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Volume 82 ◆ Number 12

Patient in Tribulation

"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer...."
Romans 12:12

Those who are saved by grace alone are to live in a way that harmonizes with this salvation. It is a life of being "not conformed to this world," but "transformed by the renewing of your mind," evidencing the "good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (12:2).

First, this means that our God-given gifts are to be used in a sober and gracious way. Also, salvation by grace alone calls for constantly "serving the Lord" (12:11). And in our text we learn that salvation by grace alone requires a certain kind of conduct in response to the difficulties and hardships of life. May our gracious Savior teach us how to endure the tribulations He sends us in this life.



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

Life in this sin-cursed world is hard! The word "tribulation" is a word that describes what is experienced when difficulties and hardships come. The word means to be squeezed in or crushed down, to be confined in a very small area with no way to turn and no way out. This can be caused by any hardship: physical, mental, or spiritual.

How is the Christian, who is justified by grace alone, to respond to tribulation? With patience! This is also the language our spiritual fathers used to describe how we are to respond to adversity (Heid. Cat., Q. 28). Not by fighting it or by trying to get rid of it. Not with stoicism or a fatalistic accepting what cannot be changed. Rather, salvation by grace alone through faith alone enables one to be patient, that is, to endure or persevere, to bear calmly the tribulation.

Patience is not a natural virtue, of which some may have more than others. Rather, patience is the spiritual ability of faith to endure tribulation, because faith sees God as the One who sends the tribulation, sees also that God lovingly

and wisely uses tribulation for great and good purposes, and waits confidently for God to accomplish His purposes.

Scripture teaches us about God's use of tribulation. First, Scripture teaches that we ought not be surprised by tribulation. Jesus even promised, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). As God's beloved, we are to "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (I Pet. 4:12). For "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12). Paul taught the new Christians in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). So faith realizes what our flesh wants to deny, namely, that tribulation is the lot of the Christian. We are cross-bearers (Matt. 16:24). The place of the Christian in this world is always limited, and this is according to God's will.

Second, the Scriptures teach us that our Lord Jesus Christ left us an example of bearing tribulation with patience. The whole of His

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earthly sojourn was filled with tribulation. He received the tribulation as God's will for Him. He endured it, lovingly obeying God in the midst of it.

Third, Scripture teaches the believer that tribulation is the way in which God disciplines His children. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Heb. 12:6, 7). The Greek word translated "endure" is the same word that is translated "patient" in our text.

Fourth, patience is required in tribulation because Scripture calls us to realize that God uses tribulation to teach us many things. Tribulation teaches us humility, for it shows us how great is our self-interest and how weak is our patience. Tribulation teaches us the reality about this world — the temporary nature of its joys and satisfactions — so that we do not set our hope on this world, its relationships or its possessions. Tribulations teach us how to sympathize with and to comfort others. The God of all comfort "comforteth us in all our tribulation, that

we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (II Cor. 1:4). And tribulations bear the "fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11). Even as Jesus "learned ... obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8), so His disciples can say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71).



Our ability to be patient in

tribulation is greatly strengthened by having hope (and rejoicing in it).

When God graciously saves unto Himself a people in Christ, He gives hope. Already at regeneration, there is hope. I Peter 1:3 states that we are begotten or born again "unto a lively hope." The hope of the Christian is not in this world, either presently or at some future date. In fact, our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself "that he might deliver us from this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4). This hope is described as "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Pet. 1:4, 5). God sets this hope before the Christian as something most wonderful: "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart

of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (I Cor. 2:9). The beauty and the glory of this hope is so great that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Further, the tribulations and afflictions of this life work "for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17, 18).

God sets this certain and sure hope before His people so that they may anticipate deliverance from this body of sin and death in which they experience tribulations. He wants us to expect to be delivered from the struggles of the earth and to be translated into the heavenly.

So, while we are yet in this life and its tribulations, we rejoice in the hope God has given us. Being justified by faith alone we not only have peace with God but we also

"rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1, 2). We "greatly rejoice" in the hope of the wonderful inheritance promised us (I Pet. 1:6). We rejoice that we are heirs.

We not only rejoice in hope of the glory of God, but "we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience" (Rom. 5:3). Tribulations are God's means to show us that any joy we have in earthly things is very brief and passing. Tribulations teach us to look for the exceeding and eternal weight of glory that shall never end.

The apostle is inspired to put first in our text the calling to rejoice in hope — before the calling to be patient in tribulation. God teaches us that there is a close relationship between the two. To the degree that we rejoice in hope we are able to be patient in tribulation. Do you seek the ability to be patient in tribulation? Then rejoice in the hope of the glory God promises you!



Then is added: "continuing instant in prayer." Being patient in tribulation by rejoicing in hope is experienced in the way of continuing steadfastly in prayer. If we are to endure tribulations and focus on the hope set before us, then we are to be praying — communing with our heavenly Father.


Prayer puts us face to face with our God and Father. Prayer puts us before the gracious throne of God whose glory is always first and whose will is always done. Prayer is the exercise of faith that opens our souls to Him, reminding us, over and over, that He is the all-wise God, never making a mistake or doing anything less than perfectly. He accomplishes the highest end for Himself and for each of His children in the best possible way. And prayer makes us see His love. We see that His relationship to His chosen ones is based on His everlasting love and is the ceaseless exercise of His un-

conditional love. Prayer enables us to abide in and confide in His love. Tribulations frighten us easily and greatly. Prayer, in the middle of tribulation, reminds those who are justified by grace alone that their heavenly Father is still giving His grace for grace. He has not forgotten to be kind and His mercy is not gone. His grace abideth ever!

But as easy as it is to be shaken by tribulation, so easy it is to forget to pray. We are therefore ad-

monished to “continue instant” in prayer. This means that we are to be devoted to and be constant or persevere in prayer. First, this means that we are to pray frequently, not just once in a while. We are to pray without ceasing. Second, this implies that there is resistance to prayer. Our flesh provides that resistance because it focuses on our tribulation. We are called to live in the consciousness

of God’s will and of our constant dependence on God, who alone is able to help. It is God’s will that His children see, by way of prayer, His help (Ezek. 36:37). He has promised that He will give His grace and Spirit only to those who sincerely and continually ask for them of Him.

Pray. See the hope set before you. Rejoice in it. Patiently wait for your Father to realize that hope, even through tribulations. 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Another Look at the Declaration of Principles (4)

The Declaration of Principles has four sections. The third part of the Declaration begins: “Seeing this is the clear teaching of our confessions...We repudiate ... And we maintain....”

The “clear teaching” which forms the basis of the third part was set forth in the previous articles. Briefly, it is as follows. In part one, the Declaration demonstrates that the doctrine of common grace and the well-meant offer as adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 is contrary to the Reformed confessions’ teaching on grace, total depravity, and the particularity of the gospel.

In part two, the Declaration sets forth the confessional teaching on election, the atonement, and faith. Concerning election, the Declaration states:

That election, which is the unconditional and unchangeable decree of God to redeem in Christ a cer-

tain number of persons, is the sole cause and fountain of all our salvation, whence flow all the gifts of grace, including faith.

Next, the Declaration asserts “that Christ died only for the elect and that the saving efficacy of the death of Christ extends to them only.” From this the Declaration rightly concludes that the blessings of salvation, which are the blessings of the covenant, are, and can only be, for the elect.

The Declaration demonstrates that Q. & A. 74, the Heidelberg Catechism’s instruction on infant baptism, teaches that the blessings of salvation are not promised to every baptized child, but to every *elect* baptized child.

Also in section two, the Declaration maintains that the promise of the gospel is unconditional. This is grounded on the confessions, which teach that both election and the efficacy of the death of Christ are unconditional. Consequently, the promise of the gospel can only be unconditional.

Finally, concerning faith, the Declaration maintains that faith is

neither a prerequisite unto salvation, nor a condition unto salvation. Rather faith, according to the confessions, is a gift of God. It is the God-given instrument whereby we appropriate Christ.

The Ground for Infant Baptism

The third section of the Declaration of Principles treats, among other things, the Reformed view of infant baptism. Among Reformed theologians, the question often arises as to the ground of infant baptism. Closely related to this is the proper way to view the child being baptized. These questions involve the doctrine of the covenant.

One view of baptism holds that baptism is meaningless unless it includes a promise from God to every child. Such a promise is conditional. During the controversy of the 1950s in the PRC, some maintained that such a promise was an “objective bequest” from God, which gave to every baptized child the right to Christ and all the blessings of salvation. This was the view maintained in the Reformed

Previous article in this series: March 1, p. 244.

Churches in the Netherlands (Liberalized).

Another view had previously been proposed by Dr. Abraham Kuyper. He claimed that the church must presuppose that every child of believers is already regenerated when brought to baptism. Dr. Kuyper maintained this because he insisted that baptism must seal an already existing grace in the child. Thus he concluded that if the parents did not assume that their infant was already regenerated, they would have no reason to bring the child for baptism.

The PRC insist that the confessions reject both of these positions. The Declaration “repudiates” the notion that “we may presuppose that all the children that are baptized are regenerated, for we know on the basis of Scripture, as well as in the light of all history and experience, that the contrary is true.”

This needs to be underscored, for there are many who hold to a conditional covenant who apparently believe that there are but two positions in this world on covenant children — theirs, and Abraham Kuyper’s. The thinking is that since the PRC reject the conditional covenant, they must hold to Kuyper’s notion of presupposed regeneration. Thus, I reiterate, in the Declaration of Principles the PRC officially “repudiate” presupposed regeneration.

The PRC also reject the view that the promise of the covenant is conditional and for all who are baptized.

The central ground for rejecting both positions is that the confessions tie not only regeneration but all the blessings of salvation to the sovereign decree of election. Once again, the Declaration points to the Canons, I, 6-8. These articles insist that election is sovereign, unconditional, and free, and that only the elect receive faith. This leads to the necessary conclusion that not all the baptized children of believers are promised salvation, nor

may all be presupposed to be regenerated. These things (the promise of salvation and regeneration) are only for the elect children of believers.

Further proof is drawn from the doctrinal part of the baptism form, which speaks much of the promises of God. It is not possible to construe these promise of God as conditional — the form does not hint at conditions. On the contrary, the form describes them as God’s certain promises of all the blessings of salvation.

