, love God, and walk in His ways. God is not only not the Father and covenant God of the heathen, He is not even the Father and covenant friend of every physical descendant of Abraham.

That is an important point. In the New Testament it means that the Gentiles who believe are also counted as Israel by God and are among the true children of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). The dividing line between Jew and Gentile, between God's people and the heathen, is not drawn along the lines of earthly parentage and descent, but along spiritual lines, the lines of election and of grace. The Old Testament, with its promises and warnings, including this prophecy of Malachi, is addressed to God's people in every age, to us as well as to them. We, too, are forbidden to intermarry with the "heathen" and to divorce, for fear of profaning the covenants of our fathers and of acting treacherously in God's covenant.

As in the Old, so in the New Testament, those who have the name and who are born into the families of these true Israelites are not all Israel, but only those to whom God gives grace and who believe by grace. That is why the Word of God in a passage like this is so sharp. It makes separation between true Israel and that which has only the name, between those who belong to God's covenant and those who do not, between those whom God the Father loves and those He does not love.

Malachi speaks of "we," not excluding himself, because he understood, as we must understand, that

there is a corporate responsibility for these sins. Especially is that true because they are sins committed against God's covenant. When mixed marriages and divorcing for every cause are allowed in the church, then the whole church comes under the judgment of God and all suffer, not only those who are directly implicated in these sins.

11. Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god.

Before we look at this verse and what follows, let us notice that the two great examples of covenant unfaithfulness mentioned in Malachi are faithlessness in office and in the worship of God by the church's leaders, and faithlessness in marriage on the part of the ordinary people. Seeing that, it is difficult to miss the similarity between Malachi's days and ours. If one had to pick two areas in which the church today is unfaithful, it would be exactly these two – on the part of the leaders, great unfaithfulness in knowing, teaching, and worshiping according to the Word of God and in using offices in the church for personal advantage and profit; and on the part of the people, a complete abandonment of all that the Bible teaches concerning marriage.

The first sin that Malachi condemns, then, is the sin of intermarriage with the heathen. That God speaks of Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem is intended to show how widespread this sin was, and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah confirm it, showing that it was not only the common people who had committed this sin, but also their priests and leaders. Nehemiah mentions the grandson of the high priest, and Ezra gives a long list of names, including 27 priests and Levites and 86 others (Ezra 10:18-44).

The sin did not lie in the fact that these women were foreigners and from other nations, but in that they were unbelieving and idolatrous. That it was not wrong in itself to marry a woman from outside Israel is seen in the many Old Testament marriages of that kind that God blessed – Joseph and Asenath, Salmon and Rahab, Boaz and Ruth. The difference was, however, that these women had learned to fear and worship Jehovah and had renounced their idolatry and the idolatrous nations in which they had been born: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). They had become Israelites not only in name but in heart.

It was unbelieving and idolatrous women who might not be married to God's people. That these heathen women are described as daughters of a strange god is a reminder of the hold that unbelief and idolatry have in the hearts of men. People love and honor and serve their gods, whether they be statues of Baal and Buddha, unbelieving philosophies, wealth and honor, possessions, or persons of influence, as children honor and obey and serve their parents. They really do become the children of their false gods.

When the heathen women who intermarried with the Israelites were still idol worshipers, then their sin became Israel's sin. Through marriage to Jezebel, Baal worship was introduced into the Northern Kingdom and eventually also into Judah. Nehemiah, Malachi's contemporary, mentions Solomon's sin and its evil fruits for all Israel: "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin."

The sin of mixed marriage is condemned also in the New Testament. In I Corinthians 7:39, the

rule for Christian marriage is: “only in the Lord.” It is as wrong for a Christian to marry an unbeliever as it was for the Jews to marry Moabites, Philistines, and Ammonites (Neh. 13:23). Such marriages, contracted deliberately and against the express command of God, cannot have His blessing. Nor may young Christian men and women ever think that in marrying unbelievers they have the opportunity to convert them and be a good influence on them. The passages in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi make it clear that the opposite is always true.


The greatness of this evil is seen in the words that Malachi uses to describe it: abomination, treachery, and a profaning of the Lord’s holiness. The word “abomination” is the word commonly used in the Old Testament to describe idolatry. It reminds us that such mixed marriages are not only the way in

which idolatry is introduced into the church, but are themselves a form of idolatry, in that intermarriage with the ungodly always involves departing from the worship and service of God.

The treacherous act of a mixed marriage is committed both against God in forsaking His friendship for union and friendship with those who do not love Him, and against God’s people in bringing into the church those who will surely lead the church astray. For this reason, too, it is a profaning of His holiness, for it will always be cause of apostasy and failure in the church.

It should be emphasized that Christian marriage is a covenant – a relationship of friendship and fellowship that is part of God’s relationship with us. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 5. When speaking of Christian marriage, he adds, “But I speak concerning Christ and

the church” (v. 32). He means that marriage does not just reflect the blessed and wonderful relationship that we have with Christ, but is part of that relationship, so that the two cannot really be separated. In marriage, man and woman experience and enjoy something of God’s relationship to us.

Nor may it ever be thought that the sin of idolatry, which is the danger faced by God’s people when such marriages are sanctioned, is a danger that no longer exists. Idolatry is committed not only by bowing down to a stick or a stone, but by loving, fearing, wanting, serving anything or anyone as much or more than God. It is committed when a man or woman loves and wants an unbelieving partner at the expense of obedience to God. We and our children, even in marrying, must be warned, “Thou shalt have no other gods beside me.” 

Special Article

Prof. David Engelsma

Deepening Darkness over Reformed Netherlands (2)

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”)

The most precipitous and dramatic falling away from the faith of “The Three Forms of Unity” is that of the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (“vrijgemaakt”) (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [“liberated”]). This is the denomination that separated from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN, “synodical” churches)

in the early 1940s under the leadership of Dr. K. Schilder. It was the conditional covenant theology of these churches, embraced and preached by some ministers in the Protestant Reformed Churches, that occasioned the grievous schism in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the early 1950s.

In former years, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”) were staunch defenders of the faith and life of “The Three Forms of Unity,” always excepting their covenant doctrine of universal, resistible grace in the generations of believers. No longer! In recent years, these churches have undergone radical changes – changes that often originated in

their seminary in Kampen, changes that are officially adopted and defended by their synods, and changes that constitute departure from the “old paths” marked out by the confessions and walked in by Reformed believers and their children for ages.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”) apostatize in their public worship. A new style of preaching is in vogue, promoted by the seminary in Kampen. Preachers now tell stories about their own experiences, or the experiences of others. These stories are only remotely connected to the text. This “narrative method” of preaching replaces the traditional exposition and application of the doctrine of the text.

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

Previous article in this series: July 2006, p. 420.

In the brochure, "*Laten wij ons bekeren*" ("Let us Repent"), in which those who have been compelled to separate from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") issue a stirring call to the apostatizing denomination to reformation, the very first evil mentioned is the debasing of sound, Reformed preaching. Because this corruption of the preaching signals and effects the falling away of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"), because this gutting of the preaching of the gospel is popular elsewhere today, and because the abandonment of doctrinal, expository preaching is the destruction of Reformed worship at its heart, I quote at some length from "Let us Repent" the complaint about preaching in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"). The translation from the Dutch is mine.

