

# The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

...exercise of the intellect is essential to spiritual listening. And without it there will never be any true listening to the Word.... It is either a putting forth of the necessary intellectual effort to understand what the Scriptures are saying, to understand what the minister is preaching about, to understand what God is saying; or it is not really listening to the preaching at all because of mere intellectual and mental laziness.

See "My Sheep Hear My Voice" — page 175

## CONTENTS

Meditation—	
Ascended on High .....	170
Editorial—	
Still Non-Functional .....	173
My Sheep Hear My Voice—	
Letter to Timothy .....	175
The Lord Gave the Word—	
Missionary Methods (9) .....	177
All Around Us—	
Of "Sacred Cows" and "Sour Milk" .....	179
Evangelism .....	180
Difficulties of Westminster Seminary .....	181
Bible Study Guide—	
Galatians — Our Liberty in Christ .....	182
Guest Article—	
Examining Church Membership .....	184
The Day of Shadows—	
Faltering Faith and Manifold Mercy .....	186
Question Box—	
Our Natural Depravity .....	188
Book Reviews .....	190
News From Our Churches .....	191

## THE STANDARD BEARER

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## MEDITATION

## Ascended on High

Rev. C. Hanko

*Ques. 46. How dost thou understand these words, "He ascended into heaven"?*

*Ans. That Christ, in sight of His disciples, was taken up from earth into heaven; and that He continues there for our interest, until He comes again to judge the quick and the dead.*

*Ques. 49. Of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension into heaven?*

*Ans. First, that He is our advocate in the presence of His Father in heaven; secondly, that we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, as the Head, will also take up to Himself, us, His members; thirdly, that He sends us His Spirit as an earnest, by whose power we "seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and not things on earth."*

*Heid. Catechism, Lord's Day 19. \**

This is Anno Domini, the year of our Lord, 1982.

By the providence of our God our calendar dates back to the time of Jesus' birth. That was the break-

ing of the dawn, heralding a new day, the beginning of the new dispensation.

Events followed rapidly one upon another after



the birth of the Savior. He was born in abject poverty in Bethlehem, dwelled and labored among us for some thirty years, and ended His earthly ministry with His atoning death on the cross. Thereupon our Lord arose from the dead and ascended to heaven. After His resurrection He had tarried only long enough to reveal to us in His resurrection body the wonder of His victory over death. Nine times He appeared to His disciples, showing them new aspects of His resurrection body, only to disappear from sight as suddenly as He had appeared to them.

The last appearance was the most wonderful of all. Jesus met the eleven, likely in Jerusalem, and led them to the mount of Olives, conversing with them along the way. There on the mount, after answering a few more questions, Jesus extended His hands over them as evidence of His continued blessing upon them. As He blessed them He began to ascend before their wondering gaze. At that moment a cloud appeared, which enveloped Him, so that they saw Him no more.

Scripture describes this event by saying that a "cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). As children we were disappointed that this cloud "just happened" to be there at that time, preventing the disciples from following their Lord's ascent until He faded away as a dim speck in the azure blue. Now we know better. We understand that this cloud was a part of the wonder of the ascension. God brought that cloud at that moment, a small distance above the heads of the disciples, that they might see Jesus enter into the cloud. This was not an ordinary cloud lazily drifting through the skies, but it was a cloud of glory that symbolized heaven itself. It was like the cloud that led Israel through the Red Sea and went before them in the desert until they reached the promised land. It was like the cloud that hovered over the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place, symbolizing God's presence among His people. A similar cloud appeared on the mount of transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus and a voice from the cloud spoke to the disciples. Here on the mount of the ascension God causes this cloud of glory to appear and to envelop Jesus as a sign of His entering into heaven. This is the interpretation of the angels who stood with the disciples and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The Old Testament stresses the importance of this event as well as the New. I think of Psalm 8, Psalm 24:7-10, Psalm 45:7, Psalm 68:18, and es-

pecially Psalm 110. It is never difficult to find *Psalter* numbers for the Ascension Day services. What always impresses us is the description of this momentous event in Daniel 7:13, 14, where the triumphant Savior is described as making His march of triumph accompanied by the entire angel host through the heavens to be presented before the throne of the Eternal God, where He receives power and dominion over all the works of God's hands. The ascension of Christ not only concludes His earthly ministry, but is the occasion for His coronation in heaven. It brings the clock of history to the eleventh hour. It introduces the "millennium" of Revelation 20. It brings about the Day of the Lord, the end of the ages, the last hour. The next great event that still awaits us is the return of our Lord with the same kind of cloud.

In harmony with its experiential approach, our Catechism emphasizes the advantage of Christ's ascension for us. We are reminded that Christ is now our Advocate before the Father. Moreover, He has taken our flesh into heaven as a pledge that we will be united with Him in glory. And, finally, we are reminded that He sends His Spirit as an Earnest in our hearts, drawing us unto Him, so that we seek the things above.

Our Advocate stands before the Father.

The apostle John writes, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not, and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1, 2). We are reminded how sorely we need one who represents us before the throne of grace, not with an occasional plea on our behalf, but as one who stands in God's presence interceding for us night and day. We are wretched, miserable sinners, who bring upon ourselves God's holy wrath every moment. Even our best works are sinful. Our prayers are for the most part an abomination in God's ears. We deserve only to be banished from His presence into everlasting condemnation. Our Advocate must be, can be no other than Jesus Christ, the Righteous, Who died for us and lives to intercede for us.

This means, first of all, that God no longer sees us as we are in ourselves, but sees us in Christ, clothed from head to foot in the righteousness of the Lamb for sinners slain. He regards us as sons and daughters, heirs of salvation, worthy of eternal covenant fellowship with Him.

Besides that, Christ intercedes for us. He prays that we may be taken up with Him to share His glory before the throne of God forever (John 17:24). Included in that main prayer are many individual petitions for material and spiritual blessings accord-

\*For the entire Lord's Day see your *Psalter* or Hymn Book.



ing to our personal needs. Christ prays for and receives the Spirit to dwell in us. By His Spirit Christ bestows upon us the gifts of grace whereby we are made ready to appear without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal. Meanwhile He holds us by His hand, guides us daily by His counsel, and afterward takes us into His glory. Christ does still more. He arouses us by His Spirit to worship in prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, before the face of the Father. He takes all of our prayers and presents them before the throne of grace. Even though we pray in Christ's Name more out of force of habit than in real need, our Lord takes this very seriously, so that no prayer arises from our lips which is not purified from all its imperfections and presented before the face of God with the plea that God hear us purely on the basis of His meritorious work of the cross. It is for Christ's sake, and for His sake alone, that God answers our prayers in a way far above our fondest imagination.

#### Our Flesh in Heaven.

The benefits of Christ's ascension seem to have no end. Our Catechism adds, "We have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, as the Head, will also take to Himself, us, His members."

Christ is our Head, we are the members of His body. Upon that fact our fathers lay the emphasis here. As our Head Christ merited the right to enter heaven. As our Head He brought our flesh into heaven. When we with our first parents were banished from paradise we were cast out from the presence of God. Christ had to merit the right for us to be brought back into God's fellowship and favor. Thus when our Savior had finished His atoning work of the cross the veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom, signifying that Christ had opened the way into heavenly fellowship with God for us!

As our Head Christ did even more than that. The Son of God came into the weakness of our flesh, tabernacled among us, died, and was raised in our flesh, transforming it into a resurrection body that was fit for heaven. The presence of Christ in heaven today is our guarantee that we will be where He is in a resurrection body.

How could we ever express it more beautifully and more emphatically than Paul expresses it in Ephesians 2:4-6? We marvel at each word as we read, "But God, Who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith He loves us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved), and hath raised us up together, and *made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*!" Already we sit with Christ at the right hand of God, possessing in Him

and with Him all power in heaven and on earth. What stronger proof could we have that "though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:26)?

We share in the blessings of Christ's ascension even now. Our Book of Instruction reminds us that Christ "sends us His Spirit as an earnest, by Whose power we 'seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and not the things on earth.' "

God provides us with a double guarantee of all the riches of our eternal salvation. He places Christ in heaven, and He sends the Spirit of Christ into our hearts. Through His Spirit Christ fulfills His promise to us, "I will not leave you comfortless (as orphans); I will come to you." Christ came to dwell in us on Pentecost. Now we gratefully confess with the apostle Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

The Spirit of Christ is an Earnest, an advance on the full salvation that awaits us in heaven. He dwells in us to abide in us forever. He quickens us with the life of Christ. He transforms us from children of Satan to sons and daughters of the living God, restored in His likeness. We are united to Christ by the bond of living faith. By the power of that faith we experience sorrow for sin, repentance, forgiveness, justification, sanctification, preservation, joy, peace, yes, all the riches of grace in Christ Jesus.

We are aliens in this present world, with our citizenship in heaven. We are strangers on the earth, wending our pilgrimage to the city that has foundations, our Home in heaven.

Oh, to be there, where we shall never more sin, where sorrow and death are unknown, where all tears are washed away!

Ah, to be with Christ is a joy unspeakable that is full of glory! To behold His face in righteousness and to be able to devote our soul and body every moment of endless life to the praise of the glory of our God!

That will be glory, glory for me!

*The Standard Bearer  
makes a thoughtful  
gift for the sick  
and shut-in.*



## EDITORIAL

## Still Non-Functional

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

In an editorial in our November 15, 1981 issue I criticized the Editor of *The Banner* for editorially decreeing that articles 27-29 of the Belgic Confession are non-functional in the Christian Reformed Church. Literally he wrote: "And the kind of thinking about the church that is recorded in the Belgic Confession is no longer functional in the Christian Reformed Church." I suggested that this was contrary to the Formula of Subscription as well as contrary to the adopted gravamen procedure of Editor Kuyvenhoven's denomination.

As it turned out, Editor Kuyvenhoven met with criticism from within his own denomination also. And in *The Banner* of December 7, 1981 the Editor takes cognizance of this criticism that he "did not do justice to the Belgic Confession" and states: "I will try to say more clearly what I had in mind."