In this connection, the Declaration makes a significant point about the prayer of thanksgiving in the baptism form, after baptism has been administered. The prayer begins:

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise thee that thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through thy Holy Spirit as members of thine only begotten Son, and adopted us to be thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism.

God established His eternal covenant with Christ, and with all those who are in Christ.

The Declaration asserts that the baptized children referred to in this prayer can only be the elect baptized children; “we cannot presuppose that it is for all.” The reason is obvious from the opening words of the prayer: God forgives us and our children all our sins. God never forgives the sins of the reprobate seed. That they grow up in the home of a believer, and even that they are baptized, does not change that. Only the elect are forgiven.

What then is the proper ground for infant baptism? The Declaration insists that “the ground of infant baptism is the command of God and the fact that according to Scripture He established His covenant in the line of continued generations.”

God commands it. That is enough. If God only demanded it and never gave us a reason, that command would be sufficient.

However, God deals with us as friends, not slaves, and thus He gives a reason, namely, that “He established His covenant in the line of continued generations.” This is “according to” such a Scripture text as Genesis 17:7. Here God did not merely inform Abraham that his seed would be *in the covenant*, and would be promised salvation conditionally. Were that the case, the covenant would not be ratified until and unless the children fulfilled the condition of faith.

No, God’s promise to Abraham is powerful and certain. God promised *to establish His covenant* of friendship with Abraham’s seed in the line of continued generations. Romans 9 reveals that the “seed” of Abraham is the seed of the promise, that is, the elect seed. Galatians 3 further explains that the “seed” is Christ. God established His eternal covenant with Christ, and with all those who are in Christ. Because of the elect seed among the children of believers, God commands believers to put upon them the sign of the covenant — baptism.

The Old Arminian Charge

In the positive part of the third section, the Declaration discusses the confessional statement on how God deals with man.

Historically, the charge has often been leveled against the Reformed faith that the teaching of sovereign, particular grace implies that God treats man as a block of wood. This is the charge of the Arminian, who will leave some activity for man to accomplish in order for salvation to be realized. In the controversy that resulted in the split of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1953, it was alleged that the unconditional covenant left

nothing for man to do, and thus he was handled by God as a block of wood.

To be sure, the old charge was slightly disguised. It took the form of an insistence that we must maintain man's *responsibility*. Supposedly, only a conditional covenant in which God promised salvation to every baptized child on the condition of faith, only that conception of the covenant leaves room for man's responsibility.

The Protestant Reformed Churches in no way deny man's responsibility, if responsibility is defined as natural man's *obligation* to obey (respond to) God's command. The PRC did (and still do) reject responsibility defined as natural man's *ability* to obey (respond to) God's promise. The latter refers to man's supposed ability to fulfill a condition unto salvation. That is rejected.

Let the Declaration speak for itself:

The sure promise of God which He realizes in us as rational and moral creatures not only makes it impossible that we should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness but also confronts us with the obligation of love, to walk in a new and holy life, and constantly to watch unto prayer.

What a comforting truth — God realizes His sure promise in us! No, not as a block of wood. The Declaration quotes copiously from the confessions, including this from Canons III, IV, 16: "this grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor takes away their will and its properties, neither does violence thereto."

Hyper-Calvinism Rejected

An additional aspect of "man's responsibility" involves the question of preaching—specifically, to

whom is the preaching addressed. The Protestant Reformed Churches are falsely branded as hyper-Calvinists. A hyper-Calvinist maintains that God in the preaching addresses only the elect, and the preaching commands only the elect to repent and believe.

The Declaration repudiates that notion. The Protestant Reformed Churches have officially adopted the following: "That the preaching comes to all; and that God seriously commands to faith and repentance; and that to all those who come and believe He promises life

and peace." Anyone familiar with the Reformed confessions will recognize the confessional language. If you do not recognize it, consult the Declaration of Principles and read the confessions cited.

Look at this statement of the Declaration carefully. It insists that the preaching commands all who hear it to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Elect or reprobate, none are excluded. But notice, also, that the *promise* is *not* for all who hear. The promise is not assigned to every baptized child or to every hearer of the gospel. Rather, "life and peace" are promised to all who "come," that is, those who "believe."

Hierarchy Rejected in the Church


In the final section, the Declaration of Principles very briefly addresses a matter of church government. It reads: "Besides, the Protestant Reformed Churches: Believe and maintain the autonomy of the local church. Only the consistory has authority over the local congregation."

This briefest of points underwent the most radical change before final adoption. As it read originally, it condemned the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) for several hierarchi-

cal actions — for imposing certain doctrinal decisions on the churches synodically; for making these decisions binding upon the churches before protest could be made; and for deposing many local officebearers. All this was in reference to a specific case in another denomination. Although it might have been helpful in the work among the Dutch immigrants from the Liberated, it would have dated the document, and reduced its value for today. It was removed, and we have the much reduced affirmation, together with support from the Belgic Confession, the Church Order, and the Form for the Installation of Elders and Deacons.

On this score, the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Liberated Churches were agreed. Both denominations opposed hierarchy. The local congregation is the church of Jesus Christ. The federation is not "the church." Christ is in the local congregation and gives His authority to the officebearers there. For this reason, the Protestant Reformed Churches are insistent that a denomination ought not be called a Church, but Churches.

It is worth noting that the Protestant Reformed Churches, while emphasizing the autonomy of the local congregation, do not despise the denomination or minimize its importance. The oneness of the church demands that the local congregations seek out other congregations in order to federate on the basis of the truth. Independentism is not the Reformed way. And the authority of Christ is exercised in the broader assemblies, so that decisions made there are binding throughout. However, the authority of Christ in the broader assemblies is delegated. Its source is in the local congregation.

The next (and final) article will discuss the proper place and authority of the Declaration of Principles in the Protestant Reformed Churches. 

The Protestant Reformed Churches in no way deny man's responsibility, if responsibility is defined as natural man's obligation to obey (respond to) God's command.

■ WARC and REC

There have been many strange (perhaps a better word would be “sad”) developments in the church world generally and more specifically within the Reformed church world the past few years. We are most concerned about those developments within the Reformed church circles—and especially in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and in America. These are the churches most closely related to our own denomination, since we have our roots in them.

The drive toward unity of churches is growing ever stronger. The scriptural basis for this drive, according to the claim of many, is Christ’s prayer of John 17, “That they may be one....” The *Grand Rapids Press*, February 4, 2006, in its religion section, headlined one such step toward uniting churches. The title was: “Protestant churches call for global body,” with the sub-heading, “New association a historic step in Christian unity.” The article, by religion editor Charles Honey and datelined from Grand Rapids, MI, stated:

A proposed new alliance of Protestant churches promises to create greater unity among some 80 million believers worldwide in the Reformed family of faith, organizers say.

In a three-day meeting this week at Calvin College, leaders of the two largest Reformed-affiliated ecumenical groups called for formation of a new global body called the World Reformed Communion.

The new association would bring together members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC),

dissolving those bodies in the process.

If approved by each group’s member churches, the new union would mark a historic step in Christian unity, officials said after forging the agreement.

“We feel the blessing of God that this opening is ahead of us, and we think this will be a big step forward in Reformed unity and witness,” said Richard vanHouten, general secretary of the Grand Rapids-based REC.

Representing the Calvinist strain of the Protestant Reformation, Reformed churches include the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church (USA).

WARC, dating to the 1870s, represents 75 million members in 108 countries. REC, founded in 1946, counts 12 million members in 25 countries.

Twenty-seven denominations belong to both bodies, including the Grand Rapids-based CRC.

...Eight leaders of the groups met to discuss closer collaboration but decided to “take the more dramatic step of becoming something completely new,” he said.

The Rev. Elizabeth Delgado of WARC called the proposed union “a joy for us.”

“This agreement is a way of joining more churches together, so we can be stronger (and) spread the Word of God in all our churches,” said Delgado, a pastor from Costa Rica.

The group produced a document calling on the new alliance to promote justice and reconciliation, a renewal of worship, church leadership and the full participation of women and youth.

The document will be circulated among member churches that must approve the new organization. Officials expect the process will take up to seven years....

One notes on the membership roster that the Christian Reformed Church in America as well as the

Protestant Church of the Netherlands (the new denomination formed from the merger of the Gereformeerde Kerken of the Netherlands, the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, and a small Lutheran denomination in the same country) are members of both of the above organizations. Noteworthy, too, is the fact that some of the denominations of both organizations are also members of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

However, the proposal to unite these two organizations is rather surprising. The REC was supposed to be the more conservative of the two organizations but became increasingly liberal the past years. Several Reformed denominations withdrew from the REC because of this. WARC, on the other hand, was noted for the extremely liberal denominations that still had at least some nominal ties to the Reformed camp. It is of interest, therefore, to read the aims and aspirations set forth for the proposed union. In their news release titled: “A ‘Major Step Forward in Unity’ in Reformed Family of Churches,” the following “calling” is set forth for the worldwide body:

- to foster Reformed Confessional identity and communion among Reformed churches;
- to promote justice in the economy and the earth and to work for reconciliation in the world;
- to encourage the renewal of Reformed worship and spiritual life as a global family of God’s people;
- to aid leadership development and the nurture of the covenant community;
- to promote the full participation of women and youth in all aspects of the church’s life;
- to renew a passion among Reformed Christians for God’s mission, both witness and service, in a spirit of partnership and unity.

Rev. VanBaren is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The above quote and additional materials can be found on the Web by accessing the individual sites of these organizations. One can search: www.warc.ch/ and also: <http://community.gospelcom.net/Brix?pageID=2562>. Enlightening articles can be found there. By reading some of these, one can see that the agenda of the proposed new organization is broader than indicated above. In an article on WARC's page titled "WARC seeks New Ways of Bringing Churches Together," one finds the following:

The worldwide family of Reformed churches needs to come together in new ways while remaining open to the higher goal of full Christian unity, says Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC).

..."We need to explore what being a communion means and how being a communion within the Reformed Family can help us be a closer family. At the same time we will always value the fact that belonging together as a Reformed family is not an end in itself.