No longer is the startingpoint for the making of a sermon careful exegesis, the careful determination of what God's word exactly teaches, in which the text itself is used and Scripture is compared with Scripture. Our theological students are rather taught that the preacher must first of all begin with a *personal meditation* about the text. That the point of departure of preaching is found less and less in the calling of the preacher as servant of the word to preach that word is expressed in the so-called narrative preaching. In this storytelling "preaching," the content is no longer entirely governed by God's own words in Scripture. Rather, the preacher tells a story, frequently fantasy, about something the Lord in His wisdom has not revealed to us in the Bible. That means that the preacher thinks that we do not have enough in what the Lord has included in His word. It means that in the sermon we have to hear a certain message of the preacher. Thus, it happens that there are sermons in which the Scriptures are hardly opened any more. One's own stories and related figures replace the glorious gospel to the people of

the covenant. Thus, it happens that in many congregations there is a poverty of the living preaching of the word: the content of the preaching of the Sender is adjusted according to the hearers and according to the creative thinking of the preacher. Sometimes, a text is sought for a message in which the Bible merely furnishes some illustrative material. Specifically, this happens in the so-called theme services. Thus, we have to hear a sermon on the Netherlands Bible Society. Exegesis and depth [of preaching] are frequently forced out [of the preaching] by aiming for "simplicity." The people may not be turned off. In this way, treasures in God's word are allowed to go unused. Things have become so bad that there is an "infantilizing [making childish]" of God's word: a strong tendency to bring everything [in the preaching] to the level of little children. Or, one directs the preaching entirely to outsiders, whether or not any is present. In this way, the Scriptural address concerning the responsibility of the older members does not receive attention.

Behind this shallow, preacher-centered, and audience-centered (rather than *God-centered*) method of preaching is a determination, indeed obsession, to evangelize the lost at the public worship services of the congregation. One of the theological professors has written that "the Church must focus completely on evangelism." He criticized the Reformed churches for their past emphasis on inward growth and on the defense of the faith. Those who promote the new style of preaching (which is no preaching of the gospel at all) reject the Reformed view of the congregation as believers and their covenant children, who must be built up in the faith.

The lament concerning the preaching in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") continues with the charge that more and more frequently Christ does not appear in the ser-

mon. There is also refusal to preach the law of God and to warn sharply against disobedience to the law. Such preaching is condemned as "legalism." "The word and concept, 'antithesis,' is not much used any more."

Apostasy in the public worship takes place in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") also by the introduction in the past few years of more than a hundred "evangelical" and other "spiritual songs." Not only does the addition of these hymns drive out the singing of the Psalms, in a denomination of churches that always prized the Psalms, but the hymns are also unbiblical. They contain all kinds of false doctrine and errors. Significantly, the first false doctrine charged against the "evangelical songs" in "Let Us Repent" is "the doctrine of common grace."

This introduction of "evangelical songs," with their message of a God who is only love and who loves all without exception, represents a radical departure of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") from their sound beginnings. One of the main reasons for de Cock's separation from the state church in 1834 was that church's singing of Arminian hymns. Kuyper too advocated singing only the Psalms in worship. One of his grounds was that the introduction of hymns invariably leads to the singing of Arminian hymns.

The seminary in Kampen promotes the apostasy, rather than to spearhead the fight against it. Professors deny the inspiration of Scripture. They challenge the historicity of Genesis 1-3. One has publicly criticized the decision of the Synod of Assen (1926) that condemned Rev. Geelkerken for denying the historicity of Genesis 3. Thus, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") head down the same broad road of unbelief into the abyss that the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN, "synodical" churches) traveled before them. Deliberately,

they head down this road. As A. M. Lindeboom has demonstrated in his book, *De Theologen Gingen Voorop: Eenvoudig Verhaal van de Ontmanteling van de Gereformeerde Kerken* (English translation: *The Theologians Led the Way: A Simple Account of the Dismantling of the Reformed Churches* [in the Netherlands, GKN]), the destruction of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN, "synodical" churches) began with criticism of Scripture. The criticism of Scripture began with the opening chapters of Genesis.

As is invariably the case, apostasy regarding doctrine is accompanied by departure from the law of God in the life of the members of the church. A synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") has recently approved the teaching that the Christian church's observance of Sunday has no basis in the fourth commandment of the law of God. According to this synodical decision, Sunday observance is merely a good practice of the New Testament church. A certain Rev. D. Ophoff preached that the members of the Reformed Churches must "let others notice how much that day is worth to you. As far as I am concerned, not on grounds of an absolute, divine command, but certainly because it is good together to enjoy one day of rest in a week, according to the example of Israel's sabbath." In answer to a protest against this teaching, the synod decided that "the view of Rev. D. Ophoff, that the Sunday as day of rest is not based on a divine command, is not to be condemned."

Heretical synods, like heretical preachers, throw a smoke screen over their false teaching in order to deceive the people. The synods of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") have been doing this regarding the decision abolishing the Christian Sabbath, as have their defenders in North America. In response to the alarm of the people over the synodical decision nullifying the

fourth commandment, they have been praising Sunday observance to the skies. Reading their reports, one would think that the observance of the Lord's Day has no greater champion in all of Christendom. But denial that our observance of the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, is based on the fourth commandment of the abiding law of God is the death of the Christian church's Sunday observance. This denial is the official decision of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated").

Ophoff's sermon and the synod's decision reflect, and justify, widespread Sabbath desecration by many members of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"). They do business on the Lord's Day, use the sabbath days especially of the summer for recreation, and fail diligently to frequent the church of God.

Another synod of these churches has recently decided to approve membership in the churches of those who divorce for any reason, and remarry. Even the guilty party — the adulterer, who has destroyed his own family and the family of his illicit lover — may now be member in good standing in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") with his new wife. There they sit at the communion table with the adulterer's first wife and with his adulterous new wife's first husband, and probably with the covenant children, scattered around in the congregation or denomination, of both the families they have destroyed. About this decision, that brazenly opposes the seventh commandment and everything that Jesus and His apostles teach about marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the New Testament, I wrote several years ago in my editorial, "The Sad Case of Bert Zandstra" (Vol. 74, p. 53).

The result of the apostasy of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated") is a split

in these churches. Beginning in 2003, some 1,200-1,500 members in all parts of the nation have liberated themselves from these churches and have formed a new denomination. Their charge is that the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") now take on the marks of the false church. Since they claim to be the true continuation of the denomination from which they have separated in a "new liberation," they have adopted the same name, adding only the word, *hersteld* (re-established).

The Canadian and American Reformed Churches in North America have a sister-church relation with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"). The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the United Reformed Churches, and other reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denominations have close ecumenical ties with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") in the international ecumenical organization, the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

It has become very dark in the Reformed Netherlands.

What explains this? What explains that the light of truth and holiness goes out among the people of the glorious struggle for the freedom to worship God according to the Reformed faith in the sixteenth century? in the country of the Synod of Dordt? in the churches of Gomarus, de Cock, Van Velzen, Kuyper, Bavinck, and Schilder?

There are a number of contributing causes, which might well be examined.

But the fundamental explanation is the fulfillment in the Reformed Netherlands of the apostle's prophecy in II Thessalonians 2:3: "that day [the day of the coming of Christ] shall not come, except there come a falling away first." The word translated "falling away" is, in the Greek original, *apostasy*. As the following verses teach, the spirit of antichrist works the apostasy, in

order to ready the world for the man of lawlessness and his beastly kingdom. The church people allow themselves to be carried away with apostasy, because they do not love the truth and because they have pleasure in unrighteousness.

Sovereign also over the apostasy of the churches, God is realizing the apostasy of the Dutch churches. In His awful providence, He sends the churches strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, and be damned. The judicial ground of this dreadful, but perfectly just, blinding act of God upon the churches is that “they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (II Thess. 2:10). They received not the love of inspired, holy Scripture. They received not the love of the Reformed faith as set forth in the

“Three Forms of Unity.” They received not the love of the gospel of salvation by particular, sovereign grace, which has its source in the eternal decree of election. They received not the love of an antithetical life in opposition to the ungodly life of the unbelieving world. In this way, they received not the love of Jesus Christ Himself, who is the truth.

