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Volume 82 ◆ Number 3

"The Just Lives by His Faith"

"Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith."

Habakkuk 2: 4

The prophet began his prophecy by expressing his great concern for the increasing wickedness in Judah. He had been for a while sending his complaint to the Lord, asking for God to judge and restore righteousness in the kingdom of Judah (1:2-4). God answers that He will send the evil and powerful Chaldean army against Judah (1:5-11).

Alarmed at the thought of the coming of the Chaldeans, Habakkuk questioned God. Why would the God of pure eyes send those who are the more wicked to punish "the man that is more righteous than he?" (1:13).

Our text is the first part of God's answer to Habakkuk's question. Briefly, God cautions the prophet about challenging God's wisdom (something that is always a manifestation of pride), and instead admonishes him to live by his faith.

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Those who are able to live by their faith are "the just." The just are the only ones who can live by their faith. Who are "the just"?

The "just" are those who are right or righteous in their character and in their conduct — according to the judgment of God. Whether one is just or not is not determined by sinful man. Only God may and only God can make this judgment. First, He is the perfectly just and holy One. It is His essence and character that determine the standard for being just. And, second, He who sees and knows all judges the hearts and lives of all rational, moral creatures and thus is alone able to determine whether His standard of right is met. When God finds that one has met His standard, then He declares him to be just; and when He finds that His standard has not been met, then He declares that one to be unjust.

The holy and just One looks down and declares, "There is none righteous, no, not one.... For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10,23). By the one man Adam sin entered into the world of the human race, and

as a result all have sinned and come short of the glory of the Lord.

Then how can our text speak of "the just"? For any descendant of Adam to be just, God must "justify" him. That is, He must make him just, taking away all his sin and giving to him righteousness and holiness. God justifies some of those who are fallen in Adam. He justifies on the basis of the meritorious life and death of His own Son. Jesus Christ bore the sin and guilt of all those given Him of the Father, satisfying the justice of God by enduring fully their punishment. And Jesus so lived in holiness that He earned for them a righteousness that makes them worthy, in God's judgment, of heaven. God justifies. Those whom He justifies are the just.

Let us remind ourselves that the only basis for God's justifying His people is the work of Jesus. Man's nature always wants to add to the basis for justification. We would like some glory, so we want to be justified also because of what we do. That is why we wrongly try to make faith and the good works that proceed from a living faith to be our work. It is not, for faith is a gift of God — a part of the gift of salvation. And also the good works

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are God working in us to will and to do His good pleasure. Besides, nothing need be added, and nothing can be added, to the merits of Jesus for our justification before God.

So the “just” in Judah and today are those whom God has justified in Christ. The just are not yet sinless, so their lives are characterized by on-going repenting and constantly seeking to know their righteousness in Christ. This experience of their being just (in spite of their sins) is by faith.



Our text declares that the just shall live “by his faith.”

Faith is a part of the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. In fact, it is the bond by which God unites each elect to Jesus. The experience of this God-given bond is the activity of believing, i.e., holding for truth God’s Word and trusting God. The just one uses the instrument of faith both to receive the knowledge of his justification by God, and to guide him in his living righteously in this world.

The just who lives by his faith is not living by sight (II Cor. 5:7). Remember that God is answering Habakkuk’s question why God is sending the terrible Chaldeans against Judah. God is telling Habakkuk that he is to live by faith, i.e., in the consciousness of the unbreakable relationship Jehovah has with His people. To live by faith means that Habakkuk does not live on the basis of what he sees and knows. Instead he is to hold for truth that God is pure of eyes and that He is perfectly wise in sending the Chaldeans. Habakkuk is to trust God. We are to trust God when we face any difficulty, affliction, or adversity. That is living by our faith.

It is most interesting to see that our text clearly teaches that if we are not living from the perspective of faith, then it is from that of pride. God judges any living without faith to be from a “lifted up”

soul. A “soul which is lifted up” is a proud soul — a soul that makes his own evaluations and judgments on the basis of his own perspective. When one is without faith (unbelief), either permanently or temporarily, then one is living from the perspective of pride — a lifted up soul. Faith and pride are enemies. To judge life and its circumstances from the viewpoint of self is always pride.

This means that the attitude of faith is always humility. Faith always acknowledges one’s own sin and need for the full payment made by Jesus Christ. Faith always acknowledges one’s own foolishness — that I do not know what is best, but I know who does know.



How does the just “live” by his faith?


The just has life, and he lives. First, he has life because of the bond of faith. Then he receives the consciousness of spiritual life through the instrumentality of his God-given faith. And also he lives his life by faith. Because he has spiritual life and is aware of his being justified by God, he is able and desires to live his life by his faith.

The just one views his life and its circumstances in the light of his belief in and trust in God. This faith believes that “the LORD is [alive and well in control] in his holy temple” (v. 20). This is a figurative way of saying that God has established a relationship with His people in Christ. The temple was the place (in the old dispensation) where God dwelt with and among His people, Israel. Faith sees the Almighty God as “the LORD,” Jehovah. This name of God emphasizes that He is unchangeable and ever faithful. When faith sees Jehovah in His holy temple, then faith realizes that the God who loves His people as a Father has not forgotten His intimate friendship with them, even when He sends the frightening Chaldeans. Their relationship with Him is se-

cure. His love endures, ever faithful, ever sure. Therefore, living by faith means that they are to (v. 20) trust Him silently, His goodness, His holiness, His power and love.

Faith accepts God’s rule, trusting Him to know what is best. This faith believes that God will judge the wicked. It may look like the wicked are prospering (and the righteous failing), but God has promised five woes (vv. 6, 9, 12, 15, 19) on the wicked. While it seems that they are succeeding, in reality they are making themselves ripe for judgment! The Holy God condemns them. And this faith enables the just to believe that the Almighty Father is working all for their good and for His glory. Faith accepts this as certain, just because God says so. The faith of the just holds for truth God’s promise that “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (v. 14). Not the Chaldeans, but the knowledge of our Father will fill the earth. This describes the effect of the gospel of Jesus being proclaimed to the ends of the earth. This is God’s promise that ultimately the truth of the gospel will triumph. Jesus will reign from shore to shore, and every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord.

This faith determines the conduct of the life of the just. Assured of God’s unchanging covenant relationship and of His sovereign control over the wicked for the sake of the just, the just lives his life with joy and peace. By this faith Abel offered; Enoch was translated; Noah prepared an ark; and all of God’s people live. This faith believes that the Baby born in Bethlehem and who died on Calvary is God’s Son — who is now Lord of all, ruling over the wicked and the just. Faith sees that this life and world are but for a while and are preparatory for the life to come.

Not worldly pride, but humble faith guides the life of the just. O, just ones, live by your faith! 

On Site Reflections

On Hyper-Calvinism and the Free Offer of the Gospel (2)

As indicated in a previous article (Sept. 15, 2005) we intend in this (and a couple of following articles) to make some comments on the free offer of the gospel as that came to our attention through reading some articles found on the website — www.monergism.com. On that website the issue of the free offer is dealt with at length in the section dealing with hyper-Calvinism. There the name of the Protestant Reformed Churches (and of H. Hoeksema and some of his ‘disciples’) appears, labeled by various contributors as the foremost remaining specimen of the error (not to say evil) of hyper-Calvinism.

While our interest is piqued by reference to the PRC as proof that hyper-Calvinism is alive and well these days, that is not our primary concern. That is how we are labeled out there, and amongst the ‘initiated’ nothing is going to change their assessment.

Our primary concern is with the free or well-meant offer of the gospel (WMO from here on). This has become the popular brand of preaching in most of what today goes by the name of Calvinism, Calvinism that has become more and more embarrassed by the doctrine of predestination, finding little place for the wonder of election in any significant way either in its preaching or in its theology (vis-à-vis the doctrine of God’s everlasting covenant, theologians re-

ducing the truth of election to a non-factor for all intents and purposes). And they certainly cannot bring themselves to say the word reprobation anymore, speaking rather of the “non-elect.” That in itself is telling. The question is, why is that? Could it be that speaking of “God’s love for each and every one” and then mentioning the word “reprobate” in the same breath does tend to give any sane man pause?

It becomes apparent that maintaining that there is such a thing as reprobation is enough in and of itself to make one a “hyper-Calvinist” these days. But does it, really? Or does the clear uneasiness with this biblical (and necessary) corollary of election rather betray something that is sub-Calvinistic? Will the real Calvinist on this matter, true to Calvin’s Calvinism, please step forward. Election without reprobation? How is it possible? Another one of those things ‘explained’ by dismissing it in the name of “It’s a paradox.” How convenient to have this magic wand around when something one does not like pops out of Calvinism. But is it (an election unconnected with a decree of reprobation) true Calvinism? That’s the question. Any number of the adherents to the WMO want nothing to do with that part of the Calvinist’s system of doctrines. Yet they claim the right to the name of Calvin without having anything

hyphenated in front of their ‘Calvinism.’ We beg to differ.

The WMO is, we are convinced, unbiblical, a mutant form of the gospel, and, having infected most of Reformed preaching and teaching, is what has left Presbyterian and Reformed churches with little immunity to the real and most deadly theological infections of the last several centuries, namely, full-blown Arminianism, and its step-sister, Modernism.

One of the first articles listed in the section under “Hyper-Calvinism” is by a certain Phil Johnson, who, in a section he classifies as “Bad Theology,” gives a list of what he judges to be the earmarks of “this deadly error” of hyper-Calvinism. In his treatment of this error (and its primary present-day representative) he makes reference to the PRC and H. Hoeksema and to Prof. D. J. Engelsma’s book *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, as well.

Before we list what Johnson deems to be the earmarks of hyper-Calvinism, it is worthwhile noting how dangerous, he is convinced, the error of hyper-Calvinism is.

The blurb to his article quotes his perspective on hyper-Calvinism.

History teaches us that hyper-Calvinism is as much a threat to true Calvinism as Arminianism is. Virtually every revival of true Calvinism since the Puritan era has been hijacked, crippled, or ulti-

mately killed by hyper-Calvinist influences. Modern Calvinists would do well to be on guard against the influence of these deadly trends.

This is no small *historical* indictment.

Our concern with the above statement is *not* Johnson's assessment that the error of hyper-Calvinism is as great an evil and threat to the gospel as Arminianism ever was. Hyper-Calvinism is to be discarded root and branch (when properly identified). Couldn't agree more. The heresy was and is real.

But with the statement we do have a twofold concern.