Now frankly, my impression is that Editor Kuyvenhoven stated things rather clearly, and even bluntly, in his first editorial on this subject. And my impression is, too, that in his editorial of December 7 the Editor is not his usual clear and forthright self. He does not address himself directly to my criticism; nor, in my opinion, does he clearly answer his critics in "Voices." Nevertheless, it seems plain to me that the Rev. Kuyvenhoven has not retreated from the position for which I criticized him, namely, of writing off the Belgic Confession without benefit of gravamen and contrary to the Formula of Subscription. If that is not his position, let him plainly state this and let him retract his original statement. Then we will at least have clarity.

In the first place, the Rev. Kuyvenhoven goes to the heart of the matter in the first part of his editorial when he writes as follows:

The Reformers and the Belgic Confession know two churches, one true and one false. They also know some sects, but these have no right to the name "church."

Can one know the difference between the true church and the false church? Yes: "These two Churches are easily known and distinguished from each other" (Art. 29).

Today nobody thinks in terms of two churches — real, down-on-earth churches—of which one is true and the other false, and nobody would say it is easy to

distinguish between the two. In the October editorial I said that we surrendered this point of view with finality when we adopted the word "denomination."

From these lines it is plain that Editor Kuyvenhoven is maintaining his claim that "the kind of thinking about the church that is recorded in the Belgic Confession is no longer functional in the Christian Reformed Church."

For my part, I do not believe that the Belgic Confession means that the true church is and can be represented in only one church denomination or communion of churches; nor does it mean that the false church is and can be represented in only one church denomination or communion of churches. Nor do I believe that the Belgic Confession precludes the idea that there may be various degrees of purity and various manifestations of the true church. Nor does the Belgic Confession compel one to believe that a given church, or communion of churches, in the midst of the world becomes completely and totally false all at once. Also in this respect there are degrees.

For the rest, regardless of what may be the attitude toward Article 29 in the Christian Reformed Church, we of the Protestant Reformed Churches subscribe without reservation to the teachings of Article 29. Nor do I hesitate to say that the Protestant Reformed Churches represent the true church in the sense that they are the purest manifestation of the body of Christ, the church, when they are judged according to the standard of the three marks mentioned in Article 29.

Twice more the Rev. Kuyvenhoven confirms the fact that he still holds Articles 27-29 of the Belgic Confession to be non-functional.

First of all, referring to the use of the word "denomination" and its introduction into the Revised Church Order of the CRC, Editor Kuyvenhoven writes:

This is what I meant when I said that the views of the Reformers and the thought patterns of the Confession are no longer ours. If Christian Reformed people thought and spoke in confessional terms, they would call Billy Graham a preacher without fixed charge and the Protestant Reformed Church (should be: Churches, HCH) a sect. But we don't do that.



Now without commenting on the advisability of the change in the Church Order to which the Editor refers, I must say in general that I do not share his aversion for the word "denomination." He calls it "a bad word—as bad as the word 'layman.'" I find it a rather innocent word, as well as necessary. After all, it only means "a group of churches of the same name." Thus, the Christian Reformed Church is a denomination; the Protestant Reformed Churches are a denomination; the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is a denomination. What is wrong with this? To be sure, as soon as that word "denomination" is given a specific identity, it also becomes incumbent upon the Reformed believer to apply the test of the marks of the true church and to make a judgment accordingly. The problem, it seems to me, does not lie in the word "denomination" but in the failure to adhere to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. Meanwhile, it is plain again from the paragraph just quoted that Editor Kuyvenhoven maintains that the Belgic Confession, 27-29, is neither functional nor functioning in his denomination.

Incidentally, the Editor is quite welcome to call our Protestant Reformed Churches a sect—on one condition, namely, that he can *prove* it by applying the test of the marks mentioned in Article 29. At the same time, I would seriously urge him to apply that same test to his own denomination and to take earnest cognizance of the test-results.

Once more the Editor takes the same position, principally, when he suggests that the confession should be rewritten:

We meet these evangelicals with a confession about a true church that is to be known by three marks: true gospel preaching, right administration of the sacraments, and faithful exercise of Christian discipline. These marks are important, also today. But they are very formal signs of the true church. Article 29 also gives the marks of true Christians. These are recited less frequently among us.

If the Reformed churches would take their confession seriously, they would now say in their own words what they believe concerning the church of Christ. Such a new confession would not invalidate the Belgic Confession, but it would articulate the same faith in a situation that was unimaginable at the time of Guido De Bres.

Notice, first of all, that the Rev. Kuyvenhoven wants the confession of the church rewritten; he wants a new confession. And he claims that such a new confession would not invalidate the Belgic Confession, but would simply "articulate the same faith in a situation" that is different from that in which the Reformers lived and in which our confessions were composed. But this is impossible for three reasons. In the first place, Editor Kuyvenho-

ven has already in effect declared the Belgic Confession invalid: it is non-functional in his denomination. How, then, can a new confession about the church ever express the same truths as does our present confession? In the second place, it is exactly the nature of confessions that they give expression to *principles* of truth. But principles do not change, but are applicable to all changing and changeable situations. Why then would a new confession be necessary? In the third place, Editor Kuyvenhoven exaggerates the difference between the situation in the time of Guido De Bres and the situation of our own day. It is true, of course, that since the time of the Reformation denominations, all claiming to represent the church, have multiplied vastly and that there are many more than at the time of the Reformers and the time when our confessions were written. But we must not imagine that in Reformation times the situation was as simple as Editor Kuyvenhoven pictures it to be. For one thing, there were not only the churches of the Calvin Reformation and the Church of Rome. There were also the Lutherans and the Zwinglians. And while there were indeed significant differences between the latter and the churches of Geneva, the Calvinists, nevertheless these three recognized one another, had contact with one another, and certainly did not exclude one another from the true church, while they were at the same time united in their condemnation of Rome. For another, we must remember that there soon appeared differences in the family of the Reformed churches. These differences were, of course, partly national and geographical. But in the nature of the case there were also differences as to the confessions which the various churches eventually adopted. There were even serious differences as to the form of church government in some of the churches. Now it is true that today the number of these differences and the number of denominations is vastly multiplied; but that is only a difference of degree, and it is a process of multiplication which, in fact, began with the Reformation itself.

We must, therefore, insist on applying the principles of our Belgic Confession to today's situation. There is no need of change, let alone the fact that Reformed churches in general would today not be spiritually and doctrinally strong enough to write a sound confession about the true and the false church.

Finally, I am perturbed about Editor Kuyvenhoven's view of the marks of the church. True, he says they are important. But he calls them "very formal signs of the true church." The contrary is true. These marks are not mere formal signs. They are essential.

Why?



The reason why these are the marks is connected with the very nature of the church. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. There simply is no other foundation possible—not for the true church! If the church is to be built, it must be built on that foundation. And whoever proclaims anything else than the pure doctrine of the gospel is not building upon that foundation; he builds on another foundation, and he builds a mere human institution. It pleases Christ to call and to build His church through the preaching of the Word. Men may raise all kinds of objections against preaching and against sermons—as they do nowadays. They may devise various glamorous substitutes for the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel. Or they may corrupt and adulterate that pure doctrine of the gospel. The fact remains that it pleases Christ to gather His church through the preaching of His own Word. You can never change that! Where the Word is preached, there is Christ;

there is the voice of the Good Shepherd; there the sheep hear His voice; there they follow Him; there He gives them eternal life! This we must never forget!

For remember: the church needs Christ! It is only in living connection with Christ, the Christ of the Scriptures, that the church *is* the church, and that the members possess the life of Christ. And the only contact which we have with Christ as long as we are in this present world is through *His* Word (not man's word), through *His* sacraments, and through *His* government and discipline. Where these are missing, Christ is missing. Where they are corrupted and to the extent that they are corrupted, there the members are being separated from contact with Christ their Head, and there the church must either repent or perish!

This is the life-and-death seriousness of this entire question of the marks of the true church!

## MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

# Letter to Timothy

January 15, 1981

Dear Timothy,

In connection with our whole discussion about the importance of our proper attitude towards the preaching of the Word, we were discussing, in our last letter, what is involved in listening to a sermon. You will recall that I concluded that last letter with the remark that listening had to be, above all, *spiritual*. It is to this matter which I want to turn in this letter.

It is not easy to listen to a sermon spiritually. One listens to a sermon differently from the way one listens to a symphony program, a choral program, or even a lecture on "Luther's View of Scripture." One listens to a symphony play Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony" to enjoy fine music. He can appreciate the skill of the composer and the ability of the orchestra playing the piece; he can even be moved by the music and capture some of the "ideas" in the mind of the composer when the piece was being written. If he listens intently and knowledgeably, he can be thrilled by the intricacies of the music. But that is not yet the same as listening to a sermon. The same is true of a stirring rendition of Handel's

"Messiah," and of well worked-out and excellently-delivered discourse on "Luther's View of Scripture." But it is not the same as listening to a sermon.

The difference lies in the fact that a sermon is authoritative proclamation, by an ambassador of Christ, of the truth of the gospel. Things happen during the preaching of a sermon which do not happen under other circumstances. Christ is speaking—though it be through the preacher. The Spirit is working—though always in connection with the preaching itself. Sinners are being brought to repentance. The cross of Christ is applying its healing balm to wounded spirits and broken hearts. The Church of Jesus Christ is being gathered, defended, and preserved—to use the expression of our Heidelberg Catechism in Q. & A. 54. Mysterious things, wonderful things, heavenly things are happening, which take place only when the gospel is being preached in Church on the Lord's Day. The minister stands in awe of this as he engages in his task.

But it is because of all this that listening to a sermon is a spiritual exercise.

What does this mean? I mean, what does this



mean from the viewpoint of our responsibility as hearers? How does one listen to a sermon in a way that is pleasing to God, in a way that makes his listening an act of worship, in a way which is for his edification and salvation?

There are a number of things which can and must be said about this.

