

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

THE STANDARD BEARER

Genesis 1 speaks of six successive days in which God created. It speaks of days which are delineated by evening and morning. It speaks already in connection with the first day of a distinction between the light and the darkness, the day-time and night-time. Here is a simple question: can those days by any stretch of exegesis be changed into periods of millions or billions of years? Is that truly a matter of interpretation, or even of honest differences of interpretation among exegetes of Scripture who may be classified as orthodox?

See: Editorial, p. 412

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Meditation

James D. Slopsema

Made Free By The Spirit Of Life

*For the law of the Spirit of
life in Christ Jesus hath made
me free from the law of sin
and death.*

Romans 8:2

James D. Slopsema is pastor of Hope
Prot. Ref. Church, Walker, Michigan.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

This is how the holy apostle begins this beautiful chapter in his letter to the church at Rome.

No condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

This is the very heart of the gospel of salvation.

How important it is to demonstrate the truth of this statement.

This the apostle Paul does by a personal confession.

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Here Paul claims that, belonging to Jesus Christ, he had received the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The Spirit of life is, of course, the Holy Spirit. This Spirit had set Paul free from the law of sin and death. This, by the way, is true of all who belong to Jesus Christ. And this, claims Paul, is proof that there is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus.

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Were there any condemnation for those in Christ, they could never be set free from the law of sin and death.

* * * * *

The law of sin and death.
What a cruel bondage!

Law does not refer here to the law of God. Law is used rather in the sense of a power or force that rules and governs our lives according to a certain predictable pattern.

Thus, for example, we speak of the laws of nature. The laws of nature are forces God has created in the universe which always operate according to a predictable pattern and which govern the activities of the creation. There is the law of gravity, the law of expansion and contraction, the law of magnetism . . .

In like manner there are laws in the spiritual realm that govern the lives of men. There is the law of sin and death. There is also the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Our concern at this point is with the law of sin and death.

Sin is viewed here as a tremendous power that has taken hold of mankind and that exercises absolute control over man's spiritual life. It all began when in Adam mankind sinned against the living God. This original sin brought the whole human race under the power and domination of sin. Ever since then sin has controlled man's thoughts, his desires, his speech, his actions, his whole life. It has led man to live his whole life contrary to the will of God.

Sin has become a law that rules and regulates the life of man.

What a cruel bondage this law of sin is for man!

The trouble is that those who are under the law of sin do not see it this way.

There is a certain amount of pleasure that the fallen man derives from sin. He finds it pleasurable to gossip, to profane God's name, to commit adultery, to become drunken. Whenever man comes under the power of sin, he finds his delight in doing exactly what God forbids in His holy law. For that reason the natural man does not consider the law of sin to be a bondage. Gladly and willingly he serves the power of sin. Blinded by the pleasures of sin, he considers the ability to live in sin to be freedom.

But the truth is that the law of sin is a most cruel bondage.

For the law of sin leads to death.

The Bible is very clear. The wages of sin is death. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. This is not because sin is some kind of poison that slowly works the death of man. This is because God punishes sin with death. God punishes every sin with death. God also punishes your sin with death.

Consequently, we read here of the law of sin and death.

The death that results from the law of sin is the complete destruction of man.

This death is realized ultimately and finally in hell. Hell is the place of God's wrath, where God terrorizes the wicked for their sins. And there is no escape from hell. Those who enter the inferno of hell face an eternity of hopeless agony and despair at the hands of an angry God.

Of this endless death the sinner has a foretaste even now.

For God judges the sin of man even in this life. Even now the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. (Romans 1:18)

God reveals his wrath against the sin of man by sending sickness and disease. His wrath is

revealed through poverty, famine, and starvation. Perhaps the greatest revelation of God's wrath upon sin is the strife and turmoil God brings to mankind: marital problems, family disturbances, racial discrimination, riot and revolution, war among the nations.

What agony the world suffers at the hand of a vengeful God!

And it is but a small foretaste of the greater sufferings yet to come.

The law of sin is freedom?

It is the most cruel bondage.

* * * * *

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

From the viewpoint of man's ability, there is no escape from the law of sin and death.

When a person finds himself in bondage to a fellow man, there is always the possibility of escape. He may redeem himself from his slavery through the payment of a price or through faithful service. Or he may simply run away.

But there is nothing that man can do to escape from the law of sin and death.

He can not overthrow the power of sin that has taken hold of him. Fact is, so long as he is under the domination of sin, he does not want to. He counts his slavery to be freedom.

Nor can man overcome the impending death which God sends as punishment for sin. Oh, man tries. He seeks to prolong death and, if possible, even conquer death through advancements in medicine. He also seeks to make his life more bearable through psychology and scientific advancements. But always he fails. A miserable life ending in a hopeless death is inevitable. For these are the punishments of God upon man for his sin.

As is evident from the apostle's confession, liberation from the law of sin and death is to be found only in the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

The Spirit mentioned here is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead.