First, as one might expect, our concern is with the seriousness of the charge that Johnson lays against hyper-Calvinism — note Johnson's charge, namely, that hyper-Calvinism is what has killed virtually every (sic!) revival of true Calvinism since the Reformation, at least in England. ("Virtually" is a wiggle word, and Mr. Johnson knows it. The difference between "virtually every revival" and "every revival" is virtually nothing.) *And then into this camp he throws the PRC and those who oppose the free offer of the gospel.* That is quite an indictment. To oppose the WMO means you are numbered with the chief instruments the devil has used to cool off, deaden, and hinder the triumphs of the gospel and its spread since the days of the Reformation. Opposing the WMO has been the chief instrument of the devil in hindering the preservation of Calvinism and the true note of the gospel truth within Christ's church. Not sins, weakness, and excesses found within those rallying to these revivals; not perhaps unscriptural means and methods being used; not the error of Arminianism has been the chief agent. No. But hyper-Calvinism! So this defender and promoter of the free offer claims.

You understand why it is that,

though we have no interest in being knee-jerk reactionaries every time our name is mentioned in a critical fashion, we do take this particular charge seriously.

But we also have a second concern (make it an allegation if you like). It is this: while Brother Johnson declares that hyper-Calvinism is as great an evil and threat to the gospel as Arminianism is or ever was, we are not at all convinced that those who hold to the WMO these days really believe *that Arminianism is as much a threat to true Calvinism and the gospel as hyper-Calvinism is or ever has been*. Where is such evidence? The question is whether they see Arminianism as much of a threat at all. This is where our grievance and concern really lies. We read where defenders of the WMO take hyper-Calvinists (real and imagined) sharply to task — *by name, with quotes*. But now, good brothers, the question must be asked, where in the writings of the promoters of the WMO have there been these same sharp words of warning, alarm, and condemnation of those of the Arminian conviction?

Here there is a silence that speaks louder than words.

Shall I name just one such Arminian? Mr. John Wesley. Does any dare dispute his pedigree? And it ain't Calvinistic, I will tell you that. Where in the writings of the ardent defenders of the WMO is there warning against the writings and teachings of this man (a man known for his strident, one might even say "vile," accusations against Calvin and Calvinism)? After all, Arminianism is as much a threat to true Calvinism, and is as deadly, as hyper-Calvinism ever was. So it is stated. But where is the hard-copy evidence that the WMO men actually believe this?

The only words I read about John Wesley from WMO men are words that describe him in terms of "that most useful and faithful servant of God." Perhaps they can bring themselves to criticize him

for a tendency towards one sidedness — emphasizing "free-willism" too much — but that is about it. *The Banner of Truth* comes to mind. I have read its publications with profit (and my all too frequent contributions in purchasing their books have profited them somewhat too). It is no secret that they unabashedly promote the WMO as the very marrow of divinity. Recently (*The Banner of Truth*, Aug.-Sept. 2005, pp. 39-46), they have once again raised warning against hyper-Calvinism (almost certainly because a certain small PRC affiliate is making a small noise in the fair Isles of Great Britain). But concerning John Wesley (that rascal of the strongest Arminian stripe) and his gospel preaching, not a word of condemnation or serious warning do we ever read. Concerning John Wesley in their publications it is always "magna cum laude." And yet we are to believe that those of the WMO persuasion perceive Arminianism to be as great a threat and deadly danger to the gospel as hyper-Calvinism is.

We trust you understand if our skepticism remains in place.

Every evidence, including the numerous joint-conferences headed by men committed to the WMO over the past 50 years in both England and the States in the name of ecumenicity, indicates that there is something deeply rooted that the WMO men have in common with Arminians of various stripes. And that something has to do with the marrow of these men's divinity, namely, the well-meant offer itself — or they would not get along so well. And this all while men are insisting that the WMO is true Calvinism when it comes to gospel preaching. Surely, something does not add up.

This brings us to Mr. Johnson's list.

He supplies the following categories of identification (and then goes on to give a brief commentary on each of his points).

A hyper-Calvinist is someone who either:

1. Denies that the gospel call applies to all who hear; or
2. Denies that faith is the duty of every sinner; or
3. Denies that the gospel makes any "offer" of Christ, salvation, or mercy to the non-elect (or denies that the offer of divine mercy is free and universal); or
4. Denies that there is such a thing as "common grace"; or
5. Denies that God has any sort of love for the non-elect.

What Johnson lists under points 1 and 2 describes, of course, what characterizes historic hyper-Calvinism. He acknowledges that these first two are the more extreme forms of hyper-Calvinism and does inform the reader that these cannot be laid at the door of the PRC.

We appreciate at least that declaration.

But the list goes on. In points 3 and 4 direct reference is made to writers of the PRC and their positions. And point 5 applies by necessary inference. Points 3 through 5 clearly have to do with opposition to the free offer. And it is apparent from the article that it is with the critics of the WMO that Johnson is most concerned.

To give the reader a flavor of what Johnson has to say about the WMO and the PRC we will quote

part of what he has written in connection with point 3.

3. *The denial of the gospel offer.*

Type-3 hyper-Calvinism is based on a denial that the gospel makes any "offer" of Christ, salvation, or mercy to the non-elect. An alternative of this view merely denies that the offer of divine mercy is free and universal. For an excellent discussion of this issue, see *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, by John Murray and Ned B. Stonehouse....


If the hyper-Calvinists in England tend to be Baptists, in America the Presbyterian variety seems more common. The best-known American hyper-Calvinists are the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). They deny that there is any sort of "offer" (in the sense of a proffer or tender or proposal of mercy) in the gospel message. They also deny that they are hyper-Calvinist, because they insist that the only variety of hyper-Calvinism is that which denies the gospel call (Type-1 above).

A few things before we end this article.

First, there are things that must be said about the use of the word "offer," and about the charge that those who deny the free offer want nothing to do with a gospel offer in any sense. It is not only Johnson who suggests this, but it is the language of other WMO men as well (as we shall demonstrate in the

next issue). It is not true. This must not be allowed to stand unchallenged. Something important is at stake here, as we intend to point out.

Second, Mr. Johnson is not correct in the last statement he makes in the above quote. It is not true that the PRC insist that the only form of hyper-Calvinism is what he lists as Type-1. We also condemn as hyper-Calvinism what he calls Type-2, the denial that faith is the duty (the solemn calling) of every sinner. To put it simply, we too insist that it is the duty of every sinner to whom the gospel comes to repent and believe. One's inability to comply with the commands and overtures of the gospel call no more excuses the preacher from calling such a one to faith, than the hearers' inability to obey God's law excuses a preacher from calling all in his congregation to keep that law. We had thought Mr. Johnson was clear on that. If not, we assure him it is so.

And now one more thing in conclusion. I cannot refrain from noting that in point 5, which has to do with denying that God has any sort of love for the non-elect (sic! — kk), Johnson brings up the name of A.W. Pink. This is interesting — interesting enough to warrant saying more about it next time. To this we intend to return in our next article, D. V. 

Letters

About Priorities

One who wishes he had had a PRC upbringing can now only hope that those churches do all they ever can to maintain their unique and precious position.

Rev. Kortering's series of articles on firing up the troops for personal witnessing is excellent, especially in that it does not inadvertently do anything to diminish the PRC role as the world's best supplier of meaty grace doctrines. Giving of milk, or the proclaiming


of simple salvation to babes, is vital. But there are many doing that already, whereas there is none to match the PRC in resisting the 'desovereignizing' of God and other apostasies.

This is about priorities. Since the PRC cannot do everything at once, they have decided to do the best things first.

Neither Rev. Kortering nor any other SB writer advocates the popularity route, for it nearly always means being all things to all

men, unacceptable compromises on charismatic, "worksy," humanistic, universalistic, worldly things. All agree that numbers matter far less than doing God's will.

So, evangelize as we can, but never at the expense of our overwhelming love of God and His truth.

In large admiration,
Lewis Price,
Batesville, AR 

The Prophecy of Malachi

Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness (2)

The Superscription: Chapter 1:1

1. *The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.*

There are several things that need to be noted about the superscription to the book of Malachi besides its identification of Malachi as the writer. Most important is the reference to Malachi's prophecies as the "burden of the word of the Lord." That they are the word of the Lord, the inspired and infallible word of God, is beyond doubt in light of the quotations in Romans 9:13 and other passages. That they were and are a burden we shall see.

In identifying Himself as the author of these prophecies, God uses the name Jehovah (LORD), reminding Judah and us of His covenant faithfulness. That is significant when we remember that there is no further positive word from God, other than the repetition of this name, from chapter 1:2 through chapter 3:1. Till then, under rebuke and judgment, that name and the divine faithfulness of which it speaks are the only evidence of God's favor.

The name Jehovah is the most important name of God in the book of Malachi for the same reason. It is found 45 times in Malachi and very often in the form "LORD of

Hosts" (23 times), a name that emphasizes God's *sovereignty* as the God of the covenant. In contrast, the name God is found only seven times in the book.

It is God's great and unchangeable faithfulness as Jehovah that preserves Israel and the church in spite of the sins of His people, and it is that same faithfulness that sends one who will "purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness" (3:3). That faithfulness of Jehovah is expressed most clearly in Malachi 3:6: "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

Here, however, God's word through Malachi is described in 1:1 as a burden. This description of God's word, also found in Isaiah 13:1, Nahum 1:1, and Habakkuk 1:1, reminds us of three things. It reminds us of the calling Malachi had to bring that word. He had to receive it, carry it to the people, and deliver it to them, as any burden is carried. But the word "burden" also reminds us of the seriousness or weight of the word that Malachi brings and of our own obligation to hear it. As God's word it is heavy indeed and may never be ignored. Finally, the description of God's word through Malachi as a burden shows us *why* that word would be so heavy, that is, it would be a word of judgment and rebuke, the kind of word that

everyone who brings God's word experiences as burdensome and difficult (cf. Jer. 20:9 and II Cor. 2:16). It is this third thing especially that is being emphasized here and in the other passages that speak of God's word as a burden.

That word comes "through Malachi." The name Malachi, as we have already indicated, is the personal name of the prophet who was called to bring God's word to God's people in those and these troubled times. That this is his personal name does not mean, however, that the meaning of the name can be ignored. In light of the book's emphasis on *the messenger* of the covenant (3:1), it cannot be without significance that Malachi's own name means "My messenger" or "My angel" (messenger and angel are the same word, the word "malach" in Hebrew).

Though Malachi looks forward to and prophesies of the coming of the great Messenger, he himself is also such a messenger. The connection between them is not just that the one (Malachi) foretold the coming of the other (Christ), but that Malachi was commissioned by Christ and spoke under the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ (I Pet. 1:10, 11), so that the word he spoke was really Christ's own word to His church, the word of *the Messenger* of the covenant.