Listening is always, first of all, concentrated effort to *understand* what is being said. The Word of God, if it is to have its power over us and in our lives, must pass through our minds and understanding. This seems axiomatic, but it is often forgotten in our day. Preaching is often considered successful when it is an emotional experience. Revivalists and Pentecostals are experts at making worship services emotional experiences. But that is about all they are too. This is not the viewpoint of Scripture. Scripture, when preached, has its power when it is given to us through the preaching as a certain body of intellectual data which conveys truth. Our Heidelberg Catechism speaks of faith as being a certain knowledge. It says that faith is *not only* a certain knowledge; but it is at least that. And, as a matter of fact, it cannot be anything else, such as confidence, unless it is first of all a certain knowledge. Nor must it be forgotten that the meaning of the word "certain" here is not: "a certain kind of" knowledge; the meaning is: "a definite and sure" knowledge.

This is probably partly the trouble nowadays. A generation brought up on the pabulum and pap of TV has never learned to exercise its God-given intellect. To learn and know and understand the truth is beyond the intellectual capacity of this generation; or, at least, if not beyond the intellectual capacity, it requires a mental effort which is too much for the average listener. To think is too hard when one has been spoon-fed all one's life.

But, however that may be, exercise of the intellect is essential to spiritual listening. And without it there will never be any true listening to the Word. We might just as well face it. It is either a putting forth of the necessary intellectual effort to understand what the Scriptures are saying, to understand what the minister is preaching about, to understand what God is saying; or it is not really listening to the preaching at all because of mere intellectual and mental laziness.

But, of course, listening must be more than intellectual understanding of what is being said. It must always be a listening which is an act of submission to the Word of God. The child of God, while sitting in Church, must listen in the awareness that God through Christ is speaking to him and that he must submit to the Word which is being spoken. This "must" is never the "must" of unwilling coercion

or necessity; it is rather the "must" of willing and joyful obedience. The child of God wants to hear God speak to him because God's voice is filled with the "good news" of salvation. But that conscious submission must be there.

It is so easy to try to impose our word upon Scripture, to try to make Scripture say what we would like to have it say, to listen to what interests us and tune out when we are no longer interested. It is so easy to be haughty and arrogant over against the Word and forget that the greatest and least of all God's people stand on a common level before the great and mighty Word of our God.

This submission to the Word must express itself in personal listening—where the determinative word is "personal."

This is how the Spirit works, you see. The Word, after all, comes objectively. The Word speaks of Christ's atoning sacrifice, by which He paid for all the sins of the elect and earned for them salvation. But the objective Word preached does not mention the personal and family names of the people of God. The objective Word preached does not say: Christ earned salvation for John Van Donkerhuis. Yet that Word is made personal—by the subjective operation of the Holy Spirit. That objective Word preached is so applied by the Holy Spirit to the hearts of the elect that John Van Donkerhuis hears that Word and, because the truth is impressed upon his consciousness, says: "Christ died for me! Wonder of wonders! Thanks be to God."

That is why spiritual listening is always personal listening. This too is very hard to do. We like to sit in Church and speculate about who the minister has in mind with this reprimand. We like to think to ourselves: "I wonder how so-and-so is reacting to all this." We like to take a quick look around the auditorium to see whether Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ is in Church because he really ought to hear what the minister is saying. We don't hear the Word that way. The only question which each child of God faces in Church on the Lord's Day is: What does God's Word have to say to *me*? There is no other question of importance. Only then will we hear Christ speak to us, objectively through the Word and subjectively through the Spirit's efficacious work in our hearts.

This spiritual listening must always be present no matter what the minister is talking about. Perhaps the minister is explaining the truth of the incarnation. Now it is usually true that the minister will spend some time in his sermon explaining to the congregation what benefit there is in this truth for the people of God. Especially if he is preaching on the Heidelberg Catechism, this will be the case. But it really need not be always the case. It is quite



possible that he never gets around to this question of personal benefit. Does that mean that there is no blessing in such a sermon? Far from the truth is such an idea. The reaction of the child of God to such a sermon is: What a beautiful truth of God's Word is the truth of the incarnation. How great God is in all His works and ways. What glorious things God does for His people. Or, in other words, the believer is moved to praise and adoration because of the greatness and beauty of God's truth.

This is usually the case when preaching takes on the form of instruction. It need not always be such a purely personal matter as: what benefit is there in this for me? In a way, that is purely selfish. Have we no other concern in the preaching than: What's in it for me? Have we become so selfish that we cannot appreciate anything but what has some immediate and tangible value?

Nevertheless, instruction, as instruction, for its own sake, has benefit, for to know God in Jesus Christ is to have life eternal (John 17:3).

We listen personally to be instructed in the truth.

We also must listen personally and spiritually when the Word of God admonishes and corrects us. This is also very difficult to do. It is difficult to do because we all have our pet sins which we do not want to forsake; and, worse yet, we all have sin which is dear to us and which we do not want exposed. And so when Scripture comes with its admonitions it sometimes hits raw nerves and opens wounds. It hits us where it hurts. It chastizes, corrects, prods, and hurts. Then to submit is most difficult because we want to remain comfortably in

our sins and not be reminded of our wickedness or of our calling to forsake these sins.

We have a thousand skillful ways to dodge the sharp sword of the Word. Sometimes the minister can even see some of these reactions from the pulpit. He is preaching against a current evil in the congregation and he can see many in the congregation shift their position and get a look on their face which clearly means to say: "Oh, brother. Here we go again. I wonder how long he's going to be on this hobby horse of his this time."

Spiritual listening submits to the Word no matter what. It is a listening which lets the Word do its work. No matter how much it hurts, one submits.

And then spiritual listening is *doing*. James warns sharply against hearers of the Word who are not doers. And doing is always first of all repentance: sorrow for sin and turning to God for forgiveness. Then it is the earnest resolve by grace to do what is right in God's sight.

But I must bring this letter to a close.

Let me conclude therefore by urging upon you the need for being a good listener to the Word. We do not have many good listeners in Church these days. They are hard to find. But our soul's salvation is at stake.

May God bless our Churches with good preachers; but may He also bless us with godly listeners.

Fraternally in Christ,  
H. Hanko

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## THE LORD GAVE THE WORD

### Missionary Methods (9)

*Prof. Robert D. Decker*

Several months ago we began a study of the book, *The Planting And Development Of Missionary Churches*, by Dr. John L. Nevius. Dissatisfied with the mission methods of his day (late 1800s) Nevius proposed a new method which has come to be known as the "Nevius method or plan." The old plan depended largely on paid native preachers and evangelists and sought to foster and stimulate the growth and development of the native mission by pouring money into the work. It is the contention of Nevius that this is contrary to Scripture; and because it is that it hinders the growth

and development of the mission churches. Nevius advocated that there be no paid native clergy. In addition the principles of self-reliance and independence ought to be applied from the very beginning.

The obvious question becomes, how ought the missionary to deal with the new converts? Nevius points to the importance of this question when he writes: "The reception of first converts in any mission is an epoch fruitful of consequences for good or evil. The course pursued at this time will establish precedents, and in a great measure fix



policy and determine the character of the Church of the future. How then shall these first converts be dealt with? To this weighty question the Scriptures furnish us some ready answers" (p. 19). To support his contention that there ought to be no paid native preachers but that the converts ought to remain in their occupations Nevius calls attention to I Corinthians 7:20, 24: "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called...Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God." This Apostolic injunction was ordained for all the churches (verse 17). These verses teach "most emphatically that Christianity should not disturb the social relations of its adherents, but requires them to be content with their lot, and to illustrate the Gospel in the spheres of life in which they are called" (p. 19). In making evangelists and preachers out of new converts, missionaries are literally, though unconsciously, opposing a divine purpose, Nevius charges. Furthermore he writes: "Such a course directly tends to unsettle the minds of new converts and excites the very feelings of restlessness and discontent which this command seems specially designed to prevent" (p. 19).

It should be understood that Nevius is not objecting to the use of *some* paid native preachers and evangelists. What he advocates is that these be kept to a minimum. Still more, they must not be novices, i.e., very recently converted. These are untried. Scripture itself speaks with unmistakable clarity to this point: "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (I Timothy 3:6). The Apostle further instructed Timothy: "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (I Timothy 5:22). We do well to listen to this experienced missionary at this point. "By one rash and unauthorized step we may inflict an irreparable injury on the person in whom we are so much interested, and destroy all hopes of his future usefulness." How true this is! The proper way is to allow the new Christians to remain in their callings and witness to the faith by word of mouth and by the godly example of their lives. If in the course of time it becomes evident that the Lord calls some to the ministry they can be properly trained and called by the churches.

Turning to the subject of the importance of precedents, Nevius observes: "The Chinese are remarkable for their tendency to follow a fixed routine, and to be governed by precedents. If the first convert is soon employed, those who follow will expect to be also. If the first station is supplied with a chapel, succeeding ones will require the same, and so on indefinitely. As a matter of precedent, the question as to whether the Gospel shall be first introduced by the instrumentality of paid or

unpaid agents is of such importance as to deserve very careful attention." In our opinion the Chinese are not unique in this tendency to "follow a fixed routine, and to be governed by precedents" (p. 21). This would be true in any mission situation. People are pretty much the same in this respect. What was true of the Chinese on the mainland around the turn of the century is true of mission work in any part of the world today. In support of his position that the hiring of new converts to be paid preachers would be to set a bad precedent, Nevius points to the striking example of the Apostle Paul who purposed to preach the Gospel "without charge." The Apostle writes to the Thessalonians: "For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you; Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread" (II Thess. 3:7-12). Apparently there were some in the Church who, because of their mistaken notions of the immediate return of Christ, refused to work. These were busybodies interfering with the affairs of others and spreading false rumors concerning the coming of the Day of the Lord. These people appealed to the Church for their material needs. The Apostle admonished them to get to work. They must eat their own bread, the fruit of their own work. In this respect the Apostle left them the example. He himself worked with his own hands while he preached the gospel lest he be a burden to the Church. The Apostle did that not because he lacked the right to support, but to be an example to the saints (cf. vs. 9; "power" is better translated "right"). William Hendricksen, in his Commentary on I Thessalonians 2:9, offers a good summary of the Apostle's position on this whole matter: "(1) Titus 1:11: He definitely does not want to give any occasion for being placed in a class with 'vain talkers' who are interested in 'filthy lucre.' (2) I Cor. 9:6-15: He nevertheless emphatically asserts *the right* to receive remuneration from the church for performing spiritual work, and to receive it even from the converts themselves (see especially verse 11). Nevertheless, as far as the latter group is concerned (the converts), *he has decided not to make use of that right* (see verse 15). (3) Acts 20:33: He will now be able to say, 'I coveted no man's silver, gold, or apparel.' (4) II Cor. 11:8: He does at times take 'wages' from



