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Volume 82 ◆ Number 10

Glory to Him!

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

Romans 11:36



f Him!

Of God the Lord are all things. He is the sovereign Creator of all. Nothing was given to Him. Upon no material did He bestow labor and effort to form anything. No wisdom or counsel was taught Him, through which He might work His deeds in wondrous perfection. No. All things are of Him. The heavens and the earth are of Him. The sun, moon, stars, and planets are of Him. The grass and trees, mountains, valleys, and plains are of Him. The lion of the jungle and the antelope of the plain are of Him. The brooks and streams, the rivers, seas, and oceans are all of Him. The fish that swim in them are of Him. The monsters inhabiting their depths are of Him.

Of Him are all creatures thinking and willing and acting. Of Him

are all men, righteous and ungodly, elect and reprobate. Of Him are all angels, those that fell, as well as those that kept their former estate. Of Him are societies and nations, their rise and their fall. Of Him are the deeds of all men, even their thoughts and the intentions of their hearts.

Of His eternal counsel and wisdom are all things. The things that have been before us were in that counsel. The things that are present have been in that counsel. The things that are yet to be are in that counsel.

Of His power are all things. Without His calling out of nothing, there would be no creature, no inhabitant of heaven or earth. Without His might, there would be neither heaven nor earth. Without Him nothing would exist.

Of Him! Of Him are all things.

Not only of Him, but also through Him are those very same things.

Through Him are all things!

Through Him the heavens and earth and all that they contain are sustained in their very existence. Through Him the sun moves in his circuit day after day. Through Him the moon stays his course about the

earth. Through Him the stars revolve in the night sky. Through Him all things of the earth continue to be. Through Him the clouds give their rain upon the earth. Through Him the streams and rivers flow into the mighty seas and great oceans. Through Him the birds of the heaven take wing in their flight, each following his appointed course. Through Him the fish in the sea school and shoal. Through Him the beasts of the forest roam and ravage for their food. Through Him all these continue in their generations, each after his kind.

Through Him are the movements of men and nations. Through Him are each individual man and each individual nation brought to birth. Through Him all the generations of the children of men come to be, live, and then die, sinking back into the dust whence they came forth. Through Him they all have their lives and times. Through Him they think, planning and determining their courses. Through Him they speak, joining themselves to one another, communicating plans and devices. Through Him they work, carrying out their intentions. Through Him they either fail or succeed.

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His power upholds all. His might directs all things.

Through Him! Through Him are all things.

Not only of Him, not only through Him, but also to Him are those very same things.

To Him are all things.

He is their appointed end. All His works shall praise Him, bringing Him glory. The glory of the sun, moon, stars, and planets belong to Him. They show the glory of their Maker. The glory of the mountains, fields, and forests and all their inhabitants are His. The birds of the heavens bring Him praise, showing His care. The fish of the sea show His greatness, even in the unsearchable depths of the oceans. To Him they point, though they lift not their heads to the heavens. Of Him they speak, though not with language audible to men.

No less true is that of all men. He is their appointed end. He will bring glory to Himself. All shall stand before Him. To Him shall they answer for all their deeds, good and evil. To Him they shall look for their eternal sentence. Even in the judgment, condemnation, and overthrow of the ungodly, all things return to Him! He is glorious in wrath, vindicating His justice!

From Him, through Him, and to Him are all things!

One more word: "To whom be glory forever. Amen."

To whom be glory!

How important this final word is! By it we are shown the ultimate purpose of the three preceding words. All things of God. All things through God. All things unto God. To God be the glory. All things are of God, for the purpose of His glory. Such is their purpose according to His eternal wisdom and counsel. All things are through God, for the purpose of His glory. As by His power they are sustained, governed, and brought to their appointed end, so that power is for His glory. He executes His sovereign will with power, all to bring glory to His

name. All things are to God, for the purpose of His glory. From Him they come forth and to Him they now proceed, for the revelation of His glory before all.

To God be all the glory!

As all things are unto God, so it must be with the glory. All of the glory belongs to the One of whom and through whom and to whom are all things. All things are of Him, for His glory. So is His eternal counsel. All things are through Him, that He might be glorified.

To God be the glory!

But this final word is important for another reason. It is a particular word, given to a particular people. For it is not spoken by all. The sun, moon, and stars have no such desire. The fish of the sea, the fowl of the heavens, and the beasts of the earth have neither heart nor voice to utter such words. God is glorified in them and through them, yet such a word they cannot speak.

To Him be glory! A particular word!

This word is not spoken by all men. The multitude of men have no heart at all for the glory of God. Most are enemies of that glory. Though they are of God, through God, and to God, they are bitterly opposed to Him and His glory. They also will bring God glory despite their determination and effort to oppose Him. Such a word they cannot speak.

To Him be glory! A particular word!

This word is particular because it is desired and spoken only by some. These few have received the mighty, irresistible grace of God. Their eyes, closed by sin, have been opened by grace. They see the wonder: of Him, through Him, and to Him are all things. Their hearts, adamant by nature, have been softened by grace. Out of their hearts they speak, "To Him be glory forever."

Of Him are all things!

That grace whereby they thus

speak is all of Him. In His eternal good pleasure, God has determined that these should be the recipients of His grace. He has chosen them to be His own people, set apart for the glory of His grace. Of Himself, He has given them His only begotten Son. His Son He offered up on the cross to purchase them and to give them every gift of salvation. Of Himself He gives His Spirit, to regenerate and sanctify them.

Through Him are all things!

Through Him, His people are regenerated. Through Him, their eyes are opened to see His glory. They see that from Him are all things, especially His grace to them. Through Him they receive all power and strength to bring Him honor and glory. Through Him they worship Him, bowing with all reverence and humility in their hearts. Through Him they lift up their voices in praise of His name, giving Him glory. Through Him they dedicate themselves to His glory in all their lives. Through Him they testify of His work in all they see. Through Him they bring Him all glory.

To Him are all things!

Unto Him they are directed. Him they love. Him they seek. Him they find. In Him they rest. In that rest they say in their hearts, "To Him be glory forever. Amen." For they know that even their giving glory to God is His work in them. That is their peculiar glory—of Him, through Him, and to Him.

Consider all the works of God. Behold His works in His creation. See His works in His redemption. Know them for what they truly are: Of Him, through Him, and to Him! By that knowledge lift up your heart and voice and say, "To Him be glory forever. Amen." As you lift up your heart and voice to speak those words, understand how you do so: of Him, through Him, and to Him. By that knowledge, repeat that blessed refrain: "To Him be glory forever. Amen."



The Declaration of Principles – Another Look (2)

Preamble

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, *to be used only by the Mission Committee and the missionaries for the organization of prospective churches on the basis of Scripture and the confessions as these have always been maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches and as these are now further explained in regard to certain principles.*¹

The preamble of the Declaration of Principles serves to remind us of the history behind the document, which history was reviewed in the previous editorial. The Declaration was drawn up to help the mission committee and the missionaries working with the Dutch immigrants after the Second World War. These immigrants asked, What is binding in the Protestant Reformed Churches? The answer in a word was: What is confessional is binding.

Yet it is not always enough simply to state that. In 1924, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church said that common grace is confessional. The Protestant Reformed Churches not only rejected that notion, they insisted that the confessions condemned the three points of common grace.

The Liberated Churches withdrew from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) after those churches adopted binding statements on specific doctrines, principally on the covenant. The Liberated refused to be bound by

the adopted statements. The immigrants from the Liberated Churches were understandably concerned about how the Protestant Reformed Churches understood the confessions on the matter of the covenant. Thus the question of what is binding in the Protestant Reformed Churches had specific reference to the doctrine of the covenant.

In order that there be no misunderstanding, the synod of the PRC adopted the Declaration of Principles. It set forth the convictions of the PRC on certain areas of doctrine that were being debated in that day, specifically common grace, the well-meant offer, and the covenant. However, the conviction remained that in a Reformed denomination, what is confessional is binding. Therefore, the Declaration of Principles expresses the convictions of the PRC *only insofar as the confessions would allow a binding to be made*. In other words, the Declaration sets forth what the confessions have to say on these doctrines. That is binding.

In harmony with that purpose, the Declaration begins: “The Protestant Reformed Churches stand on the basis of Scripture as the infallible Word of God and of the Three

Forms of Unity. Moreover, they accept the liturgical forms used in the public worship of our churches” (and then the eleven adopted forms are listed).² Immediately, the PRC made known what is the foundation of the churches — the inspired Scriptures, and the Reformed confessions.

The listing of the liturgical forms is noteworthy. The purpose is not merely to report what forms are adopted, though this information does indicate something of the worship of the churches. Rather, the inclusion of these forms serves notice that the PRC consider them to be binding. In fact, they are sometimes referred to as “minor creeds” in distinction from the “major creeds” — the Heidelberg Catechism, the (Belgic) Confession of faith, and the Canons of Dort. These forms are called minor because they are limited in scope. Each form contains instruction on the particular doctrine connected with the form — the form for the administration of baptism gives instruction on baptism, and the marriage form instructs concerning marriage, etc. The listing of these forms indicates that the PRC are bound by the doctrines as developed in the forms.

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2006, p. 196.

The intent of the Declaration of Principles is to express what is binding, that is, confessional, concerning grace (common or not), the well-meant offer (and the promise of the gospel), and the covenant. Some have criticized the Declaration, maintaining it contains not a summary of the confessions, but merely the opinions of the PRC. Thus we take "another look" at the Declaration in order to demonstrate that it accurately sets forth what the confessions teach.

Common Grace Rejected

The Declaration states:

On the basis of this Word of God and these confessions:

I. They repudiate the errors of the Three Points adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, 1924.

The "Three Points" are the points of common grace. The Declaration summarizes the main elements of these three points as follows:

A. That there is a grace of God to all men, including the reprobate, manifest in the common gifts to all men.

B. That the preaching of the gospel is a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all that externally hear the gospel.

C. That the natural man through the influence of common grace can do good in this world.

Over against these, the Declaration sets forth the positive teaching of the PRC (in three points), which we will examine individually.

In opposition to the third point (C) above, the Declaration insists "that the unregenerate man is totally incapable of doing any good, wholly depraved, and therefore can only sin." Is this statement the teaching of the confessions?