That is always the relationship between the prophets and Christ in the Old Testament and between Christ and His ministers in the

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Previous article in this series: September 15, 2005, p. 491.

New. They are not only those who speak of Christ, but they are the ones through whom Christ Himself speaks to His church (John 10:27; Eph. 2:17). One of the words for a preacher in the New Testament reminds us of this, and when used of a minister of the gospel is very similar to Malachi's own name. The word usually translated "preacher" refers to the minister of the gospel as a "herald," or messenger of Christ, by whom Christ speaks and makes Himself known.

This may never be forgotten. When it is forgotten by the church, then the preaching of the gospel is despised and seen as nothing different from other forms of teaching and speaking, and is soon replaced, as it is today, by all sorts of frivolity and foolishness. When this is forgotten by the preachers themselves, then they, no longer seeing themselves merely as bearers of God's message to His people, begin to bring their own wisdom and to speak their own words, none of which have any saving power or value.

This word of God is addressed to *Israel*, not just to Judah. God never recognized the division between the two kingdoms, just as He does not recognize the divisions that come between Christians today, but views and addresses His church as one. Not only that, but God by His word continued to gather a remnant out of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. He had done that in the days of Jeroboam, in the time of Hezekiah, and continued to do it until the gospel was taken from Israel and given to the Gentiles (cf. Luke 2:36).

It ought to be noted here, too, that in addressing *Israel* God makes it clear that the foolish and wicked notions of British Israelitism, which find the lost ten tribes in Britain and America, are not to be tolerated. The destiny of those lost ten tribes and of whatever remains of them has now been merged with the destiny of Judah and is not to

be found in the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The First Disputation: Chapter 1:2-5

2. *I have loved you, saith the LORD, Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob,*

3. *And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.*

4. *Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places: thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation forever.*

In these verses God begins the prophecy of Malachi by speaking of His eternal love for His people, and does so because His love had been called into question by the people. This love of God the people had questioned because they had not received the temporal blessings He promised them. To this, chapter 3:10, 11 alludes. The people had experienced drought, enemies, poor harvests, and many other troubles and had seen this as an evidence that God's love for them had failed.

The truth is, of course, that not only are temporal benefits in themselves not the equivalent of God's blessing or proof of His love — it is only a carnal and covetous people that can think so — but the problem was in their own sinfulness. They had no right to expect anything from God when they were hard-hearted, formal in their worship, and did not even acknowledge God's mercies with tithes and offerings. They expected the most from God for the least amount of effort or expense, and when God in anger gave them nothing, instead of questioning themselves they questioned God's love.

This is the usual way with an unredeemed heart. The ungodly

world, which does not even acknowledge its obligation to be thankful to God, always questions God's love and mercy when God sends His judgments on the world. It insists that He cannot possibly be a God of love and mercy when He sends hurricanes, disease, famine, and other judgments.

The apostate church does the same. Never does she question herself and her own wicked ways, but she tells lies about God's love when she herself comes under God's judgments or when she sees those judgments in the world around her. She says, in the face of disaster and trouble, that God does not send such things, but rather the *devil*, and that to believe that these things come from God is inconsistent with the love of God.

We see the same inclination in ourselves. When God sends trials, all of which are designed to purify us and deliver us from our sins, we almost always begin to doubt God's love and to think in our hearts that He does not love us, instead of humbling ourselves before Him, examining ourselves, acknowledging our sinfulness and repenting. We do not mean by this, of course, that every trial comes as a result of some particular sin, but only that trials come because we are sinners, and that God uses them to deliver us from our sins and purify us, and that when afflicted we must profit from our afflictions by self-examination and repentance.


In the face of such denials of His love, God speaks of His eternal and unchangeable love for Jacob. The Jews would have understood that in referring to Jacob, God was referring not only to the man himself but to the nation that traced its ancestry to him, the nation of Israel. They would have known this from the prophecies of Isaiah, who often calls the whole nation "Jacob" (Is. 44:1, 8; 43:1).

God does not, however, speak through Malachi of the love He bore for Israel at the time of Malachi's prophecy, but of His *past*

love for Jacob: "I *have* loved you, saith the LORD." Reformed believers have always understood the past tense in such statements to refer to *eternity* (compare Num. 23:21). When God says, "I *have* loved you," he refers not just to time past, but to eternity past, and therefore to His eternal love, the love that is revealed in election.

The proof for this is found in Romans 9, where Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, quotes from this passage and identifies

God's past love for His people as God's election of them in Christ. There the apostle makes reference to the birth of Jacob and Esau and to the word of God concerning them, "The elder shall serve the younger," and tells us that this was said in order that "the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth," and proves his point by quoting from Malachi 1:2, 3: "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated."

We may never forget that election is the eternal love of God for some. As difficult as that doctrine may be, the fact that it is *love* and not bare choosing makes it of great comfort for those who know themselves to be the objects of election. That it is eternal love answers all the questioning of God's people and shows that whatever their outward circumstances might be, it cannot ever be that God's love for them has lessened or failed. 

Guest Article

Rev. Steven Key

The Biblical Basis and Goal of Christian Education (1)

The subject of this article is one that lies dear to my heart, and indeed to the heart of our Protestant Reformed Churches. It has been well developed in the churches and it is found important throughout the churches. For that reason, this article will not set forth any new thing. But it is not without reason that we give our attention occasionally to the biblical basis and goal of Christian education, even to refresh our minds and renew our zeal for this cause.

It becomes evident in Psalm 78 that foundational to Christian education is the truth of God's cov-

enant, established with believers and their seed in the lines of continued generations. Because God, in sovereign mercy, is pleased to establish His covenant with us and our children, and because He is also pleased to use *means* to fulfill His will, even *weakest* means, He gives us the calling to teach our children. So I call your attention to the biblical basis and goal of Christian education.

The Basis

I begin by calling your attention to the opening verses of Psalm 78, where the psalmist speaks on behalf of God's people and acknowledges an obligation to covenantal education that belongs to all generations in the church. And although, as we find in other passages, it is an obligation that rests primarily upon the fathers of the households, nevertheless, this passage is far more broad in its reach.

The address of this Psalm is not to fathers only. It is to all Israel, the entire church, to you and me

exclusive of none. "Give ear, O my people," says inspired Asaph. A striking element of this Psalm is the recognition of the breadth of our responsibility and obligation to God's covenant children.

We often overlook that obligation as it applies to every one of us. We like to focus on the obligation of the parents to their own children. After all, that seems only natural. And this Psalm does not in any sense deny the solemn obligation of parents toward their own children. Scripture speaks of that calling of fathers and mothers repeatedly and from many points of view.

But Asaph's concern in Psalm 78 was not the enrichment of the home, nor the particular calling of parents, first of all. But his focus is upon the important role children play in the generation of the church as the one body of Christ.

That is evident from the very language of the text. Notice in verse 4, the psalmist does not even refer to his own children and the

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children of his own generation as *our* children or *my* children, but *their* children, namely, the children of those whom he calls “our fathers.” They are the *church’s* children.

It is important for us to see that, in order that we might have a proper perspective concerning the instruction of our children. Although we certainly distinguish the spheres of each, and find particular roles and responsibilities in each, there is to be no *separation* of church, home, and school.

This obligation, acknowledged by Asaph and by us who join him in this song, is an obligation that has as its basis God’s good pleasure to save His church in the line of succeeding generations. All covenant instruction is based upon the truth that children as well as their believing parents are incorporated into the covenant of grace. God’s church is an organism. The generations of believers have their roots in the past, and the branches reach into the future; but they are all part of one tree.

For that reason the duty to instruct our generations comes upon us all — parents, grandparents, and married couples without children, as well as single individuals in God’s church. Which is to say that this text, together with the whole river of truth winding its way through Scripture, condemns all individualism.

From that point of view alone, the error both of the Baptists in rejecting the church membership and baptism of infants, and, closer to home, the same rejection of children in Christ’s body by the Netherlands Reformed congregations in their teaching that all children are unbelieving and unregenerated, is a most serious and mischievous error. Their errors concerning God’s covenant and the place of children in the church are grievous! We don’t speak merely about a mistake concerning a speculative point of doctrine. Theirs is an error that so directly contradicts the spirit of the

whole Bible, and of all Jehovah’s precious promises and the covenant He established with Abraham and his seed to everlasting generations, that it must be considered an attack upon some of the most vital practical interests of the body of Christ, and an error that exerts a poisonous influence on the advance of Christ’s spiritual kingdom. It is no less dangerous than the falsehood of presupposed regeneration — which we have been falsely accused of teaching, but which we vehemently condemn. Both give an erroneous basis for the Christian instruction of children.

If I may mix Old Testament perspective with New, our homes and our covenant schools and our fellowship with the children and youth of the church and our catechism teaching are not mission efforts to make true Israelites out of uncircumcised Philistines! The purpose of this instruction is not to make our covenant children into children of God. That would be a task far beyond our capability, and it would be hopeless even to attempt it.

Basically, the order is exactly the opposite. Because the Lord our God draws His seed out of our seed, it is both possible and necessary to instruct our children in His wonderful works and to teach them to keep His commandments. No, that does not assume that all shall be saved. Nor do those efforts save them. But it recognizes the obligation God lays upon us in that He is pleased that the seed of Christ be present — not head for head, but organically — in the generations of the church.

Though today the state forces us to educate the world’s children by our tax dollars, and we do so in willing subjection, nevertheless, our obligation is not the instruction of the *world’s* children, but the *church’s* children. And would some within the church contribute toward the education of the world’s children, but contribute nothing to-

ward the education of the church’s children?!

That obligation comes upon us, not by the force of society or the state, nor by mere necessity if our children are to succeed in life, but by Jehovah God.

Covenant education is not an option, but a mandate of which all church members are partakers. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel. That testimony is a witness concerning the will of God. God commands us to instruct the church’s children and grandchildren. And that testimony is at the same time a law, immovable and irreversible, the departure from which brings the wrath of God and severe chastisement.

Do we understand that? God’s testimony concerning our obligation toward covenant instruction is not merely some pretty good advice, which you follow or do not follow depending on your priorities. It is not something that you may follow only as your money allows, or as you see fit. It is a mandate from Almighty God!

When you search the Scriptures you will find that same testimony and law often repeated. The words of Deuteronomy 6:6-9 are probably familiar to us: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.”