already established churches, while he is working in a new field. (5) Phil. 4:10-20: He accepts gifts from an already established church (Philippi). (6) Acts 20:34, 35; I Thess. 2:9 and II Thess. 3:8: Most of all, he provides for his own needs (and even for the needs of others) by laboring with his own hands. (7) Acts 18:3: He is a tent-maker by trade. (8) I Cor. 6:12; 8:9, 13; 9:12; 10:23: The principle on which he insists again and again (applying it to various questions) is this: All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful: there are a good many things which I have a right to do, but that does not mean that I should therefore do them! The real question is always: 'What course of action will be most useful in promoting the work of the kingdom and glory of God?' (9) II Cor. 11:7: Even so, in spite of this carefully worked out plan with respect to work and wages, he does not escape criticism. If he takes money, or if his enemies suspect that he does, they are ready to charge him with selfishness, greed; if he does not, they accuse him of making a show of his humility. (10) I Cor. 4:12; Eph. 4:28; I Thess. 2:9; II Thess. 3:8, 10: He (and the Holy Spirit through him!) dignifies labor, and proclaims the great principle: 'If any man will not work neither let him eat.' (emphasis, Hendricksen's)

Precisely for these reasons Nevius believes "it best, at least in the first stages of mission work, for the native evangelist to follow Paul's example. Take a man laboring on the plane of his ordinary life as an earnest Christian and make him a paid agent, and you deprive him of half his influence" (p. 22). Let the missionary do the preaching, let the new converts abide in their callings at least in the initial stages of the work. "What we want," Nevius continues "are examples of men illustrating Christianity during six days of secular work, as well as by one day of Sabbath observance. Such men and women

present Christianity in the concrete. They are 'cities set on a hill,' 'epistles known and read of all men.' When stations multiply after this type they strike root into the soil. There is life and aggressiveness in them." This, no one can deny, is sound, Biblical mission methodology. Because it is patterned after the methods of the Apostles this method is applicable to any field of mission labor.

This leaves one question: "Why do not missionaries themselves work with their own hands and set the same example that Paul did?" (p. 23). Nevius argues that if the circumstances were the same, most missionaries would do so gladly. Paul was a Roman citizen in the Roman Empire. He labored in his native land. He was a master of both Hebrew and Greek, the languages in which he preached and taught. Missionaries today often must undertake the difficult task of learning a foreign language before they can even begin to work. Besides, for a foreigner (and such is the missionary) to be in competition with natives in the work force is not only impractical but also harmful to the cause of the Gospel.

To the objection that to depend on so much voluntary, unpaid labor of native Christians is to require a much greater amount of zeal and devotion than is found among members of the sending church Nevius replies: "If this is true, so much the worse for Christians at home" (p. 25). This is not true. There is a whole host of voluntary, unpaid workers in God's Church. Think of the countless hours elders and deacons spend in the work of the Church. There are Sunday School teachers, organists and choir directors, and committee members. There are godly widows and mothers in Israel who visit the sick and care for the elderly. This is as it should be. This is as it should be in the mission churches as well.

## ALL AROUND US

Rev. G. Van Baren

# Of "Sacred Cows" and "Sour Milk"

I make no claims of being a scientist. Though I regularly remind catechumens and the congregation of the errors of the "scientific" theory of evolution, and point them to the Scriptural truth of creationism, I do so not on the basis of "science" but of faith — whereby I believe without doubt that the worlds were framed by the Word of God.

Yet a Christian might be inclined to wonder

about the truthfulness of Scripture — when all the "scientific" evidence seems to point to evolution — and a long age of the earth and universe.

The worldly scientist insists on a certain rule of "uniformitarianism." He insists that all things ever existed even as they do now today. He is convinced that, on the basis of what he discovers now, he can posit what must have been true in the past.



Obviously, he refuses to take into account the Scriptural presentation of an instantaneous creation; of a fall of man into sin — and its resultant curse upon the earth; of a universal flood which must have radically altered the face of this earth. Still, I'm not a scientist. I feel myself lost before the avalanche of "scientific facts" quoted to prove evolution.

But recently I read a brief article in the *Herald of the Covenant* which points out several things apparently contradictory to the idea of evolution. I am not in a position to prove or disprove them. At the least, however, the material is interesting. The writer of the article, Hugh Powlison, points out several "proofs" for a young earth — one not much older than 6,000 years. What do you think of the "proof"?

...One of the finest clocks available to our observation is our own solar system. The sun is its main-spring, and it is unwinding at a rate of 4 million tons PER SECOND or about 8 miles off its diameter per year. With a diameter of 865,000 miles, its useful future life is less than 100,000 years. Looking backward in time to see how big it was at the 'beginning', we run into deep trouble if we are looking for eons.

Any astronomer can tell you that if you know the mass of the sun, the mass of the earth, the distance between them and the velocity of the earth, you can calculate the orbital equilibrium. Any significant changes in any of these parameters, and the earth either goes out into space or is sucked into the gravitational field of the sun, just as Skylab did to the earth after 7 short years. All the planets, asteroids and satellites are displaying a symphony of motion as they obey these exact parameters. Now if the sun is losing so much weight per second, and the earth is adding 14,000,000 tons of meteorites and space ash to its weight per year, it is conceivable that it could still be within the tolerances after 6,000 years, but to talk of 4.5 BILLION years is to confess that blind chance would have been kinder to Skylab than all their careful planning.

The sacred cow kicked over the whole bucket when the Apollo space missions brought back moon rocks to

be analyzed. The evolutionists reveal their crass dishonesty in failing to publish or admit the problems created by the discovery that the concentration of Thorium 230 in the moon rocks indicates by their own clocks that the moon could not be older than 100,000 years, which for evolution's requirements is barely a tick of the watch. They had expected some 50 feet of space ash on the moon to account for their billions of years. You know it turned out to be half an inch when you saw those footprints around the landing module.

...If you visit Glen Rose, Texas, you can find human footprints preserved in stone along with dinosaur tracks in the Paluxy River bed. An honest scientist would be happy for this correction to his chart of history, but the textbooks still teach our children that dinosaurs disappeared 70,000,000 years before man appeared. By the way, can you explain how to make a fossil out of a FOOTPRINT? They say it took a lot of time, and how long do YOUR footprints stay around?

If you visit Carlsbad Caverns, the guide will explain to you in all seriousness that those stalactites and stalagmites took 100,000 years to reach their present size. He fails to tell you that inside one stalactite a complete bat was found encased. It had not rotted or been eaten by predators. This does not seem to bother the evolutionist.

In Pennsylvania a spoon was found inside a block of soft coal. A finished spoon speaks of a civilization far beyond the cave man style, yet this spoon was fabricated BEFORE the coal bed was formed. Do you know when the books say the Devonian, Carboniferous & Permian ages were? With evidence like that, you should feel sorry for the evolutionist....

The above makes for interesting reading. I am not in a position to verify the statements made. Yet after all is said and done, we need not "prove" the creation fact by science, but we believe by faith (Heb. 11). Many things can not be "proved." Yet the faith of the Christian holds to the testimony of the Word of God. And, after all, it is far less difficult to understand creation as Scripture presents this than it is to believe that what we see and what we are, came to be by blind chance. But unbelief will not agree.

## Evangelism

The *R.E.S. News Exchange*, Dec. 8, 1981, quotes from a Dutch paper indicating the changing attitudes towards evangelism. More importantly, there is a changed definition of proper evangelism. The changed definition governs not only churches in the Netherlands, but also those throughout the world. It is time for the faithful in Christ to return to the old and proper paths.

An exchange of ideas in *Central Weekblad* reveals that not everyone in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) thinks alike of what is meant by evangelism. The Rev. J.B.J. Jonkers of the Center for Evangelism here highlighted the change in conception that has occurred in the churches by juxtaposing two synodical declarations, one in 1923, the other in 1973. The 1923 statement said: "The aim of evangelism is to



call those who are estranged from God's Word and the service of the Lord back to the Lord, and thus also to the church of the Lord." Fifty years later the Church's Board of Evangelism described evangelism as: "the communicative mode of existence and activity by which church (members), as sharers in Jesus' mission, invite people to participate in the liberating work of the Lord."

Jonkers points out that more than a formal change has occurred, for a "material" shift has taken place. The synod of 1973 held that the gospel cannot always and in all situations be articulated in the same system of concepts. "In the bringing of the gospel the normal and clear call to conversion may definitely not be absent." Jonkers concluded that the aim of evangelism itself is susceptible to change. This means, of course, that before doing evangelism one should determine what one wishes to accomplish with it. In his opinion, this makes evangelism more difficult but also more true to life.

Reacting to Jonkers, Prof. Klaas Runia questioned whether the fact that life constantly changes requires a change in the aim of evangelism. Doesn't the essential message of Jesus Christ and the salvation of the Kingdom which He announced and for which He

lived, suffered, died and rose again remain the same? Runia was not opposed to speaking of participating in the liberating work of the Lord. But one can never really participate in that liberating work without first having a part in the Lord himself....

Notice especially the first paragraph above and the statement: to "invite people to participate in the liberating work of the Lord." It is that kind of statement that is heard increasingly in connection with the calling of the church. This usually does not mean that there is that liberation from sin and death through the work of Christ. Rather, the calling of the church is said to be to liberate the oppressed from the oppressors: to liberate women from the oppression of men; to liberate the poor from the oppression of the rich; to liberate the black from the oppression of the white. This emphasis is also the mark, I am convinced, of the anti-christian church. That seeks "liberation" not in the cross of Jesus Christ, but in the efforts and strivings of men. Be aware of this emphasis of a "liberation" theology which rejects the theology of the cross.