If there is any doctrine of grace that the Reformed creeds teach explicitly, it is the depravity of natural man. Even the Remonstrants

dared not blatantly contradict a doctrine taught so plainly in the confessions. As part of its proof for this doctrine, the Declaration quotes the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 8. "Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness? Indeed we are; except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God." Also quoted is Q. and A. 91, which gives the Reformed definition of good works. The Catechism's definition clearly indicates that the unregenerate cannot perform even one good work. In addition, the Declaration quotes the Belgic Confession, Article 14, and Canons III/IV, Articles 1-4, further confirming the confessional status of the doctrine of total depravity. It can only be concluded, then, that this affirmation of man's total depravity is the teaching of the Reformed confessions.

Next, in opposition to the first statement (A, above), the Declaration maintains "[t]hat the grace of God is always particular, i.e., only for the elect, never for the reprobate." Again, we ask, is that the teaching of the Reformed creeds?

To substantiate its contention about grace, the Declaration demonstrates, particularly from the Canons, that God's decree of predestination makes all the difference with respect to how God deals with men. Canons I, Article 6 states, "And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the *righteous discrimination between men* equally involved in ruin; or *that decree of election and reprobation...*" [My emphasis, RJD].

Additional quotations from the Canons I, Articles 6-8, demonstrate concretely how predestination determines whether God is gracious to an individual or not. To His elect, God gives faith and softens their hearts. In this decree of election God, "out of mere grace" has chosen some "to redemption in Christ." God "decreed to give [His elect] to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw

them to His communion by His Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification, and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His Son, finally to glorify them for the demonstration of His mercy and for the praise of His glorious grace." In contrast to all that gracious activity upon the elect, the Canons say of the reprobate only that God "leaves...[them] to their own wickedness."

Sovereign election determines who receives grace. The Canons emphasize that the elect alone receive God's grace. None of the confessions hint at a grace of God for the reprobate.

The Preaching:

Offer or Command

Over against the position that the preaching contains a well-meant offer (B, above), the Declaration expresses the conviction of the PRC "that the preaching of the gospel is not a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all men." In order to substantiate this, the Declaration turns to Canons I, Article 5.

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.

1. The complete Declaration of Principles is available on line at www.prc.org/principles.html.

2. In addition to the Formula of Subscription, the following forms are listed: Administration of Baptism, Administration of the Lord's Supper, Excommunication, Readmitting Excommunicated Persons, Ordination of the Ministers of God's Word, Ordination of Elders and Deacons, Installation of Professors of Theology, Ordination of Missionaries, Confirmation of Marriage Before the Church.

Concerning this, the Declaration indicates the PRC's agreement with the teaching that the preaching of the gospel is to be promiscuous, to all who hear the preaching externally. Secondly, it is noted that the preaching is, according to this article (I, 5), a *command*, not an *offer*. The command is: "repent and believe." Thirdly, this rejection of the well-meant offer is confessional since it is in perfect harmony with the Reformed doctrine of predestination, as has already been established. Consistent with all His dealings with men, God, also in the preaching, deals graciously with the elect, but not with the reprobate.

However, for the sake of clarity and precision, it is not enough merely to condemn the well-meant offer. It is necessary to explain the content of the *promise* of the gospel.

The matter of the promise was the very issue confronting the PRC in the early 1950s that led to the Declaration of Principles. What is the content of the promise to the covenant people in the preaching, and especially, to the child of believers at baptism? The fruit of her study of the confessions was the following statement in the Declaration: "That the preaching of the gospel is not...a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized...."

On what confessional basis does this rest?

First, it is in harmony with the rejection (based on the confessions) of a gracious well-meant offer and with the truth that election determines how God deals with all men. Unless God has elected all baptized children, He cannot offer salvation to every one of them. (And that God does not elect every baptized child is evident from the fact that not all believe — God "bestow(s) upon [the elect] true faith.") How much less would God *promise* salvation to every baptized child on the condition of faith?

If God were to make such a conditional promise, how foolish this would be. The Canons demonstrate that the unregenerate man can do nothing good, cannot believe, indeed, cannot fulfill any condition whatsoever. Why would God mock the unbelieving, reprobate child with such a conditional promise? It would be akin to a man walking through a cemetery, loudly promising life to every corpse that fulfilled a condition. Yet for God to promise life to every baptized child would be worse, for, though He has the power, He has no intention of giving life to the reprobate. He has determined to "leave...[them] to their own wickedness."

In addition, the confessions will not allow that faith could be a condition laid down by God in the promise, for the Canons teach that faith is the gift of God, and "that some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree." The decree of sovereign, double predestination determines how God deals with each individual.

Therefore the Declaration insists that Article 5 of the Canons (I) "presents the promise, not as general, but as particular, i.e., as for believers, and, therefore, for the elect." Not only that, but it adds that the "preaching of the particular promise is promiscuous to all that hear the gospel, with the *command*, not a condition, to repent and believe."

If the preaching is neither a gracious offer of salvation to all who hear, nor a conditional offer (or promise) to all those born in the sphere of the covenant, what then is the promise of the gospel? The Declaration describes it as "an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith."

Promoters of a conditional covenant, maintaining that the promise is conditional, object to the word "oath." Is it legitimate to call the promise of the gospel an "oath"? The Canons call it a

"promise." However, with God, a promise is the same as an oath, for God cannot go back on His promise. The promise of the gospel is indeed an oath.

The content of that promise, or oath, is (according to Canons I, 5) "that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Obviously, this promise indicates who will be saved, namely, everyone that believes. And who is a believer? The Canons answer: Everyone to whom God gives faith. And, to whom does God give faith? The Canons answer: To His elect alone.

Thus, indeed, the confessions indicate that the promise of the gospel is an oath, based on His decree of election, that God will infallibly lead His chosen people to salvation.

Against this description of the promise, a clamor is raised. This is cold, it is alleged. This is impersonal. There is no comfort. There is no personal assurance of my salvation!

These objections must be answered. First, the Declaration of Principles is not giving a *quotation* of the promise, as if all the preacher says is: "God speaks an oath that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith." Obviously not. Paul did not speak thus in his answer to the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31 — "Believe...and thou shalt be saved...."). Nor did Peter so respond to the question of the multitude on Pentecost (Acts 2:38-39).

However, the Declaration is not misrepresenting the confessions. For the confessions insist that election is the bedrock of the gospel. If God did not choose some unto salvation, then God is not in control of who are saved. Salvation is then up to men. The preaching will be a pleading and an offer, an entreaty made with the hope that it will move the hearts of the hearers to believe and thus be saved.

However, the confessions indicate that Reformed preaching is a command to repent and believe, and with it comes the promise,

whoever believes shall be saved. Such a promise can be, even must be, made because God decreed to save His elect, and He does so by giving them faith.

Over against the objection that such a presentation is impersonal and devoid of assurance, it should be pointed out that the Holy Spirit makes the promise personal. He applies the promise to the hearts of the elect believers. And can one know that he is an elect without God addressing him by name? Most assuredly, affirm the Canons.

He knows it from the presence of the fruits of election, especially sorrow for sin and faith.

The Declaration is a clear expression of the confessions on these doctrines. God's grace is particular, only for and upon the elect. The preaching is neither a gracious offer to all men, nor a conditional promise. Rather, in it God makes an unchangeable promise (oath). That promise is particular. For, though the preaching of the promise is promiscuous, the promise is to *believers* (whosoever believeth),

not to every individual who hears. God will save every one whom He has elected. What a blessed hope!

The members of the Protestant Reformed Churches say: We are convicted of these truths. We are convinced that these are the truths taught in the Reformed confessions. If you love the truth of a sovereign and particular saving grace, based firmly on the Reformed doctrine of predestination, join with us. If not, do not join the PRC. This is our Declaration of Principles.

...to be continued. 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Public Schools— or Parental Schools?

I often quote Cal Thomas, whose hard-hitting and conservative articles usually address the issues of the day relevantly and accurately. That was strikingly true in two recent articles speaking to the issue of public school education vs. parentally controlled education in private or home schools.

In an article from Tribune Media Services and printed in the *Grand Rapids Press* of December 22, 2005, Thomas quotes from a report titled, "The Youth Risk Behavior Survey," compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which polled more than 5,000 randomly selected Hillsborough students of Tampa, Fla. The reports of the sexual activity, the common use of drugs, the prevalence of use of alcoholic drinks, and the smoking of those illegally doing so were shocking. In light of the statistics that he presents, the conclusion Thomas comes to is that the instruction given in public schools, rather than improving the situation, has worsened it. Many public schools have insisted on the need for "sex education" in the

public schools. The argument runs: as long as children will be engaged in sexual activities at an early (and ever earlier) age, the schools must teach students how to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancies and sexual diseases. The sad fact is, as the above-mentioned report shows, that this sort of "education" has rather resulted in increases of sexual activity and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) with the students. Thomas writes:

Although true abstinence-only programs have been effective in altering sexual behavior, the so-called "sex education" programs in government schools do more to promote sex than prevent it, giving lip service to chastity while spending most of the class time teaching kids how to use condoms. If parents care enough about their children to want to do more than fret about such things they will have to radically alter their approach to childrearing.

Thomas continues by presenting his "radical" proposal for concerned parents to consider. Many, doubtlessly, were shocked at his proposal. Nevertheless, the proposal has some very valid points—also for us who promote our own Christian schools.

Step one is to pull them from the government schools that serve

as hothouses for this kind of behavior and thinking.

Step two is to reduce lavish lifestyles so parents work less and invest more time in their children, with one parent staying home to make the home a safe haven.

Step three is no television in the home. TV is hostile to the things most parents want their children to believe and embrace. It is deadly to their moral development; it undermines those things that once made families a strong, positive cultural force.

The government schools and the sex and entertainment industries aren't about to fix the problem. The responsibility to properly raise children belongs to parents. The state and interest groups have no right to develop the moral fiber of a child and, in fact, they are speedily undermining that development. If parents don't want any more surprises such as those in Tampa, they must rescue their kids from a hostile culture, just as they would rescue them from a burning building.

Those "buildings" are enveloped in the flames of self-indulgence. And the damage is not only to their bodies, but also to their minds and souls.

I'd say: "Well put." We have long insisted that the task of educating our covenant seed is that of Christian parents, and not that of government. The government, in accommodating itself to all reli-

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gions, can finally allow for none. It cannot allow only one system of morality—hence morality (however defined) becomes virtually non-existent.