This is the law Jehovah gave — not to fathers only, but to Israel, the church. Are you a member of Christ’s church? Then this law comes to you. It comes to you upheld by the very words of Jesus recorded by Matthew, Mark, and

Luke in their gospel accounts, where we read: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." And again, "Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me."

It is our God-given calling to be living examples of godliness to the children of the church and to teach the generations to come.

That divine command applies to every area of life.

Yes indeed, it applies within the *church*. It is what motivates us to bring our children under the preaching of the gospel. It is what compels us to provide careful and faithful catechism instruction to the church's children and youth.

The same divine command applies to the instruction given in the home life of our children. This, of necessity, limits the involvement somewhat of those outside the immediate family. I say "somewhat," certainly not "entirely." Certainly the calling of the parents is emphasized within the sphere of the home. A man not interested in providing for the spiritual training of his own flesh and blood in the home will not serve to help instruct others either. To those whom God has given children, that faithful instruction of the generations begins right within the walls of their own household. That is why the man who will serve in the offices of the church and play a prominent role in such covenant instruction must, according to the words of the apostle Paul in I Timothy 3, rule well his own house. "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?"

But that instruction of children within the home sphere is also contributed to by the other members of the church. When grandparents spend time with their grandchildren, testifying of God's

wonder works of grace, when aunts and uncles speak unashamedly about their faith with their nephews and nieces, when church members speak to the children of the church, it leaves a profound impression upon the minds of those who are the spiritual seed of Israel. Worldliness likewise leaves an impression upon very impressionable minds, an impression that has a very detrimental effect upon this calling God has given the church.

But this divine command to instruct the generations of the church also applies more broadly beyond the sphere of the home to that of the school. Parents may, and wisely do, band together to form a school society and hire teachers to give instruction in various subjects. In doing such the parent does not transfer his own responsibility to the teacher. He only adds to his own. He still is responsible for that covenant training of the child whom God has entrusted to his care. But he adds to his responsibility because he now is also charged with seeing to it that the teacher he hires gives the instruction that God calls him to provide.

The interest in the children's covenant instruction, however, again reaches beyond father and mother when it comes to the sphere of the school. Here also the instruction of the church's children ought to be the interest of all church members.

Don't overlook the fact that the psalmist speaks in Psalm 78 of *four generations!*

There are, first of all, the people speaking in the Psalm. This is one generation, the generation in which Asaph stood.

But those in whose place Asaph wrote this Psalm mention their *fathers* and speak of the fact that the words that came from the mouth of God are words that they heard from their fathers.

Furthermore, these same people speak of their *children*, the

third generation. And they speak of their own obligation to teach their children the wonderful works of God and His truth.

And finally, they make mention of the fact that their children in turn "should arise and declare them to *their* children."

So the generations all together work for the education of the church's children. Young and old have a wonderful opportunity to contribute financial support to the covenant training of the church's children. Some can teach; some can help the teachers; others provide in other ways, including financially; and all pray. So we express the reality of the body of Christ, all parts standing in an inseparable connection with each other, working together toward the same goal.

Notice, the psalmist writes, "We will not hide them." The implication is that there are surely those who do hide them from their children. There are those in the church who hide the things of God from their children. Asaph wrote with such in mind. He would that we not be like them. "We will show to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done." Shall we? We?

Perhaps you ask, why should we, a couple with no children, a single man or woman, a father and mother whose children are grown up and through school, continue to support financially and with prayer the showing of God's praises to those children to whom I have no physical tie or relationship?

Why? The answer is and must be, Because you love God. He who loves God loves his brother also, writes the apostle John. And when you love your brother — which includes the church's children, those little brothers and sisters in Christ — then you will contribute to their heavenward sojourn, and do so with joy and even self-sacrifice. Do you love the church's children?

... to be continued. 

The Fundamental Work of the Deacons (11)

Keeping in Touch with the Directors of Institutions of Mercy

Article 26 of our Church Order requires deacons to work closely with other diaconates in the care of the poor, to correspond with civil poor-relief organizations so that aid might be better distributed among those who have need, and to cooperate with the board of directors of institutions of mercy so that the poor can use these institutions. Concluding our examination of the duties of Reformed deacons as set forth in our Church Order, we now examine the latter duty required by Article 26.



Specifically, Article 26 requires this of deacons: "Moreover, they shall make it possible for the poor to make use of institutions of mercy, and to that end they shall request the board of directors of such institutions to keep in close touch with them."

This requirement was not found in the original Church Order as adopted by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-1619. Nor did the churches in the Netherlands add it when they, in 1905, adopted a revision of the Church Order. Rather, this point was added to the Church Order by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1914.¹ In other words, the requirement of Article 26 that we are now examining is a relatively re-

cent addition to our Church Order. Today the Protestant Reformed Churches in America are the only Reformed churches in the United States officially to require this of their deacons.² We must not conclude that diaconates of other Reformed churches had or have no interest in the work of caring for the poor in institutions of mercy, for history shows otherwise. In Calvin's Geneva the deacons maintained a hospital (caring not only for the sick, but also for the aged and orphans). Reformed diaconates in the Netherlands and in South Africa have undertaken similar works.³ But for now our point is that the requirement as found in the Church Order is currently unique to the Protestant Reformed Churches, as an inheritance from our mother, the Christian Reformed Church.

VanDellen and Monsma explain why the Christian Reformed Church added this requirement. When Reformed Christians in the United States began building homes for the aged, many aged who could have used such homes could not afford them. Consequently, "diaconates began to aid the afflicted or their relatives financially, so that this very necessary Christian care could be shared by such as would otherwise have to forego this privilege. To assure the continuance of this practice the second provision of Article 26 was added to this Article."⁴



The term "institutions of mercy" refers to those private organizations

that care for the sick, poor, aged, widows, orphans, or any other needy people. I say they are *private* organizations because Article 26 has already spoken of "others" who are "devoting themselves to the care of the poor," which "others" refers especially to the government or other civic relief organizations. Now the article is speaking of private organizations, and especially of those institutions that not only care for the poor and needy, but also build infrastructure and hire employees, so that the needy can receive full-time care and support. That the article has such an organization in mind is clear from the fact that it speaks of a "board of directors," a group of people who oversee the operation of this facility. We have in mind, therefore, hospitals, retirement and nursing homes, orphanages, boarding schools for the deaf or blind, and other institutions of a similar nature.

Those who are poor because, while having jobs, their income does not sufficiently meet their needs, are given financial aid and brought comfortable words from Scripture. But the poor in institutions of mercy need round the clock help, which requires full-time caregivers and adequate facilities in which such care can be given. The cost of caring for such poor, therefore, is significantly greater. Such institutions must charge high fees for their services, and often the poor cannot afford these high fees.

We can appreciate the fact, therefore, that our Church Order directs the attention of the deacons to their calling in this regard: make

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it possible for the poor of the church to use such institutions!

We ought to note that the article does not require deacons to *establish and maintain* such institutions, as was done earlier in Reformed churches. It remains a question whether deacons properly may do so, and to this question we hope to return in a future article, the Lord willing. Regardless of how these institutions are established and maintained, Article 26 requires deacons to be sure that the poor are able to use them.



How do the deacons fulfill this responsibility?

Obviously, one way is by dealing with the poor and needy themselves, on an individual basis. That is, on a regular basis the deacons might visit those of their congregations who are in such institutions of mercy, to inquire whether they need financial help. Or, if the deacons are aware of a person in the congregation who appears to be in need of such an institution — an aged person who lives alone, or a special-needs adult who might need full-time care, for example — the deacons might visit the person or the person's family, to express their willingness to assist financially with placing the person in an institution of mercy. In such instances, the deacons would still follow the procedure set forth in Article 25, which requires deacons to collect sufficient alms to help the poor, to determine the amount of the individual's genuine need, and "after mutual counsel, faithfully and diligently to distribute ... to the poor as their needs may require it."

But the requirements of Article 26 are not completely satisfied when the deacons deal with the poor and needy on an individual basis. For the article requires the deacons, as they seek to make it possible for the poor to use these institutions, to "request the Board of Directors of such institutions to keep in close touch with them."

On the one hand, this requirement seems rather simple to implement. The deacons would request, probably by letter, that if any matters arose regarding the care of a particular individual with which the deacons could be of help, the deacons would like to be so informed. Perhaps, to impress upon the Board of Directors the sincerity of the deacons in this regard, the letter would be followed up by another letter, or other letters, or even by a personal visit. (After all, not every letter to directors and boards of such institutions is given a response; and some might not even be read). In some way, at least, the deacons must indicate that they truly desire to be kept in *close touch*, that is, to be informed quickly and frequently, if need be. When the deacons have conveyed their desire to the board, it becomes the responsibility of the board to inform the deacons of how they can help.

On the other hand, just as we pointed out in our last article, we live in a day in which organizations put a high priority on protecting the privacy of individuals whom they serve. This might make it difficult for the board of directors ever to inform the deacons of a need. In such an instance, the deacons might do two things: first, they might encourage the individual who is receiving care at such an institution to give written permission for the board of directors to divulge such information to the diaconate; and secondly, they might try to get the board of directors to see that the deacons consider it very important that the needs of the members of the church are met not by civic grants or other sources, but by the church itself. What a witness to the church's love for her own, and desire to manifest true mercy — the mercies of Christ — when deacons do this!



Implied in this requirement of Article 26 is not only that deacons desire the well-being of their mem-

bers who use such institutions, but also that deacons desire the well-being of such institutions themselves — particularly, of such institutions that are operated by Christian believers on the basis of Christian principles. As DeJong says: "This [the close contact requested by the deacons, DJK] presupposes that the deacons take a deep and lasting interest in the work of these Christian institutions. For although it is not being performed by them directly, it is similar to the task which the Savior has laid on them."⁵

In at least two ways, in addition to being ready to care for the needs of institutionalized members of their own congregation, the deacons do well to manifest this interest in the work of such organizations.

1. To confirm these historical data, the interested reader can consult the following works: Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1941), pp. 119, 121; and Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1952), p. 219.

2. I have consulted the current Church Orders of the following Reformed denominations in North America to confirm that they do not officially require this of their deacons: Reformed Church in America, Christian Reformed Church in North America, United Reformed Churches in North America, Canadian and American Reformed Churches, and Reformed Church in the United States.

3. The interested reader can consult pages 210-216 of DeJong's book for a survey of the history of Christian institutions of mercy from the time of the early New Testament church, through the Middle Ages and the Reformation era, until the present time. Also Prof. William Heyns indicates that the Reformed churches busied themselves in the work of founding and directing such institutions — cf. his *Handbook for Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1928), pp. 339-340.