## Difficulties of Westminster Seminary

Most of us have heard of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. It is an independent, rather conservative, seminary, independent of any denomination though always closely allied with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Some of its professors are former Christian Reformed men, including the well-known Dr. C. Van Til. In past years there has been a controversy surrounding the teachings of one of its professors, Mr. Shepherd. The controversy centers in Mr. Shepherd's view of justification by faith and the relationship this has to works. The details of the controversy I have not carefully analyzed. From reports, they appear to be confusing. But the result has been the dismissal of Mr. Shepherd from the teaching staff of the seminary. A report is presented in the *Presbyterian Journal* of Dec. 9, 1981:

Pressed to the wall by a complex controversy which it called "unresolvable," the board of Westminster Theological Seminary here has dismissed systematic theology professor Norman Shepherd from its faculty effective January 1.

Grounds for the dismissal were stated by the board to be "the best interests of the seminary."

In a public statement remarkable for its candor, the Westminster board all but conceded that it took the

difficult step for reasons of expediency rather than principle.

"The board makes no judgment," said the statement, "whether Mr. Shepherd's views as such contradict or contravene any element in the system of doctrine taught by the Westminster Standards."

Instead, the board observed that for a variety of reasons "too many people in the seminary community and constituency and the larger Christian public have come to judge that Mr. Shepherd's teaching appears to them to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, some elements in that system of doctrine taught by the Standards."

With obvious hurt, the Westminster board blamed "its own indiscretions" for the fact that such judgments had been made. It also blamed "the indiscretions and at times one-sided allegations of others," "the deep inherent problems in the structure and the particular formulations of Mr. Shepherd's views," and "Mr. Shepherd's manner of criticizing opponents as non-Reformed rather than primarily incorporating their concerns more thoroughly into his own position in response."

The board said the "controversy over Mr. Shepherd has reached such dimensions and such tangled complexity that it appears unresolvable...."

...Beyond the personal issue, however, continue to



lurk the implications for the denominational constituencies which Westminster Seminary serves. Although Westminster is commonly perceived as an institution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) it is in fact not only independent, but is controlled by a board denominated now by members of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) rather than from the OPC....

One could well follow future developments in this trouble. Not all of the board or the majority of the faculty of the seminary were happy about the "resolution" of the controversy. Whether Shepherd is correct or not, surely on a doctrinal matter the board of that seminary ought to have taken a stand. As the situation presently exists, the problem likely remains, though Shepherd is dismissed.

## BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

# Galatians — Our Liberty in Christ

Rev. J. Kortering

The Epistle to the Galatians is the strongest polemic against the attempt of the Judaizers to impose on the New Testament church the ceremonial aspects of the Old Testament law. At stake was much more than the circumcision of the Gentiles. The epistle dealt with the question of the law, whether one is justified by faith in Christ Jesus alone or is righteous in the keeping of the ceremonial law. The gospel of this epistle expresses the antithesis between bondage under the law and liberty in Jesus Christ.

### THE GALATIANS

In the epistle itself, Paul addresses the recipients as "the churches of Galatia" (1:2). That designation seems simple in itself; but the attempts to identify these churches have produced two different answers. Some Bible scholars insist that they are churches in Northern Galatia, others in Southern Galatia. Connected with the position taken on this question is also the attempt to date the writing of the letter. The determination as to which group Paul addressed in this letter has bearing on the date of the epistle in this way: if he had in mind only the southern group, he probably wrote it soon after the first missionary journey; if he included the northern group, he probably wrote it after the second or even third journey.

The name Galatia is derived from the Gauls, a people of Celtic origin that invaded north central Asia Minor and settled in three centers, Ancyra, Pessinus, and Tavium about three centuries before Christ. This territory became a Roman province known as Galatia about 25 B.C. It included a northern part which was originally inhabited by the Gauls, and a southern part which included Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra. Paul visited these cities and established churches there on his

first missionary journey.

Other references to the Galatians by Paul and Luke are not decisive on this point. In the letter here (1:2 and 3:1) only the name Galatians is used and there is no clue beyond that. In I Corinthians 16:1 Paul speaks of the "churches of Galatia" who were asked to contribute for the poor in Jerusalem. In the context, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia are referred to as provinces. One would think that in such a context, Galatia would also be referred to as a province. In Acts 16:6 Paul mentions his going to the region of Phrygia and Galatia, a territory west of Asia and Mysia which the Holy Spirit forbade them to enter. In Acts 18:23 we read of the "region of Galatia and Phrygia," the reverse order of Acts 16:6, which in turn must refer to the same region known as Galatia. These broad references are to the entire region. One cannot be sure if it was north or south or both.

The debate as to which group is intended in this letter has a long history among Bible scholars and is well documented. We are impressed with the arguments of Wm. Hendriksen in *Bible Survey*, which arguments we summarize.

1. The book of Acts does not indicate that Paul ever founded any church in Northern Galatia. It does refer to churches in Southern Galatia — e.g., Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:14). On the second missionary journey Paul visited some of these churches a second time (Acts 16:1).

2. It would seem that Paul hurried from the marsh lowlands of Perga and went to Galatia for his health (Gal. 4:13). The climate of Southern Galatia was more conducive for this purpose.

3. In Galatians 2:5 it is clear that the churches addressed were established before the Jerusalem



conference. The text refers to the Jerusalem conference at which time the issue of circumcising the Gentiles was considered and decided.

4. In Lystra, Paul circumcised Timothy, whose mother was a Jewess and father a Greek (Acts 16:3). The charge that Paul was inconsistent (Gal. 5:11) must have come from the Judaizers of the Lystra-Derbe region. They observed Paul's act and accused him of not preaching what he practiced. This assumes that the readers of this epistle were from that region.

5. In Acts 20:4 we find a list of names of responsible men who were to carry the money collected at Antioch for the Jerusalem poor. Included in that list are Gaius and Timothy, men from the southern region; but none on the list are from the northern region.

6. The epistle refers to Barnabas (2:1, 9, 13). Only the southern churches would have known him, since he went with Paul on the first missionary journey and separated after that.

#### AUTHOR AND DATE

We can state without any need of argument or proof that the Apostle Paul is the author of this epistle. As was his custom, he identified himself at the opening of the letter, "Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren which are with me" (1:1, 2). Though his apostolic authority was questioned by some of the Gentiles in Galatia and Paul had to deal with that in the letter, no conservative Bible student questions whether Paul wrote this epistle or not.

In light of our observations made so far, we take the position that Paul wrote to the churches of the south region of Galatia which were already established on the first missionary journey. This would allow for the early dating of the letter.

This still does not solve the problem of dating. Even though it allows for *early* dating, we still need to try to determine *how* early. In consulting commentaries and Bible study manuals, we find a disparity for the date of writing — anywhere between A.D. 48 - A.D. 57.

The problem in dating this letter is connected with the chronology presented in it. In Galatians 4:13 Paul referred to the fact that he had preached the gospel to the Galatians "at the first." This implies that he preached to them twice. Some suggest that it refers to the two times he preached to them on the first missionary journey (once on the way out and then on the way back). Others say this refers to the first missionary journey and then on the second journey. This seems to us more plausible and would therefore place the date of the letter

sometime after the great conference in Jerusalem (Acts 15).

In addition to this, we must try to identify the two Jerusalem visits that Paul mentions in Galatians 1:18 and 2:1ff. In the former passage, Galatians 1:18, we learn that Paul went to Jerusalem three years after his conversion and visited with Peter. This seems to refer to the same visit recorded in Acts 9:26 where we learn that the saints in Jerusalem were afraid of Paul, so Barnabas had to calm their fear.

Then in Galatians 2:1ff we have the reference to the second visit which was fourteen years after the first. In trying to identify this visit, we learn from Acts that, in addition to the visit mentioned in Acts 9:16, Paul also went to Jerusalem with the money for the poor (Acts 11:31), and for the great council to settle the question of the law and the Gentiles (Acts 15). The problem is this, should we identify the visit mentioned in Galatians 2 with the visit of Paul carrying the money for the poor, or with the visit of Paul to the Jerusalem conference.

After much discussion in trying to piece together a chronology of the life of the Apostle Paul, Bible students differ as to which position to take. If the view that the Galatians 2 visit is to be identified with the Acts 11:30 one, then the date for the writing of the letter to the Galatians could be as early as A.D. 48, which would place it prior to the Jerusalem conference. The difficulty with this view is that, in the context of Galatians 2, Paul makes reference to the successful labor among the Gentiles (2:2). Such reference would be impossible if the visit was for bringing the money for the poor, for that took place prior to any of his missionary journeys. We favor the position that Galatians 2:1 refers to the time when Paul attended the great council. We could ask, if that be so, why Paul did not make much of this decision in his letter. Would not the authority of that decision have been convincing? Luke in Acts 15, makes much of this, implying that it decided once for all this issue that was dividing the churches. Paul, however, is concerned with the attack upon his apostolic office by the heretics in Galatia. In addition, he intended to dispel their attack by showing from the gospel itself that the circumcising of the Gentiles was a denial of the liberty in Christ. This is not to say that no reference is made to the conference at all (see Gal. 2:2-5).

Our conclusion is that evidence points to Paul's having written the letter to the Galatians while at Corinth during his second missionary journey. The approximate date was the year A.D. 53.

#### OCCASION FOR THE EPISTLE

Paul had preached to the Galatians that a person



became a child of God and a true son of Abraham by faith in Christ alone. There was no need for any observance of ceremonial laws. This was the liberty of the Gospel of Christ. The Christians in Galatia rejoiced in this word.

The Judaizers, however, influenced the church of Galatia. They insisted that it was not as Paul preached. They maintained that it was necessary for the converted Gentiles to become Jews first of all, that is to be circumcised and brought under the restrictions of the Old Testament laws of Moses such as eating of meats, observing holy days, etc. Then, if one did that, one could partake of salvation in Jesus Christ. They did not deny outright the necessity of Christ; rather they placed human laws as requisites for believing in Christ. Here we see the basic doctrine of justification by faith once again attacked. Is Christ's perfect work the *ground* for justification, or must we still keep the law for righteousness?