"We have been called to a higher goal of Christian unity."

...The Alliance general secretary reminded members of the area council that Reformed ancestors saw the church as always reforming. The challenge today, he cautioned, is not to turn the things Reformed churches hold as dear into a "static set of traditions."

To avoid this, Nyomi said, the Reformed family must constantly be interpreting and re-interpreting its tradition and theology for contemporary witness. To do this effectively Reformed churches must take seriously the voices of women and those on the margins of society.

"The church in many parts of the world acts as if it has space for everybody on Sunday but in terms of commitments and decision making processes, it counts only men usually of 50 years and above," Nyomi said.

"How can we make ourselves open to God's transformation

which makes it possible for us to be more inclusive and to regard women and men, young and old, lay and clergy as partners in the mission of God?"

The general secretary said he was happy that many WARC member churches are in the process of studying the Accra Confession, a critical statement on neoliberal economic globalization from the Alliance's 24th General Council....

It becomes clear from the documents available that the drive to unite WARC and REC is in order to promote social improvements and activities. Doctrine and Scripture seem to be rather irrelevant (except John 17:21, "That they all may be one...").

The agenda is broader. The documents on the Web site of WARC indicate this:

Leaders of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) have called for a new era of partnership on justice issues in their first meeting with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican on 7 January.

"We are eager during our visit here at the Vatican to pursue with you how Catholic and Reformed Christians might be partners together for God's justice in a world wracked by poverty, war, ecological destruction and the denial of human freedom," Clifton Kirkpatrick, president of WARC, told the pontiff.

...In addition to the meeting with the pope, the delegation also met with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Council for Justice and Peace.

Kirkpatrick said the Reformed family is grateful to God for the three phases of the Reformed-Catholic dialogue that have been completed and said WARC was eager to move closer to the Catholic church "in common faith and witness."

While there have been breakthroughs in ecumenical relations between Catholics and Protestants, Kirkpatrick called for further movement.

"There is still much to be done

to move beyond our past condemnations of one another, to truly respect one another as parts of the one body of Jesus Christ, serve God together without worrying about inhibitions in our nations and to come together at the table of our Lord.

"We are eager to be partners with you in this important ministry of Christian unity."

In the pope's response, he noted that the dialogues between Catholic and Reformed theologians had shown significant convergence on the understanding of the nature of the church of Jesus Christ.

"It is an encouraging sign that the current phase of dialogue continues to explore the richness and complementarity of these approaches," the pope said.

Following the meeting, WARC general secretary Nyomi said: "This visit was an important symbol of WARC's commitment to Christian unity as well as to working with other Christian world communions in transforming the world into more just communities."

The committee stated to the Pope:

...Finally, we come as pilgrims in the cause of Christian unity. At the core of our tradition is the understanding that to be Reformed is to be faithful to Jesus' high priestly prayer "that they might all be one....that the world might believe." (John 17:21) We are grateful for new ecumenical breakthroughs between Protestants and Catholics. In talking with the Moderator of the Waldensian Church here in Italy, who is part of our delegation, I was pleased to learn of positive new ecumenical developments between Protestants and Catholics around honoring the Bible and inter-confessional marriages and of new structures of ecumenical cooperation at the grass roots levels – developments that are paralleled in the U.S.A. where I live and in many parts of the world....

In many ways, historians will likely look back on the second mil-

lennium of Christian history as the millennium of the division of the Christian Church. May we together, in the power of the Holy Spirit, commit our efforts to make the third millennium the era of the reuniting of the broken body of Christ. May God bless you and may God bless our common efforts to be pilgrims together for the unity which Christ intends for the Church and the world!

The Pope responded in part:


...Dear friends, I pray that our meeting today will itself bear fruit in a renewed commitment to work for the unity of all Christians. The way before us calls for wisdom, humility, patient study and exchange. May we set out with renewed confidence, in obedience to the Gospel and with our hope firmly grounded in Christ's prayer for his Church, in the love of the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Unitatis Redintegratio, 24).

Increasingly, Reformed and Presbyterian churches see no major hindrances to unity with the Roman Catholic Church. Even the divisive issues of the Lord's Supper and salvation by grace alone appear to be no longer very divisive. There can be no doubt about the judgment of John Calvin and Martin Luther on this development—and more importantly, I am convinced, about God's judgment.

■ The Clash of Two Civilizations

Briefly, it might be noted that secular journalists are using recently the phrase: the clash of two civilizations. The reference is to the unrest in the Muslim world against the Western world (Christian world?). Because of a few cartoons in a Danish newspaper that presumably defames the Prophet Mohammed, a large part of the

Muslim population across the world has been aroused to riot, and to destroy property and embassies of those of the "West"—the infidels. It is claimed that despicable cartoons have regularly appeared in Muslim-controlled newspapers that mock and defame the "infidel," the Jew, and often the American. All know of the beheading of some kidnapped people in Iraq and displayed on Arab web sites. But hardly a word is heard in condemnation of that from the Muslims.

All of this supposedly shows the "clash of two civilizations." Increasingly this appears to be a fulfillment of the prophecy of the book of Revelation that speaks of the final battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16). If the present is not the prelude of that battle, it certainly is a clear indication what the final confrontation between the anti-Christian states and the non-Christian ones will be. 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Janice Miersma

Royal Children: Stewards of the King

Mine!" shouts the two-year-old with furrowed brow. "Give it to me!" Nearly everyone, especially those who are parents, has heard these words at one time or another. Psychologists tell us that the child is simply learning to distinguish between what is his and what is another's. While there may be a grain of truth in this idea, we can also see that such behavior is often the expression of the sinful nature

we are born with. Shaking our heads and smiling a little, we reflect that the little one has much to learn, pitying him too, as he must begin, already at a young age, to battle his sinful nature. Yet, are we much different? Our "mine" is a little more refined; many times it does not come to such vehement outward expression. We look at our possessions, our mental abilities, our talents, our physical beauty or strength, our relationships, our time, and say in our hearts, "Mine!"

A wise mother, a friend of mine, would answer her children, "Nothing is yours. Everything be-

longs to God." This is what we must learn—all our life long. This is what we must teach our royal children, our servant-children—over and over. We saw last time that the central characteristic of the servant is humility. All the other characteristics will flow from this one most essential characteristic. It takes humility to recognize that we are stewards, not lords, and to confess, "Nothing is mine—by right. All that I am (and all that I possess) I owe to Thee." All that He gives us, He gives for the purpose of advancing His cause and kingdom. All that God gives us, He gives in trust, to those who will

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render an account. All that God gives us still belongs to Him.

Creating man as His friend-servant, God set Adam as a steward over His creation. Richly bestowing all the wonders and beauties of the creation upon him, He called Adam to rule all things and use all things to bring glory to God, his Creator and Heavenly Father. In the Fall, turning from God to serve Satan and the lie, we, in Adam, forfeited that position, that privilege, and those possessions. Now, though still called to love and obey God, we have become usurpers whom God, in judgment, drives from His presence and His creation. We have no

right to anything in this creation. Only in Christ, who came to do the will of God; only in Christ, the perfect steward; only in Christ, who blotted out our sins as miserable usurpers, are we not only restored to that place of stewardship, but received as sons and daughters. By His grace, we strive now to live out of that place and to expound to our children what it means to be God's steward.

Living out of our place as God's stewards is a blessed privilege, not a dreary task. By grace our stewardship is of a higher order than that of one merely hired for the responsibility; as permanent members of God's own household and heirs in Christ of all that our Father possesses, we will daily thank God, not only for the many gifts He has given us, but also for the privilege we now have to serve Him by and through them. We do this chiefly by means of prayer, and leading our children in prayer, but the motto, "Pray and work" is one we should heed. If we thank God for His gifts and blessings, and moments later complain of the task before us or grumble about the portion for the day, our children may begin to see our expressions of gratitude as a formal exercise instead of the true delight of a thank-

ful heart. The same applies to our children. Repeated moaning about the work that is their responsibility, whether household tasks or studies, or about the food on the table, or about the things they want but do not have, gives us an opportunity to remind them of the thankfulness that accompanies their privilege as steward-children.

Thus, thankful joy will characterize our stewardship of all that God has given us. How does this thankful joy apply to our stewardship of material things? How do we teach this to our children? Since all that we have belongs to God, our first priority will be to show to our chil-

dren the important place of Christian giving, in accordance with the principles of Scripture in II Corinthians 8 and 9 and Proverbs 3:9. As we bring our offerings we explain these principles to our children, set an example before them, and train them from a young age to set aside a portion to give to the Lord.

There are many ways to do this. We can give our children money to put in the offering when they are young, but as they grow older, if we give them an allowance or pay them for household chores, we should teach them to set aside a portion of this in thankfulness for God's blessings. Talking about the various causes for which offerings are received and allowing them to decide to which they will contribute will help them learn to give personally and thoughtfully. We can also teach them to give to those in need by gifts of food, clothing, toys, or helping the elderly or disabled with needed work.

There is far more, however, to Christian stewardship than Christian giving or tithing. Many seem to have the idea that after giving God a tenth, the rest is mine to do with as I like. No. All is God's; ours only in trust. We will strive to avoid

two extremes in teaching our children what it means to be a steward: miserliness, and the extravagant materialism that characterizes our age. Miserliness may not be the best term to describe the first extreme. It is not the kind of miserliness that pinches pennies in order to heap and gather—to build a large bank account. Rather, it is an approach to stewardship that, while properly desiring to be accountable to God for the gifts He has bestowed, often fails to enjoy the gifts, sees everything in severely practical terms, and sometimes sets financial accountability above other equally and sometimes more important virtues like fairness, generosity, and love.

In I Timothy 6:17, we are reminded that the living God "...giveth us richly all things to enjoy." Instructing our children that all belongs to God, we not only explain to them His generous provision for us as His children, but also His will that we live in the enjoyment of His gifts—including not only our daily bread, but the wonders of His creation, including the beauty of music, art, literature, and athletics, to name but a few. There is a necessary place in the life of salvation for delighting in the good creatures of God—never as ends in themselves, always as a means to give thanks to God.