Thomas presented a subsequent article that appeared in the *Grand Rapids Press* of December 28, 2005. In it he comments on the “intelligent design” that has been a major part of media reports in past months. Thomas, probably to the disappointment of many religious conservatives, expresses somewhat of an approval of the ruling of Judge John E. Jones III to “bar the teaching of ‘intelligent design’ in the Dover, Pennsylvania public schools on grounds it is a thinly veiled effort to introduce a religious view of the world’s origins.” Thomas agreed with the Judge that the advocates for “intelligent design” in that case lied under oath when they insisted that it was not their intention to introduce biblical creationism “through the back door.”

Thomas made an even more telling point in writing about the work of creationists in Dover:

Culture has long passed by advocates of intelligent design, school prayer and numerous other beliefs and practices that were once tolerated, even promoted, in public education. People who think they can reclaim the past have been watching too many repeats of “Leave it to Beaver” on cable television. Those days are not coming back anytime soon, if at all.

Culture, including the culture of education, now opposes what it once promoted or at least tolerated. The secular left, which resists censorship in all its forms when it comes to sex, library books and assigned materials that teach the “evils” of capitalism and “evil America,” is happy to censor any belief that can be tagged “religious.”

Thomas then presents a second reason for “welcoming Judge Jones’ ruling”:

It should awaken religious conservatives to the futility of trying to make a secular state reflect their beliefs. Too many people have wasted too much time and money since the 1960s, when prayer and Bible reading were outlawed in public schools, trying to get these and a lot of other things restored. The modern secular state should not be expected to teach Genesis 1, or any other book of the Bible, or any other religious text.

What is Thomas’ conclusion? As in the earlier article quoted above, he now advises similarly:

Religious parents should exercise the opportunity that has always been theirs. They should remove their children from state schools with their “instruction manuals” for turning them into secular liberals, and place them in private schools — or home school them — where they will be taught the truth, according to their parents’ beliefs. Too many parents who would never send their children to a church on Sunday that taught doctrines they believed to be wrong, have had no problem placing them in state schools five days a week where they are taught conflicting doctrines and ideas.

Private schools or home schooling cost extra money (another reason to favor school choice) and extra time, but what is a child worth? Surely a child is more valuable than material possessions.

Our children are our letters to the future. It’s up to parents to decide whether they want to send them “first class” or “postage due.”

Rulings such as this should persuade parents who’ve been waffling to take their kids and join the growing exodus from state schools into educational environments more conducive to their beliefs.

We have, as a matter of conviction, long maintained the necessity that we, as covenant parents, instruct our children according to the doctrines of Scripture as it is

maintained in our churches. The need for such a practice can truly be seen today as never before.

■ Christmas Past

This article appears a considerable time after Christmas 2005. This past Christmas there was a great outcry that the nation as a whole was attempting to “take Christ out of Christmas.” And it seemed to be so. In some stores, clerks had been instructed to wish customers “happy holidays” rather than “merry Christmas.” (It would be less offensive to those of other religions — or no religion.) Some were calling Christmas trees, holiday trees. Many church people were becoming very upset. Our “Christian” nation, so it appeared, was trying to root out the last remnants of the mention of Christ in this great holiday. All the while, these church people seemed ignorant of the fact that with all of the mention of the name “Christ” in this holiday of Christmas, there was precious little of Christ that really remained.

Cal Thomas (once more) presented a striking comment on this great debate in an article appearing in the *Reporter-Herald* of Loveland, CO on December 13, 2005:

The effort by some cable TV hosts and ministers to force commercial establishments into wishing everyone a “Merry Christmas” might be more objectionable to the One who is the reason for the season than the “Happy Holidays” mantra required by some store managers.

I have never understood why so many Christians feel the need to see and hear “Merry Christmas” proclaimed to them at stores by people who may not believe its central message. While TV personalities, junk mail letters and some of the ordained bemoan the increasing secularization of culture, perhaps some teaching might be helpful from the One in whose behalf they claim to speak.

Jesus—the real one, not the Re-

publican-conservative-Democrat-liberal one made in the image of today's fractured political culture—said His kingdom is not of this world. Why, then, are so many who claim to speak for Him demanding that this earthly kingdom celebrate Him and His Kingdom?

Paul the Apostle said, "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus spoke a parable about the Kingdom of Heaven resembling a treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13:44). The Apostle John warned, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

Let's see: Should the crass commercialization of "Christmas" and the focus on accumulating and giving stuff (each sold separately; batteries not included) be part of this indictment? Even a casual observer or biblical illiterate might reasonably draw such a conclusion.


Thomas concludes movingly:

I do not care if a mall employee wishes me a "Merry Christmas," or not, or if mall managers favor snowpersons over manger scenes, or erect trees they call "holiday" and not "Christmas." It isn't about their observing this event, giving us a "religious rush" and creating a false sense of security that culture is better than it is. It is about people who believe in this historic event observing it in a way that recalls the birth of the Savior of the world (not the savior of the bottom line): silently,

wondrously and worshipfully.

Let the world get drunk at its office parties. Let it consume material things, pile up credit card debt and embrace other trappings of this counterfeit "Christmas" road show. I prefer the "original cast."

...We should expect that homage only from those who "believe on His name," not from the Santa Claus worshippers.

There is much of the celebration of Christmas in our day that is, or ought to be, disturbing indeed. Thomas hits the target again when he insists that the unbelieving world cannot truly celebrate Christmas. That world, for all of its mention of the name of Christ, has long ago taken "Christ out of Christmas" in its mad celebrations. Let us be mindful then of our own celebration. Is "Christ" in our "Christmas"? 

Things Which Must Shortly Come To Pass

Prof. David J. Engelsma

Chapter Two

The Intermediate State (3)

The intermediate state is an aspect of the hope of the covenant people of God. It is part of their hope because God has made known in His Word that life and bliss in the soul upon their death are benefits of His covenant with them. The comfort of life with God in the soul is not on the foreground in Scripture simply because the intermediate state is not the main hope of the church. The res-

urrection of the body in the Day of Christ is the main hope. But neither is testimony to the intermediate state lacking.

The Old Testament Witness to the Intermediate State

Contrary to the thinking of some, there is witness to the intermediate state in the Old Testament, even though this witness is not as clear and strong as that of the New Testament. The Old Testament combines the intermediate state and the resurrection of the body as one hope for future good after death. It does not sharply distinguish the two elements of the hope of the God-fearer in the face of death, just as it does not sharply

distinguish the two stages of the coming of the Messiah. But with all due regard for the fearful gloominess of death and the grave, something that the New Testament by no means denies or minimizes, the Old Testament holds before the God-fearing man or woman the bright prospect of life and glory after death. This prospect includes the intermediate state, as well as the resurrection of the body.

Psalms 16:9-11 is prophecy of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ: "My flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." This is the inspired, authoritative interpretation of the apostle

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in Acts 2:24-32. David spoke "of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption." Because of the resurrection of the head of the covenant, resurrection is also the hope of all Jehovah's covenant people. And this hope in the face of death and the grave takes the form of an all-embracing expectation that God will "shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11). The intermediate state cannot be excluded from this expectation, since the ground of the expectation of great good after death is Jehovah as "the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup" (Ps. 16:5).

When the psalmist comes to his senses in Psalm 73, he realizes that the trouble-filled life of God's Israel must be viewed in light of the end of this life, just as the trouble-free life of the wicked must be evaluated in light of the end of that life. For the psalmist and all those who are "of a clean heart" the end of earthly life consists of the Lord's receiving them to glory (v. 24). There is no reason to limit this to the resurrection of the body in the Day of Christ. The text simply speaks of "afterward," that is, after this trouble-filled earthly life ends in death. "Afterward," there will be reception to glory—glory in the soul at once, glory in the resurrection body in the Day of Christ.

The passage opposes the notion that glory for the true Israelite who has died is held in abeyance until the resurrection. Verse 23 lays the basis for the confidence of glory "afterward" in the Psalmist's being "continually with thee." This is covenant fellowship with the living God of Israel. Death cannot interrupt this communion.

In addition, Psalm 73 threatens the ungodly with destruction immediately upon their death. Their "end" is "desolation, as in a moment," a desolation in which they are "utterly consumed with ter-

rors" (vv. 17-19). Just as the destruction and desolation of the ungodly do not wait for the final judgment, but begin at the instant of death, so also, according to the comparison of the psalm, the end of the godly is bliss at the moment of their death.

The comfort of Psalm 23 follows everyone who has Jehovah as his shepherd through death. The shepherd's love and care give goodness and mercy "all the days of my life." When this life is over, "I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (v. 6). We distinguish between the intermediate state prior to the resurrection of the body and the eternal state following the resurrection of the body. Psalm 23 includes both as the "for ever" that follows death. During this "for ever" the child of God dwells with God in His house. He dwells there in the soul during the intermediate state; he dwells there in body and soul during the eternal state. But the future of the child of God after death is dwelling in the house of God.

The New Testament Witness to the Intermediate State

What is dim and indistinct in the Old Testament is clear and distinct in the New Testament. The bright light that the gospel of the resurrection of Jesus Christ has shined on the Christian's hope illumines his expectation of good at the moment of death.

In John 11:26 Jesus taught that "whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Never dying is a benefit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ mentioned in verse 25: "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life." One benefit of the resurrection of Christ for those who believe in Him is their own bodily resurrection. This the Lord promised in verse 25: "he that believeth in me, even though he may die, yet shall he live" (my translation; the KJV is confusing here).

But there is also another ben-

efit of Christ's resurrection for the believer. One who lives spiritually, by virtue of the regenerating work of the Spirit in his heart, and believes in the risen Christ shall never die. He shall not die even when he does die physically. The spiritual life that is in him does not die. It cannot die. It is a life beyond the reach of the killing power of physical death. Even at the moment of physical death, the believer continues to live the spiritual life that he has received from Christ in the Spirit. He lives this life in his soul. In this way, the believer lives through his death, triumphs over death, and passes through death into the enjoyment of everlasting life in the soul.

The reason is the presence in the believer of the resurrection life of Christ. This life is immortal. Since this life has become the believer's own, the believer is immortal. The intermediate state must be reality, because the believer is immortal. Through faith, Jesus Himself, who is the resurrection and the life, indwells the believer. Jesus is immortal in the believer. Death may kill the body, temporarily, but with regard to his spiritual life—Christ in him—death cannot kill the believer. This demands the intermediate state.

Christ taught the conscious life of Abraham's children—believers—in heaven at the moment of death in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Death for beggar Lazarus meant being carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. This is conscious enjoyment of blessedness, for "now he is comforted" (v. 25). That the beggar consciously enjoys bliss at death, in his soul, is implied by the rich man's suffering torments in his soul: "in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments" (v. 23).