Over the years, their love for the truth, and thus for Christ, cooled.

By this time, they have come to despise the truth, or to allow the despising of the truth in their midst, which amounts to the same thing.

And God, who loves His truth, because it is the truth about Himself, the truth that He has revealed by the gift of His own Son, and the


truth that is the power of salvation, sends these despisers and haters of His truth “strong delusion, that they should believe the lie” (II Thess. 2:11).

Let the Protestant Reformed Churches beware!

The pressure builds on these churches also.

Observing, and trembling at, the deepening darkness over the Reformed Netherlands—motherland to many in the Protestant Reformed Churches—let the Protestant Reformed Churches respond as II Thessalonians 2:15 calls the true church to respond to the sign of apostasy: “Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught.”

In the hope of the coming of Christ.

His coming is near. 

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Arie denHartog

Paul in Athens (2)

It was a dramatic moment for Paul. He was brought to the Areopagus, a famous Greek arena, a place where the great men of the world would give their lectures for the debate and discussion of those interested. He stood before a large audience, including philosophers and teachers and learned men, the great and wise of the world. There he stood in the providence of God. He was an apostle by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, called to testify of the true and living God and the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. Never for a moment did Paul abandon his calling. God made Paul

mighty and up to the task that was before him.

In our last article, published some time ago, we considered things that Paul did not do in Athens. Contrary to a very common interpretation of Acts 17, Paul did not speak with great admiration for the culture of Athens, its famous philosophy and glorious architecture. Paul did not extol the greatness of the Athenian religion that tolerates all kinds of gods. Paul did not gawk at the magnificent temples of heathen gods in Athens. He did not go out of his way to praise the Athenians for their great learning, art, and architecture, all of which was the glory of Athens. Paul did not even decide that he could use the great religious devotion of the Athenians as a kind of positive ‘connecting point,’ something commendable among the Athenians, which he could use to

begin his preaching. In fact, the apostle of our Lord speaks of being deeply grieved by the idolatry of the Greeks. The reason for this grief was Paul’s zeal for the honor and glory of the name of God, the one only true and living God, the sovereign of heaven and earth. Paul did not decide that the best way to bring the gospel to Athens was to debate with the great philosophers of the city and try to show them by mere reason the superiority of his Christian philosophy.

There was another thing that Paul did not do, something that is very often done by modernism and liberalism of our day, especially in America. Just recently I read an article in the Grand Rapids Press that showed this very thing again. This article reported the speech of a famous woman preacher, in which she had ‘great things’ to say

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

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2006, p. 232.

about the relative good in all modern pagan religions. Paul did not discourse on the relative value, wisdom, regard for virtue of all the religions of the world, comparing pagan religions with Christianity. He did not try to show that every pagan religion in the world also has something good to say to us, some great wisdom to show us who happen to be Christians.

Paul testified of the true and living God. He preached the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This he was commissioned to do by the exalted Lord of heaven and earth. Never did the apostle abandon that calling. Paul preached the gospel courageously and boldly no matter what the cost to his own personal standing among the 'great and wise' of the world. He was not afraid of ridicule and persecution for the truth of God that he came to proclaim.

Before preaching the gospel, the apostle of the Lord exposed the great folly of the world. Its learning, art, and philosophy were all devoted to pagan gods. In spite of the fact that the Athenians worshiped many gods, they were ignorant of the one only true God, the God of infinite majesty and glory, the sovereign of heaven and earth. The folly of the Athenians was revealed in their altar to the unknown god! In all their religion they were willfully ignorant of the one only true God! They refused to worship this God, though His glory was revealed in the world all around them, in all the things that God has made. They were blinded by all their pagan idolatry. Professing themselves to be wise they were fools.

The true and living God transcends the highest heavens in glory and majesty. He is not worshiped by men's hands as though He needs anything. He cannot be represented by a man-made image. He gives to all life and breath and all things. He is not far from every one of us. In Him we live and move and have our being. The poets of the hea-

then spoke of the truth of this God, but they were fools because they did not believe on Him. The truth concerning this God cannot be ignored. It is not hidden before the eyes of men, because the whole universe reveals His wisdom, power, and Godhead. He makes Himself known as the God who must be worshiped and glorified.

What a mighty testimony of the absolute sovereignty of God Paul gave in Athens! The true and living God is the Lord of heaven and earth. Every man owes his being and existence, even his life and breath, to this God. God made all men of one blood to dwell on the face of the earth. He has determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation.

Man is utterly dependent on God. He cannot escape the absolute sovereignty of God, who rules over the whole universe that He created. Man himself is a creature of God! God determines the place of every man in the world and the whole course of all the nations of the world. They are all dependent on Him, even though they do not acknowledge Him as God. The pride of the Athenians and of the nations of the world is that they imagine themselves to be greater than all others. The natural man imagines that he has distinguished himself by his own great learning, wisdom, and achievements. But as long as man denies God, he is a fool.

Every man is called to worship the true God, who exists not for man's sake but for the sake of His own glory. God made all things to reveal His own glory. Man has the solemn obligation to behold the glory of God and to worship Him with fear and trembling. He is called to serve this God in all of his life. Man can never add anything to the infinite fullness of the glory and power and sovereignty of the true God. In his folly, man worships the creature rather than the Creator! The Sovereign of heaven and earth, who is God, does not need the worship of man! He

dwells not in temples made with hands as though He needs anything. The folly of man is that he makes a god who is utterly dependent on man. This god exists by man and for man. The god of man's foolish imagination is utterly dependent on man. He needs images that man makes of him, he needs temples that man makes for him. He needs the offerings of man to be made glorious. These gods are every bit as foolish and vain as the men who make them.

The religion of the heathen is absolutely antithetical to the religion of the one only true and living God. The absolute antithesis that there is between pagan religion and Christianity must be declared on the mission field. The true church must declare this antithesis also in the apostate Christian world in which we live. It must condemn the modernism of our day that wants to compare the relative value of all religions and proposes, finally, a world in which all religions will be tolerated. Each will be allowed to have its own deity. This is the absolutely false religion of apostate Christianity.

The apostle Paul declared the truth of God's absolute sovereignty when he called the people of Athens to repentance. In the past, God "winked at" the unbelief of pagan nations but now He calls all men to repentance (see Acts 17:30). The meaning of this statement is not that God did not regard the idolatry of the pagans, that He was not in time past offended by it. The Psalms of the Old Testament declared the folly of the idolatry of the pagans. Read the classic Psalm that does. Psalm 115 uses the same kind of language as Paul did in Athens. The prophet Isaiah, especially in Isaiah 44, does this, even mocking the idolatry of the heathen and calling God's elect people to the worship of Him who alone is God, besides whom there is none other, no other God.

Paul declared that God in times past allowed the heathen to con-

tinue in their own folly, the folly of their idolatry. The commentator Lenski says it well, in describing the work of God: "He bore the idolatries of the Gentiles, He ceased not to reveal Himself to them in nature and in providence, and because of their guilty ignorance made them feel His wrath by giving them over to the effects of this ignorance, their depravity." This is also the teaching of the apostle Paul in Romans 1: 18ff. The gospel was not yet preached to the Gentile nations in the days of the Old Testament. God revealed His sovereignty also in this. He was pleased to reveal Himself only to one chosen nation, chosen by His own sovereign grace.