Perhaps a homely example will help to illustrate the point. When we as mothers make or give a special treat to our children, because we love them, we want them to enjoy it, not just to utter a polite "thank you," or to acknowledge that "This will be useful in fulfilling my nutritional requirements." If we give them a present like a bicycle or a microscope, we want to see them use it and enjoy it, not sell it for hard cash. In the same way, we as children live in the true enjoyment of God's gifts. We don't always have to see an immediate "practical" purpose for every expenditure of time or money. Educating our children is about much more than equipping them to earn

*It takes humility
to recognize
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a living—it is schooling them to live as God’s thankful children in the midst of this earthly creation, guiding them to appreciate His gifts by exploring and using them, and by offering up all these benefits and our godly enjoyment of them as a sacrifice of thankfulness to Him.

In a similar vein, when we find a good deal, drive a hard bargain, or haggle for the best possible price, are we necessarily being good stewards and rearing our children in principles of Christian stewardship? With limited means, especially in one-income homes, we need to use the means God has given us wisely. Yet each must examine himself or herself in this area. Is our delight in the “deal” always appropriate? Have we always been strictly honest with ourselves and others, or have we justified what we know to be dubious at best, in the name of stewardship? And when the “deal” is all it should be, do we remember to thank God who has provided for us by these means, or do we congratulate ourselves on our sharp dealing? Because of our sinful natures, thriftiness quickly degenerates into stinginess. Losing sight of the goal stated in the Heidelberg Catechism (LD 42) that we faithfully labor so that we may relieve the needy, we become thrifty as an end in itself. Instead of using our possessions as a means to serve others, we cling to things we no longer need, or use what we have only for our own pleasure. Our children watch, and they will learn by our example.

While living in the enjoyment of God’s gifts, we also seek to avoid the opposite extreme, extravagant materialism. Living in a society in which materialism has become utter madness, we’re not immune to this one either. Television, radio, internet, billboards, magazines, and newspapers all bombard us with the message, “If you want it, you should have it—now! If you don’t want it, you should want it!” We see it in

the pathetic bumper sticker, “Whoever has the most toys when he dies, wins.” When having things is the ultimate goal, how you get them doesn’t really seem to matter much. Some steal them. Others steal to get them, by promising to pay money they do not have, nor ever will have, to credit card companies. The average credit card debt of an American family is reported to be somewhere between \$8,000 and \$10,000. Just as with sexual immorality, this material madness and “charge it” mindset is promoted as the normal lifestyle. If you’re not like this, you’re out of step.

How do we instruct the children of the King to live in the midst of such a world? We do this by setting the positive calling to stewardship before them, while at the same time seriously warning them against the illusion Satan creates of happiness by things, or happiness by experiences, or happiness by technology. We can talk about our own sad experiences in this regard—for we have nearly all had them. While Scripture makes provision for the necessity of borrowing in the case of real need, we will teach our children the principle of living within the means God has provided, of avoiding debt as much as possible. But the most powerful instruction will once again be the fact that we will keep ourselves “unspotted from

Our children watch, and they will learn by our example.


the world,” also in its mad, materialistic rush, that we will not spend money we do not have to get the things we covet, and

that we will seek a lifestyle whose priorities are plainly spiritual.

Another example of extravagance is being wasteful. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of this as “all abuse and waste of His gifts,” in LD 42. We live in a throwaway society. In so many cases, it is cheaper to throw out an old or broken item and buy a new one. Sadly, however, this approach grows in its influence in our lives, and we soon simply throw things

away or waste them with scarcely a twinge of guilt. We fail to care properly for the possessions God has given us, or fail to teach our children to do so, thinking that there’s always more where that came from. The biblical principle is expressed in Proverbs 10:4: “He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich,” and the warning in Proverbs 18:9, “He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.”

It is striking that when Jesus feeds the multitude with an abundance that is amazing, He instructs the disciples to “gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost” (John 6:12). This, by the way, is also a good reason for striving after a certain simplicity in our lifestyle. More possessions demand more time and more energy caring for them, time and energy we could often use far more profitably. Let us labor with the things of this life in such a way that we may say with the servant in the parable, “Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.” Let our stewardship, by grace, be such that our Lord will then say unto us, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:20).

As we examine ourselves and what we have taught our children, we cringe for our sins and failures in this area of Christian stewardship, but the point, for all of us, is not to brood on past failures, but to confess our sins and strive to flee from them. Knowing that ultimately everything in our lives is an issue of how we are living out of our relationship to God as His children, we desire to live as His faithful, joyful stewards in the midst of a world of wasting thieves. We want, more and more, to live in the consciousness that “All that I am I owe to thee.” May God give us grace so to do. 

Evangelism in the Established Church (4)

Practicing Personal Evangelism

Part A: Sharing the Good News

We ought to pause a moment to get our bearing as to where we are going with this series of articles. The general theme is "Personal Evangelism." We are considering this subject in connection with the efforts of each local church to do outreach ministry. Our contention is that any such effort must include and emphasize the importance of personal evangelism by the members of the congregation. We wrote two articles that set forth the legitimacy of the activity within the office of believer: every member of the church has the calling and qualification to share his faith with others. Then we wrote four articles addressing a series of nine hindrances or obstacles that have to be overcome if we are going to practice this calling among us. We now want to direct our attention to the positive side — that is, how we can go about doing this work and what we must keep in mind in actually engaging in personal evangelism. We begin this by considering what it is that we share when we personally evangelize. The answer is simply, we share the good news of the gospel.

Two things have to be said at this point.

First, please remember that by expressing it this way we do not in any way minimize the importance of the preaching of the gospel. This

seems to be the biggest difficulty we face in giving a proper place to personal evangelism. I would think that in light of what we have written in the past, this ought to be acceptable to our readers. The preaching of the gospel is God's way of declaring the good news of salvation to everyone, whether in the local church or on the mission field. It is because of the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit through the preached word that the believers who embrace this word are equipped to take the word preached and function in their office of believers and practice personal evangelism. Also, the great goal of personal evangelism is to excite others to come and hear the preaching of the word in the established church. Personal evangelism is no threat to the preaching of the gospel. It depends upon it and expands its usefulness outside the walls of the congregation. We have cited enough passages from the Bible in our past writings so that we can now move on.

Secondly, as we say something about the content of the gospel, the good news that is shared with others by our personal evangelism, we must of necessity be brief. We speak of everything we learn from our pastors as they preach to us every Lord's Day. We grow through our own reading of the Bible and personal study. We talk about our faith with fellow Christians and members of the congregation and learn from their experiences how the Bible speaks to them

and how they apply it to their own lives as children of God. We ask, what do we say to non-Christians, nominal Christians, or even weak and seeking Christians, when we share with them the gospel? The broad answer is: everything that God gives to us in the Bible and that forms for us the basis of the good news that means so much to us personally. We want, now, to condense and simplify this knowledge so that we can better witness personally to others.

For our encouragement, we are among the most equipped and blessed people on the face of the earth to know what to say. There are precious few churches that have such a solid catechism program, Bible Study meetings for every age, and good preaching on the Lord's Day as we do as churches. Our members, including our youth, have every advantage to know and appreciate the gospel. Even controversy has sharpened our knowledge in areas of doctrine and life. What a difference there is between us and new converts who have opportunity personally to evangelize and do their best with their limited knowledge and experience. We do not say that they are not qualified to do this, because then we deny God's work in them, and experience testifies the opposite. In their "first love" God enables them to reach out to others and be a blessing to bring into the church many other non-Christians. From the point of view of ability to know what to say and how to express it, we have some ad-

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vantage over them. This ought to encourage us to press on with the task. They have the advantage of “first love” motivation, which most of us lack. Our difficulty and lack is the motivation to go out and do it. This is why new converts in the midst of the congregation are such a blessing and motivation for us all.

Where do we start when we have the opportunity to share the good news of the gospel with someone who is not a Christian?

Let’s just give a few highlights.

First, we must begin with God!

The Bible does this: “In the beginning God...” The good news of the gospel is all about our God. The world is full of false gods. As we do personal evangelism, we do not have to take up controversy with those around us first thing. If we are truly converted to God, we have in our hearts an excitement of who our God is. We cannot help but speak to others about all His wonderful works. “Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works ... if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered” (Ps. 40:5). I recall during a visit to India that we had opportunity on a Sunday morning to speak about our God as a Friend (something quite foreign to any other god). The occasion was our praying together in a local coffee shop during breakfast and a local Muslim came up and asked if we were Christians. He wanted to speak with us. We talked for over an hour with him about who our God really is. That is where the gospel begins.

You may ask, should we not begin by pointing out that a non-Christian is a sinner in need of Jesus? The answer is that such a person will never know his sins, unless he stands before the God of the Bible. People have so many ideas about sin; even heathen people do, and they quite often speak about

hell for sinners. When we share the gospel with non-Christians (and even other Christians who are not Reformed) the issue is always, who is God. When we speak about the holiness and justice of God as set forth in the Bible, such a person begins to realize that the one true God is pure and cannot tolerate any sin. God defines what sin is, and we stand before Him as if we are in His courtroom and He is the judge who makes such determination.

This is done so effectively in Romans. After the greeting, Paul expresses to the Roman Christians his desire to bring the gospel to them, and he details that gospel in terms of the “righteousness of God” (1:17). Furthermore, he defines the heart of the gospel in terms of justification by faith (1:17). He does not hesitate, then, to speak of the wrath of God upon the wicked, pointing out that idolatry is not ignorance but conscious rejection of the God revealed in creation, and therefore they are accountable to Him even though they wallow in their immorality, including homosexuality (1:20-32).

This is also done in our Heidelberg Catechism. I have already used Romans as the biblical basis for “proofing” the Catechism, because it follows the same pattern as the Catechism. I know my comfort, so as to live and die happily in the threefold knowledge of how great my sins and miseries are, how I am delivered from my sins in Christ, and how I shall express my gratitude towards God for that deliverance. If you examine the Catechism in the first part, man’s sinfulness is determined by God Himself. God is the One who defines sin, and not just as a few wrongful deeds, but as sinfulness rooted in our fallen human nature.