The most vivid, forceful expression of the truth of the intermediate state as consolation and hope to a miserable sinner in the wretchedness of his dying was

Jesus' word to the penitent evildoer on the cross: "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (v. 43). This is the hope of those for whom Christ died immediately upon their death and before the resurrection of the body: "Today." This is the hope of the conscious enjoyment of great good: "in paradise." This is a sure hope: "Verily I say unto thee." This is the hope of everyone who, like the murderer and robber to whom Christ gave the promise, repents of his sins and trusts in the Lord to be remembered for good (v. 42), for that man was as wicked and unworthy an inheritor of paradise as ever there was. And the explanation of the intermediate state, the necessity that elect, repentant, believing men and women live with Christ in heaven in their soul at death, is the inseparable union of Christ and His people: "with me."

In accordance with Christ's own doctrine, especially His well-known word to the penitent evildoer, the apostles made the intermediate state part of their gospel of hope. Indeed, it was Paul's own personal hope. Regarding his own death, he was confident that he would not be "ashamed." Dying would be "gain." The reason is that in departing this life in death he would "be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. 1:20-24). The thought is that dying would be instant gain because he would be with the Lord at once. But this can only be in his soul, for his body would be in the grave.

The hope of the apostle is obviously not soul-sleep. A state of lacking all experience of communion with Christ is not better than the fellowship we have with Christ in this life. If dying means soul-sleep, dying is loss.

Being with Christ at death is not the hope only of the apostles or of a few extraordinary Christians. In I Corinthians 5:1ff., the Word of God assures all believers that "if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have

a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." We *have* this house in heaven at the moment of the dissolving of our earthly life, and we are "clothed upon with our house" immediately upon our being unclothed with regard to earthly life (vv. 2-4). In language reminiscent of Philippians 1, the apostle declares, in vivid Greek, that all Christians have the confidence of faith that "emigration" from the body—death—will be "home-coming" to the Lord Jesus Christ. To be home with the Lord is so desirable that we are "willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (vv. 6-8).

Two passages in the book of Revelation clearly teach both the fact and nature of the intermediate state of elect believers. Revelation 6:9-11 has the martyrs in heaven ("under the altar") in their souls prior to the end of all things and the resurrection of the body. In their souls, the martyrs are conscious. They cry out to God for justice upon the cruel enemies of the church in the world.

According to Revelation 20:4-6, those who suffered and died for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God live and reign in their souls with Christ in heaven. This state precedes the resurrection of the bodies of all men and the final judgment. Verse 6 describes the translation of the believer in his soul to heaven as "the first resurrection." Such is the bliss and glory of the intermediate state that all those who enjoy it are "blessed and holy" (v. 6).

Jesus Himself is the pattern for all His own. When He died, He commended His spirit, or soul, into the hands of His Father (Luke 23:46). Thus, in His spirit, He was in paradise with the penitent evildoer on the very day that He died (Luke 23:43). That Jesus is the pattern for His people is evident in Acts 7:54-60, the account of the martyrdom of Stephen. Stephen too in dying committed his spirit

to God, although by committing it to the Lord Jesus (v. 59). Stephen did this in the expectation that Jesus, whom he saw standing at the right hand of God, was ready to receive him in his spirit and that in his spirit he would immediately see and enjoy the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (v. 55).

The Intermediate State of the Unbeliever

Scripture says even less about the state of the unbeliever after death than it does about the state of the believer. As is also true of its teaching about the resurrection of the body, Scripture is mainly interested in the future salvation of the elect believer. Nevertheless, both by the implied contrast with the intermediate state of the believer and by explicit warnings, Scripture does teach the intermediate state of those who die in unbelief and disobedience.

The intermediate state of the ungodly is the suffering of the torment of hell in the soul. Physical death is a horror for everyone who dies outside of Jesus Christ. For him too, death is the violent, painful tearing apart of body and soul. Death dissolves his earthly life. Since earthly life with its relations, positions, pleasures, and possessions is his all, death for him is pure loss. Upon the preliminary judgment that immediately follows death for every human, in which he must give account of his unrighteous life and deeds to the just Judge, the unbeliever is cast away, in his soul, into hell. There the soul, which was always spiritually dead, suffers the dreadful torment of eternal death as terrible, but perfectly just, punishment for sin.

As was already noticed, Psalm 73:17-20 describes the end of the ungodly, an end that begins at the moment of their death, as "destruction" and "desolation" in which they are "utterly consumed with terrors." There is no warrant in the passage to limit this destruction to the suffering of the ungodly

in their body in the Day of Christ. Since their “end” is the moment of their death, there is every reason to regard the destruction of the wicked as their suffering the torments of hell in their soul immediately upon dying.

Jesus teaches that the intermediate state of the reprobate wicked is hellish torment in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:14-31). Having died, “in hell he [the rich man] lift up his eyes, being in torments.” This is the state of the rich man prior to the end of earthly history in the Day of Christ, for the time is still the day of salvation, as the request of the rich man on behalf of his brothers shows. This instruction concerning the punishment of the wicked in their soul in the intermediate state is in harmony with Jesus’ warning elsewhere that men are to fear Him who “is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

Peter’s description of the destiny of the traitor at death, ominous by its very restraint, can be understood no otherwise than as

referring to Judas’ descending into perdition in his soul: Judas went “to his own place” (Acts 1:25). The grave is not Judas’ “own place.” Burial in the ground, he shares with all who die. Nor is the reference to the place of punishment Judas will occupy, in the body, after the final judgment. The thought of the text is that Judas went to his place at once, so soon as he had committed suicide. Joseph Addison Alexander is correct when he charges that the various efforts that have been made to “escape from the obvious but fearful sense of these words” are merely “ingenious but unnatural expedients to avoid the plain sense of the words, as substantially synonymous with what is elsewhere called *the place of torment* (Luke 16:28)” (*A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Banner of Truth, 1963, p. 36).

Not even the body of the unbeliever escapes the wrath of God in the time between death and the Day of Christ. The death of the body of the unbeliever, or, to speak

more precisely, the death of the unbeliever in his body, is the punishing act of a wrathful God. This is the case, regardless whether the unbeliever dies violently in a catastrophe or “peacefully” in his bed of old age. God destroys him.

Even though the body of the unbeliever lies in the grave, or exists as ashes, having been cremated, it is not at rest. Scripture does not speak of unbelievers falling asleep at death. The body of the unbeliever awaits the resurrection of damnation. God has an angry eye on that body, whether in a grave or an urn, reserving it unto resurrection and final judgment in order that in the body and soul that sinned the unbeliever may suffer the punishment that divine justice requires. Such a state of the body is not restful sleep.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is a fearful thing already in this life. It is a still more fearful thing at the instant of death. It will be the most fearful thing at the final judgment.



When Thou Sittest In Thine House

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

The Discipline of Covenant Children

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Ephesians 6:4

God’s church receives a most reassuring promise from God: I will be a God unto you and to your children after you in your generations (Gen. 17:7). Since the beginning of this world, believing parents have

clung to that promise of God as they have brought forth the next generation of the church. Despite their weaknesses as parents, God has been faithful to His covenant and its promises. God has by His grace alone saved unto Himself a people in Christ from one generation to the next. Our salvation and the salvation of our children is entirely dependent on the work of God’s sovereign and free grace in salvation.

But God fulfills His promise to His people by the use of means. Although it is true that we and our children are saved by grace alone

and never on the basis of our own efforts, nevertheless, God uses the means of godly homes to raise up unto Himself a people from one generation to the next. In such homes must be found the proper nurture of covenant children. Covenant parents are duty bound before God to instruct their children, give to their children a godly example, and discipline their children. It can happen, in the home where parents sorely neglect all these, that God will still save His children; but as a rule this is not true. God continues to gather in the generations of the church

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where fathers and mothers take their calling seriously to nurture carefully their children in the fear of God.

In this article we will begin our treatment of the discipline of children. What we mean by discipline is the particular work of parents that shapes, corrects, and therefore refines and perfects the moral/spiritual character of their children. Very simply put, parents must train their children to lead a life of godly self-control. Discipline, first of all, includes positive reinforcement by means of encouragement, approval, and praise.

There is a poem, a couple of lines of which read like this: "If a child lives with encouragement he learns confidence. If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate. If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself." There is truth to that. If all that parents do is criticize, ridicule, or mock their children, their children generally lack self-confidence, and become bitter toward life and the church. Teaching children to live a disciplined spiritual life takes encouragement and praise. When our children learn to hold in check the desires of their sinful flesh and walk according to God's Word, they must be bolstered and praised. Our children will then learn to appreciate walking in a godly way. They will cheerfully go forth in the confidence that they please God.

Discipline of our children, therefore, is not all negative. It truly has also a positive side in which parents must diligently exercise themselves.

There is, however, also the negative aspect to discipline. The worst error that Christian parents can make is to think that their covenant children are "perfect little angels" who would never deliberately do anything wrong. Far too often this error translates itself into action in homes of the church. Such parents seldom if ever see a need to discipline their children, even when one of them is being an

absolute terror! He can be screaming in a fit of anger or even openly rebelling against his parents and they seem to be oblivious to it. Everyone else is embarrassed or annoyed by his behavior but the parents act as if this is normal.

These same parents are also those whom the teacher in the Christian schools dread to speak to about their children at parent/teacher conferences. No matter how sinful and rebellious that child might be in class, the parent defends the child and argues with the teacher as if the teacher is all wrong and their sinning son or daughter is simply being a normal child. That type of an attitude is certainly contrary to the Word of God!

Our children are conceived and born in sin (Ps. 51:5). This means that from the moment they are born there is sin in them. This is why Solomon could write: "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child" (Prov. 22:15). Such sin, when it reveals itself, may never go unchecked or unpunished. The unbelieving world's psychology, which is based on the inherent goodness of every person, is this: when a child rebels, a parent must simply divert the attention of the child to something else or give him a "time out," but must never administer strict punishment of any kind. The Word of God, on the other hand, takes into account the reality of sin in a child's heart — even the heart of a child who is redeemed in the blood of Jesus Christ. Proper discipline of our children, therefore, not only rewards them with words of praise when they do well, but punishes (chastens) them when they sin. All the above, Scripture defines as the discipline of children of the covenant.

Neither ought young parents be uncertain about this aspect of their calling. It is their duty as covenant parents. They *must* administer discipline to their children as a part of their children's training.