In the New Testament age the gospel must be preached to all nations. A new age has come. This new age had its inception when Christ was crucified, raised, and exalted. The prophets of the Old Testament had many times prophesied concerning this new age. This age was in the eternal counsel of God. The apostles of the Lord declared that this age has now come. The gospel must now be preached to all nations. Therefore Paul went on his great missionary journeys throughout the world.

All men now must be called to repentance. The great and learned men of the world, those who profess to be wise, they must be called to repentance. The idolaters of the world must be called to repentance! Those who boast in the virtue and excellence of their own religion must be called to repentance. The proud of the earth, those who glory in human wisdom, art, and culture, devoted to their humanly devised idolatrous religion, they must be called to come before the one and only true and living God. They must be called to repentance. The calling of the church is not to go into the world to discuss with all nations the relative virtue of pagan religions. The calling of the church is to declare that all men are sinners because of their enmity

against the true God of heaven and earth. This enmity makes all their wisdom, art, and culture grievous in the sight of God.

Having declared the truth of the one only sovereign God, Paul preached the gospel in Athens. He preached the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. He preached the truth of Jesus Christ crucified, raised, and exalted. Acts 17 makes this plain especially when it tells us that Paul preached about the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ followed His crucifixion. The resurrection of Christ is the final proof that He is the Son of God, the only Savior. He is able to deliver men from sin and death and hell. There is no other hope for fallen men than in the crucified, risen, and exalted Christ, whom God has made the Lord of all.

When Paul preached about the truth of the resurrection of Christ, the Athenians began to mock him and the truth he preached. To their humanistic wisdom this was impossible. They were offended. They considered the gospel that Paul preached to be utter foolishness. This is always the reaction of the natural man to the gospel. This is the reaction of the wise of this world, the world's philosophers and aristocrats. Very few believed in Athens. God showed in Athens the truth declared by Paul in I Corinthians. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty men, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise: and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and the base things of the world, and the things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and the things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence" (I Cor. 1: 26-29).

This kind of thing is utterly disappointing to the modern-day preacher. When he experiences the reality that not many in this world 'accept the gospel' as it is revealed in the Word of God, then the mod-

ern-day preacher tries to change the truth of the Word of God to make it more popular. He praises the world for its own great learning and regard for virtue. He begins to adopt the heathen and pagan practices for his own life and even brings them into the worship services of the church as though the true God of heaven and earth will also be pleased with these. Large audiences come to hear. The preachers of this kind of a 'gospel' often become very popular.

In Athens the preaching of the Word of God through the Lord's apostle fulfilled the purpose of God. The result of Paul's preaching was entirely dependent on God's working. Though many in the world-famous city of Athens did not believe because they considered Paul's preaching foolishness, God saved the elect remnant of His people. "Certain men clave unto him (Paul), and believed: among which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (Acts 17: 34). God gave them faith to believe. By this God-given faith they were made wiser than the philosophers and great men of the world. They were made wise unto salvation. They began to worship the one only true and living God. They rejoiced in the hope of Christ's resurrection.

Wherever the gospel is preached, God will save His own through the power of the preaching of the gospel. So God will be glorified among the nations, and all the wisdom and glory of man will be abased. The church of Jesus Christ, called to preach the truth of God and gospel of Jesus Christ faithfully, will rejoice. The elect of God will be gathered as the church of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of Christ will be realized. Those who are saved by the grace of God will finally represent all the nations of the world. All nations shall come to worship before the glorious throne of the true and living God.



Baptism: The Sign and the Grace Not Inseparably Connected

There are centrally two errors taught concerning the sacraments: the error of denying that the sacraments are means of grace, and the error of teaching that everyone who receives the sacraments receives grace. The second error amounts to teaching either that the sign becomes the grace of God or that God's grace and the sign are inseparably connected. Either way, the result is that everyone who receives the sign receives also the grace.

Roman Catholics and Lutherans are examples of those who hold to this false teaching. But they are not the only ones. There are many today who claim to be Reformed who hold to essentially the same position. A gracious promise, they say, is received by every child that is baptized. The child, however, must make good use of this grace, in order to benefit from it everlastingly. This gracious promise is said to be conditional, and only those who fulfill the condition — whether that condition is said to be faith alone or faith plus the good works done out of faith — will end up going to heaven. It is not a coincidence that this is essentially the same error as that taught by the Roman Catholics. The error is taught and promoted today with the desire — which is often explicitly stated — of bringing the Protestant churches back into communion with Rome.

I will begin by setting forth the truth over against the error of the

papists and Lutherans, which error has a very long history. Then I will consider this same error as it is taught today by those who hold to a conditional covenant.

The Error of Rome and of the Lutherans

It was quite early in the history of the new dispensation that the Romish church fell into the error of teaching that the sacrament of baptism confers grace on every individual who receives it. The sacrament, they say, confers grace *ex opere operato*, which is a Latin phrase that means “by the act performed.” In short, they teach that by means of the act of administering the sacrament, grace is automatically conferred upon all who receive it. Magically, the sacrament itself supposedly washes away the guilt of original sin and of all sins committed prior to baptism, incorporates the one baptized into the communion of saints, and brings about spiritual renewal by the infusion of sanctifying grace.

The teaching common among the Lutherans is very much the same. According to them, when an infant is baptized, God creates faith in the heart of that infant, regenerates him, and gives him the blessings of salvation by means of the faith he has received. This position is often referred to as *baptismal regeneration*. On the one hand, they acknowledge that one is saved only by faith; but then they go on to say that God gives this faith to every person that is baptized, and then saves that person by means of this God-given faith. Does that mean that everyone that is baptized goes to heaven? No, they would

say, because the faith that the baptized person receives must be constantly nourished, or it will die. In other words, they blatantly deny the preservation of the saints. According to them, there are many who receive the life of Christ for awhile, only to fall away later and perish everlastingly in hell.

So do the Lutherans teach that receiving the sacrament of baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation? No, they do not. They say that baptism is only one way in which God regenerates a person. Some individuals, like the thief on the cross, are regenerated by the spoken word of the gospel. One who is regenerated in this way should also submit to being baptized, they would say. For even though baptism will not be a means to regenerate him — since he is already regenerated — it will still be used as a means by which his faith will be confirmed and he will be blessed. But what about infants of believers who die before they are baptized, and who never consciously hear the gospel? It is commonly held among Lutherans that God can save these little ones without working through either the spoken word of the gospel or the sacrament of baptism. Nevertheless, they would say, God normally regenerates His people through the sacrament of baptism, in such a way that they are actually regenerated at the moment that they are baptized.

The Sign and the Grace: Not Inseparably Connected

Over against this position, the Reformed have clearly distinguished the sign from the grace that is signified by it. Firmly they have maintained that some who re-

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

Previous article in this series: May 1, 2006, p. 345.

ceive the sign do not receive the grace, or, in other words, that the sacrament of baptism and the real baptism are not the same. The pastor administers the former; Christ administers the latter.

Therefore the ministers, on their part, administer the sacrament and that which is visible, but our Lord giveth that which is signified by the sacrament, namely, the gifts and invisible grace; washing, cleansing, and purging our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts and filling them with all comfort... (Belgic Confession, Art. 34).

This is actually the same distinction that was made by John the Baptist. While preparing the way for Christ by his preaching and baptizing, John made clear that the sign he was administering was to be clearly distinguished from the grace given solely by Christ.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire (Matt. 3:11).

Now someone may say, even if the minister administers only the sign, while Christ administers the reality, could it be that Christ always administers the reality at the very moment that His representative on earth is administering the sign? This question both Scripture and our confessions answer in the negative. In the old dispensation, for example, there were many who received the sign of circumcision but did not receive the real circumcision.