4. VanDellen and Monsma, p. 121.


5. DeJong, p. 219.

First, the deacons might consider scheduling collections for such organizations. Many of our congregations do this already. Perhaps it happens that deacons think to themselves, as they prepare to make a collection schedule for the year, "So many organizations have asked us to take collections, and we cannot take them for all. Perhaps we should simply reject the request of any organization that is not directly affiliated with the Protestant Reformed Churches." While my intent is not to tell deacons what criteria they must use in determining for which causes to schedule collections, it should be clear that we must not ignore the fact that Christian institutions of mercy are good causes, kingdom causes, for which we may pray, and to which we may give our money.

Second, a diaconate that understands its responsibility to "do good unto all men" (Gal. 6:10) and that is eager to fulfill this responsibility, but does not know how, might consider asking the board of directors whether there are any in the institution who have needs that are not being met. After all, one finds two sorts of people in institutions of mercy — the one has family and friends who visit often, while the other has few visitors and perhaps no family. Sadly, this happens even to those who are members of congregations; the members of the church are too busy to visit the shut-ins, or never think to visit them. The deacons have here an opportunity to assist financially if there is need, and also to visit these lonely people, bringing them comfortable words from Scripture.

Obviously, these two sugges-

tions are not required by the letter of the article. But deacons do well to ask themselves the question: "Are we as busy in the work to which we are called as we could be? Are there some to whom we could minister, if we looked harder?" If our diaconates have the desire and ability to minister to others outside their own congregation, here are possible ways to do that.

This brings us, then, to the conclusion of our examination of the duties of the deacons to care for the poor, in light of what our Church Order and Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons requires. We plan next, God willing, to deal more specifically with the deacons' care of widows, of the sick, and any work that would consist of administering the mercies of Christ. 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

"Southern Decadence" Cancelled

This organization scheduled its annual "Southern Decadence" event for Wednesday, August 31 through Monday, September 5, 2005. Its Web Site proclaims that this will be "Southern Decadence XXXIV in New Orleans — A celebration of Gay Life, Music & Culture." Similar bashes are held in New Orleans with a "Gay Easter Parade" and "Gay Halloween" and "Gay Mardi-Gras" (this one scheduled next for February 24-28, 2006). The last "Southern Decadence" held in New Orleans in 2004 drew, so it is reported, some 125,000 celebrants.

The current mayor, as had two former mayors, effusively welcomed the assembly. The Web Site of "Southern Decadence" stated:

Due to the significance of *Southern Decadence's* importance to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and

transgender community, and the millions of dollars in economic impact, the past three *Mayors of the City of New Orleans* have issued an official proclamation welcoming visitors to *Southern Decadence*.... Additionally, in 2000, the *New Orleans City Council* issued the first proclamation recognizing the *Official Southern Decadence Grand Marshals* that year.

The same article presented the proclamation of the current mayor, C. Ray Nagin, issued in connection with the "celebration" scheduled for New Orleans on August 31-September 5, 2005:

Greetings!

Welcome to the most intriguing city in the world: New Orleans, Louisiana!

The City of New Orleans extends to you our heartfelt gratitude for coming to our unique mecca on the Mississippi River. The birthplace of Jazz, the "blue" in Blues, our music and our culture is as varied and as diverse as our citizens. There is no place like this place on this earth! Southern

Decadence XXXII is an exciting event! We welcome you and know that you can anticipate great food, great music, and great times in New Orleans.

Our City offers true Southern hospitality at its finest. Explore our heritage and witness our growth and commitment for generations to come. Share in our future by observing how we honor our past. Our museums and galleries offer world class exhibits. Take some of our "home grown" art home with you!

Come to New Orleans often and please tell your friends and associates what a grand place New Orleans is for meetings, vacations and business opportunities.

Sincerely
C. Ray Nagin

This same mayor on Thursday, September 1, bitterly berated the federal government for their slow response in helping their distressed city. He used vile language to describe this lack of action so that radio and television stations had to "bleep" out several of his words.

"Southern Decadence XXXIV,"

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needless to say, was cancelled (although some of these individuals nevertheless appeared in the city). On August 29 "Katrina" hit. It was listed as a category 4 hurricane. Though it was first headed directly for New Orleans, the last minute it seemed to swerve slightly from that path. There were those who rejoiced that New Orleans had been spared the worst of devastation from the storm. But then the levees that protected the city were breached. The bowl-shaped city, much of it below sea level, filled with water. Hundreds, it has been estimated, died there and in the surrounding vast area. On Tuesday the order was given to evacuate the entire city. For the week after the hurricane hit, pictures of devastation, suffering, and death were presented on every television news broadcast.

It was heart-rending to watch. There were people lying dead along the streets. Mothers had lost sight of their children. Husbands had lost their wives. It was listed as the worst disaster ever to hit our land. And the government, it seems, hardly knew what to do or where to start to help in this devastation.

It was, as some broadcasters said, a "disaster of Biblical proportions." Perhaps like that of Sodom and Gomorrah? It would almost seem so.

Estimates of the total cost of the damages range to over 100 billion dollars. The effects on the economy of the United States remain to be seen. The "pain" at the gas pumps, at the time of this writing, is obvious.

But a bold face is put on all of this. The President has signed a relief bill of over 10 billion dollars. And, so he says, this is only the beginning of the help that will come. The city will be built to be bigger and better than before. One recalls God's testimony concerning Edom as recorded in Malachi 1:3-4: "And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished,

but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever."

One recalls also the words of Christ in Matthew 5:45: "...for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Even so, His wrath affects both the just and the unjust. The just must know that all these things work together for the good of His people. The unjust must understand that this is but a foretaste of the wrath to come when, shortly, Christ returns.

We likewise have Christ's testimony, "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:7-8).

In the meantime, recriminations continue apace. The mayor of New Orleans, the governor of Mississippi, and many with them accuse the federal government of being far too slow in their efforts at disaster relief. The President ought to have shown greater compassion by visiting the area immediately. The Federal government ought to have provided (before the storm hit) for the evacuation of those who had no transportation. The Federal government should have had available relief by providing water and food immediately. The Federal government should have provided troops and the national guard to patrol and keep order. The Federal government for years has under-funded the project of enlarging and hardening the system of levees.

Others point out that the mayor of the city never ordered the 200 school buses in the city to be utilized in evacuating those without other transportation. The buses remained unused and subsequently

ruined, say some, under four feet of dirty water. The city itself evidently had no emergency food supplies to assist its citizens if and when the long-forecast hurricane hit the city. The governor waited far too long before declaring orders for evacuation. The governor failed to mobilize the national guard troops immediately. The governor failed to order in buses to assist in the evacuation.

Others point out that the disaster was compounded by the racial divide. Most wealthy white folk left the city, the poverty-stricken colored remained. Perhaps the delay in providing support and relief was because these were mostly merely poor black people who remained. If it had been a city predominately white, the help would have come immediately.

Except for some religious publications, none mention the hand of God in this all. It was a storm that came likely because of global warming (and the Bush administration, such is the claim, has failed to act to reduce global warming). The extreme devastation came as a result of the failed environmental policies of the Bush administration (the government did not provide sufficient funding to restore the wet-lands which would have moderated the effect of the storm). But

God? Would a loving God send such a storm and wreak such destruction?

Would He express in it His judgment against the wickedness of a city or of the nation? Would a kind God send such a terrible storm with all of its destruction and loss of life to remind of the near coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ? No. President Bush is to blame. The mayor and governor are to blame. Racism is to blame.

The child of God must look up. God speaks through disastrous storms as well as through the "still small voice."


The late Gerrit Vos, who was a pastor in the Protestant Reformed Churches, wrote a Meditation titled

The child of God must look up.

"Visited by Majesty on High" in the *Standard Bearer* after a devastating tornado swept through his hometown of Hudsonville, MI, "Our village received a very special visit by the Lord Christ. It was a visit of the Majesty on high. What we really received is a little

foretaste of the end of the world. Some of us went to heaven in the process of that visit. Others are in the hospital because of that visit. Some of us had a brush with death. All of us were deeply impressed by that visit. God came to us, and

He roared: I have never yet heard a voice such as we heard around supper time, Tuesday evening, April 3, 1956...."

Far more might that be said about "Katrina," which swept through the southern states on August 29, 2005. 

Things Which Must Shortly Come To Pass

Prof. David J. Engelsma

Chapter Two

The Intermediate State (2)

The believer's death in the body is not the whole story about the intermediate state. Indeed, it is not the main part of the story. The main part of the story is life, joy, and glory. According to this other aspect of the intermediate state, the believer is not subject to the power of death, but enjoys deliverance from death. His place is not the grave, but heaven. He does not sleep, but is conscious and active.

The second aspect of the state of the believer upon death is that he lives with Christ in heaven in his soul, or spirit. In his soul, he consciously enjoys the bliss of this heavenly communion with Christ. He even shares in the glory of reigning with Christ.

Man is not only a material body. He is also an immaterial soul, or spirit. In his soul, the believer is taken up to Christ immediately at death.

The Last Enemy

The truth of the intermediate state demands that we take careful note of what physical death is for the Christian. Death is the violent tearing apart of a man as regards

the two substances, or elements, of his human nature: body and soul (Gen. 2:7; Eccles. 12:7). This is the aspect of death that the believer heartily dislikes and shrinks from. Even though he is not terrified by death, he fears dying. Although death is compelled to do him great good, dying inflicts upon him great and painful evil. Inasmuch as death rips apart what belong together—the body and soul of the believer—death remains the last enemy of the Christian—and thus of *Christ*—even though by His death Christ has pulled the stinger out of death for His own (I Cor. 15:26, 55). The Christian has a desire, a *strong* desire, to depart this life and to be with Christ; he has no desire to die (Phil. 1:23). Referring to the intermediate state of his soul, Paul declares that he groans with eagerness to be "clothed upon" with heavenly life. But being stripped in dying holds no attraction for him: "not for that we would be unclothed" (II Cor. 5:4).

This passage teaches that, with the unnatural separating of body and soul, there is the dissolving of the "earthly house of this tabernacle" of the believer, in order that he may be "clothed upon with [his] house which is from heaven" (II Cor. 5:1ff.). This dissolution of the "earthly house of this tabernacle" is not the same as the separation of soul and body, although it oc-

curs at the moment of the separation of soul and body at death. The dissolving of the earthly house is not merely that the body dies and is buried, while the soul goes to heaven, to enjoy life there. Rather, with the wrenching apart of a man as to soul and body, death does away with his entire earthly life. All earthly relationships, interests, attachments, and even ways of thinking are destroyed. The dissolving of the earthly house of this tabernacle involves not only the death of the body, but also a change upon the soul.