Discipline is not always something that comes naturally to a parent. But parents receive the calling from God that they, out of love for their children and their spiritual welfare, must administer discipline.

"For 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). Just as the magistrate punishes those who disobey the laws of the land, and just as the employer has the right to discipline the employee, or the elders the member of the church who disobeys, so also in the home the parent must exercise his authority in discipline. At the time of baptism, parents take the solemn vow that they will to the utmost of their power nurture their children in the fear of God's name. This includes discipline.

Let it be noted, too, that the particular parent who must take the lead in such discipline is the father. Ephesians 6:4: "Ye fathers ... bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Hebrews 12:7: "...for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" This does not mean that mother is not involved in discipline. What it means is that the father, as head of his home, leads the way in discipline. There are homes where mother disciplines but father does not bother himself with it. Most often this is true because the father is of a weak character and is not comfortable with strict discipline. In these cases a father may reason to himself that it really does not matter if he is involved in the discipline of his children so long as his wife is handling it. That reasoning is faulty. God has placed the man to be head of the wife and of his children and he is responsible before God to fulfill this task. It is his duty therefore to lead his home in this important work. Besides, when children are punished by mother but they see that father

is not bothered by their sin, they will rebel against mother too. This attitude on the part of the father will undermine even the discipline that mother administers. Fathers must know that they are held before God answerable for the discipline of the home.

One last question we answer yet in this article: Why discipline? What is the purpose of disciplining our children? Why ought father and mother take this calling so seriously? There are two reasons.

First, covenant parents discipline their children because in this way they lead their children to the cross of Jesus Christ. We do not deny that this must be done through instruction and example too. But discipline is of such a nature that it forces children to confront their sin and their need for the cross of Christ. It does so by teaching them, first of all, that they may not live according to what is right in their own eyes. They belong to God's church and covenant in this world. They are called therefore to be holy as God is holy. They must be consecrated and dedicated to serving God. How? By keeping His Word and commandments! And when they fail, then they sin.

Discipline forces our children to confront their sin and the punishment of sin too. They are made to experience that sin will not go unpunished by God. The wages or punishment of sin is death. Ah, how our punishment can smart — not just the backside, but the heart and soul of a child! But how minor is the chastisement of a father or mother compared to the eternal punishment in hell!

Discipline, therefore, humbles a child and teaches him repentance. When proper discipline is administered, and when our children show an attitude of sorrow over sin, then parents quickly forgive. In doing so, covenant parents also lead their children to the cross, where they can find forgiveness with God in the blood of Jesus

Christ. Parents ought to consider this great benefit of discipline before shirking it as if it really makes little difference.

There is one other purpose to our discipline of children. It teaches our children to walk the life of the antithesis. Very simply put: it teaches them in a concrete way to say "no" to sin and this evil world and "yes" to God and to the way of righteousness.

Since the beginning of time, God has created enmity between His people in Christ and the wicked reprobate of this world. There is a huge spiritual gulf between them. The child of God is called to fight the fight of faith against the forces of darkness and unbelief around him. He must do this by keeping himself unspotted from the world and its lusts.

Covenant parents know well that the most difficult part of that battle is not against this world and Satan, but against their own sinful flesh. As adult believers mature in their faith, they struggle with what Paul writes in Romans 7:20 and 22, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.... I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." This struggle is not true only of us, but of our children too. Their flesh as well as ours is tempted to walk in the ways of sin. A godly parent who is deeply conscious of his own battle within must teach his children to be conscious of the sinful flesh that they have within them. Discipline teaches our children this. And it teaches them the necessity, in their young lives too, of saying "no" to the sinful desires of the flesh.

That sinful flesh shows itself in small ways in our little children. A parent may tell a toddler not to touch an item on an end table, and the challenge is on! Where there is law there is transgression! Mom says no, but my flesh says I want to, despite what Mom has told me. With a gleam in his eye, as soon as Mom is preoccupied with some-

thing else, the child goes to play with that item on the table anyway. Disobedience! Such disobedience is taken care of when our children are that small by a slap on the hand or a whap on the butt. But if it goes unchecked, and the child grows older, then the sins of disobedience show themselves in much worse ways. Then those ways are not so easy to be dealt with through discipline. By disciplining a child immediately for the wrong he commits, parents train their children to say no to their own sinful flesh, to their own self-gratification, and to the proneness of their flesh to give in to temptation. Those children are taught to discern between good and evil and to follow after the good. Such is the purpose and function of discipline in a covenant home.

Next time we wish to consider the different forms of discipline fathers and mother have at their disposal. In close connection with that, we will also distinguish between what is true discipline as opposed to the abuse of children. It is our prayer, of course, that covenant parents, especially young parents, will take seriously the teaching of the Word of God concerning the discipline of their children. This world is becoming increasingly more lawless, with a blatant disregard for authority. Children are becoming violent, rebelling against parents and authority in general. More and more in the churches today children are spoiled by affluence, being given everything they desire, and by this being stripped of the will to say no to anything. Young parents who bring forth the children of the covenant must be warned to discipline those children, so that they might grow in the grace and admonition of the Lord. Then the generation coming will stand as Christian soldiers who will not entangle themselves in the affairs of this life, that they might please God who has chosen them to be soldiers (II Tim. 2:3, 4).




Stone

It is easy to overlook the lowly stone. But Scripture does not. In it, stone represents spiritual realities as commonality (2 Chr. 1:15), a fool's wrath (Prov. 27:3), danger (Ps. 91:12), end of man (Job 28:3), and terrified, lifeless, natural, and inhumane hearts (Ex. 15:16; 1 Sam. 25:37; Ezek. 11:19; Job 41:24). But it is especially their permanence that is special in the kingdom. More interested in show than substance, the children of men make their kingdom from brick (Gen. 11:3). God builds with stone. The corner of His kingdom is Jesus, the living stone made without hands, rejected of men but chosen of God and precious (Dan. 2:34; Matt. 21:42). He said that His Father didn't give stones for bread (Matt. 7:9) and could raise up children from stones (Matt. 3:9), and that if people didn't praise Him the stones would (Luke 19:40). For three days He lay encased in stone, only to spring free (Lam. 3:53). Upon Him is built a spiritual house of elect stones—each solid, lasting, formed in the quarry of this world, but very alive (1 Pet. 2:4ff.; 1 Kings 6:7).

Stones represent God's use of lowly means such as the Word and discipline to maintain the antithesis and preserve the covenant from threats within and without. Stones were formidable weapons in the hands of the skilled (1 Chr. 12:2). David toppled that uncircumcised monstrosity Goliath with one. Uzziah developed cunning engines to hurl them on those who laid siege to God's city (2 Chr. 26:15). Sometimes, God simply hurled the stones himself (Josh. 10:11). The Egyptians sank like stones in the Red Sea (Ex. 15:5). As a great stone cast into the sea, Old Babylon fell, a fate that awaits the New Babylon (Jer. 51:63; Rev. 18:21). And Jesus is the ultimate stone; those who fall upon Him are humbled and saved, but those upon whom He falls are ground forever into powder (Matt. 21:44). The accursed were buried under stones (Josh. 7:26; 2 Sam. 18:17). Stoning freed the congregation from the guilt of another. Therefore, it was reserved for sins of which they might easily become partakers by "silence and connivance," such as blasphemy (Lev. 24:14), adultery

(Deut. 22:21), Sabbath desecration (Num. 15:33), soothsaying (Lev. 20:27), idolatry (Deut. 17:5), promoting apostasy (Deut. 13:6), and rebellion by riotous children (Deut. 21:18ff.). But apostates used stones on the righteous (Heb. 11:37). Almost stoned were Jesus and Moses (John 10:31; Ex. 17:4). Stoned but spared were David and Paul (2 Sam. 16:13; Acts 14:19). Killed was Naboth, for trying to preserve his heritage (1 Kings 21:13); and for their testimony, the prophet Zechariah (2 Chr. 24:21) and deacon Stephen (Acts 7:59).

Stones represent the unconditional character of God's covenant. On the one hand, they testify of the church's covenant unfaithfulness. They witnessed notorious evil: Adonijah's rebellion (1 Kings 1:9), Saul's treachery (1 Sam. 20:19), and Joab's murder of his cousin (2 Sam. 20:8). Israel turned them into high places, worshiped stones as their father, and learned from stones (Jer. 2:27; Hab. 2:19). On the other hand, stones witness to God's everlasting covenant faithfulness. With his finger God wrote the "words of the covenant" on two stone slabs to teach that men could (and would) break them, but the covenant itself was unbreakable (Ex. 31:18; 34:28). Stone monuments testified of this truth to succeeding generations. Jacob set up two in Bethel, one each time God confirmed the covenant (Gen. 28:13; 35:9ff.). Israel set up stones to remember God's covenant promise (Josh. 4:7), God's covenant law (Deut. 27:8; Josh. 24:26), their covenantal unity (Josh. 22:34), and God's defense of the covenant (1 Sam. 7:12).

Finally, stones reveal the grace and purpose of God's sovereign election in the covenant. God made some stones precious, beautiful, and rare. The church was carried into the presence of God as gems set in the garments of the high priest (Ex. 25:7-8; 28:9ff.). Precious stones make up the King's treasury (1 Chr. 29:8; 2 Chr. 32:27) and cover His crown (Zech 9:16). Mere rocks when in darkness, they burst forth in radiant beauty when infused with the glorious light of God's perfections (2 Chr. 3:6). The consummate gem, Jesus, glows like a rainbow (Rev. 4:3). And His church, the New Jerusalem, is where the glory of God forever glitters on crystalline walls of the righteous, pearly gates of patriarchs, and a foundation of twelve apostolic gems (Rev. 21:11-21). 

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Paul in Athens

The history of the labors of the apostle Paul in Athens is most fascinating. The book of Acts has sometimes been called “the charter of missions.” It records the first glorious age of the amazing missionary expansion of the New Testament church.

We believe that the work of missions is the work of the almighty, exalted, and glorious Lord Jesus Christ, the sovereign of the universe, the ruler of all the nations of the world. He guides the course of history in such a way that all things are fulfilled for the final realization of His glorious everlasting kingdom of righteousness in the new heavens and earth. He is the One who sovereignly gathers His elect church from the beginning to the end of time from all the nations of the world through the preaching of the gospel.