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Rom. 2:28, 29).

The Belgic Confession teaches this same truth:

Further, though the sacraments are connected with the thing signified, nevertheless both are not received by all men. The ungodly indeed receives the sacrament to his condemnation, but he doth not receive the truth of the sacrament (Belgic Confession, Art. 35).

This quote from the Belgic Confession, although found in the article on the Lord's Supper, applies also to the sacrament of baptism. There are many who receive only the visible sign and not the invisible grace. The latter is received only by the believer.

Why the Sign Is Called the Reality

Those who object to this would be quick to point out that Scripture does in fact call baptism the washing away of sins. Soon after Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, Ananias was sent to him to open his eyes and to instruct him concerning his calling. At that time Ananias exhorted Paul to arise and be baptized:

And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).

Here baptism is indeed called the washing away of sins, even though the sacrament itself does not wash away anyone's sins. This same idea is found in the book of Titus, where the washing of baptism is called the washing of regeneration.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Tit. 3:5).

Baptism is called the washing away of sins and the washing of regeneration, even though the sacrament itself does not perform this washing. One may wonder why this is.

The Heidelberg Catechism gives a good answer to this question. After pointing out that the external baptism with water is not the washing away of sin itself, the Catechism goes on to ask the following question:

Q. 73 Why then doth the Holy Ghost call baptism* "the washing of regeneration," and "the washing away of sins?"

A. 73 God speaks thus not without great cause, to wit, not only thereby to teach us that, as the filth of the body is purged away by water, so our sins are removed by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ, but especially that by this divine pledge and sign He may assure us that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins as really as we are externally washed with water.

Our fathers said that the Spirit of God called baptism the washing away of sins in order to teach us something and to assure us of something. First of all, it is to teach us that there is an analogy between the cleansing of the body and the cleansing of the soul. We all know that God has given us water to cleanse our bodies. By calling baptism the washing away of sins, God is saying that this bodily cleansing pictures a spiritual cleansing that is performed by the Spirit of Christ, who washes our souls in Christ's blood, and regenerates us unto children of God (Belgic Confession, Art. 34).

But the main reason why the Spirit calls baptism the washing

* It is important to note that this is one place in our creeds where we officially confess the inerrancy of Scripture. When Scripture calls baptism the washing away of sins, the Catechism says that it is the Holy Spirit that is saying this. There are those today who deny that the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture is found in our Reformed confessions. But in the Catechism here we officially call the Scriptures the words of the Holy Spirit. It naturally follows, then, that the Scriptures must be without error, since the Spirit of God makes no mistakes.

away of sins is to assure believers that as really as they receive the sign so really do they receive also the grace signified by it. This, our Catechism says, is the central reason.

God's promise is what assures us. It is the only thing that can assure us. So the significance of calling baptism the washing away of sins is that this was a way of promising to us that He would give

us the reality with the sign. The same is true of the Lord's Supper. Christ's act of calling the bread His body was a way of promising to us to give His body along with the bread. It is a promise, however, not to everyone who receives the sacrament, but only to those who partake by faith. And it is only when we are believing this promise that we experience our faith be-

ing strengthened by the sacrament.

As was stated at the beginning of this article, those who deny this and who instead teach that *every* baptized child receives a gracious promise from God are really falling into the same error as that of the Roman Catholics and of the Lutherans. Next time, Lord willing, this subject will be considered.



When Thou Sittest In Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

How He Would Have Him Called

Giving of Name

The newborn child is by no means alone in getting a name. On the contrary, there is a need to call everything that we severally desire to indicate, by a name of its own.

God the Lord Himself set the pace in calling inanimate things also by a name. "And God," so we read in the majestic document of creation, "called the light *day*, and the darkness he called *night*." In the same way God the Lord *named* the name of every part and element of the world, of the *firmament*, of the *dry land*, and of the *seas*.

And when man, created after the divine image, appeared on earth, his first thought at the sight of Eve was how to name her (Gen. 2:23); likewise God brought the beasts of the field to Adams, *to see what he would call them* (Gen. 2:19).

To call everything around us by a name has become a second nature to us, a necessity of our spirit. Every land bears a name, and every district and city and hamlet, and in city and village every street

and byway and alley. Even houses are numbered, but of old every house, even now every estate, had a name of its own. And in our centers of commerce with our store-houses the case is the same.

Inexhaustible indeed is the flood of names wherewith man has covered the world. There is no river and no stream or pond, no bay or narrows, no cape or mountain, no coast or strand, in brief, no spot of ground on the whole earth, but man has named it by a name. By a name also every sort of plant and animal.

And this is not the end, for also in those sorts of animals we give our own animal again a separate name. There is no dog, but has a name of his own; no horse in his stall that is not called by a name of his own; and they who go out to milk the cow call her from afar by name.

In navy-yards this goes even so far that at the launching of the ship, she is ceremoniously named. Even at the naming of a ship sometimes prayer is offered. Fortunately not in the Dutch language, but in English and French, in a questionable way, there is frequent mention of *christening* a ship.



Yet it is at once evident that all this sort of naming is nothing but

the far background that lies behind the naming of the *name* in highest sense, and that in all name-giving this highest is only reached when man kneels down, and prophecy is fulfilled, which God proclaimed by Ethan (Ps. 89:26): "He shall call me: *Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my Salvation*."

This is the *highest* naming. Thus resounds the name that is above every name. In the worship of the Only-One, all giving of names celebrates its absolute triumph.

Between that lower and this highest name-giving stands the naming of the human child. Taken from the earth, and yet created after God's image.

It is for this reason that the naming of a child is a piece of history; that Holy Scripture comes back to it so often; and that God Himself has so frequently deigned to change human names into new names. Think of Abraham and Israel. And stronger yet, that as promise it is sure for every child of God that once he shall "receive a white stone, and on that stone a new name, which God shall give him, and which no one knows but God and he."

Thus every child that is born should really have a name of its own, a name which no one else bore; and every one elected unto salvation should before and in bap-

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

tism receive a name that would express what once eternally he shall be in the kingdom of heaven, and what the particular and appointed calling is, which to eternity is laid up for him.

Of the stars Isaiah the prophet says that God calleth them all by name by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power. Those names, those real, actual names of the stars are unknown to us; those God alone knows; and we help ourselves with mechanical names and speak of Mars and Mercury, of Jupiter and Saturn.

So the matter stands with respect to our children, in case they go into life. Their real name is not told us. That God alone knows, and only in eternity shall it be discovered to them.

If we could look into their being, we would know their real name; but now that we do not know this, we help ourselves with respect to our children with imperfect auxiliary names, and give them names from Scripture or family names, if not names in which, as though they were dogs or horses, our whim is at play.

One knows that at the end of the last century especially this whimsical desire to choose fanciful names was very strong. Only think of the very common name of *Egalite*, i.e., *Equality*, wherewith then thousands and tens of thousands in France, and also in our own country, were named.



So when God gives us a little child, and we come to giving it a name, we should first of all sense our impotence.

We see that little child, that newly-born infant, in the cradle, or on the bed in mother's arms; but it is and remains a perfect mystery to us.

We do not understand that infant. It is a closed book to us. We can read nothing in that child as yet either of his disposition or of his character.

Also, before such a newborn infant our impotence is so entire.

And yet the babe must receive a *name*. He must be named in his baptism, he must bear a name, if you would make report of him to the clerk of vital statistics. Without a name no infant is thinkable.