Second, the important link between sharing the virtues and praises of God and confronting the sinner with his guilt before God is

the sovereignty of God. The Reformed faith is so helpful in this regard. You need but speak a few moments with a non-Christian about God and sin and he will soon make this point: “Why should I accept your God as telling me what to do? I have my own religion; you have yours. Nice to meet you!” The answer to that is God’s sovereignty, though we might not want to use that word, because the non-Christian would not understand it. We have to press on with this observation, that God has the right to expect every human being to behave himself on His terms and to define sin according to His standard, because He has created the universe and preserves every human being. We must point out that we are talking to each other this very moment because of God’s care.

Now is the time to focus on the origin of man and how God created him. This God is so great that He not only made the first man and woman, but continues providentially to keep the universe in place. God made the first couple perfect and without sin. Man voluntarily disobeyed God, even after God had warned him, “the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” Adam represented every human being, hence God’s punishment justly falls on everyone of us. Romans 5:12, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” From that moment on, the human race became spiritually enemies of God, lovers of pleasure, as described in Romans 1:20-32. Their very nature became, as the Catechism says, “incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil.” God had every right to punish the entire human race with physical death at that moment, “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). He could have destroyed the heaven and earth right then and there. But He did not. Why not? The answer is that He willed to save a people whom

*...we are among
the most equipped
and blessed people
on the face
of the earth
to know
what to say.*

He had chosen in Jesus Christ His Son. He had planned, even before He had created man, that man would fall into sin; but, more than that, He also planned a way of salvation. With His eye upon saving His people, God preserves the universe and keeps every natural law in place. We owe our existence to Him who is the Lord of the universe. He has the right to tell us how to live and to call us to account.

Third, Jesus is God's Son, whom He gave to die on the cross to satisfy His own justice and merit forgiveness. Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Also, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). This is the heart of the good news of the gospel. Because there is among many heathen religions mention of gods having a family and sending family members to earth to do all sorts of things with mankind, this can easily be confused as just another such narrative. The emphasis here must be on the unique way in which God sent His Son. He Fathered Him by means of a virgin, so that His Son was both God and man. This was necessary, as His work on earth was to make payment for man's sins, and the debt of sin was everlasting punishment in hellfire. The cross has a wonder about it in that it is not just a story of a good man who was made the victim by evil men, but it is God's cross. He willed that His Son be on that cross as the only way in which He could put on His Son His just wrath for the sins of His people. God gave His own Son as the substitute in place of man, who could never bear it. This sets forth the amazing depth of God's love for His children; He punished His Son in order to spare us. The resurrection becomes, then, the confirmation on God's part that His Son bore this punishment and God was satisfied. The cross reveals both justice and mercy or love in amazing harmony.

Fourth, our proper response to this wonderful work of God in giving us His Son is to acknowledge our sins by repentance (heartfelt sorrow and desire to forsake them) and to embrace Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. Romans 4:25; 5:1: "Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." At this point, the great truth of our justification by God through faith must be set forth. Justification is of great value because it establishes the legal basis for our being adopted as God's children and enjoying the benefits of forgiveness of sin and everlasting inheritance. The condemned sinner must hear from God the Judge that he is righteous by means of his faith in Jesus. He is not righteous on the basis of his faith, because faith is God's wonderful gift to us by grace (Eph. 2:8-10). Faith is the means or the tool that God uses to join us to His Son Jesus Christ, and through that union imparts to us the benefits of His suffering and death.

That faith includes our active response to the call of the gospel. Romans 10:9, 10: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." For this reason, in our presentation of the gospel, the matter of confession of the Lord Jesus must not be simply stated as a fact (abstractly as a biblical teaching), but must be set forth as an urgent and necessary response. To our listener, our personal witnessing does not differ one bit from the call of the gospel set forth in the preaching of the gospel as far as the message is concerned. The difference is that in

the preaching Christ Himself addresses the sinner; in our personal evangelism we share the message as we talk about God and His Son, Jesus. This is why we want to lead a seeking soul to the feet of Jesus, who speaks in the midst of His church by the word preached.

Finally, what is a proper response to God for this salvation? It is a thankful and obedient life. Romans 13:8-10: "Owe no man anything, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." One of the joys of personal witnessing is to help a young Christian learn to say thanks by teaching him to pray, to emphasize that holy living is not by force, but by thankful response and willingness of heart. This becomes the beginning of a lifelong pilgrimage of changed living to the glory of God.

I close with this threefold summary.

First, use of the Bible is important, for God speaks through His Word. Memorize the location of key passages that will help you in your sharing of the good news. Use the Book of Romans.

Second, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The apostles said the same, "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This makes it so urgent for us. Not only do we rejoice in the God of our sal-

Memorize the location of key passages that will help you in your sharing of the good news.

vation, but we know He is the only God, and Jesus is the only Savior. The burden and motivation to speak of Him in personal evangelism is the salvation of souls. We don't know whom God is pleased to save, thus we care about every soul that crosses our pathway, for

it may be God's very purpose in placing that person there, that we direct him to the Savior.

Finally, faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). The emphasis there is on the preached word. Personal witnessing is God's means to prepare the heart for that

great work of salvation. None of us knows just when and how God saves a soul, but one thing is sure, He uses personal witnessing and preaching as the means to accomplish it. For that we must be eternally grateful to God.

It is His wonderful work. 

Search the Scriptures

Prof. Herman Hanko

The Charter of Christian Liberty (6) An Exposition of the Book of Galatians

Paul's Defense of His Apostolic Credentials (1:1 - 2:14)

Paul's Surprise at and Warning Against Apostasy Among the Galatians

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ."

Galatians 1:6, 7

Having concluded his greetings, and being about to start the defense of his apostleship, Paul first of all expresses amazement at the rapid apostasy that came into the churches of Galatia. The sudden turn to this subject and the way in which the words are formulated speak of something bottled up, as it were, in the apostle's heart, something that suddenly bursts out in an unexpected cry of surprise.

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"How is it possible," the apostle shouts, "that in just a few years you who professed faith in the true gospel now suddenly abandon it?"

The address of the gospel in the preaching is frequently misunderstood. Some ministers address their congregations as "audiences" or mere "hearers" to whom a religious address is now to be given. It is common in our day to have "children's services," in which children are separated from the congregation, addressed separately, and then dismissed from the worship, the preaching being only for adults, apparently. Others consider their audience in whole or in part as unconverted, and evangelistic sermons (usually in the evening) are the order of the Lord's Day. All this is dreadfully wrong.

From Paul's general address to the churches in Galatia and to all their members, including the children, one might conclude that all these churches had totally and completely turned away from the truth into terrible heresy. He addresses them all, after all, as having turned aside from the One who has called them. Such a conclusion is, how-

ever, not correct. We must remember that the apostle is addressing the entire congregation organically. Throughout the epistle he uses different expressions: Sometimes he calls them "foolish Galatians who have been bewitched"; then again he does not hesitate to call them "brethren" or "little children"; then again he directs words to them that suggest that one or two in the congregation are ringleaders, and he expresses a desire that those who trouble the congregations be cut off. All these varied expressions are addressed to the same people.

The congregations in Galatia are, organically considered, churches of Jesus Christ. They are composed of God's elect church, but as that church is found in the world. Here below, before the church is brought to heaven, the church has in it carnal members. From the viewpoint of the error in these churches, there were undoubtedly wicked men, unregenerate, evil-minded, who were bent on leading the churches into heresy. These men had their followers, perhaps in all the congregations. Their followers were their lackeys, bask-

ing in the notoriety of the leaders and as wicked as those whom they followed. There were also people of God in the congregations, for the churches were Christ's churches in which Christ dwelt. Some of these people of God resisted the inroads of heresy. Others, while worried about it, did nothing. Yet others were wavering, wondering whether there might not be some merit in what all these Judaizers were saying. And some, more heavily influenced by the heretics, were strongly inclined to repudiate Paul's teachings.

To all of these God's Word through Paul is addressed. The congregations with all their members received this letter. Sometimes the letter speaks to the congregation from the viewpoint of the ungodly in their midst; sometimes addressing the wavering; sometimes from the aspect of the great danger in which the whole congregation stands; but all always the recipients of the word of the apostle.

This is the same way in which the organism of the nation of Israel or Judah was addressed by the prophets in the Old Testament. Words of warning, rebuke, and terrible judgment are mixed with words of peace, comfort, and glorious promises. So the Word is proclaimed today in the church of Christ. The church is not pure, for a carnal element is present and reprobate seed are to be found in it. Yet, God's people need also to hear the words of rebuke, for they are sinful. The carnal seed need to hear warnings, for they are called to repentance. Further, all need to hear the promises of the gospel. The elect need to be comforted as they appropriate these promises by faith; and the wicked need to hear these promises, for Christ is presented in the gospel as God's means of salvation, so that through faith in Him those who believe are saved. Thus the Word, which comes to the whole congregation, must be a word of rebuke and warning as well as of comfort.

It is like a farmer's field in which wheat is planted and grows, but in which also are to be found weeds. The farmer cultivates the entire field, irrigates if necessary, sees the sun shine on wheat and weeds, sprays the entire field for insects and thistles, and fears the "judgments" of hail and strong winds. The whole field is the concern of the farmer, but, of course, only for the sake of what is planted in it. So God deals with His church.

... So soon....

How long a time was it between Paul's first missionary journey and the apostasy that reared its ugly head in these churches? Whenever this epistle was written, and the date of its writing cannot be established with certainty, the time between Paul's first missionary journey and this epistle could not have been very long. The New Testament church was established on Pentecost in approximately the year A.D. 31. Paul's conversion took place a few years later, around A.D. 35. Paul suffered martyrdom in Rome somewhere in the later 60s, perhaps around A.D. 67. At most, therefore, only twenty years or so could have passed between the conversion of the Galatians and their apostasy. And if the epistle was written early (as some contend), less than twenty years had elapsed between Paul's ministry among them and this sad departure under the influence of Judaizers. That is indeed reason for amazement.

But there be some that trouble you

There is one thought of the apostle that moderates somewhat his surprise. It is expressed in the clause "but there be some that trouble you." It is not as if the churches themselves, without any reason whatsoever, drifted so soon from the pure gospel into grossest heresy; the matter is rather that there were men in the congrega-

tions, members of them, confessing faith in Christ, who nevertheless were leading the congregations astray. This fact does not take away the surprise of the apostle, for the people themselves were being persuaded by these unscrupulous members of the churches. But it did tend to explain the hasty departure from the truth that so much concerned the apostle.