All of this finds support in the book of Acts. The apostles were directly called and commissioned by Christ. They went forth in His authority and power that was unique to the office of apostleship. This was also true of the apostle Paul. The apostles were by virtue of their office able to speak the infallible, authoritative Word of the Lord Jesus Christ, the mighty Word of salvation. The apostles obviously thoroughly understood the truth that the church of Jesus Christ is gathered not by “the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (see I Cor. 2: 4). The pur-

pose of this, according to the apostle Paul, was so that our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Acts 17 (as the whole book of Acts does) sets forth great principles of missions. It also gives the inspired example of how the church of Jesus Christ must do mission work in a pagan world. Acts 17 gives us a pattern for how the Christian gospel confronts the foolishness of human wisdom, pagan philosophy, and pagan religion in the world. The mission work of the church even today must follow this pattern. When one considers much of modern-day mission philosophy in books that are being published, it is quite obvious that, along with apostasy in doctrine, the church of our day has departed far from the true principles for doing mission work outlined in the Scriptures, particularly the book of Acts.

The record of Paul’s labors in Acts 17 has much to say even about the stance that the Christian church, the truly Reformed church, must take over against the philosophy, art, and culture of our post-Christian age in the apostate and nominally Christian Western countries in which we live. As the Word of God prophesies, in the end of time the wickedness of these apostate Christian nations will exceed even that of pagan countries. We are certainly living in these times. The church of Jesus Christ must know her stance in this world.

We believe that the entire course of the mission labors of the apostles was directed by the Lord from His throne in the heavens. We are at times told specifically in the book of Acts that the Lord gave di-

rection as to where the apostles were to go. At other times the Spirit of the Lord actually prevented the apostles from going into certain parts of the world (see Acts 16:6). So in the purpose of the Lord the apostle Paul was also directed to go to the famous Greek city of Athens, though we are not told specifically how this was revealed to Paul.

When Paul visited Athens, she was a world famous city comparable to one of the great modern cities of our times. Athens was a world center of art and learning, of philosophy, science, art, and architecture. Many in our world today have studied the philosophy of the Greeks. Many of the philosophers hailed from Athens: Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and many more. Those who have gone to liberal arts colleges, where they have studied some philosophy, are aware of the great impact Greek philosophy had, extending its influence even to our modern age. In Paul’s time each of these philosophers had his own school in Athens. The city of Athens was known for its grand buildings, temples, palaces, and amphitheatres, some of which were monuments of architecture and design of the times. The ruins of some of these buildings have been preserved unto our day for tourists to marvel at. The culture of Athens had powerful worldwide influence. Modern-day democracy and government, with its freedom of speech and great pride in tolerating almost every brand of worldly philosophy and lifestyle, derives many of its basic principles from Athens. The men of Athens, we are told in the Bible, were always

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interested in hearing some new teacher of some new way.

Athens was especially noted for its many pagan idols. Ancient secular writers have commented on this. One states that Athens was one great altar, one great sacrifice, to pagan gods. Statues, busts, and images of pagan gods were found on every street. There were more gods in Athens than in all of the rest of Greece. She imagined herself well protected. Virtually all of the philosophy, art, and lifestyle of the Athenians was devoted to the pagan gods. This was the great inspiration of it all.

The apostle Paul says that he found the city “wholly given to idolatry.” So devoted to pagan gods were the men of Athens that they wanted to try to worship all known gods in the universe. In case they inadvertently missed one of the gods, they also had in the city “an altar to the unknown god.” When Paul came to preach in Athens, they at first imagined that Paul had come to their great city just to tell them about another god or religion that they had not heretofore heard about. They would be interested to add this “god” also to their collection. They were dreadfully mistaken.

Paul did not come to Athens as a tourist to gawk at its art and architecture and to debate with the philosophers in order to learn something of their great wisdom. Paul came to Athens as the ambassador of Christ, the mighty preacher of the gospel of Christ Jesus. The Lord directed His apostle to proclaim the truth of God in this city. Many commentaries have been written on Acts 17, in some cases entire books on just this chapter of Acts.

How did Paul preach in Athens? What was his approach? Opinions concerning this vary greatly, as you will learn when reading various popular Bible commentaries on the book of Acts. Some make a large point out of how Paul had sincere appreciation for the art and culture of Athens. Others state that Paul debated with the

philosophers of Athens on their own turf. Some interpret Acts 17 in a way that suggests that Paul was really a failure in Athens because he did not preach the gospel at all but only debated with worldly philosophers. As a result there were only a few converts in Athens. Others suggest that Paul got so caught up with the glory of Athens that he forgot his calling.


Some commentators use Acts 17 as proof that we as Christians should have a large interest in the philosophy and art of the world. We should attend the theaters of the world in order to learn important lessons for our world and life perspective that will be of great value to us for our careers in the world and our calling as citizens of the kingdom of Christ in the world. We should see the philosophy and art of the world as an evidence of “common grace” in the natural man, from which we can learn much with great positive benefit for our Christian life.

In the providence of the Lord, Paul was at first alone in Athens. Timothy and Silas, Paul’s co-laborers in the gospel, stayed behind for a time in Berea to care for the fledgling church there. They did not join Paul in Athens until some time later. While Paul stayed in Athens, he had occasion to walk the streets of this pagan city. Acts 17 gives us no reason to imagine that Paul got carried away with the glory and culture of Athens. Paul had one all-consuming passion. It was the passion for the glory of God. He had one calling, to give a faithful testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ in the world. Even though there were but few of God’s elect in this city, Paul was sent to accomplish the purpose of God in it.

Act 17:16 describes Paul’s reaction when he walked the streets of Athens. “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.” There is no evidence that Paul was greatly impressed and amazed by the culture and learning of Athens, by its

art and architecture, and by all of the monuments to human achievement and wisdom and greatness. Rather, the spirit of Paul was stirred within him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Strong language describes the attitude of the apostle, intense feeling and emotion, distress and indignation, even anger, grief, and sorrow. This attitude of Paul was rooted in his fervent love for God and for the Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul sought not the glory of man but the glory of God. Paul sought to deliver God’s people, redeemed by Christ from a pagan world of ungodliness, humanism, pride, and wickedness. From this perspective Paul performed all his labors in Athens. We can learn much from the great apostle of the Lord.

It is not true that Paul had no knowledge of or interest in the culture and learning of the day. Paul was not a simpleton. He had degrees from some of the best schools of the day in Jerusalem and Tarsus. Even from a formal point of view Paul was one of the most brilliant intellects the world has ever known. He was well read. He could quote from memory poets and philosophers of his day. Paul had knowledge of things such as the Olympic games, and sometimes in his letters he used illustrations for the inspired godly instruction he gave to the churches. He knew about the wars of the nations that had been and were being fought in the world in which he lived. He knew what it meant to be a soldier in an army. He was well acquainted with the armor that was so tremendously important for the Roman soldier. Paul had a penetrating insight into the pagan culture of Athens. He uncovered its deepest principle of paganism. He showed its utter folly and hopelessness. He preached the gospel in Athens, the gospel of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

We shall continue our discussion of this chapter in our next installment. 

The Charter of Christian Liberty (5)

An Exposition of the Book of Galatians Paul's Defense of His Apostolic Credentials (1:1 - 2:14)

The Apostolic Blessing

Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Galatians 1:4, 5

A very graphic description of Christ and His great work is appended to the apostolic blessing. This is unique among the blessings that Paul pronounces on the churches in the name of Christ, for, while he frequently includes important ideas in his address to the different churches,¹ he never includes such ideas in the blessing itself. There is some indication in this blessing of the agitation that fills the heart of the apostle at the thought of the apostasy that was present in the Galatian churches.

If we should ask why there is this particular description of the work of Christ, the answer can be found in Paul's deep concern for the error being promoted in these churches. The error of the Judaizers involved the deepest truth of the faith: the excellency and sufficiency of the cross of Jesus

Christ. This conviction of the apostle is evident from 5:2, 4: "If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.... Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." The Galatians were in dire danger of denying the cross and thus repudiating their salvation. Already in the blessing that Paul pronounces on them, he wants them to know how excellent is Christ's cross and what a great work it accomplished for the church. "This work of Christ, by which you are rescued from this evil age," Paul says, "is the work of Christ you are in danger of repudiating."

The greatness of the work of rescuing us is emphasized in the text in various ways.

First of all, the apostle speaks of this present age.² He is referring to the mighty stream of history that runs from creation to the end. It can indeed be pictured as a river, rushing through time, becoming wider with each passing year, moving more swiftly as it nears its destination, and ending in a mighty waterfall that spells not only its end, but also its destruction. Every bit of history as it is ordained to come to pass in the eternal counsel and will of God is included in it.

Second, the apostle characterizes that stream of history as "wicked." The word here defines

wickedness from the viewpoint of its vicious character. There are some little boys who are mischievous. While this is wrong, one can look on such mischief with a fairly benign attitude and even smile a bit, especially when their mischief does no one any harm. But there are also boys who are vicious. They are cruel, sadistic, evil in a way that destroys. The latter is the word that the apostle uses here to define the history of the world. History is made by people. These people are evil. Their evil is the vicious kind of evil that destroys.

Such is the world from the viewpoint of its enmity against and hatred of God. The evil of the world is not a passive inability to do good, but an active, destructive attempt to destroy God and expel Him from His own world.

The men who make up this world and are the agents of history are men who are also intent on subduing the earth. This was the original creation mandate (Gen. 1:28, 2:15, 9:1-3). Man is compelled, by virtue of his own creation as an organic part of God's world, to subdue the creation of which he is a part. But he is viciously evil. The result is that the sin of man develops as the creation is increasingly subdued and the powers of the creation are harnessed and put to man's use. He expresses his contempt for God by taking God's world, thumbing his

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nose at God, and using God's world for his own sinful purposes.

This stream of history is, therefore, a foul stream filled with garbage and sewage, unbelievably vile, stinking, and poisonous. Into it all men are born. In it they spend the days of their life in the world. And swimming along in its current is their delight. That latter is the worst of all. Wicked men find it the most pleasant way to spend their time — swimming along in the sewage.

The end of the stream is that high waterfall that plunges into hell. As time rushes on, the stream moves more swiftly and the roar of the falls is clearly heard. But wicked man pays no attention, for he is secure in the enjoyment of being swept along in this foul river.

Third, it is from this river, Paul says, that Christ rescues us!³ Such is the excellency of Christ's work.