Prior to death, our soul, although it relates also to God and heavenly things, is intimately related to the earth. Indeed, even the way the soul relates to God is after an earthly manner. The soul thinks of God's eternity as endless time. It conceives His Fatherhood along the lines of earthly fatherhood. It pictures, and even enjoys, the covenant in terms of the intimacy of earthly marriage. This is not wrong. God's own revelation of Himself in Scripture instructs the soul of the Christian to know God in this way. It is impossible for the soul of the Christian to relate to God differently in this life, for the Christian is of the earth earthly.

Death dissolves the earthly. Everything earthly is forever discarded, not only as regards the

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body, but also as regards the soul. In his soul the child of God moves out of his little, frail, earthly tent into a large, solid, enduring, heavenly building of God. Death strips him of the earthly in order that he may be clothed with the heavenly.

The Resurrection of the Soul

As regards the believer's soul, therefore, the intermediate state is twofold. The soul is taken up to Christ in heaven. The soul also undergoes a change, a radical change: it is made heavenly. Because the believer *is* his soul, we should say that the *believer* undergoes radical change at death. The earthly is dissolved for him, and he is made heavenly in the soul.

The intermediate state of the believer as regards the soul is a wonderful work of salvation by Jesus Christ upon the believer at the moment of his death. It is a resurrection of the believer in his soul. We must not have the idea that it naturally happens that the soul flies off to heaven, perhaps by some inherent property of "immortal souls." Rather, Christ purges the soul from all sin. The soul is as defiled with original sin as is the body. The soul is full of lusts. The soul is stained with innumerable iniquities of pride, envy, self-seeking, anger, desire of revenge, covetousness, sloth, adultery, and much more. Up to the moment of death, the soul of the regenerated child of God is sinful. There is a new beginning of obedience that rules the soul, as it rules the body, but it is only a beginning and a very small one at that (Heid. Cat., Q. and A. 114). At the moment of the death of a believer, Christ perfects the sanctification of the soul by His Holy Spirit. Insofar as the Roman Catholic purgatory is supposed to serve the purpose of cleansing the souls of the faithful, its fires are unnecessary. Christ cleanses the soul of every one of His at death by the water and fire of the Holy Spirit.

Christ also translates the soul so that it is perfectly heavenly in

nature, adapted to live the new life of the risen Christ in heaven. No longer is it an earthly soul. Sharing fully in the heavenly nature of the exalted Christ, it has become a heavenly soul. It is still a human soul, but it is now a heavenly human soul. Its relations are heavenly; its attachments are heavenly; its pleasures are heavenly; its desires are heavenly. Even its thoughts of God, spiritual in nature (as was also the case with the regenerated soul's thoughts of God during the man's earthly life), are after a heavenly manner.

Thus, by a wonderful, direct act of salvation upon the soul, Christ takes the believer to Himself at death.

Those who are yet alive when Christ returns will experience this same purgation and transformation of their soul without dying. By the same saving act, Christ will cleanse and transform also their body. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (I Cor. 15:51).

The intermediate state of the Christian is a preliminary stage in the resurrection of the dead. The Christian has one hope. This one hope is resurrection with Christ. The Christian's future resurrection is realized in stage one at death in the intermediate state. According to Philippians 1:23, his departing in death will be a "being with Christ." That is, at the death of the Christian there will be a presence of Christ to the Christian. There will be a first stage of the *parousia*, the coming and presence of Christ, that constitutes the Christian hope.

Revelation 20:5 calls the intermediate state "the first resurrection." About the living and reigning with Christ a thousand years of "the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus" (v. 4), verse five says, "This is the first resurrection." The second resurrection will be the raising of their bodies.

In Question and Answer 57, the Heidelberg Catechism describes the intermediate state of the believer as resurrection. It teaches

that "my soul, after this life, shall be immediately taken up to Christ its Head." There is an act of Christ upon the soul. The soul does not fly off; it is "taken up." And this truth of the intermediate state appears as part of the comfort of the resurrection. The question to which the taking up of the soul of the believer is part of the answer is: "What comfort does the resurrection of the body afford thee?"

Now we are ready to describe fully the glorification of the believer in the intermediate state. The intermediate state is perfect communion with Christ in the soul. This involves perfect conscious enjoyment of eternal life. For every one who believes the gospel of grace from the heart, to depart in death is "to be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). But the intermediate state is also the glory of reigning with Christ. In his soul, the believer who has died a martyr (and every believer loses his life for Christ's sake in one way or another, as Christ teaches in Matt. 10:39) sits on a throne, exercises judgment, and reigns with Christ a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6). The intermediate state is bliss: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:6). It is also rest from the toil and hardship of earthly life (Rev. 14:13).

This is why the prospect of death is not dreadful to the believer, much as he shrinks from dying. He can desire to depart in death, and when he is living in his faith and according to his confession he *does* desire to depart, preferring this to abiding in the flesh. The intermediate state is better, "far better" (Phil. 1:20-24).

Required for this communion with Christ is the cleansing of the soul from sin. Because Christ sanctifies the soul at the moment of death, the Heidelberg Catechism calls the death of the believer "a dying to sins" (Q. and A. 42). The German original has "*eine Absterbung der Sunden*," "a dying off of sins." Only in the way of this

purification of the soul is it the case that the death of the believer is also, as the Catechism goes on to say, an “entering into eternal life.” Necessarily involved in Christ’s work upon the soul is also His transformation of the soul into a heavenly mode of life. “As is the earthly, such are they also that are earthly: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption” (I Cor. 15:48-50).

Preliminary Judgment

Since there may not be such blessedness as the intermediate state apart from judgment, for Zion is always redeemed by judgment, the intermediate state is based on a preliminary but decisive judgment. In his soul, the believer is judged by Jesus Christ on behalf of the righteous God. This preliminary judgment is suggested by Hebrews 9:27: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” II Corinthians 5:10, which is commonly applied exclusively to the final judgment at Christ’s coming, stands in the context of the teaching of the intermediate state. With specific reference to our having a house not made with hands as soon as the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved and to the state of being absent from the body and being present to the Lord, the apostle says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

This judgment, like every other phase of divine judgment, is for God’s sake. He must be just, and appear to be just, in His salvation of sinners. The preliminary judgment in the soul is also for the benefit of the elect saint himself. How could he ever enjoy himself in

heaven, how could he ever rid himself of nagging doubt about his right to be with Christ, unless God justified him in a definite, official judgment before calling him, in a preliminary way, to inherit the kingdom prepared for him from eternity (Matt. 24:34). And this is what the preliminary judgment is: gracious acquittal on the basis of the cross of Christ, in accordance with the believer’s life of good works by the Spirit of Christ.

Fearless of the King of Terrors

The truth of the intermediate state of the children of God implies something concerning our death. At the moment death rears up against us in its most frightening mien, it is impotent. It is a defeated foe. Christ has smitten it for us in His cross. By the power of His resurrection, He compels death to be our servant. As the Reformed believer confesses in Q. and A. 42 of the Heidelberg Catechism, by the crucifixion of Christ the death of believers is not “a satisfaction for our sin,” as it otherwise would be. It is not against us. On the contrary, it is for us. It is an “entering into eternal life.”

The “king of terrors” does not terrify the Christian. Athanasius powerfully expressed the fearlessness of all of Christ’s disciples with regard to death.

For that death is destroyed, and that the Cross is become the victory over it, and that it has no more power but is verily dead, this is no small proof, or rather an evident warrant, that it is despised by all Christ’s disciples, and that they all take the aggressive against it and no longer fear it; but by the sign of the Cross and by faith in Christ tread it down as dead. For of old, before the divine sojourn of the Savior took place, even to the saints death was terrible, and all wept for the dead as though they perished. But now that the Saviour has raised His body, death is no longer terrible; for all who believe in Christ tread him under as nought, and choose rather to die


than to deny their faith in Christ. For they verily know that when they die they are not destroyed, but actually [begin to] live, and become incorruptible through the Resurrection. And that devil that once maliciously exulted in death, now that its pains were loosed, remained the only one truly dead. And a proof of this is, that before men believe Christ, they see in death an object of terror, and play the coward before him. But when they are gone over to Christ’s faith and teaching, their contempt for death is so great that they even eagerly rush upon it, and become witnesses for the Resurrection the Saviour has accomplished against it. For while still tender in years they make haste to die, and not men only, but women also, exercise themselves by bodily discipline against it. So weak has he become, that even women who were formerly deceived by him, now mock at him as dead and paralyzed. For as when a tyrant has been defeated by a real king, and bound hand and foot, then all that pass by laugh him to scorn, buffeting and reviling him, no longer fearing his fury and barbarity, because of the king who has conquered him; so also, death having been conquered and exposed by the Saviour on the Cross, and bound hand and foot, all they who are in Christ, as they pass by, trample on him, and witnessing to Christ scoff at death, jesting at him, and saying what has been written against him of old: “O death, where is thy victory? O grave, where is thy sting” (“On the Incarnation of the Word,” par. 27, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1987).

Death simply cannot kill the one who lives and believes in Jesus Christ. In his soul, he continues consciously to live the immortal life of Christ that he began already to live in earthly life when he was born again from above. This is the comforting truth that Jesus taught in John 11:25, 26: “He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

The great principle that underlies and accounts for the intermediate state of the elect believer in his soul is covenantal. Salvation is union and fellowship with Christ. This fellowship of the covenant cannot be cut off, not even by death. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35) As we shall see, the truth that the believer cannot be separated from Christ was the ground of Calvin's rejection of soul-sleep in his first theological treatise, *Psychopannychia*.

Exceptions Establishing the Rule

The exceptions to the truth of the intermediate state of the God-fearing in their soul are those saints who died only to be raised again into earthly life: the son of the widow at Zarephath, the son of the Shunammite woman, the Israelite whose corpse touched the bones of Elisha, Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, Lazarus, Dorcas, and Eutychus (I Kings 17:17-24; II Kings 4:17-37; II Kings 13:20, 21; Mark 5:22-24, 35-43; Luke 7:11-17; John 11; Acts 9:36-42; Acts 20:7-12). What became of their souls in the interim between their

death and their resurrection, Scripture does not say, and we, therefore, do not know. According to the rule, "Where Scripture is silent, we must be silent also," it is improper to speculate. One thing is sure: the souls of those who returned to this life were not in the meantime taken up to enjoy the bliss of heaven. For them to resume the earthly life of sin and death, having known the perfection of heaven, would have been for them an unbearable burden and an exquisite torture. This would have been unworthy of God. 