Him that called you in the grace of Christ

That the heresy that was being promoted by these Judaizers was serious is evident in every word the apostle speaks in these verses. Let us not forget that the fundamental issue was justification by faith alone vs. justification by faith and works. There are those today, found in churches of the Reformation, laboring in denominations that have for centuries treasured the great central truth of the Reformation (justification by faith alone), who are teaching the precise doctrine that Paul combats in this epistle. The words of these verses ought to frighten such teachers, as it must have frightened the Galatians.

First of all, Paul accuses them of turning away from the One who had called them in the grace of Christ. This is a surprising way of describing their apostasy, but a powerful indication of the seriousness of it. They have turned away, not only from the gospel, but also from God. The apostle does not mean to deny that their departure has been from the gospel, but he means to underscore the fact that such departure is from God Himself. Their attraction to and acceptance of the gospel by faith was not a mere persuasion of the veracity of a number of propositions concerning religious matters; when they believed the gospel that Paul preached, they believed in Christ proclaimed in the gospel and in God who called them.

The reference is to the efficacious call of the gospel. Through

the preaching and call of the gospel they had been sovereignly and irresistibly called out of darkness into light, out of the corrupt age of which they were a part, to the glories of fellowship with God in Christ and the blessings of salvation.

That calling had come to them “in the grace of Christ.”¹ The apostle means to say that the efficacious call of the gospel had come within the sphere of the grace of Christ; i.e., Christ had earned, by His sacrifice on the cross, the grace by which God saves His people. The word “in” has almost the meaning of “by means of.” The AV has the sense that the calling brought us out of the sphere of sin and death into the sphere of grace. And, while that is true in itself, the emphasis here falls on the fact that it was grace that was the reason for the call that saved. Again, the apostle looks at this point from the perspective of the controversy in Galatia: grace or works. “Remember,” the apostle says to the Galatians, “it was grace that brought about and made effective your calling, which brought you into the blessedness of salvation; not your works. Now you want to deny that you were called because of God’s unmerited favor earned in the cross; that, brethren, is a departure from God Himself.”

We may not conclude that their apostasy from the God who called them was a falling away from grace, a falling away of saints. The apostle is addressing the congregation as a whole. The heresy that they were in danger of making their own was so serious that it carried them away from God; that is, from God’s grace, favor, love, blessing, and fellowship. From the point of view of God’s work, that can never happen to His elect, but from the point of view of the Galatians, that is exactly what they were doing. If they were elect, they would repent; if they were reprobate, they never were believers, but were rather hypocrites in the church.

Unto another gospel, which is not another

The second point that places an exclamation mark behind their apostasy is the words “into another gospel, which is not another.” The expression, as it stands in the AV, is puzzling and confusing. At best, the AV seems to suggest that Paul is saying, “The heresy into which you are about to enter is another gospel, but not so seriously another gospel that you need worry unduly about it. It is little more than a variation, minor in every respect, from what I preached.” Such an interpretation, however, would negate all that the apostle had said and that he will say with such vehemence later on in the epistle.

The solution lies in the fact that there are, in the Greek, two words for “another,” both of which are used here, but with quite different meanings. Supposing that a man were talking about mushrooms and explaining to an audience the difference between edible mushrooms and poisonous mushrooms. Taking a poisonous mushroom in his hands, he might say to his audience, “This is not simply another mushroom (somewhat different in appearance from these lying here on the table, that are edible); this is another mushroom (of an entirely different kind, the difference being so great that if you would eat this one you would die).” That is what Paul is saying here.

The Galatians have turned away from God to a gospel of an entirely different kind, which to believe ends in death.² That other gospel to which they have turned is *not* simply another gospel, differing from the true gospel only in non-essentials.³ There are such differences. Every preacher has his own style of preaching, his own way of doing exegesis, his own manner of expressing things, and his own unique viewpoint of the text. Ministers differ from each other in many respects. This enriches the congregations to which they minister and the churches they

serve. They all preach the same gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But one who preaches salvation by faith and works does not preach the gospel at all, but comes with a different kind of gospel. This dreadful sin was committed by the Judaizers in the Galatian churches.

And, because they were leading the people into another gospel of a different kind, they were leading the people away from God into the thorny thickets of apostasy.

There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ

There is yet a third way in which Paul indicates the seriousness of the apostasy present in the churches. He describes those who are teaching false doctrine as “some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ.” This is a powerful statement.

False teachers had entered the Galatian churches. They had done so under the pretense of faith in Christ. They were, however, wicked men. The Galatians must not think, Paul says, that these men have only an imperfect understanding of the gospel, that because they are new converts they do not see things very clearly as yet. They are, in actual fact, not men who have the love of the church in their hearts but are mistaken on a relatively insignificant matter. They must not be dealt with charitably, lovingly, patiently. Their error must not be tolerated in the church.

1. It is better to translate the phrase “in the grace of Christ” rather than the AV’s use of “into.”

2. The Greek word is *heteros*. It appears in such words as heterodoxy, which means teaching of an entirely different kind and, consequently, heresy.

3. The Greek word here is *allos*, which means another of the same kind, in the way that a Persian cat is another cat, but of a particular variety.

The fact is that they desire to *corrupt* the gospel of Christ. That is their motive for and purpose in teaching what they do

The gospel is the gospel of Christ. It is of Christ because it has as its sole content Christ and Him crucified. It is also the gospel of Christ because it originates with Him, and through it Christ Himself speaks to His church, for His sheep hear *His* voice when they hear the preaching. That gospel is the very truth of God Himself.

That gospel is deliberately, consciously, and wickedly corrupted by the Judaizers. They know and understand what Paul preached. They do not want that gospel. They change it into another gospel, which makes the true gospel unrecognizable, and they do so for wicked reasons.

This is almost always the case in the church. It may happen, of course, that a minister preaches error because he has an imperfect un-

derstanding of the truth.⁴ But if a man had such a poor understanding of the truth, he should not have been permitted entrance into the ministry in the first place. However that may be, usually the truth is deliberately corrupted. It is corrupted in sly, confusing, deceptive ways, so that it sounds as much like the truth as a skillful heretic can make it; but his motives are not the propagation of the truth of Scripture but the corruption of the truth. That was the case with the Judaizers. They *desired* to corrupt the truth. The words of the AV, “they *would* corrupt the gospel,” must be interpreted to mean, “they *willed* to corrupt the gospel.”

It was in this way that they troubled the churches. The result of their agitation for heresy was not that they caused some mental turmoil among the members of the churches so that people were saying, “We are somewhat troubled by what these men are teaching.” The

meaning is rather that the Judaizers troubled the churches because they were imperiling the salvation of the saints. They were robbing the members of the church of their faith and leading them away from God, who had called them in the grace of Christ. That is what heretics do. That is what those who teach justification by faith and works do. They imperil the salvation of God’s people and bring upon the church trouble of the worst sort. What terrible responsibility to have in the judgment day when, before the throne of Christ the Head of His church, such men must explain their actions of leading the church away from the truth.



4. This seems to have been the case, for example, with Appolonaris, who taught, in the fourth century, that Christ had a human body but a divine soul. See my sketch of him in *Portraits of Faithful Saints*.

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Charles Grandison Finney: Revivalist (3)

Introduction

Charles Finney is usually considered to be the father of the Second Great Awakening. He became a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the US without attending any seminary and with only an incomplete college education. He remained a minister in the Presbyterian Church until the

time he became professor of theology in Oberlin Institute in Ohio. Just before he moved to Oberlin he resigned from the Presbyterian Church and established a Congregational church. He remained Congregational the rest of his life.

It is something of a mystery how he managed to remain a minister in good standing in the Presbyterian Church in the US, because Finney departed from the doctrines and creeds of the denomination at significant points. He was, in his doctrinal position, an out-and-out Pelagian — insofar as he paid any attention at all to doctrine, for he

was indifferent towards and uninterested in doctrinal matters.

His life revolved around revivals. And his reputation even today is of a great revivalist who brought awakening to a dead church. He developed a doctrine of revivals in which he claimed that revivals were brought about by men, seeming to eliminate the Holy Spirit’s work altogether. He claimed that in his day revival could be brought only by him — which was, as a matter of fact, true. When he went on a cruise in the Mediterranean Sea, or when on three different occasions he went

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to England, revivalism in America disappeared and churches fell back into spiritual lethargy.

He developed a method of revival preaching in which emotional preaching was dominant, and the anxious bench, the precursor of the altar call, was the means to force people to make an immediate decision for Christ.

Because it is not necessary to show how the Pelagianism of Finney's views is unbiblical, and because Finney is especially noted for his revivalism, it is my purpose in this article to concentrate on the wrong of revivalistic doctrine and method.

It is clear that many supporters of revivalism appeal to the divine origin of revivals on the grounds that there is no other explanation for what takes place at a revival than that it is the work of the Holy Spirit. I shall not attempt to engage in a religious or psychological explanation for the bizarre behavior that frequently characterizes revivals, or even for the mass turnings to religion that are supposed to be the fruits of revivals. Mass hysteria explains much of it, especially because of what the Welsh, famous for their revivals, call a *hywl*. This term is used to describe the peculiar tone of voice and inflection that a revival preacher uses to arouse people's emotions and to bring about what is truly a hypnotic state.

Hugh L. Williams writes in the *British Reformed Journal* concerning Finney:

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century came the theology and practice of that arch-Pelagian Charles Grandison Finney, with his "new measures." Finney organized the "anxious seat" method, in which new converts were exhorted to come to the front of the meeting and make profession of their faith, a practice that still characterizes much of evangelicalism to this day. In addition, Finney was able to deploy certain personal characteristics he had developed, the virtually hyp-

notic state, the sustained emotional harangue, and the branding of local ministers and elders as failures and hypocrites because their churches were (by Finney's standard) "dead." This contagious egocentric wrote voluminously, and his literature on "revival" amounted to being a manual of "how-to-do-it."