When Paul heard that this lie was being promoted in Galatia, and that his missionary work was being undermined, he was angry. Righteous indignation led him to write this fiery letter to expose this serious error which some in the church began to follow. We must keep in mind that Paul's wrath was not a personal retort against those who attacked him personally. True, they attacked his apostolic office, they questioned whether he should be an apostle, they accused him of making it too easy for the Gentiles to become Christians. I suppose they said that as a missionary he was compromising on the gospel just to get results. This angered Paul, to be sure, for he was a faithful missionary of the Word. His anger, however, was directed against the lie and those who would propagate it. The sharpness of this letter is proof that the Apostle Paul determined to expose this error for the sake of the truth. Nothing must take away the glorious liberty that the believer has in Christ Jesus.

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## GUEST ARTICLE

# Examining Church Membership

*Rev. J. Slopsema*

It is generally recognized that the church today as an institution is on the decline. Strange as this may seem, this decline goes hand in hand with what is being heralded as a spiritual awakening in our land. There is a spiritual movement in our land that goes under the name "Neo-Evangelicalism" or "New-Evangelicalism." This movement is associated with such names as Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Bill Bright, Mark Hatfield, and many others. Through their organizations and crusades we are told that thousands upon thousands have been brought to Jesus Christ.

This movement is not above criticism. Thus, for example, the gospel of these neo-evangelicals is often only a "thumb-nail" gospel. The gospel they proclaim is at best only shallow and superficial. More often it is riddled with all kinds of false doctrines so that their gospel is what Paul in Galatians 1 calls a gospel which is no gospel. But perhaps the most serious weakness, which is the root of all that is wrong with the neo-evangelicalism of our day, is its attitude concerning the institution of the church. It is simply a fact that many of the big-name evangelists of our day work apart from the institution of the church. They are supported by and operate

under the auspices of private organizations and evangelistic associations. In harmony with this, neither do they generally emphasize the importance of church membership to those whom they claim as converts. Church membership simply is not all that important. The important thing is that you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. But such a relationship can exist apart from the organization of the church. And so church membership is simply not all that important. In fact sometimes church membership is viewed as being detrimental to one's personal relationship to Jesus Christ.

It is my purpose in this article to show the importance of the institution of the church in salvation. In a future article I wish to demonstrate not only that church membership is important, but also that it is important that we be members of a particular kind of church.

Very early in the history of the Christian church, the church as an institution was considered to be the mother of God's people. Thus, for example, the early church fathers emphasized that you can not have God as your Father unless you have the



church as your mother. John Calvin, the great Reformer of Geneva, takes up this same idea in his writings. He does this for example in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Writing on the institution of the church, Calvin cites the church fathers as we have above. In his commentary on Ephesians, explaining chapter 4 verse 13, Calvin writes, "The church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes and brings up children to God."

And this is Scriptural. In Galatians 4:26 the Apostle Paul speaks of the Jerusalem which is above. This is a figurative term to denote the church of the new dispensation from the viewpoint of her heavenly origin. Of this "Jerusalem" Paul says, "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."

That the church is the mother of God's people means that God brings His people to salvation and preserves them in that salvation only through the ministries of the church. Apart from the church institute there is no salvation possible. Three things must be understood in this connection. First, salvation is by faith alone. This is the teaching of Scripture throughout. This, for example, is the teaching of the Scripture in Ephesians 2:8, 9: "For by grace are ye saved *through faith*; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Faith is essential to salvation because faith is our spiritual connection to Jesus Christ in Whom are all the blessings of salvation. Hence, it is by faith alone that we are justified; by faith we receive the adoption of sons; by faith we are forgiven; by faith we are renewed and spiritually strengthened so as to live a new and holy life.

The second thing we must understand is that this faith is a gift of God. The fallen, natural man does not possess the ability to believe on Jesus Christ unto salvation. That is something lost in the fall. If man will believe in Jesus Christ, that faith must be given to him of God and must be sustained in him by God. Certainly this is the teaching of Scripture in Philippians 1:29, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." To believe on Jesus Christ is something given to us. It is a gift of God.

In the third place, however, we must understand that God works and maintains faith in the hearts and lives of His people in and through the ministries of the church institute. Apart from the institution of the church God does not work faith. The ministries of the church are indispensable for faith and salvation. In that sense the church is the mother of us all. God used the church to bring forth His people to salvation so that He may receive them as true sons and daughters in His house.

We ought to add at this point that no church can claim exclusive right to the title "Mother of God's people." No one church can make the claim that you must belong to her organization or you can not be saved. There have been churches in the past who have made that claim. The Roman Catholic church still makes that claim for herself. Yet this is a false claim. The other side of the picture however must also be presented. To claim the title "Mother of God's people" a church must be faithful to the ministries God has given to her. Just because an organization goes by the name "church" and goes through the rituals of a church organization does not qualify it to be called the mother of God's people.

The ministries God has committed to the church and which are indispensable for the faith and salvation of God's people are three. In the first place there is the preaching of the gospel. The preaching of late has fallen on hard times. It is being despised and done away with. We are told that there are much more effective ways today to present the gospel. And so the preaching is more and more being replaced by dialogue, music, drama, films, etc. That however is not the viewpoint of the Bible. According to the Scriptures it is especially through the preaching that God works faith in the hearts of His people. According to the Scriptures preaching is indispensable to faith and salvation. Thus, for example, Paul in I Corinthians 1 speaks repeatedly of the foolishness of preaching. The idea there is not that the preaching is foolishness. Rather, that is what the citizens of Corinth considered the preaching of the gospel to be — foolishness. But in verse 21 of that chapter we read, "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Likewise in Romans 1:16 the Apostle Paul by divine inspiration tells the church of Rome, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ (in light of the preceding verse this means the preaching of the gospel): for it is the power of God unto salvation." Finally, in this same epistle, chapter 10 verses 13 and 14, we read, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Notice that we have here a chain. The subject is salvation. To possess that salvation it is necessary to call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. To call on the name of the Lord, however, is necessary to believe in Him. To believe on Christ it is necessary to hear Him (thus we read literally in the original). And to hear Christ so that we may believe on Him unto salvation it is necessary that there be a preacher and preaching. This is the plain teaching of this passage. And who is it that



preaches? It is the calling of the church as an institution to preach. And the church preaches through the office of the minister.

The second ministry God has given to the church is the administration of the sacraments. Christ has instituted two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. These sacraments are essentially pictures. In the preaching, the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ is proclaimed. In the sacraments this same salvation is pictured. Thus, for example, in baptism the washing away of sins in the blood of Christ is pictured in the sprinkling of water. In the Lord's Supper the suffering and death of Christ on the cross where He allowed His body to be broken and His blood to be shed is depicted in the breaking of bread and the pouring out of wine. And when these sacraments are properly administered by the church, God uses them to strengthen and confirm the faith of His people. Thus, the sacraments along with and in subordination to the preaching serve to maintain the faith of God's people unto salvation.

Finally there is the exercise of Christian discipline. By Christian discipline we mean the proper supervision of the life of the members of the church by the ruling body of the church. According to Scripture, God has ordained rulers in the church, which the Scriptures sometimes call and which we call elders. They are those who are entrusted by God with the supervision of the church. It is their

calling to maintain the Word of God in the church, to see to it that the members of the church both in confession and walk conform to the Word. Those who do not conform to the Word of God but go astray are to be admonished and rebuked by the elders. Should those who stray persist in their sin, then eventually they are to be cast out by the elders. This is Christian discipline. And this discipline is necessary in the church. It is necessary not only to cleanse the church of those who do not really belong. It is necessary also for the true believer in Jesus Christ. He needs the watchful eye of the elder and the admonition of the elder from God's Word when he goes astray. In this way God brings him to repentance and keeps him faithful even to the end. The flock is easily scattered when there is no supervision; God's people are soon led astray when there is no Christian discipline.

And so the child of God needs the church. Through the preaching, sacraments, and discipline of the church, God brings him to faith and salvation in Jesus Christ and maintains him in that faith and salvation. Without the church he perishes. Let us therefore not despise the church as an institution. She is our mother, even as God is our Father. The church as an institution must be very precious to us. Let us cling to her and pray for her.

(to be continued)

## THE DAY OF SHADOWS

# Faltering Faith and Manifold Mercy

*Rev. John A. Heys*

Although man does not live by bread alone, man does live by bread. His earthly life, and body of flesh depend upon bread for continued existence. For did not the same Jesus, Who told Satan that man does not live by bread alone, also teach us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"? Indeed man is constantly faced with the bread question. That very prayer teaches us that every day this question is there. Be he believer or unbeliever, young or old, white or black, bond or free, man faces every day the question, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink?"

There are, however, different ways to ask that question. Jesus tells us not to ask that question in such a way that bread becomes an end in itself. No, we are to seek the kingdom of God first, that is, as

the priority in our lives, and then do so in the assurance that God will add to us the bread that we need to seek that kingdom. The kingdom is the end that we seek. Bread is a means that we seek and pray for in order to have the life and strength to seek that kingdom. The unbeliever seeks bread for bread's sake and so that he may seek the world and its lusts.

This does not rule out two undeniable truths. We must be industrious and take care that there is bread. We must make use of the means which God provides for the obtaining of our daily bread. But we must not worry about it. For if we are anxious about it we reveal that we are not making the seeking of God's kingdom the priority in our lives, and that our heart is not right for seeking that king-



dom; and also that we are not seeking bread only as a means but as an end in itself. And the second truth is that the believer still has his old nature and that therefore in the day of the Antichrist he will be under great temptation to take the mark of the beast in order to be able to buy and sell for his bread's sake, and his earthly life's sake. That is why even today men will defend themselves while walking contrary to the rule of that kingdom of God which is found in II Corinthians 6, so that they are unequally yoked with unbelievers in worldly, rebellious, fifth-commandment-defying unions that are only concerned with bread and have no interest at all in seeking the kingdom of God. And they try to defend themselves by asking, "I have a God-given calling to provide food for my family, do I not?" They also brush aside the rule of the Kingdom in Romans 13 where we are told by God Himself to "be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive damnation to themselves." And that employers are powers is plain from I Peter 2:18, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the gentle, but also to the froward." And masters are power, or, as a clearer translation would have it, authorities. Those who seek the kingdom of God — which is a realm where all consciously and willingly seek God's glory, and is therefore called the kingdom of God, the kingdom where God is all in all the lives of all who are in it — will do nothing against the laws of His kingdom. The new life in them will let go the job and means of obtaining bread rather than break a law of that kingdom. He seeks the kingdom FIRST. Bread comes in the way of seeking that kingdom.