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Women and Missions (2)

In our previous article on this subject, we pointed out that the primary obligation of women in the churches' work of missions is to support the preaching of the gospel, which involves being vitally interested in it. We now consider some of the practical ways in which this can be done.

We look specifically at five things. As we do so, it is good for you who are mothers to keep in mind that these are not only things that you yourselves can and ought to be doing, but they are things that you should also teach your children to do.



The first thing is knowledge. What I have in mind is that you have a knowledge of the mission

fields, of the missionaries, and of the mission work that is being done. That will naturally be the case if you have an interest in mission work. Having an interest, you will seek to know as much as you can about the work. Do you do that? Do you know, for example, the names of our missionaries? Do you know where each of them is? Have you taken out an atlas lately and spent some time with your children in order to show them where our missionaries and mission fields are? These are things we all should know.

The second thing is giving. By that I mean financial support of mission work. It is needed, for mission work is expensive. There are many ways in which we can give. We do so, first of all, through the budget (the general fund collections), for part of this goes toward the denomination's work of missions, both domestic and foreign. We can also give through the special collections that are taken for mission fields, including the special collections taken for the missionary assistants. And then we also have opportunity to give ex-

tra financial gifts to the work of foreign missions. These gifts are to be given, of course, in a proper way — through the calling church and the mission committees. This is necessary so that the money can be used and distributed carefully and wisely. And once again, important with regard to giving is that you also teach your children to do this.

Thirdly, you support the work of missions through correspondence. Perhaps we do not do enough of this. Our missionaries and their families, and the missionary assistants with them, make many sacrifices in the work of missions. On account of where they are living, and this is especially true in foreign mission work, they often feel very alone. They are living in a different country away from things that are familiar. They miss their family and friends. All of this means that they need to hear from you. They need to know that you are interested in and supportive of them and their work. They need to know, even if it is just through a few lines in an email, that you care for them and remem-

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ber them in your thoughts and prayers. You hear from them (through newsletters and emails) — but do they hear from you? They need that. We do well to stay in touch with those on the mission fields. And we do well to have our children do the same.

Fourthly, you support the work of missions through prayer. Prayer is the most important evidence of your support and interest, for the child of God prays for the things that are dearest to his heart. We should pray for the missionaries and their families. We should pray for those who hear the gospel that is preached on the mission fields. We should pray for the councils of the calling churches. We should pray for the mission committees. We should pray for the synod in its decision making with regard to missions. All these prayers are very necessary, for the work is difficult. Many challenges and struggles are faced. There are many disappointments. Much wisdom is needed to know what we ought to do. The mission work of the churches needs the prayers of the people of God. Pray! And teach your children to do so as well.



There is one more way in which women can be involved in the churches' work of missions. This is a work and obligation that comes especially to mothers. It is the calling to be a Hannah.

We read of Hannah in I Samuel 1. She was barren and prayed earnestly for a son. In her prayer, she promised to give her son to the Lord. When the Lord answered her request and gave her Samuel, she returned him to the Lord. She did that first of all by preparing Samuel for his work. She gave him, in the few years that she had for that, a godly upbringing. Then she brought her son to the tabernacle and lent (returned) him to the Lord for the work of the ministry.

What this means is that the church needs you as mothers to

give your sons to the work of the ministry.

I mention this because it is the need of the hour. Our churches need ministers, and missionaries. We need them because there is a shortage — consider how many vacancies there are. And we need them because there are many opportunities for us as churches to be involved in doing more mission work than we are currently doing. The need is great. Our churches need your sons for ministers and missionaries.

We can sometimes think that the need is not really so great — that we have enough, or will soon have enough. Perhaps your thoughts go like this: "I'm sure we'll have enough by the time my son could possibly be a minister. He's just a young boy. With all the years of schooling ahead, it would be another 15 to 20 years, or more, before he could become a minister. The churches won't need ministers then as they do now. There will be others that will fill the void. The churches don't need my son!"

But the fact is that the churches always do and always will need ministers. Christ said so in Matthew 9:37, where He stated, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few." What Christ said is a truth that applies and stands until the end of time. It will always be the case. There will always be a plentiful harvest unto the end of time, exactly because the central work of Christ in time and history is to gather His church. And the laborers will always be few. It is not simply every now and then that the churches need a few ministers. It is not just every ten years or so that we need to send a few more men through the seminary. The church will always need ministers. She will need them until the end of time. And therefore the church needs mothers like Hannah.


This requires raising your sons, already now in your homes, with a

view to the ministry. For students for the ministry are produced in our covenant homes. Students for the ministry do not suddenly appear from nowhere. Nor do the churches send out a committee in order to recruit young men for the seminary. But it is covenant homes, under the blessing of God, that produce students for the gospel ministry. And for that reason, mothers have a most important calling. Fathers do too, of course. But your calling and work as mothers is crucial and highly significant.

I urge you then to prepare your sons for the ministry. That does not mean that all your sons will or should be ministers or missionaries. But the point is that you as mothers are in a position in which you are able, more than anyone else, to know the talents and abilities God has given your sons. You are in a position, more than anyone else, to help them develop those gifts. And you are in a position, more than anyone else, to impress upon their minds the need for them to consider the ministry. It is important for you to do that, for God uses those means to call your sons to the gospel ministry.

Be sure, then, to have your sons face the questions (that every young man and young boy ought to face): "Has God given me the gifts? And if so, is the Lord pointing me to prepare for the ministry?" Then help your sons answer those questions. And help prepare them, as the Lord equips you to do that, for the work of Christ in His church.

We are living in the last days. The harvest is plenteous and the laborers are few. The church needs your sons. Be willing, therefore, to lend (return) them to the Lord.

And pray! Pray that God may provide laborers. Pray that God bless your work in preparing your sons to be such laborers, if the Lord wills. And pray that God prosper the work of the spread of His gospel through missions so that the day of Christ may come. 

Charles Grandison Finney: Revivalist (1)

Introduction

Among the churches in some parts of Europe, particularly in the British Isles, revivalism is a popular conception. Churches who, while once strong and vibrant, have become lethargic and small look to revival for deliverance from their present woes. Spiritually weak churches think that revival will be the solution to all their problems, and many prayers are made for this special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

While such countries as the British Isles, perhaps especially Wales and Northern Ireland, have been noted for revivals in the past, this phenomenon has not been quite as common here in America. From a certain point of view, Charles Finney can be called the father of American revivalism.

By calling Finney the father of revivalism, I do not mean to imply that America had not seen revivals prior to his time. When George Whitefield came to this country and worked in New England with Jonathan Edwards, revival was said to have come to the colonies there. This took place in the first half of the eighteenth century. Charles Finney was born in the last half of the eighteenth century and did his work in the first half of the nineteenth. His method of revivalism and the theological aspects of his evangelistic preaching left their indelible mark on American

evangelicalism. And insofar as there is still hope of revival in this country, it is mostly of the Finneyan type.

If Finney's method and theology are ostensibly rejected by some conservative churches and preachers who pray for revival, their search for a "better" form of revival leaves one puzzled. Finney borrowed heavily from John Wesley; and John Wesley has received favorable treatment by conservative churches in the British Isles. His revivals have become something for which conservative churches long. To approve of Wesleyan revivalism is, therefore, to approve of Finney's revival teachings.

Finney's influence is widespread. He is frequently appealed to as a model of modern evangelistic preaching, and his methods are said to be just what the church needs if it is going to engage in the work of "saving souls."

It is worth our while to examine Finney's life and teachings.

Finney's Pre-conversion Life

Charles Finney's early life was unspectacular, with few evidences of what he would someday become. He was born August 29, 1792 in Warren, Connecticut into a family of farmers. He was the seventh son in this rather large Puritan family, and he was born and raised among those who for over 160 years had attempted to maintain a Calvinistic religion in New England, where the Puritans had originally settled. Jonathan Edwards had given the colonies a strong Calvinism, and, because of Edwards' association with the Whitefield revivals, revivalism had

made an early mark on Finney. But it was also a time of national turmoil and change. The country had just emerged from its battle for freedom, and the Constitutional Convention was still fresh in the minds of people.

It was also a time when doughty settlers were pushing the boundaries of the country farther west with each passing month. On the frontier, tent meetings, emotional religion, hastily organized churches, and circuit preachers were the order of the day. By comparison with the yeasty frontier, Warren, Connecticut was staid and bland. But superb educations were available on the eastern seaboard, something not true on the frontier. The move of the family to Oneida, New York, a town in the western part of the state and considered part of the frontier, had a profound effect on Finney's educational career and religious viewpoint. He never became a highly educated person, but he did become a religious man.

Although the family was a part of the Presbyterian church, Finney considered most of the preaching to be doctrinally dry. Apparently the same was true of the family, for, after moving to Oneida, the family worshiped in a Baptist church. A great deal of the preaching on the frontier was revivalistic and attractive to the emotions, and this type of preaching seemed to be more appealing to Finney. A religion that emphasized the knowledge of the truth was to him stodgy; a religion with an emotional appeal and therefore more exciting suited his tastes.

Finney did make an effort to continue his education. He en-

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rolled in Warren Academy in his hometown and stayed for two years. He was a good student and became proficient in music: voice, violin, and cello. For four years, from 1814-1818, Finney taught school, but soon turned his attention to law. He returned to his home in Oneida and became an attorney's clerk. Although once again Finney attended a Calvinistic church, he really had no interest in theology or religion. He did study the Bible, as he tells us in his autobiography, but his interest in the Bible was due to his interest in law and the influence the Bible had on jurisprudence.

Finney claims to have been converted in 1821. He describes his conversion, probably at a revival meeting, in these words: "The Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression like a wave of electricity going through and through me." He claims to have been made a different man.

Finney's Post-conversion Ministry

Finney was committed from the outset of his "new" life to the notion that the choice of the human will was decisive in the work of conversion. From this Pelagian position he never wavered. But it is better to discuss this aspect of Finney's ministry a bit later.

Finney committed himself to the ministry. As is so often true of new "converts," his first impulse was to preach that which he had come to believe. He began to study for the ministry under his Presbyterian pastor, George W. Gale. This study continued from 1822-1825, during which time he also engaged in preaching. Finney claims that the committee of presbytery that was responsible for preaching in the district where Finney lived wanted him to go to Princeton, but that he refused because he was convinced that the students who studied there were all wrongly educated. Finney's pastor, however,

said that the school was reluctant to take him.

Finney's preaching soon aroused curiosity and some excitement, for it seems that almost from the outset it resulted in the conversions of many people and frequently sparked revivals.