My concern in this article is the question: Are revivals biblical? That is, do the Scriptures ever give any indication that the Holy Spirit works in a revivalistic way when He saves Christ's church? Our answer to that question will determine our entire attitude towards revivals.

No Revivals in Scripture

If one attempts to find any evidence of revivals taking place in Bible times and recorded in Scripture, one's search is futile. Scripture gives no evidence of anything approaching revivals. Defenders of revivals attempt to show that Scripture does contain records of revivals by appealing to reformation brought about in Israel during the times of Samuel (I Sam. 7:1-12) and reformation such as took place during the reigns of Asa (II Chron. 15), Hezekiah (II Chron. 29-31), and Josiah (II Chron. 34, 35:1-19). But there are three reasons why appeals to these reformations are spurious. 1) They bear no resemblance whatsoever to the revivals that took place in our dispensation. 2) Though revivals are defined as being special visitations of the Holy Spirit, this could not have happened in the Old Testament times, because, as Scripture points out to us: "the Holy Ghost was not yet given" (John 7:39). 3) Israel was a picture, not of a given nation such as America or Wales, but of the spiritual church of Christ. Within the nation, Christ was being carried. God preserved the nation through good kings who brought about a measure of reformation so that Christ could come in the fullness of time. But such reformations have no resemblance to revivals.

Others appeal to Pentecost as a revival. How foolish such an appeal is! Pentecost was the time when the ascended Christ poured out His Spirit upon the church for the first time. That outpouring of the Spirit was not accompanied by bizarre behavior and strange conduct, but by signs that spoke of the work of the Spirit in the people of God and in the new dispensational church. It was a once-for-all event, though the Spirit continues in the church forever in the same way He was present with the church on Pentecost.

Revivals and the Church Institute

Revivalists worked in biblically wrong ways because of their disdain for the church institute.

Christ has established the church institute in the world for the sole purpose of preaching the gospel. Not only is the task of preaching the gospel given to the church institute, but the church institute is the only institution in the world that has the *right* to preach the gospel. By the preaching of the gospel through the church institute, Christ "gathers, defends, and preserves" His church. This task the church performs through ministers who are sent by, are under the direction of, and are answerable to the church. Revivals were carried on mostly by itinerant preachers, holding office in no church, working entirely on their own, preaching without ecclesiastical credentials, and answerable to no ecclesiastical body. Christ does not work that way.

Revivalists, with their frequent indifference to doctrine, were almost always broadly ecumenical. They, apart from their own personal beliefs, were willing to cooperate with anyone and everyone, in spite of heresy and unbiblical teachings. Arminians, Pelagians, deniers of infant baptism — revival brushed it all aside in the name of restoring spirituality to the church. In other words, revivalists believed that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit whom Christ has given to the church to lead the church into all truth, did not any

longer care about truth when He began His revivalistic work.

Revivalists did not seek the unity of the church, but were divisive in their work and frequently brought schism to the church. This is a major point in Charles Hodge's scathing critique of revivals in the Introduction to the book *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church*. Revivalists damned the church as dead. They frequently entered congregations without the approval of the officebearers and began to preach to the people — if not in the church building itself, then in any appropriate place. They charged the ministers with being unregenerate if the ministers refused to cooperate with revivalistic efforts. And they did their work independent of the church in which they were working.


Frequently a distinction is made by modern evangelists between preaching in the established church and evangelistic preaching. Perhaps a morning service is for the members, but the evening service is evangelistic. But such a distinction leaves one with a truncated view of the gospel, and evangelistic preaching is no longer the preaching of the whole counsel of God, but is geared to create an atmosphere conducive to conversion. True preaching makes no distinction between preaching in the con-

gregation and outreach to the unconverted. Hughes Oliphant Olds, in discussing the preaching of Clement of Alexandria, calls attention to Clement's preaching, which made no distinction between preaching in the church and evangelistic preaching so-called.

Our sermon [the sermon of Clement on which the author is commenting, HH] ends by calling all who are present to repentance. The preacher begs his listeners to repent from the bottom of their hearts that they might be saved. Evangelism did not require a special message preached for the unconverted, different from the one for the converted, nor did it mandate that the faithful hear and enthusiastically support again and again evangelistic sermons that were not really directed to them. Rather, when Christ is proclaimed as Lord and Savior, when God's promises are proclaimed and a witness is given that God is faithful and that in Christ those promises have been fulfilled, and will yet be fulfilled, then evangelism is done. Whenever the way of life which Christ taught his disciples is shown to be the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets, then evangelism is done. Whenever the beauty and the power and the sheer joy of holiness are proclaimed and God's people see that this is something for them, evangelism is done. When Christian preaching is done the way it should be done, then it is evangelistic.

Revivalism and Mysticism

It is not surprising that revivals and charismatic meetings have many things in common, for both are mystical. Mysticism speaks of revelation directly from God to the individual without the mediation of Scripture. Wesley believed he had such direct contact with God; so did Finney. As we noticed in an earlier article, Finney frequently spoke of inner voices or feelings that guided him in what he did and where he went.

Robert G. Tuttle, himself a Wesleyan Methodist, points out in his book *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition* that mysticism tends to bypass Jesus Christ. This is understandable. Scripture tells us that Christ is the revelation of God, and he who sees Christ sees God also. Jesus tells Philip at the time of the Last Supper, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). When mystics claim to have direct contact with God, as Evan Roberts, the father of the Welsh Revival of 1904-1905, claimed, and as Finney claimed, they were bypassing Christ. From bypassing Christ in revelations, it is inevitable that such mysticism would also bypass Christ in prayer, in faith, and in doctrine. Finney really had no room for Christ in his theology and preaching. 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. James Laning

The Idea and Importance of Sacraments (2)

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Previous article in this series: *March 1, 2006, p. 247.*

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The sacraments are holy, visible signs and seals given by Christ to the church to confirm the faith of His covenant people. They are not empty signs, as some make them out to be. Rather, they really are

means of grace by which the Spirit of Christ strengthens the faith that He has worked by the preaching.

They are not empty signs, but seals. They seal unto us God's promise, and thus confirm or strengthen our faith. Therefore, to

understand the sacraments one must understand what is meant by a seal.

The Sacraments as Seals

There are many kinds of seals that are used to assure people of something. A seal on a letter assures the reader that the signature at the bottom is genuine. A seal on a medicine bottle serves to assure the buyer that no one has tampered with the bottle's contents. Similarly, the sacraments are seals, which means they are something that God uses to assure us.

The truth of which the sacraments assure us is this: God is really giving to us the salvation in Christ that He has promised. By means of the sacraments Christ assures God's people that as really as they receive the sacrament, so really do they receive the invisible grace that is signified by it.

The sacraments have this assuring effect upon God's people because Christ has added a promise to the sacraments. The Heidelberg Catechism points this out in its explanation of both baptism and the Lord's Supper. The believer confesses that Christ has added this promise to baptism:

That I am as certainly washed by His blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water, by which the filthiness of the body is commonly washed away. (Q. 69)

And then he goes on to confess that Christ has added the following promises to the Lord's Supper:

... first, that His blood was offered and broken on the cross for me, and His blood shed for me, as certainly as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup communicated to me; and further, that He feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, with His crucified body and shed blood, as assuredly as I receive from the hands of the min-

ister, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, as certain signs of the body and blood of Christ. (Q. 75)

This explains why the believer has his faith strengthened by means of the sacraments. It is because Christ has added a promise to the sacraments. He has promised to give His people the very blessings that they see signified by the sacraments.

It is Christ's promise that assures us. And it is because Christ has added His promise to the sacraments that they function as seals that assure us, strengthening our faith.

A Real Means of Grace

What has just been said serves to point out that the sacraments really are a means of grace. Although receiving the sacraments is not necessary for salvation, there really is grace that comes to us by means of the sacraments.

There are many churches (e.g., most Baptist churches) that deny that baptism and the Lord's Supper are means of grace. They often refuse to call these two by the name of *sacraments*, and instead prefer to call them *ordinances*. We use both terms (*ordinances* and *sacraments*) to refer to them. But the latter term they reject. The term *sacraments* comes from the Latin term *sacramentum*, and has long been used by the church to refer to a church ordinance that is both a sign and a means of grace. Therefore, those who deny that baptism and the Lord's Supper are means of grace often refuse to call them sacraments.

But means of grace they are, and they are such because of the promise that Christ has attached to them. But this is precisely the point that many deny. Where did Christ attach a promise to these two ordinances? That is the question many ask us when we confess that baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments. And again the

Heidelberg Catechism serves as an instructor through which our fathers point us to the correct answer.

Q. 71 Where has Christ promised us, that He will as certainly wash us by His blood and Spirit, as we are washed with the water of baptism?

A. 71 In the institution of baptism, which is thus expressed: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." This promise is also repeated, where the scripture calls baptism the washing of regeneration, and the washing away of sins.

Q. 77 Where has Christ promised that He will as certainly feed and nourish believers with His body and blood, as they eat of this broken bread, and drink of this cup?

A. 77 In the institution of the supper, which is thus expressed: "The Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said: Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying: this cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For, as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come."

This promise is repeated by the holy apostle Paul, where he says: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body; because we are all partakers of that one bread."

This is where our fathers found the promise that Christ attached to the sacraments. They found it first of all in the words Christ spoke in connection with the institution of each sacrament. Then, secondly,

they found this promise repeated in other places in the New Testament. Our fathers rightly saw that when the Scriptures called baptism the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16), and when Christ called the bread His body and the cup His blood (Mark 14:22-24), this amounted to a promise to give along with the sign the grace that it signifies. This promise, however, is only to the elect, and they alone are the ones that receive grace by means of the sacraments.

A Particular Means of Grace

When considering the sacraments, it is of utmost importance that we distinguish the signs (i.e., the sacraments) from the grace that they signify. The minister administers the sacrament; Christ gives that which is signified by the sacrament. This is the official Reformed position, as it is confessed in Article 34 of the Belgic Confession:

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.


The sign is not the same as the grace that it signifies. Some who receive the sacrament receive only the sacrament, and not the grace.

Since the sacraments confirm faith, one must have faith to be blessed by them. The Spirit works faith by the preaching of the gospel and confirms it by the use of the sacraments. The sacraments are a secondary means of grace, used to confirm or strengthen the faith that is already there. Therefore one must have faith, in order to receive the blessing of having that faith confirmed by the sacraments.