Then to find a name that shall be prophetic is a task of such entire hopelessness that, as a rule, weeks before it is born a name is mutually agreed upon.

And it almost never happens that, before the child is finally given that name, it is gravely considered whether that name is suitable to *this* child.

In Zacharias' home this went so far that, of itself, the family gave John the name of "Zacharias." The first son must be named after the father. Such was the custom, it spake for itself. And only when Elisabeth raised the objection, and Zacharias' counsel was called in, did the child receive the prophetic, the of-God-ordained name of John (Luke 1:62).



And such is still the custom.

In every family certain names have become indigenous. From the two families of husband and wife these two series of names converge in the younger generation of the new household.

Right of custom has even here ordered a certain rule, and there are people among whom this rule is strictly kept that really every name of a child that is to be born is agreed upon in advance.

Such is the family rule, and so must his name be and not otherwise.

Herein lies something human, something that by reason of the coherence of our generation must be respected.

A dog, a horse, or a ship is just named. According to whim or fancy. Accidentally, and without further thought.

But with children the connection with former generations must be honored. Every child that is born

is no oneling, but a bearer of the blood, and thus also of the traditions of parents and grandparents.

People stand related with people. We belong together. Together we form one great and broadly ramified society. And that relation, that connection, is expressed by giving the name of father and grandfather, of mother and grandmother, to children and grandchildren.

In every family an emulation should be alive, gradually to elevate one's generation along spiritual lines; to lift it up to higher levels; to make it richer through and for God; and it is this stimulus to attain nobility of soul that comes to us from our ancestors, and which by this permanency of family names must operate in us.



Sometimes we diverge from this and ask some one outside of the family to be godfather to the child; or we give the child the name of a man of reputation, whose memory, after his death, is sacred to us.

In early Christian times this was done systematically. When from among the heathen one came to holy baptism, he had to give up his old name, and accept a Christian name. Such had been the custom in Israel with proselyte baptism. A heathen who went over to Judaism had to leave father and mother and abandon his past after the flesh, to pass over into the spiritual Israel, and there receive a new father, and from that father a new name.

This became the custom among Christians. He who became a Christian left his heathen affiliations and bid his heathen name good-by, to pass over into the spiritual affiliations of Christ's people; among Christians to receive a new father, who was called godfather; and whose name he took.

With children, however, born of Christian parents, this of course could not be practiced. They were born in the covenant of grace, and as members of Christ's church they

were baptized. So they received at once their permanent name, which name could not be heathen, but had to be a Christian name. Even in the days of the martyrs, baptism was denied by the church when it was proposed to call the child by a heathen name. This was not permitted. It was a denial of the Lord.

But a loved name from outside of the family was allowed to be taken wherewith, as with a new element and with new spiritual power, to enrich the life of one's generation. For by that name the spiritual significance of him after whom such a child was named was woven into the family traditions.

So it behooves us, in naming our children, to act consciously. With clear insight into our impotence, to call our children by that name which they have with God; but also with clear insight what the giving of such a family name or the calling after a revered name from elsewhere means.

A name means so much. When in serious moments you call one by his name, by that name you bore down into the deepest being of his soul. When in bitter strife of soul one calls himself by his own name, the impression of it upon his soul's perception is so mighty.

Therefore one should really

have but one name, and naming a child by three, four, or more names does not prevent that only one of these lives, and that the other as dead names stand alongside of it as mere figurants.

But one should take the name one bears seriously. And the foolish urge which is common especially among young girls to maim her name, and so to abbreviate it that a striking sound is heard, and with that piquant nickname to make a show, is evidence enough that in her heart and upon her lips higher seriousness has not succeeded to banish vain self-complacency.



In His Fear

Rev. Garry Eriks

Being Content with What You Have

Contentment is the gift of God's grace whereby we submit to and delight in God's will for us. It is to accept joyfully God's way with us. In His Word, God commands us to be content with what we have. Hebrews 13:5 says, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." The apostle Paul reminds us of our calling to be content in I Timothy 6:6: "But godliness with contentment is great gain." Paul himself was a faithful example of contentment, as we read in Philippians 4:11: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

Frequently, the Word of God reminds us to be content because contentment is one of the great struggles of the Christian life for both young and old. Contentment is not some-

thing that comes naturally. What does come naturally is complaining. We so easily complain about God's way with us - about the spouse or the children God has provided; about the job, the employer, the employees, or the amount of money we have. Are we content with the life God has given to us?

The truth of contentment is so important to the Christian life because it causes us to face the question, "Whom do we serve?" In Scripture, contentment is often treated with its opposite, covetousness. When we covet, we crave what God has not given to us. If we lust after something other than God, then we serve that thing. This adversely affects our walk with God. When we are not focused on serving Him, we live for self, doing what is right in our own eyes. When we are truly content, we are fixed on God by faith. Because we know the blood of Jesus Christ has been shed for us, we must serve Him. We cannot serve Him unless we are content with God's way with us. This is why contentment is so vital to the Christian life.



Because contentment and covetousness are opposites, to understand contentment we must understand covetousness. Before we can be content, we must extinguish all traces of covetousness in our lives. This is the meaning of Hebrews 13:5, which says, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content...."

Covetousness is the sin of lusting for what God has not been pleased to give us. The object of lust can be anything. Scripture warns of the love of money (I Tim. 6:10). But lust can also be toward a person, a possession, or health. Anything in life has the possibility of being the object of our covetousness.

Coveting what God is not pleased to give is to disagree with God's will for our lives. When we are covetous, we foolishly think that our lives would be better and happier if the circumstances were different. We think we know better than God! Would we dare to inform God face to face what He could do better to make our lives happier and better? This is what

Rev. Eriks is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

we do when we live covetously. If only I had..., then I would be so much better off.

Essentially, covetousness is idolatry. It is fixing our heart on something other than God. The burning desire and lust for something becomes supreme in our lives. The thing we crave for happiness becomes bigger than God. It becomes our Baal. The larger the object of our desires becomes, the smaller God becomes. The awful, naked truth of covetousness is that something other than God is at the center of our lives.

If something other than God is at the center of our lives, we will begin to serve that lust because whatever is supreme and most important in a man's life is what he will serve. A man will do anything and give up anything to have that thing that is first on his mind and in his heart. If we lust after something other than God, we cannot expect to live unto Him in holiness. Such a desire will certainly lead to a life of selfish living, following the carnal desires of the flesh in sin.

Because contentment and covetousness are bitter enemies, we cannot be both simultaneously. Before we can even think about enjoying the grace of contentment, we must root out the evil of covetousness.

Grumbling and complaining because of dissatisfaction with God's will is an indication that the festering sore of covetousness lives in our hearts. If covetousness reigns in our hearts and minds, we will not be happy with our lives. Instead we will harbor deep-seated anger and resentment against God. But when we are not happy with the circumstances of our lives, we look for someone to blame, deflecting the true reason for our discontentment. We cast the blame upon others: my boss, my spouse, or my children. Or we think that life would be so much better if it were easier. The blame is shifted to sickness or poverty. Really we are saying that the problem is God and what He has given or has not

given. But none of these things is the problem. The problem is the covetousness and idolatry found in our hearts and minds.

The Word of God demands that our lives be completely free of covetousness. Especially in the materialistic, selfish age in which we live, we must beware of the idol of money, for "the love of money is the root of all evil" (I Tim. 6:10). Coveting money and possessions is a danger whether we have little or much. With the increases in the price of fuel, healthcare, food, and tuition, the cost of living may outpace increases of our wages. The danger is that we begin to think that life would be so much better if we only had more. But God says that we must erase all such thinking and desires from our minds and hearts. We will not experience the joy of contentment if we are harboring such covetousness.