It was not long before Finney began to disagree with fundamental Calvinistic doctrines, notably the doctrines of original sin and limited atonement. He considered them to be unreasonable, unbiblical, and impractical from the viewpoint of evangelical preaching.

When Rev. Gale became ill, Finney was invited to fill his pulpit. This required that he appear before presbytery. Under questioning by the presbytery he was so vague on the question of his agreement with the creeds (the Westminster Confessions) — he said that he was in substantial agreement with them — that he got by. In fact, he had never read the creeds completely, much less studied them.

Finney prided himself in never preparing sermons prior to preaching. In fact, he sometimes entered the pulpit without even knowing what text he intended to use as the basis for his sermon. He thought that the Holy Spirit would give him his sermons, and that preparation would be nothing but an obstacle to the free work of the Spirit. Nevertheless, he was ordained into the ministry as a full-time evangelist on July 1, 1824. Without seminary training, admittedly hostile to some key doctrines in the Westminster Confessions, a traveling evangelist without any fixed charge, he was nevertheless ordained. Such action speaks loudly of the state of Calvinism in the Presbyterian churches in those years. I will discuss this matter a bit later.

In the Fall of the same year that he was ordained, Finney was married to a woman by the name of Lydia Root Andrews. With her he had six children, one of whom died in childbirth and another as a child. An interesting story is told of his

early married life. Apparently Finney found it necessary to move to the northern part of New York. He had to go a considerable distance to obtain a cart in which to pack their belongings. While going to fetch the cart, he preached here and there and began revivals wherever he preached. The result was that he did not return to his wife with his cart for six months.

As Finney's work gained in popularity he was invited to more and more churches that were considered dead — although the definition of "dead" is not always clear. He sparked revivals in almost every place and considered his work successful only if a revival followed his preaching. Finney, in his preaching, required of his audience immediate decisions for Christ. In fact, he instituted the "anxious seat," which was a row or two in the front of the building, to which "seekers" could come, and in which seat they were pressed for a decision. This idea of an anxious seat was the forerunner of the invitation system or altar call so common in present day revivalism.

Finney's revivals were accompanied by noise, which sometimes was so great that all Finney could do was move about and holler the gospel into one ear, then into another. Bellowing, roaring, weeping, shouting, holy laughter — all kinds of bizarre behavior were the results of Finney's preaching, and such bizarre behavior was considered a sure sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the success of revival. Such activity was not unique to the Finney revivals; it was characteristic of revivals in New England and in the British Isles.


Finney's method was to preach sometimes every day of the week, visit people in their homes, hold inquiry meetings, roam about through the audience assembled to hear him, and summon people to the anxious seat. This was thought to increase pressure on people to make immediate decisions. His *Memoirs* are frequently boastful of his success.

Finney was soon invited to the big cities to perform his revivalistic work. Philadelphia was a target city, and in it he gained the support of the Dutch Reformed minister and the German Reformed minister. In New York City he began a chapel in the city's most depraved area. The chapel became a church that grew rapidly, but the overwork soon brought Finney to the brink of bad health. As a result, he went on what was scheduled to be a ten-month cruise, by himself, in the Mediterranean Sea. In his absence, troubles arose in the church he had founded, and the life of the church deteriorated rapidly. He cut his trip short, but seems to have lost his popularity in New York. This decrease in his popu-

larity sapped his energies, for he fed on acclaim.

In 1835 the Oberlin Institute in Ohio offered him a professorship in theology. He accepted this offer and began what amounted to a new career. Although he attempted to keep up his work in New York City, this proved to be impossible. For reasons of health and finances, he could keep up both no longer. Before resigning from the church in New York, Finney left the Presbyterian denomination in which he had worked all these years, and he organized the New York church as a Congregational church. From henceforth his labors were as a congregationalist. But Finney did mix his work in Oberlin Institute with revival work.

In Oberlin, meetings were frequently held in a tent, which seated as many as one thousand people. This was the beginning of tent revivals, common in America in the first half of the twentieth century.

Finney's wife died in 1847 after many years of poor health and many trials, including the care of a mentally handicapped girl, the death of a son-in-law, and her husband's own poor health. Finney married again in 1848, but his second wife, Elizabeth, died in 1863, in the middle of the Civil War. His third wife was Rebecca Allen Baze, whom he married when he was 78 years old and Rebecca 41. Finney died in August of 1875. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Denomination Activities

A new season Wednesday morning, September 21, at the South Holland, IL PRC. Women from all our churches in the Chicago, IL area were invited and encouraged to attend. Rev. Nathan Brummel, pastor of Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN, is the leader in the study of the book entitled, *The Pursuit of Holiness*.

This fall's annual meeting of the Adult Bible Societies of the West Michigan churches was held September 20 at the Grandville, MI PRC. Rev. A. denHartog spoke on "How to Generate Enthusiasm and Participation in Bible Study Season." An important consideration for any member of a Bible study.

The annual meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association was held September 22 at the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. Rev. G. VanBaren addressed the audience on "All Around Us," the title of the rubric for which he writes in this magazine.

Evangelism Activities

Saturday, September 24, the Evangelism Committee of Bethel PRC in

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

Roselle, IL organized another opportunity for their fellow church members to go to their neighborhood to invite the people to their church for a worship service or perhaps a mid-week Bible study. Bethel also was encouraged to hear that they received a contact looking for more CDs from an earlier outreach.

The Reformed Witness Committee, made up of members of the Doon and Hull, Iowa PRCs, along with members of the Edgerton, MN PRC, announced plans recently to begin a Bible study in Sioux Falls. This study met for the first time on September 26 at the former Calvin Christian School. Plans call for a Bible study on the parables. It began with an introduction to the parables from Matthew 13:10-17. Members of these three churches living in or near Sioux Falls were encouraged to attend, including all those attending college.

Congregation Activities

With the approval of the consistory of the Lynden, WA PRC, the congregation laid plans for both a Young People's Society and Young Adults Society season this year. Plans called for the two groups to meet on alternate Lord's Day evenings. It was anticipated that some of the young people of Lynden would provide baby-

sitting services during the meetings of the Young Adults Society.

Members of the Reading Club from the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA have begun meeting again this fall. They meet after the evening worship service and continue to discuss chapters of the book *The Marks of God's Children*.

In the last issue we included news that several of the churches had encouraged their congregations to assist in hurricane relief for some Presbyterian churches and congregations in the Gulf coast of the United States. We are happy to include here that since that writing several of our other churches have joined in the effort. Our Lynden, WA PRC encouraged their members to do what they could on an individual level, while our Wingham, ON PRC scheduled a collection for hurricane relief, as did our South Holland, IL PRC.

Rev. Daniel Kleyn preached his farewell sermon in the Edgerton, MN PRC the evening of October 2. He and his wife, Sharon, planned to arrive in Holland, MI on Tuesday, October 4. Installation will take place, the Lord willing, October 12, with Rev. Kleyn's father-in-law, Prof. H. Hanko, as the officiating minister. A welcome program was planned immediately following the installation

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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service by the congregation of First PRC.

A farewell for the Kleyns was held in the Edgerton, MN PRC on September 29, where Rev. Kleyn had served since 1998.

The consistory of Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI has decided to have the congregation recite the Lord's Prayer in unison at the very end of their celebration of the Lord's Supper. After study, the consistory believed this practice will show the unity of faith and the joy of their hearts as a congregation.

Mission Activities

The Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Fayetteville, NC welcomed

the Domestic Mission Committee-sponsored visit of Elder Larry Meulenberg and his wife, Judy, September 29 to October 2. Plans included a Bible Study on September 29 on "The Way and the Covenant," fellowship on Friday evening, followed by a Men's Meeting Saturday morning, with plenty of time in between for visits with families. Elder Meulenberg also led the Fellowship in congregational prayer at both Sunday services.

Rev. A. Stewart, pastor of the Covenant PR Fellowship in Northern Ireland, was invited to speak to the Aberdeen Branch of the Scottish Reformation Society on September 30 for the first of their services on the five points of Calvinism as set forth from the


Scriptures by the Synod of Dordt in the Canons of Dordt. Rev. Stewart spoke in the Footdee Mission Church in Aberdeen on the history of the Synod of Dordt and its vital importance for our day.

Minister Activities

The Edgerton, MN PRC has extended a call to Candidate John Marcus to serve as their next pastor.

Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ has extended a call to Rev. A. Spriensma.

The Loveland PRC in Loveland, CO has called Rev. A. Brummel.

Rev. S. Key declined the call from Faith PRC in Jenison, MI to serve as their next pastor. 

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We are thankful that the Lord has blessed our parents,

MICHAEL and LINDA ZUVERINK, with 25 years of marriage on September 26, 2005. We thank our heavenly Father for giving them to us these years. We are thankful for their godly instruction and example to us. May the Lord continue to bless their marriage in the years to come. "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which have been taught, whether by work, or our epistle" (II Thessalonians 2:15).

- ❖ Mitchell and Jennifer Zuverink
- ❖ Ross
- ❖ Tina
- ❖ Andrea

Zeeland, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 5, 2005, our parents,

JOHN and VALERIE VAN BAREN, celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to God for His faithfulness in our generations. We are thankful for their godly examples and for their covenantal instruction. They have shown us the picture of Christ and the church in their marriage. They have been a great blessing to us, and we pray that the Lord will continue to bless them in their marriage and keep them in His care. "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

- ❖ Mitchell and Jennifer Zuverink
- ❖ Jordan VanBaren
- ❖ Jason and Jill Kregel
- ❖ Jared VanBaren

Hudsonville, Michigan

Principles and Practices of Reformed Education Seminar

Sponsored by the Federation
of Protestant Reformed
Christian Schools

Led by Mr. Jon Huiskens

Classes will be held alternating Wednesdays January through May of 2006. For information or to register, contact

Mrs. Deb Kuiper (616) 531-6785.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hope Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer Mr. Tom DeVries and his family in the death of his mother,

MRS. BEATRICE DE VRIES.

It is our prayer that they may find comfort in the Word of God found in Philippians 1: 21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Rev. James Laning, President
Cal Kalsbeek, Clerk

Reformation Day Lecture

Hope P.R. Church, Walker, MI
Thursday, November 3
8:00 p.m.

Prof. H. Hanko
"The Reformation and Reforming in
the Reformed Tradition"

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for November

Date	Topic	Text
November 6	"Enduring in a Lawless Age"	Matthew 24:12, 14
November 13	"Enduring by Searching the Scriptures"	John 5:39
November 20	"Are You Thankful? Are You Content?"	Philippians 4:11-13
November 27	"Enduring from One Generation to the Next"	Psalms 145:4