The text emphasizes by its very language that this work of rescuing us is closely tied to Christ's work on the cross. Both the power of our rescue and the precise identity of those rescued are determined by the cross. We do not rescue ourselves. If a lifeline is thrown to us, we ignore it or destroy it. If someone on the shore pleads with us to climb out of the river, we stick our fingers in our ears. The choice of man's will is always to stay in the river. He is rescued by Christ's power. Christ comes through His Spirit and plucks us from the muck and filth of the stream.

He rescues those for whom He died. Those for whom He died are those eternally given to Him by the Father. Those given to Him by the Father are those whom God has eternally chosen to be His people. These elect, redeemed in the blood of the cross, are those rescued.

Although the sinner objects strenuously and fights with all his might against his rescue, the rescue itself makes him delighted in the work performed for him. He is, so to speak, brought to the

riverbank. He is given spiritual understanding to see the river from which he was rescued as it truly is, and he can't any longer stand the sight or the smell. On the riverbank he comes to understand that he was not rescued only to be left standing helpless at the side of the river, but, turning away from the river, he sees the glorious vista of a whole new and sinless creation that is his by a free gift of God.

In other words, the rescuing of which the text speaks makes those rescued happy, thankful, humble, and joyful saints of God who glory in that work of grace performed for them. Is it really possible, Paul wonders, that the Galatians are now ready to dive back into that river?

This work is possible because Christ "gave himself for our sins."

The whole gospel is wrapped up in those words.

That Christ gave Himself indicates our Savior's perfect obedience.

Sometimes a distinction is made between Christ's active and passive suffering. While perhaps this distinction has its value to understand more fully the whole work of Christ, it is also misleading. In fact, no part of the work of Christ was passive. Even His lowly birth was His own. He entered by His own act into our flesh and conceived Himself in the womb of Mary. He chose His own birthplace in the stable. All His life He walked in the consciousness of His calling, "I must be about my Father's business." The theme song of His life was the words of Psalm 40, which He Himself had penned through David: "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." (See also Hebrews 10:5-10.)

Christ was also active in His

suffering on the cross. He was in control every moment — as was evident when at His word the soldiers who had come to capture Him fell to the ground (John 18:6). He assembled the Sanhedrin and brought Pilate to the praetorium. He went to the cross willingly, obediently, and in the consciousness of His calling to fulfill Scripture — "In the volume of the book it is written of me. I come to do thy will, O God." So also our Lord was not simply passively obedient when the wrath of God was poured out on Him. He, as it were, reached up into heaven and pulled down the fury of God upon Himself. He walked (or stumbled) step by step down the dark stairway that led to the bottom of hell; there He built an altar; there He plunged the knife of the wrath of God into His own heart. He was, even on the cross, the eternal Son of God.

Even in that moment of awful confusion when it seemed as if He, engulfed in wrath, lost the consciousness that God was His Father and no longer could see clearly the need for such agony as He endured, He was still obedient. He loved the Lord His God with all His heart and mind and soul and strength. He loved Him in life —

1. See for example, Romans 1:2-6.

2. The word "age" is correct here. Two different Greek words are translated in the AV by the word "world." The first one, familiar to us as the word "cosmos," is used in John 3:16 and I John 2:15, 16, as well as in many other places in Scripture. Basically, its meaning is the entire creation of God. It has, however, in addition to this basic meaning, various other meanings: the world of sin, the world of election, the creation itself, etc. Here another word is used, which can best be translated "age." It refers to the world from the viewpoint of its history, as the creation is an active organism moving from the moment it was formed to its final destination.

3. The Greek word has the meaning of "to rescue," fitting for the figure of the text.

and in death. He loved Him on this earth and in hell. When that awful cry rang over Calvary, "My God, my God, why..." still He loved His God. He kept the law. He said, "Though this awful blackness is too deep to penetrate and this terrible wrath almost more than I can bear, though I do not understand anymore, I love Thee, oh, My God. I do not know why Thou hast forsaken Me, Thine own beloved Son. But though Thou dost pour out Thy wrath upon Me, I will love Thee still!"

That is what it meant that Christ gave Himself for our sins.

Three mighty truths are locked up in that expression "for our sins."

The first is that the most general word for "sin" is used here in the text. It defines sin in its essential character as missing the mark. We are called to aim the arrow of our life at the target of the glory of God. We miss. We miss, not because we try to hit that target but are rather poor shots, we miss because we turn around and shoot the arrow of our life in the opposite direction. This is the most fundamental characteristic of sin and of our lives of sin. God's glory alone is of importance. That glory we despise. In all our life, with everything we do, we sin.

Second, the preposition "for" is crucially important. It is always startling that a major truth of Scripture hangs on a small word. Here, on the word "for" hangs the whole truth of the substitutionary atone-


ment of our Lord. That He gave Himself for our sins means that He took our sins on Himself, was made sin for us, assumed full responsibility for every one of them, and did so in the full consciousness of God's holiness, which requires that one sin be punished by an eternity in hell. That He gave Himself for our sins means that the uncountable eternities for an innumerable host of elect who had committed sins without number had to be paid for by our Christ. Only His perfect sacrifice could do that.

But that He paid for them means that they are gone forever, erased from the mind and heart of God, and that we are no longer, in any way, responsible for them. No one who teaches that Christ died for every man head for head can possibly maintain the substitutionary atonement of Christ: "He gave himself for our sins."

Third, this is a personal confession of God's people. That must not be forgotten. Paul is pronouncing a blessing on the church. He does so in the name of Christ. Paul pronounces Christ's blessing on the saints. But he does so as a personal confession that includes himself. And, because that blessing must be appropriated by faith, the people of God say, in their hearts: "He gave Himself for me."

Miserable doubt and vacillation concerning one's salvation is sinful and really impossible for the child of God. He lives in the joyous reality of his rescue through

the power of the cross. How can he who marvels in awe at the truth that Christ performed this work for him now abandon it to return to his own works as the way to be saved? Ye foolish Galatians...!

It is no wonder that Paul closes with a doxology. The work of Christ is the work of God in Christ, for "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (II Cor. 5:19). Christ's work is God's work, for Christ is God. God has chosen us from eternity in sovereign love for Himself; God gave us to Christ so that Christ might, as the Head of the church, be responsible to do all that was necessary for our full and complete salvation; God in Christ gave Himself for our sins; and now God in Christ rescues us from this present evil world. We have done nothing to earn or merit it. We have contributed nothing to attain it. We stand on the bank of the river in astonishment that we could ever have delighted in swimming in that cesspool. We marvel that for some reason beyond our comprehension He has freely chosen us and done such wonderful things for us. We look at what awaits us and are overwhelmed. What shall we then do? All we can do is give all glory to God who has done so wondrously. And while giving our glory to God, we confess that God Himself has done all these things that He and He alone might receive all glory. That we give glory to Him is also of grace! 

Book Reviews



We and Our Children: The Reformed Doctrine of Infant Baptism. Herman Hanko. Second Edition Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association. 2004. xviii + 165 pages. \$7.25 (Paper). [Reviewed by Russell J. Dykstra.]

We and Our Children, first published by the RFPA in 1981, was a compilation of a series of ar-

ticles in the Protestant Reformed Theological Journal. In those articles, Professor Herman Hanko answered a book entitled *Children of Abraham?* by David Kingdon. Kingdon rejected infant baptism from the standpoint of a Reformed Baptist. *We and Our Children* analyzed and refuted the arguments of Kingdon's book, and then set forth the Reformed position.

This second edition of *We and Our Children* is an extensive revision of the first. As the author informs us, entire sections of the book have been rewritten. In my judgment, the first edition was a powerful defense of the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism. The revision is even better.

Although this second edition does not focus exclusively on

Kingdon's book, the main focus is still the position of the Reformed Baptist. A major strength of the book, therefore, is that it refutes the strongest case that can be made for the Baptist position. The strongest position is not the premil-dispensational view that posits that the old and new covenants are two entirely different covenants, established with two different peoples, and thus having two different signs. That children of Abraham are included in the old covenant as indicated by the circumcision of babies means nothing for the new covenant, according to them, because the new covenant is radically different from the old.

The Reformed Baptists agree with the Reformed that the covenants of the old and new dispensation are essentially the same covenant. In some ways this position is, therefore, much more credible, because it embraces the unity of God's covenant of grace. Nonetheless, Hanko's purpose is to demonstrate that this position of the Reformed Baptist is inconsistent, and ultimately untenable.

The major revisions came in the first two chapters of the first edition ("An Implicit Dispensationalism," and, "The Unity of Dispensations"). In the new edition, this was expanded to five chapters ("The Intermediate Position of the Reformed Baptist," "Two Dispensations?," "One Church," "One Covenant," and, "One Sign"). This distinct treatment of the various elements in the argument is an improvement over the first edition. The presentation is clear and the arguments well grounded in Scripture.

A major part of the argument concerns the place of children in the covenant. This book is crystal clear on that issue. It is exceedingly helpful in discussing the organic element of the covenant. With this biblical presentation of the covenant as eternal, as unconditional, and as established by God only with those who are in Christ

(the elect), it lays to rest the arguments of the Baptists. It is Hanko's position that any other view of the covenant will not consistently and effectively defend the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism. In my judgment, he has made his case.

The book is clear and well written, and thus profitable for theologian and layman alike. ■

Cruel Paradise, Life Stories of Dutch Emigrants. Hylke Speerstra; translated and abridged by Henry J. Baron. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005). Pp. xv, 240. (Paperback) [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

Hylke Speerstra, himself a Frisian, has given us a collection of stories, told by emigrants themselves, of their departure from Friesland to seek a new life in another country. Whether one is himself a Frisian, or of Dutch ancestry, or of any other nationality, he will find these stories so absorbing that he will have difficulty laying the book down before finishing it.

The story involves mostly, though not entirely, Post-World War II emigrants who left their mother country and their own province in the north of Netherlands to seek their fortunes elsewhere. They left their homes, their families, their churches, and their familiar surroundings in which their ancestors had lived, sometimes for centuries, for the sake of building a new life in another country. They traveled (and their stories are told here) by boat to the United States, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia.

The stories are told, for the most part, by the ones who themselves made the trip. Though most are not intended to boast of their exploits, what comes through strongly is their courage through suffering, their hardship and pain, their hard work and sacrifice in establishing themselves in a new land. The stories will make one

sometimes laugh uproariously and other times weep copious tears as one lives with them through their experiences. Settling in a new land was not easy.

Most of the stories told here in the book are success stories in financial terms. One observer of the lives of the emigrants estimated that 90% were financially successful. In most cases, it was not like the immigration to America in the nineteenth century: most of these immigrants never enjoyed financial success, but built a foundation on which the next generation could build. These people could themselves enjoy the fruit of their labors. Some became owners of vast business enterprises and attained enormous wealth.