The word contentment means "to be satisfied, to be sufficient." Being content is to know that we lack nothing. An outstanding contentment confession is found in Psalm 23:1: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." To confess this from the heart joyfully is true contentment. Contentment is to confess, "I lack nothing. I have everything that I need. I have enough." This is the contentment that we see with our eyes in a little child that has a clean diaper, warm clothes, and a full belly after being fed at its mother's breast. That infant sighs, closes its eyes, and drifts off to sleep. We sing in Psalter #366, stanza two, "With childlike trust, O Lord, in Thee I calmly rest, contented as a little child upon its mother's breast."

This sufficiency has nothing to do with how much or how little of the things of this earth we have (Phil. 4:11). Confessing this has nothing to do with the circumstances of life. The large Christian family living in a tiny, old house can make the confession "I lack nothing." The child of God who lives month to month

so that he and his family just barely scrape by can confess this. The Christian writhing in pain in a hospital bed can confess this. No matter what the circumstances of life may be, the child of God can and must confess, "I lack nothing." Strikingly, Paul confesses God's sufficiency in Philippians 4:11 while he is imprisoned in Rome, not knowing what the outcome of his trial before Caesar will be. Paul learned contentment with the thorn in the flesh God gave to him and would not take away (II Cor. 12:7-9). God told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Paul did not need the thorn removed. He needed God's grace. God says the same to us, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Being content with the present circumstances of life means knowing that we possess everything we need in Jesus Christ. What do we truly need? Do we need to be popular? Do we need the approval and love of other people? Do we need health and an easy life? Do we need much money and much of the things of this life? No, we don't *need* any of these things. What we truly *need* is the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus Christ. We need His righteousness. The Word of God declares to us that our sufficiency is found in Jesus Christ, for He is the Bread of Life. Everything we need is found in the blood of Jesus Christ because He fully satisfied for all our sins. The cross is the evidence of God's unconditional, perfect love for us. Therefore, we know that God's will for our lives is good for us. We are satisfied with God's sovereign control because He is doing all things to glorify Himself. Contentment is the gift of God's grace in our lives that causes us to look to Him with true faith and to find in Him everything we need. Knowing God and His Son Jesus Christ is enough! What more do we need?



The basis of this contentment is the unfailing promises of God. Hebrews 13:5 reminds us of this when

it says, "be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." The basis for contentment is what "he hath said." This reminds us not to look at ourselves or our lives or anything else to find contentment, because it is impossible to find contentment there. Neither can the word of man calm our worries or anxieties. When we struggle, others may try to encourage us with their own words of advice. But the words of man cannot bring contentment. The Word of God calms our worries and anxieties. In the Word of God you will find the basis for contentment because it is God's Word! What God says in His Word is certain because it is the Word of Almighty God. We don't respond to God's Word by saying, "Well, maybe this is true, but I don't know." Because God has said it, we know it to be true and faithful – the Bible tells us so.

The promise found in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," is frequently repeated in the Old Testament. God spoke these words to Solomon when he began to rule over Israel. God spoke these words to Joshua to encourage him when God called him to be the successor to Moses, to lead the people of Israel across the Jordan River into the land of Canaan. He would lead the unskilled and untested army of Israel against the physically superior armies of the Canaanites. Jehovah promised, "I will be with thee." Therefore, Joshua had nothing to fear. God speaks the same promise to us in Hebrews 13:5. This promise is stated very strongly in the passage, so that it actually

means, "I will not at any time leave you. I will not at any moment forsake." The idea is that God would never under any circumstances abandon us. This is the reason for being content with all things.

This promise is Jehovah's covenant promise to be with us. When He promises that He will never abandon us, Jehovah promises to be present always with us. God certainly knows everything that happens to us, because He has determined it. He sees everything that happens to us, because He is everywhere present. That God is present with us means He is our help and strength and refuge. Jehovah is present always with His power and grace. His grace will always be sufficient for us. He does not promise to lessen the hardships of life, but He does promise to give sufficient grace so that we will not be defeated spiritually.

We have the assurance of this covenant promise of God because it was fulfilled by Immanuel, which means, "God with us." Jehovah did not leave us in our sin, but sent the Son of His love to pay for our sins on the cross of Calvary. Christ did not abandon us when He ascended into heaven, but sent another Comforter, His Spirit. Through the work of the Holy Spirit God is with us in His power and grace.


This promise of God obliterates all fear, doubt, and worry. Not only does complaining come naturally to us, but also worrying comes naturally to us. We worry about making ends meet to feed our families, to pay the tuition, and to have something left to give to the church. We worry about our covenant children. We worry that

our worst fears will come true. We worry because we like to be in control of our lives.

The promise of God is personal. It is to all those who are His children by sovereign grace. What great hardships we face in this life. But God speaks to each one of His children personally and says, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." When we hear God say this, there is a peace and calm that fills our hearts. All our fears and anxieties are put to rest. In this we are content.



The truth of contentment reminds us what is the focus of our lives: God! In Him we trust. God is the One whom we serve. We trust Him and serve Him because He bought us with the price of Christ's blood. In contrast to covetousness, which leads to a life of unrighteousness, contentment is manifest in a life of trusting and obeying. This is because when the Spirit works this grace in us, our focus is upon God and His promises. When our focus is on God, covetousness will be far from us.

All men are searching for the treasure of happiness. They think they have found it in pleasing themselves with all that the world has to offer. But there is no happiness found in the world. Where the grace of contentment is found, true spiritual joy is found. A life of covetousness will not bring such joy. But a life of contentment on the basis of God's sure promises will result in such spiritual joy and happiness. Joy is not found in things, but in knowing the sufficiency of God's love in Jesus Christ. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

Members of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI were invited to take a moment before a recent Sunday morning worship service to look at a copy of the 1793

edition of the Liturgical Form for Baptism displayed in their narthex. This 1793 edition was the first translation of that form from Dutch into English, and members of Georgetown could see that the form

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

and questions asked on the occasion of baptism in our churches were identical to the form and questions that have been in use in the Dutch Reformed Churches in America since the early 1600s. Quite literally, hundreds of thousands of Reformed believers for more than 300 years have used this form, the same form we use in our churches today for the baptism of our covenant children. May God keep us faithful to the path of truth that our spiritual fathers have confessed before us.

Our Hope PRC in Walker, MI held an open house Sunday evening, June 18, at Hope PR Christian School to commemorate Prof. H. Hanko's 50 years of service to our churches. Thanks go out to Hope for giving all of us who were able to have an opportunity to express our appreciation to Prof. Hanko personally for his many years of faithful service.

During the summer months many of our congregations find time to come together for their annual church picnics. The Grace PRC in Standale, MI is one of those congregations. But they do their picnic just a little differently. Instead of eating dinner together, they get together for breakfast. This year's church picnic was held at Hope PR Christian School on June 24. Coffee and fellowship began at 9:00 and breakfast was served at 9:30.

The Young Adults of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada are responsible for their annual church picnic each year. This year's picnic was held Saturday, July 1, at the Gull Lake Park. Immanuel's congregation could look forward to a day of fun and games, some of which included Hydro Challenge,

Drag Racing, Truck Driving, and the William Tell game. Each family was asked to bring either a salad or dessert, but buffalo patties, smokies, and beverages were provided.

Also with respect to Immanuel, we note that Rev. Dale Kuiper, one of the churches' emeriti pastors, supplied the pulpit there on June 18 and 25. While there, Rev. Kuiper planned to finish a short series on the prophecy of Jonah. Immanuel's congregation was reminded that Rev. Kuiper began this series among them last summer.