The thing signified is received only by those who believe the Word. The grace signified is found in the Word, which is Christ. So only those who believe the Word receive the grace that is signified by the sacrament. Thus the sacraments must be used in connection with the preaching of that Word,

in order to function as a means of grace to those who use them rightly, partaking of them by faith.

The grace in the sacraments, as well as the grace in the preaching of the gospel, is particular. The two means of grace must go together. If there was grace in the sacraments for all that partook of them, then one would expect that there would also be grace in the preaching for all that hear it. But such is not the case. There are many who receive the sacrament, but do not receive the grace that is signified by it. The grace in the sacraments is particular. Similarly the grace in the preaching is particular, being a blessing only to those who embrace the Word by faith.

The sacraments are signs of the covenant, given by Christ to the church to be administered by her. Thus it is not surprising that different views on the covenant and church of Jesus Christ manifest themselves in different views of the sacraments. Lord willing, this will be considered next time. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Young People's Activities

The News is convinced that if you had the time, money, and appetite this time of year, you could quite possibly eat your way across North America, stopping at various of our congregations for either breakfast, dinner, or perhaps even a little shopping. Recent bulletins have been full of fund-raisers, organized by our young people, raising money for this summer's Young People's convention. You could have started at the Loveland, CO PRC on January 14 with a pancake breakfast, then driven on to West Michigan, join-

ing the congregation at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI for their pancake supper on January 21. After that you could have headed out to the west coast and the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA to join their young people for a rummage sale on January 28. Then off to the Doon, IA congregation for a taco dinner on February 2, before ending up at the Edgerton, MN PRC for their young people sponsored Candlelight Supper on February 13.

While your thoughts are on young people and their upcoming convention this summer, we also take the opportunity to remind you that this year's convention, hosted by the Young People's Societies of the Doon and Hull, IA PRCs, will be held at Dordt College in Sioux Center, IA on July 24-28. The theme of this year's convention is

"Running the Race." Rev. A. Brummel, Rev. G. Eriks, and Rev. D. Overway will be speaking. Check out www.prypconvention.com for more information.

The Youth Group of the Lynden, WA OCRC invited both the Young People's Society and the Young Adult Society of the Lynden PRC to join them for an evening of games and fun on February 3 at the Lynden YMCA.

The young people of the Hudsonville, MI PRC were able to enjoy a day of skiing and snow boarding at Caberfa Ski Lodge on January 20. The following day the young people of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI were also able to enjoy skiing and snow boarding at Caberfa.

The Young People's Society of the South Holland, IL PRC met recently for their usual Bible study

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

after an evening worship service. In addition to a study of the book of Job, the young people also enjoyed a discussion on the subject of enlisting in the military.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Randolph, WI PRC has developed a church website. It can be viewed at www.randolphprc.org. The site can be accessed now; but it will remain under construction for some time yet.

Young Adult Activities

The Young Adults of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL invited the young adults from the area churches around Bethel to join them for a Chinatown outing in Chicago, IL on February 4. Plans called for the afternoon to begin with a walkabout tour of Chinatown, with Mrs. Esther Mahtani (who is Chinese) serving as tour guide. Stops included a visit to a Chinese Christian bookstore, a Chinese church, tea testing in a Tea and Herb Store, and a taste of Chinese candy at a Chinese grocery store. Then, late in the afternoon, the forty or so young adults enjoyed an eight-course dinner at the Three Happiness Restaurant, after which they were treated to an evening at the Crown Arena, to watch the Chinese New Year Festival. After the concert the group returned to the restaurant for dessert and a time of reflection and devotions.

The Young Adults of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI served as hosts for a retreat held at the Farmstead Inn in Shipshewana, IN Friday and Saturday, February 10 & 11. The theme this year was "Sabbath Observance." The leaders this year were the two Rev. Kleyns. Friday evening Rev. D. Kleyn led a discussion on worship, the most important part of Sabbath keeping. This included discussion on the different elements of worship, preparation for worship, and the principles of worship. Satur-

day morning Rev. R. Kleyn led a discussion on a Christian's activity during the rest of the Lord's Day. The young adults saw the Sabbath as a gift from God for us and for our benefit, as well as being a sanctified day, something that God has made holy and for which He is jealous. In addition to the two discussions, the 30 or so young adults enjoyed an Amish-style supper and breakfast, besides activities including table tennis, basketball, swimming, sitting in a hot tub, board games, and more eating. Young adults came from GR area churches, South Holland, Pittsburgh, and Colorado.

Mission Activities

Rev. G. Eriks, representing the calling church, and Rev. R. VanOverloop, representing the Domestic Mission Committee of our churches, visited the Covenant PR Fellowship in Northern Ireland January 26 through February 6. This trip was the regular annual visit to the mission work in Northern Ireland and was meant in part for the encouragement of our missionary, Rev. Angus Stewart, and his wife, as well as the Fellowship. In addition to preaching the two Sundays they were there, Rev. VanOverloop gave a lecture in Limerick on "Justification by Faith Alone," and Rev. Eriks led mid-week Bible Study on the Antichrist.


Rev. W. Bruinsma preached his farewell sermon as pastor of the

Kalamazoo, MI PRC on Sunday evening, February 5. Rev. Bruinsma chose to preach his final sermon from the Word of God found in Luke 12:32 under the theme, "No Reason to Fear." The Friday before his farewell, the Kalamazoo congregation hosted a dinner and farewell program for the Bruinsma family. Then the following Lord's Day, Rev. Bruinsma was installed as Eastern Home Missionary at the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI. Rev. A. denHartog led the installation service preaching from God's Word found in John 20:19-31 under the theme, "The Commission of the Resurrected Lord." A time of refreshment and fellowship followed.

Congregation Activities

The Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN hosted a conference February 4 entitled, "Walk in the Spirit." Rev. C. Haak gave the keynote address in the morning session, and Rev. J. Mahtani spoke in the afternoon session on his conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. It was inspiring to see about a hundred saints from area churches come together to meditate on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Minister Activities

Candidate Dennis Lee accepted the call to the Edgerton, MN PRC. He will be examined, D.V., by Classis West on March 1 in Loveland, CO. 

Announcements

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2006, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

Check out www.rfpa.org for an *Easter Special* on RFPAs.

NOTICE!!!

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan, is inviting applications for a full-time 7th-8th grade teacher/administrator beginning in the fall of 2006. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, biblical inerrancy, 6-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Applicants should send a letter of application and resume to: Steve DeVries, School Board President, Reformed Heritage Christian School, 700 N. Fletcher Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49006. For more information, phone (269) 375-8455.

THE STANDARD BEARER

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RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Doon PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to fellow members Geraldine Blankespoor, in the death of her mother, and Cora VanDenTop, in the death of her sister,

RIKA VANDENTOP.

May they, their families, and the entire VanDenTop family be comforted by God's word in Psalm 62:1, 2: "Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved."

Rev. David Overway, President
Henrietta VanOort, Vice-all

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Tim and Sue Hoving and their family in the death of Sue's mother,

MRS. JIM ANDERSON.

May they find their comfort in God's word in Romans 14: 8: "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

Rev. William Langerak, President
Mr. Ron Kooienga, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Paul and LaRae Kamps and their family in the death of Paul's father-in-law,

MR. LUKE TAMMINGA.

May they find their comfort in God's word in II Corinthians 4:17, 18: "For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at things which are seen, but at things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Rev. William Langerak, President
Mr. Ron Kooienga, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

On January 10, 2006, our heavenly Father in His infinite wisdom called

MRS. BERTHA DUSSELJEE

to her eternal reward, as she was through death translated from the church militant to the church triumphant. May the saints that are left behind have comfort in our Lord's words found in I Corinthians 15:55-57: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, President
Tom Kiel, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 23, 2006, our parents, **MR. and MRS. HOWARD KRAKER**, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary.

We give thanks to our heavenly Father for the years He has given them together and for their faithfulness to one another. We pray that God will continue to bless them in their marriage and care for them in the years to come. "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Dale and Ruth Kraker
Ryan, Lauren, Lisa
- * Dave and Sharon Kraker
Jared, Tyler, Austin
- * Dave and Denise Overweg
Danae, Jacob, Jason

Allendale, Michigan

NOTICE!!!

The Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee is offering scholarship awards to prospective Protestant Reformed teachers and ministers. If you are interested in receiving a packet, please contact Melinda Bleyenbergh at 616-453-8898 or e-mail darylme@altelco.net by April 1, 2006.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 28, 2006, our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, **MARJORIE and MARINUS KAMPS**, will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary.

We give thanks to our heavenly Father for His plan of salvation in our lives, bringing great joy out of sorrow. We earnestly pray our Lord's richest blessing on them as they continually lead and encourage us by their godly example. May the Lord of our salvation bless them and continue to be a source of joy and assurance in their lives.

"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)

- * Dan and Kathy DeMeester
Daryl and Mindy Bleyenbergh
Dan and Tamara Kalsbeek
Allen, Brett, Jedd
Rich and Nelle DeMeester
- * Gary and Carol Nienhuis
Charles, Chad, Edward, Dustin
- * Jon and Kris DeMeester
Neil, Stacy, Jennifer, Kimberly
- * Todd and Kim DeMeester
Megi, Brijia
- * Bernie and Laurie Kamps
Titus and Charlynn Kamps
Kendra, Blake, Aubrey
Mitchell and Sarah Kamps
Erika, Dana
Jordan and Chandra Kamps
Denae, Dawson
Lydia, Justin, Katelyn
- * Joe and Doreen Dykstra
Marinus, LaRaye, Laura
- * Larry and Darlene Bertsch
Stephen and Rachel Dykstra
Taya
David, Jonathon
Jason and Tarah Bertsch
Austin
Patricia
- * Eugene and Sharon Kamps
Aaron, Matthew, Abigail, Kayli
- * Paul and LaRae Kamps
Travis, Tyler, Lexi, Luke, Dylan,
Darla, Colton
- * Becky and late Steven Barnard
Stephanie, Jeffrey

Grand Rapids, Michigan