Now Jacob, the believer, was no exception to this matter of facing the bread question. And ultimately this became the reason why he allowed his sons to take Benjamin along with them to Egypt. With Jacob it was not a case of being willing to have his sons prove to this "man" in Egypt (who he did not know was Joseph) that they were true men and not spies and to redeem Simeon. It was a matter of sending the sons with Benjamin, or starve to death, and so lose all his children and his own life. We read at the very outset of Genesis 43, "And the famine was sore in the land." That land was the land of Canaan where Jacob and his sons dwelt. And Judah in Genesis 43:10 states, "For except we had lingered, surely now we had returned this second time." And Jacob answers, "If it must be so now, do this...." Although the "it must be" is in italics, because it does not appear in the Hebrew text, the word "lingered" speaks of a delay, which when coupled with the fact of a sore famine in the land shows that the sons felt deeply the need of

going, and would have gone because of the great need, had their father only allowed them to take Benjamin along. The bread question did finally cause Jacob to yield.

Once again Jacob's flesh rules him so that he cries out, (after resorting to his old tricks by instructing his sons to take a present of balm, honey, spices, murrh, nuts, and almonds to gain the favour of this "man" in Egypt), "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." And when the nine sons had come home without Simeon he had said in regard to taking Benjamin along the next time, "If mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave."

It is true that in the sentence in which he said, "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved," he first expressed his prayer, "And God Almighty give you mercy before the man that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin." For he was a believer, and he did have faith in God as the Almighty. Yet there is a point here we must not overlook.

Our Reformed fathers expressed it so correctly when in the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day XXIV they answer the question, "But why cannot our good works be the whole, or part of our righteousness before God?" in this manner: "Because, that the righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin." And in Lord's Day XLIV, and in answer to the question, "But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep His commandments?" our fathers stated, "No; but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God." And all this is but an explanation of and re-emphasis upon what God said Himself through Paul in Romans 7:18-21, "For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.... I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me."

In that light we can understand Jacob, the believer's, cry of, "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." How radically it differs from Job's, "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." How different it is from the psalmist's confident speech in Psalm 103:17, "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those that fear Him." Jacob had called God "God Almighty," but no sooner had he



called Him that than his faith gave way to his flesh and he spoke words of fatalism. He should have spoken thus, "And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother and Benjamin; and if not, so that I am bereaved of my children, it is not because this everlasting mercy of God has been interrupted and is no longer upon me." He should have told his sons that he would grieve if he is bereaved of his children, but he would still bless God and trust His promises.

Now that Jacob watched his sons with Benjamin until they were out of sight, that his thoughts were with them every day until they returned, and that he prayed daily for their safe return with Simeon was not at all out of place or a lack of faith. And, if we may anticipate a moment, the truth set forth in this whole account, including the safe return of all the sons and with the truth concerning Joseph, so beautifully and powerfully underscores what Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:20, "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." Jacob prayed for the safe return of his eleven sons, and he did not ask or think of asking for the return of Joseph. But God restored to him this son whom he thought to be dead. How could he ask or think of asking that he might yet see Joseph on this earth? He got much more than he asked for, or thought of asking for. All these things were not against him but working for him. God Almighty not only gave his sons mercy before Joseph; but, what is more, God's own mercy was on Jacob and his sons. Although the cross of Christ was far yet in the future as far as the history of this world is concerned, He is the "Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world" in God's counsel. And on that basis Jacob and his sons are dealt with in tender mercy by God.

Now apart from the fact that Jacob's faith wavered so that he spoke words of fatalism, there is another element so sadly lacking here. Jacob not only set a bad example before his sons. He also failed in his duty as a covenant father. These sons were by no means eager to go back to Egypt and

face more rough speech and perhaps imprisonment. They feared that the money in their sacks was purposely put there so that "he may seek occasion against us, and fall on us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses" (Genesis 43:18). It was no pleasure trip on which they were going. They were like a man going to the dentist to have a tooth drilled or pulled: a "necessary evil" because they needed food, and an ordeal that they loathed. Then, too, in the back of their minds was the fact that they believed that God had given them all this distress because of what they did to Joseph. Fear was in their hearts. The future looked bleak. And they had an awesome responsibility over against Benjamin and his safe return to his father.

In light of all this, Jacob should have strengthened their faith with the Word of God and pointed them more directly to this God Almighty and HIS mercy. What is the mercy of man toward us, if God is not merciful? What a way for these sons to leave their grieving father, namely, hearing him say "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." Those were the last words they heard from him before they left.

Surely here he was not manifesting himself as Israel, the Prince of God. And it is only because that mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting upon those whom He chose in Christ that after such outbursts of fatalism such as, "All these things are against me" and "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved," that Jacob still receives more than he could ask or think. Because our God is unchangeable and His Son is ever faithful, all our unfaithfulness and failure to live by faith cannot bring His mercy to an end. As Jeremiah stated it so beautifully in Lamentations 3:22, 23, "It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness."

Well may we with the psalmist sing:  
 "Thy mercy and Thy truth, O Lord,  
 Transcend the lofty sky;  
 Thy judgments are a mighty deep,  
 And as the mountains high." Psalm 36:5

## QUESTION BOX

### Our Natural Depravity

*Rev. C. Hanko*

We received the following question: "Is a regenerated person still depraved?"

Your question reminds me of two errors that

often arise within the church: on the one hand, the error of perfectionism, and on the other hand, the error of antinomism.



The perfectionist argues that we are new creatures in Christ; old things are passed away, and, along with these old things, also our depravity. He appeals to such passages of Scripture as I John 3:9: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." The perfectionist will also refer to saints like Job, of whom it is written that he was a man, "perfect and upright, and one who feared God and eschewed evil." The Pentecostals seem to lean in that direction when they speak of being baptized by the Holy Spirit, enabling them to live sinless lives. These perfectionists stress, of course, an outward perfection of "touch not, taste not, and handle not."

On the other hand, there are the antinomians who stress that we are by nature depraved sinners who cannot keep God's law. They remind you that Christ has fulfilled the law for us. In Him is all our righteousness, so that we can add nothing to that nor detract from it. Nor must we try with our good works to add to the righteousness of Christ. Some will, therefore, object to admonitions in the preaching, since we cannot fulfill them anyway. In extreme cases the antinomian will condone sin with the attitude, "Let us, then, sin, that grace may abound."

Now I am sure that you have neither of these errors in mind. Your question centers about the extent of Christ's work of regeneration in us. When we speak of the renewal of the *heart*, does this also include the renewal of our *nature*?

To that I must answer, that it is my conviction, that the renewal of the heart does not include the renewal of our nature. It is true that the heart is the spiritual ethical center of our life, for from the heart are the issues of life. Paul teaches us: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." This is true even to the extent that there is a new man in Christ within us that wills the good (Romans 7). This is evidently what our fathers had in mind in Canons III, IV, XI, where they state, "But by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, (God through His Word) pervades the inmost recesses of man; He opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions." Nevertheless, that does not renew our nature. Our sinful inclinations, our character weaknesses do not change. We do not become better people. The old man of sin is still present, sin still wars in our members.

This is the plain teaching of Scripture in many passages, such as Psalm 19:13, Romans 6:12-14, Galatians 5:16, 17. In Galatians 5:16 Paul makes a contrast between "walking in the Spirit" and "fulfilling the lusts of the flesh." This is the tension in the life of the believer, the constant warfare between the old man of sin and the new man of Christ. The lusts of the flesh refer to every carnal, wicked inclination and desire, all the sinful cravings of our nature, whereby we transgress, not some, but all of the commandments of God, and are not able to keep one of them (Lord's Day 23). This is our covetousness, the root of all our sins. Those lusts are summed up in the verses 19-21 as every conceivable sin that can be committed, not only by the unregenerate, but also by the regenerate.

Over against these "lusts of the flesh" stands our walking in the Spirit. The new man in Christ has learned to love God, and therefore to hate sin. He is afraid to offend his God. He opposes sin, because sin is contrary to God's holiness and contrary to his desire to live according to all the commandments of God. When he sins he experiences bitter pangs of conscience, a deep sense of shame and guilt, so that he daily humbles himself before God with the confession of sin and a plea for forgiveness. An integral part of his prayer life is the petition, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," as well as the crying need, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Sin is still so much a part of us. We do not improve with age, even though that may be the dream that lives in the soul of every young Christian. As far as our depravity is concerned, a child is like a young sapling, an elderly person like an old, gnarled tree. Young people may give vent to their evil lusts, but their nature is not as experienced in the ways of sin as is an older person's. The difference is that a child of God becomes ever more aware of his own weaknesses and character sins, so that he prays ever more fervently: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He roots himself ever deeper into Christ, relies no more on his firm resolutions or hopes for improvement, but seeks all his salvation only in his Savior. Sin is still like an angry, snarling dog within him, that tugs at the leash and must constantly be kept in control by the grace of God operating in the new life within him and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore our Catechism asks the question in Lord's Day 2, question 5, "Canst thou keep all these things (all the demands of God's law) perfectly?" It is a matter of keeping God's law in love to God perfectly, or not at all. And the answer is given, "In no wise!" That is strong language. But the reason that is given is even more emphatic: "For I am prone by nature to hate God and my



neighbor." By nature I hate God. By nature I am so self-centered, so selfish that I hate God in wicked pride. I hate those closest to me, so that even my natural affections, sociability, kindness, and all else is still hatred against God, rooted in sin. The reason for that can only be ascribed to the proneness, the evil inclinations of my nature. "I am evil, born in

sin"; my only hope of salvation is my Savior, Who died for me and intercedes every moment for me in heaven, and the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit constantly causing grace to abound, so that sin no longer can have dominion over me. "I Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25).