The consistory of the Byron Center, MI PRC encouraged their congregation to come and hear Rev. J. Kortering speak after their morning service on June 25 on work being done by Rajastephen, a man in India who is presently being supported by individuals in his very beginning efforts to establish a Reformed Christian orphanage and work.

Several young people and adults from the Georgetown congregation in Hudsonville, MI left in late June for service trips to Romania and Rehoboth, New Mexico. The Romanian group left June 19 and the Rehoboth group on June 24.

The Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN invited their children to attend Vacation Bible School the week of June 19-23. The work promised to be an opportunity for learning, singing, and "Discovering the Riches of Christ."

All members of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to attend an open house at their new parsonage on Wednesday evening, June 28. Members could park at church and follow a walking path between the church and parsonage. The

Slopsema family planned to move into the new parsonage in mid-July.

Mission Activities


Rev. R. Miersma, his wife, Sharon, and Elder Steve Ezinga, visited the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship of Spokane, WA from June 23 through 27. These delegates from the Loveland, CO PRC, the calling church for our denomination's mission work in Spokane, were there primarily to receive the confession of faith of some fellowship members and also to have opportunity to get to know the members better.

Friday evening, June 23, Rev. A. Stewart, our denomination's missionary to the Covenant Reformed Fellowship in Ballymena, N.I., spoke at Porthcawl, South Wales on "The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11."

Denomination Activities

Members of our churches were invited to stop by the new RFPA facility on Saturday morning, June 17, for an Open House. You could not only enjoy refreshments, but you could also see the warehouse, offices, and how the *Standard Bearer* and books are mailed to people around the world. In case you missed the open house and would just like to drive by the building, it is located at 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., near the corner of Baldwin and 20th Ave. in Jenison, MI.

Minister Activities

The Kalamazoo, MI PRC has extended a call to Rev. A. Spriensma, presently serving our churches as missionary to the Philippines, as their next pastor. 

Announcements

RFPA Annual Meeting will be held on September 21 in Faith PRC at 7:30 P.M.

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for August

Date	Topic	Text
August 6	"Worshipping God in the Light of His Goodness"	Nehemiah 9:1-31
August 13	"Let Not Our Trouble Seem Little to Thee"	Nehemiah 9:32-38
August 20	"Covenant Renewal"	Nehemiah 10
August 27	"Jerusalem Filled with Boys and Girls Playing"	Nehemiah 11

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hudsonville PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to Elder Erv Kortering and his family in the passing away of his son-in-law,

MR. JONATHAN BLYSTRA.

We pray that they may receive comfort in the words from Psalm 138:3: "In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedest me with strength in my soul."

Rev. Garry Eriks, President
Ralph VanderVeen, Clerk

1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7173

THE STANDARD BEARER

PERIODICAL
Postage Paid at
Jenison,
Michigan

OFFICEBEARERS' CONFERENCE CLASSIS WEST OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES

Hull, IA - Tuesday, September 5, 2006

The Holy Spirit: True and Coeternal God

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, *he shall testify of me.*

John 15:26

9:00 A.M. KEYNOTE ADDRESS

"I Believe in the Holy Ghost": The Church's Confession Regarding the Holy Spirit

Rev. Richard Smit,

Pastor of Immanuel PRC, Lacombe, AB

10:30 A.M. - 12:00 P.M.

"Worshiped and Glorified": The Divinity of the Holy Spirit and Its Implications for Faith and Life

Rev. Jaikishin Mahtani,

Pastor of Bethel PRC, Roselle, IL

12:00 P.M. - Lunch served

1:00 P.M. - 2:30 P.M.

"Who Spoke by the Prophets": The Work of the Holy Spirit in Salvation and Its Implications for Officebearers

Rev. David Overway,

Pastor of Doon PRC, Doon, IA

2:45 P.M. - 4:15 P.M.

"Grieve Not the Spirit": Sins Against the Holy Spirit

Rev. Douglas Kuiper,

Pastor of Randolph PRC, Randolph, WI

* All past and present officebearers, as well as all interested people, are invited to attend.

* After the noon meal, a free-will offering will be taken to defray expenses.

NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by Hull PRC in Hull, Iowa, on Wednesday, September 6, 2006, at 8:30 A.M. Delegates or visitors in need of lodging or transportation should notify Hull's clerk, Mr. Don VerMeer, by phone (712) 725-2505, or by e-mail (donver@siebring.com).

Rev. Richard J. Smit,
Stated Clerk of Classis West

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 13, 2006 at the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, Michigan.

Jon J. Huisken
Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 26, 2006

JOHN and JUDY KALSBECK

will be celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary. It is with gratitude to God that we, their children and grandchildren, remember them on this day. We give thanks for their covenant instruction, their necessary discipline, and the godly example they have set for us in the 40 years of their marriage. It is our prayer that they may continue to experience God's blessing in their life together.

"For thou, O God, has heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name" (Psalm 61:5).

- ✿ Joel and Jory Mulder
Kylie, Collin, Dana, Brooke, Ty, Trent
- ✿ Jay and Lora Kalsbeek
Tristan, Monte, Cedric, Seth
- ✿ Tim and Gwennan Engen
Olivia, Charlie, Veronica, Elise
- ✿ Chad and Erika Stuit
Karsyn, Kayden
- ✿ Dan and Tamara Kalsbeek
Allen, Brett, Jedd
- ✿ Dave and Kristin Korhorn
Samuel
- ✿ Trevor and Sara Kalsbeek
Brendan, Caleb
- ✿ Alex Kalsbeek
- ✿ Kenton and Lisa Kalsbeek
- ✿ Ethan Kalsbeek

Grandville, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 18, 2006 our parents,

PROF. ROBERT and MARILYN DECKER,

will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary. As their children, we thank God for the covenant blessings we have received through our parents who have guided and encouraged us by His word. We rejoice with them and thank them for their love and sacrifice and above all their godly example.

We pray for God's richest blessing upon them as they continue their lives together.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Psalm 103: 17, 18).

- ✿ Douglas and Deborah Altena
Jared, Amanda, Rachel, Michael
- ✿ Daniel and Denise Decker
Blair, Paige, Danae
- ✿ Timothy and Kathy Decker
Tyler
- ✿ Jonathan and Sarah Decker
Jordan

Jenison, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 11, 2006, our parents and grandparents,

LEON and PHYLLIS UITTENBOGAARD,

will celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary. We praise God for His faithfulness shown in their marriage these many years. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for their godly example and for their faithful instruction and guidance. We pray the Lord will continue to bless them in their marriage in the years to come and keep them in His care. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generation" (Psalm 89:1).

- ✿ Chad and Sue Uittenbogaard
Haley, Emily, Alyssa, Kelsey
- ✿ Dan and Kathy Poppema
Faith, Anna, Elizabeth, Drew, Grace
- ✿ Jeff Uittenbogaard
- ✿ Steve and Denise Uittenbogaard
- ✿ Mike Uittenbogaard

Hull, Iowa

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On July 8, 2006, our parents and grandparents,

IRVAN and BARB (Maat) VELTHOUSE,

celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them and are thankful for the covenant instruction and Christian guidance that they have given us. We ask for God's continued blessing on their marriage in the years to come. "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- ✿ Dan and Dawn Zandstra
Michelle, Todd, Danielle, Brittany
- ✿ Mark and Amy Oomkes
Taylor, Lisa
- ✿ Dan and Kari Timmerman
Alec, Cherie, Grant
- ✿ Pete and Sara Byker
Hailey, Tessa

Hudsonville, Michigan