Yet, not all are success stories. Some failed in their efforts, even on occasion returned to their home country, and left behind financial disaster and destroyed marriages.

This emphasis on financial success is the troubling part of the stories. The immigrants who came to this country or other countries prior to World War II, though they too found life financially difficult in the Netherlands, were frequently motivated by religious reasons. They sought a land where they could worship their God in peace, train their children in schools where the Reformed heritage was taught their children, and walk an antithetical life without harassment. They built their church first, their schools second, and made their homes decent and really livable only when their religious needs could be satisfied.


Things changed religiously and morally after World War II. From what one reads of postwar years, and from what one observes today, the war fatally damaged the people of the Netherlands ecclesiastically, religiously, and morally. This was reflected in the people who sought other lands in which to live. The book tells a great deal about their motives for leaving their homeland, and, in fact, emphasizes the finan-

cial aspect of their stories. There is little about religion and a great deal about becoming wealthy. There is little about seeking a Reformed church or establishing one, but much about establishing a flourishing business — often at the expense of a Reformed church home. Granted that after the great war, Netherlands was finding it difficult and very costly to rebuild a ruined economy; it still remains a fact that material considerations

drove most people to go elsewhere. This in itself would not be something for which the immigrants could be criticized, but even in other lands, wealth came first; church a poor second.

Another theme that runs through the book and makes the book extremely interesting is that these Frisian emigrants never really were able completely to pull up their roots sunk so deeply in Frisian soil. Their ties to their

province remained strong all their lives. They could not shake free completely from the country out of which they had come. They returned frequently and in a few instances permanently to the land of their forefathers. It was as if they lived in two lands: their bodies and souls in their adopted country, their hearts in Friesland.

The book is most enjoyable and adds an important chapter to the history of the Dutch people. 

Report of Classis East

Hope Protestant Reformed Church
January 11, 2006

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, January 11, 2006 at the Hope PRC. Each church was represented by two delegates. Rev. W. Bruinsma served as chair of this session. Students in the church history classes at Covenant Christian High School were in attendance for part of the morning session.

The business of classis was, for the most part, routine for a January classis. Classis devoted a good deal of time voting for synodical delegates and the other functionaries of the classis. Elected to serve as delegates to Synod 2006: *Primi*: A. denHartog, C. Haak, K. Koole, J. Slopsema, R. VanOverloop; *Secundi*: M. Dick, D. Kleyn, R. Kleyn, W. Langerak, J. Laning. Elders — *Primi*: G. Kaptein, H. Langerak, D. Ondersma, T. Pipe, D. Rau; *Secundi*: P. Adams,

T. DeVries, A. Rau, J. VanBaren, B. Zandstra.

In other voting, Rev. W. Langerak was elected to a three-year term on the Classical Committee, Rev. C. Haak to a three-year term as a *primus* delegate *ad examina*, Rev. D. Kleyn to a three-year term as a *secundus* delegate *ad examina*. Revs. K. Koole and R. VanOverloop were elected as church visitors, with Rev. C. Haak as alternate.

The report of the church visitors was read. The church visitors reported that there is peace and harmony within the congregations of Classis East.

Subsidy requests were received from Covenant, Kalamazoo, and Wingham. These requests were approved and will be forwarded to Synod 2006. Classical appointments were granted to Kalamazoo and Covenant.


Considerable time was given to

a discussion on the continued viability of the Covenant PRC. In the context of continued subsidy to small churches, Synod 2005 asked the classis to inquire again into their viability. A special committee of classis recommended that Covenant be granted subsidy for 2007. Classis adopted this recommendation and will forward its findings to Synod 2006.

Classis was in closed session to consider a matter of discipline.

Classis bid farewell to Rev. Bruinsma, as he will soon be taking up his work as home missionary in Pittsburgh. Rev. Bruinsma thanked the classis for the fellowship he has enjoyed in the meetings of this body.

Expenses of classis amounted to \$1,593.46. The May 10, 2006 meeting of classis will be held at Byron Center PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk 

News From Our Churches

Congregation Activities

All the members of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA were in-

vited and encouraged to remain after their evening worship service on January 8 to hear a Christmas concert presented by their church choir.

Members of the Ladies Tuesday Morning Bible Study at the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville,

MI were invited to a special meeting on January 17 to hear one of their own, Mrs. Laura Miedema, speak to them on "The Abortion Industry in our Backyard." Laura planned to speak of how abortion affects us right now in our Christian environment. Laura also

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

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

hoped to inform the ladies of ways they could help address this issue.

After Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, a group of Presbyterian churches in that area familiar with our churches contacted several of our ministers and congregations for help. Since then members in the PRC have donated about \$50,000 through Rev. Eugene Case, pastor of their Woodville congregation and administrative treasurer. He thanks God "for the absolutely wonderful generosity of the PRC people" and says, "every cent has been and will be applied to the needs of their people." Through the council of Georgetown PRC, they have now asked for help with general reconstruction of homes and church buildings. They are able to feed and lodge 90 people at a time. If anyone is interested, contact Tom Schimmel at 616-437-6671, or e-mail tom@blshomes.com.

The Adult Bible Study of the South Holland, IL PRC invited members from their congregation, as well as others from our nearby churches, to join them on January 10 for a presentation and discussion on the subject of the "Federal Vision." Prof. H. Hanks presented an introduction to this movement and then entertained questions and chaired a discussion of this recent threat to the Reformed faith.

At a congregational meeting in mid January, the members of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI approved the purchasing of a piano for the lower level of their building. The congregation also approved a proposal to buy a house, for a parsonage, on the property adjacent to their church.

The consistory of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI called a special congregational meeting for January 12. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss and vote on a proposal to have a 4:00 P.M. second service each Sunday instead of their present 7 P.M./6 P.M. arrangement. After some discussion it was decided to change the

time of their second Sunday worship service to 4:00 P.M. This change will begin on February 5 and will be for a trial period of one year.

The council of the Emmanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada approved a proposal to purchase an outdoor storage unit for the storage of their church and parsonage yard maintenance equipment.

Rev. R. Miersma, newly installed pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, delivered his inaugural sermon as Loveland's undershepherd on Sunday morning, January 8. Rev. Miersma chose to preach from the Word of God found in Romans 1:16 under the theme, "Boldness to Preach the Gospel."

Evangelism Activities

As promised in our last "News," we now include more information regarding the radio broadcast of worship services from the Georgetown PRC. These hour broadcasts began on Sunday, January 1, on WFUR, 1570 AM from 3:00 to 4:00 P.M. under the general program theme of "Sitting at the Feet of Jesus," taken from Luke 10:39 and the example of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Georgetown's goals in airing their services are: 1. The spread of and increased understanding in the wondrous gospel of grace. 2. The strengthening of believers in the solid and peace-giving Reformed faith. 3. The building of the church by the call of the gospel. Pray for the Lord's blessing upon this means of magnifying Him through His Word.

"Christianity on Campus," the outreach work at Grand Valley State University, under the combined direction of Grace PRC in Standale, MI and PR university students at Grand Valley, began its meetings for the spring semester in mid January. Plans called for the study of the entire New Testament this semester. Rev. C. Haak, pastor at Georgetown, led

the first week and leads every other meeting, with Rev. M. Dick, pastor at Grace, leading the other meetings.


Mission Activities

The Lord continues to bless the work our churches are doing in the Philippines, so that the Berean Fellowship is to the point that they are eager and ready for organization as a congregation, having made the request to the Doon, IA PRC and the Foreign Mission Committee. Rev. A. Spriensma, missionary pastor, writes, "The saints are growing in their understanding and appreciation of the Reformed faith. We continue to see visitors in our worship services. This morning (Jan. 1) we celebrate God's goodness to us by hearing God's Word in Psalm 37:5. 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him and he shall bring it to pass.'" A word we should all remember.

We also include a recent quote from a bulletin from the Covenant Reformed Fellowship in Northern Ireland: "I've learned so much from your website and grown so much in faith and knowledge that I yesterday for the first time in a very long time enjoyed the Sunday. The past year I hated Sundays — they reminded me in an awful painful way of my loneliness and churchlessness.... But yesterday for the first time I've enjoyed the Sunday and considered the day to be too short to read and hear all that I'd like to listen to and read. For the first time I see clearly what a blessing it is that God has revealed the truth to me!! —Sweden

Minister Activities

Rev. M. Dick declined the call he had been extended by the congregation of the Edgerton, MN PRC to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. A. Brummel declined the call he had been considering to serve as pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Doon PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to fellow member Chester Hunter, Jr. and his family in the passing away of his father,

MR. CHESTER HUNTER, SR.

We pray that the family will experience the comfort of our Lord who took this brother in Christ to his eternal rest. Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Perry VanEgdom, Vice-All
Mr. Jeff Baker, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Gerben and Carol DeJong and their children in the death of Carol's father and mother,

MR. and MRS. COLMAN LUND.

May they find their comfort in the Word of God in Psalm 73:24, "Thou shalt guide me by thy council and afterwards receive me to glory."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Don VerMeer, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary-Martha Society of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands expresses heartfelt Christian sympathy to fellow member Shirley Meulenberg in the loss of her husband,

MR. PETE MEULENBERG.

May she find comfort in the words found in Isaiah 51:11: "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President
Dawn Howerzyl, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC extend their Christian sympathy to Carl and Jill Maassen and their children in the death of Carl's sister-in-law,

MRS. SHARON WYNIA.

May they find comfort in the words of I Thessalonians 4:14, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Don VerMeer, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Eunice Brummel, Mr. and Mrs. Ray Brunsting, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hoekstra, Mrs. Margaret Hoekstra, Mr. Ted Hoekstra, and Mr. and Mrs. Bert VanMaanen, in the death of their brother and brother-in-law and to the cousins, nieces, and nephews of

MR. JOHN HOEKSTRA.

May the comfort of the family be in this, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Psalm 73:25, 26).

Rev. Steven Key, President
Don VerMeer, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Society of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church expresses Christian sympathy to fellow member Eleanore Bol and her family in the death of her brother,

MR. HENRY MEULENBERG.

It is our prayer that the family take comfort from the Word of God found in Psalm 73:24, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

Rev. Garry Eriks, President
Brenda Hoekstra, Secretary

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2006-2007 academic year should make application at the March 16, 2006 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

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

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 16 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

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The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.