## Book Reviews

**PARABLES OF OUR LORD**, by William Arnot; Kregel Publications, 1981; 532 pages, \$10.95. (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

This book is part of Kregel's efforts to reprint valuable works from the past. It is a book written by a Free Church of Scotland minister who lived in the Nineteenth Century. It is an interesting and valuable addition to one's library and can be read either to come to a clearer understanding of the parables or for good and (on the whole) sound devotional reading.

The author does not present the purpose of parables correctly and is not always as Reformed and Calvinistic as one would like. Nor does he always clearly see the difference between what is essential in a parable and what is only part of the story without any particular spiritual significance. But he does shed some new light on the parables and gives perspectives to these beautiful teachings of the Lord which make the book interesting and worthwhile. There is no doubt about it that there is far more content for the most part to "old" books than to what is written in our day. One does well to build up one's library with old books.

**GOSPEL OF JOHN**, Expository and Homiletical, by W. H. Van Doren; Kregel Publications, 1981; 1436 pages, \$24.95. (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

W. H. Van Doren was a Nineteenth Century preacher whose major work on John has been reprinted by Kregel.

This is a commentary of a different sort. Instead of the usual exposition of a passage, this commentary takes a phrase, a clause, or a word or two and gives a number of rather unrelated and disconnected thoughts and reflections upon it. Sometimes other commentators are quoted. Sometimes the thoughts are homiletical; then again expository; then reflective and meditative. It all adds up to a very different, but in many respects very nice commentary. It is an interesting and valuable addition

to one's library for this reason. It will not serve the purpose of an only commentary on John, but it will be valuable to use alongside of another commentary to give a slightly different slant on the text and to lead one's thoughts in many different directions as he ponders the text.

The commentary is not very Reformed at crucial passages and has to be read with discretion and discernment. But it has the advantage of including the more technical material at the end of each section so that it can be used by ministers and laity alike.

We quote a section to give the flavor of the commentary. The quotation is on John 10:26.

NOT OF MY SHEEP. See on verse 2. —The phrase synonymous with not my believing disciples. —Ye do not recognize ME in MY word and work, and not knowing ME ye do not subordinate yourselves to ME and trust in MY guidance. On the contrary ye desire a Messiah, that he may be the tool of your passions. Lange.—They longed for a king with a splendid victorious army to redeem them from Rome. —They did not know that this same Good Shepherd now calling them, was also a KING, Whom the *armies of heaven* rejoice to obey. Heb. 1:6.—That His throne, unlike the tottering, tumbling one of Caesar, was an everlasting throne. —These Jews did not want a Saviour dying to atone for their sin. —Like modern "Liberals," they did not believe their sins needed any atonement. . . . —They are not His sheep: —1. Who hear not the voice of the Good Shepherd. 2. Who know it not when they hear it. 3. Who are not known by Him. 4. Who follow strangers. . . .

**CHRISTIAN POETRY**, compiled by Pat Alexander, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., 1981; 125 pp. \$10.95. (Reviewed by Gertrude Hoeksema)

In the first paragraph of the introduction to her book, Pat Alexander tells us: "This book is a 'taster', an appetizer. It is designed as an introduction to the rich heritage of Christian poetry in the English language over a period of 1300 years."



Included in this compilation are poems by Caedmon from the late seventh century to works by contemporary Christian poets. Some poets are represented by only one poem and others by several selections. The format of the book is lovely. The poems, most of them short, are attractively placed and accompanied by tasteful and appropriate illustrations.

Many classic works of well-known poets are included, such as John Donne's "On Death," George Herbert's "Redemption," John Milton's "On His Blindness," as well as several selections by Gerard Manley Hopkins and T.S. Eliot. The book also gives us samples of lesser known and even obscure or anonymous poets.

Arranged chronologically according to the dates of the poets' lives, the poems are introduced by brief paragraphs about the poets' backgrounds and lives. I liked that feature, for it helped me better understand the poetry. What standards did the compiler use for choosing the poems? She says in her introduction:

It is the content of the poems themselves, not the Christian standing or theology of the poets, which has determined the selection. Since many of the poets are long-dead, this seems the only practical basis of choice. Poets are in any case by nature individualists, expressing their own unique insights. Sometimes the depth of faith expressed in the poems is surprising in the light of what we know of the poet otherwise.

Most of the poetry is devout, Biblically sound, and inspiring. Some poems are generally "Christian," that is, in the Christian tradition. However, other poems fall outside the sphere of the Christian faith, as, for example, in William Cullen Bryant's "To a Waterfowl," where we read:

"There is a Power whose care

Teaches thy way along that pathless coast...."  
By the Power he meant God, but his God was the god of the Unitarian, not ours. The discerning reader will judge which poems fall into the periphery of Christian writing and which echo a sound Biblical note.

I would highly recommend the book as an excellent addition to one's library or as a gift for anyone of any age.

## *Take time to read and study The Standard Bearer*

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 25, 1982, our parents, REV. AND MRS. GISE VAN BAREN, will celebrate, the Lord willing, their 25th wedding anniversary.

We, their children and grandchild, are thankful to our heavenly Father for giving us God-fearing parents who have brought us up in the fear of the Lord. We pray that God will bless them and keep them in the years to come.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children." (Psalm 103:17)

John and Valerie Van Baren  
Jennifer  
Carolyn Van Baren  
Gerald Van Baren  
Marilyn Van Baren  
Denise Van Baren  
Daniel Van Baren  
Philip Van Baren  
Rachel Van Baren

### NOTICE!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Randolph, Wisconsin on Wednesday, March 3, 1982, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. Material for the Agenda must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk thirty days before Classis convenes. Delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should inform the Clerk of the Randolph Consistory of their need.

Rev. David Engelsma, Stated Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ruth Society of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan, expresses its Christian sympathy to Mrs. Henry Velthouse in the death of her husband, HENRY J. VELTHOUSE, who passed away on Christmas Day, 1981.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." (Rev. 21:4)

Rev. Richard Flikkems, Pres.  
Eileen Terpstra, Sec'y.

## News From Our Churches

A Holland, Michigan bulletin gives us more information concerning the planned organization in Singapore: "Rev. James Slopsema of Edgerton and

Elder Ed Van Ginkel of Doon will leave for Singapore in January for the organization of the group with which Rev. den Hartog is laboring into a



church. We can rejoice in this evidence of God's covenant faithfulness as He continues to gather His church."

That same bulletin informs us that "Rev. W. Bruinsma has declined the call extended to him by our sister church in Redlands."

Of late, pulpit supply for our Redlands, California congregation has been in the able hands of some of our "retired" ministers. The following bulletin announcements give the particulars: The Southwest Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan November 29 bulletin reports: "Rev. and Mrs. Veldman will be flying to Redlands, California, on December 3. Rev. Veldman will be preaching in our Redlands church for an undetermined length of time. We wish them God's traveling mercies and blessings while they are absent from us." The Redlands, California December 6 bulletin announced: "We thank our Heavenly Father for safely bringing Rev. and Mrs. Veldman into our midst. They are scheduled to labor in our midst until the first part of March, if needed. May God bless their stay in Redlands." The Holland, Michigan December 13 bulletin states: "We welcome Rev. and Mrs. Heys back into our midst after several months labor in Redlands." It appears that the stay of Rev. and Mrs. Heys in their home in Holland will be short-lived, however. A conversation with Rev. Lubbers revealed that he and his wife and Rev. and Mrs. Heys planned, the Lord willing, to leave for Jamaica on January 13 for a stay of approximately two months. We take this opportunity too, to pass on the request of Rev. Lubbers that we remember them before the throne of our Heavenly Father.

While we are on the subject of our emeriti ministers, we also report that Rev. C. Hanko is currently in the middle of an extended stay in Bradenton, Florida on behalf of our First Church in Grand Rapids which continues its church extension work in that area.

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Concerning a recent Mission Committee publication, a Loveland, Colorado bulletin reads: "There are copies of a small leaflet in the bulletin rack containing a brief description of the beliefs and practices of the Protestant Reformed Churches. These are intended for distribution to people who

wonder what we believe. They may be your relatives, neighbors, people with whom you work. Take as many as you can distribute." By the way, the exact title of this publication is "The Faith and Practice of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America." Those of our readers who do not have direct access to this useful little pamphlet should be able to obtain a copy by sending to our business manager, Mr. Vander Wal. (See the masthead of this magazine for the correct address.)

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A December 13 bulletin informed the South Holland, Illinois congregation that: "The sacrament of baptism will be administered to the child of Rev. and Mrs. Ron Van Overloop on December 27th in Birmingham under the supervision of Elders Poortenga and Van Baren." We who are in the established congregation — especially the larger ones — find the administration of the sacrament of baptism to be a regular occurrence. However, this was the first baptism in our Birmingham mission and was something special for the group who gathers there from week to week. A visit to Birmingham by the undersigned over the Christmas weekend also produced some other information worthy of the *Standard Bearer* news, I think: First, Rev. Van Overloop is now broadcasting on a different radio station, namely — or should we say, "letterly," WQEZ. The broadcast time is 9:30 on Sunday mornings. Secondly, they have changed the site for their evening worship services to the Baptist Deaf Church located at 419 11th St. in Midfield, Alabama. This church is much closer to Pastor Van Overloop's home in Hueytown than the union hall where they continue to hold their morning services. I might add that there is one drawback to holding services in the Baptist Deaf Church and that is that no piano is available to assist them in their group singing. To offset this the Van Overloops record on cassette tape the songs that will be sung and play them back at the appropriate times during the worship services. Thirdly, the Van Overloops have a new address: 6875 Sunny Dell. No, they have not moved! They are just among the unsuspecting victims of a new house-numbering system that has taken place in the area of their residence.