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. This emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is the One through Whom we receive the life of Jesus Christ.

On the basis of the perfect work on the cross, Jesus was raised on the third day to a glorious, heavenly life.

And our Savior Jesus shares this life with us. In fact, the very purpose of His death was to earn this life for us. He was raised again on the third day exactly that He might both receive this life and give it to us. To this end Jesus also received the gift of the Holy Spirit at His ascension into heaven. This Spirit the exalted Jesus poured out upon the church. And through the indwelling Spirit, Christ shares with every member of the church His resurrection life.

Hence, the Spirit is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

When the Spirit of life takes up His abode in our hearts and bestows upon us the new life of Jesus Christ, He becomes an irresistible power to direct the whole course of our life. Sin may have taken hold of us from the beginning, leading us into every way of disobedience. But when the Spirit accomplishes His great work, the power of sin is broken. And the Spirit becomes as a law, regulating our lives according to the holy will of God.

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death!

And what a glorious freedom this is!

Many consider life under God's law to be a terrible bondage. And bondage it is, if our hearts despise the way of God. But we are forced to conform our outward behavior to it.

However, the Spirit of life so changes our hearts that we delight in God's law and gladly keep His ways. And that is freedom. For in the way of willful service of God there is the joy of God's friendship, the security of God's protection, the hope of life eternal.

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death. Now we must walk in this freedom.

Belonging to Jesus Christ, we possess this freedom of the Spirit. However, this freedom is not yet complete and full. For we still have a sinful nature. And that sinful nature delights in the way of sin. In fact, it seeks again and again to lead us into the bondage from which we have been delivered.

Hence, we must remember that we are not debtors to the flesh to live after the flesh. We owe the flesh nothing.

Rather, through the power of the Spirit we are to mortify the deeds of the flesh and live in the glorious liberty that is ours in Jesus Christ.

In that liberty we also have the certainty that in Jesus Christ there is for us no condemnation.

For there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. □

Editorial

The Creation Record Literal (2)

[In our previous editorial on this subject we stressed that for the Christian the truth of creation is strictly a matter of the testimony of the infallible Scriptures. Connected with this is the whole subject of the historicity of the creation record. Somehow the theistic evolutionist and/or

the progressive creationist must try to leave the impression of loyalty to the Genesis record. But the matter of the Genesis record, we stressed, is strictly a matter of exegesis, i.e., of interpreting Scripture with Scripture.]

Over the years there have been various theories concerning Genesis 1 which have been devised in order to accommodate the Genesis record to various "scientific" theories which involve millions and billions of years for the origin of things. They are not really *interpretations* of Genesis, but perversions of Scripture. Yet they claim to be interpretations; and we shall accept this claim and put them to the test of Scripture. Please note: we shall put them to the test of *Scripture*, the test which we described in our June editorial. It may very well be that these views will meet the test of "science" and of some "scientists." That is not the issue. If they meet the test of "science" and of some "scientists," even thousands of them, but fail to meet the test of Scripture, they fail and are false and are to be rejected by the believer.

Among the various non-literal interpretations there are some which we may dispose of at once. They are not only non-literal, but they are non-Biblical. I refer to such theories as the mythical theory (Genesis is a myth, Israel's national myth concerning the origin of things), the allegorical and poetical theories, and Karl Barth's saga theory. These do not have the semblance of being interpretations; and we may dispose of them without further ado. They are non-Biblical. Faith cannot even consider them.

There are, however, some more current theories.

First of all, there are three theories known as the concordistic theories.

The first of these is known as the *restitution theory*. It teaches that Genesis 1:1 records the creation of the first world, but that following this there was a series

of mighty catastrophes which destroyed it and left it "without form and void," (vs. 2), and that out of this desolation was created the present universe. This view leaves an indefinite time-gap between verse 1 and verse 3 of Genesis 1. For the theistic evolutionist this theory does not leave enough room and especially does not leave room in the remainder of creation-week. The latter is essential for the theistic evolutionist and the progressive creationist. It is interesting to note that Mr. Leo Peters, who wrote a few large articles in *The Grand Rapids Press* about the Calvin College situation, while he certainly does not promote the restitution theory, seems to allow for a long period of time in this same segment of Genesis 1. In his article on May 7 he wrote concerning the beginning as follows:

"beginning" = start of temporal time; there is no other kind of time. So, "beginning" is the original time-frame. Since God did not tell how long "the beginning" lasted, it could have spanned eons of time, or science's billions of years.

This is, of course, by definition impossible. The beginning is that indivisible moment which marks the onset of time, not a period of possible billions of years.

Probably the most common of these concordistic theories is the *period theory*. It claims to interpret the term "day" in Genesis 1 as a period of hundreds of millions and even billions of years. Each of the six successive days of creation-week was such a long period. Thus this theory makes room, as far as the crucial time element is concerned, for the possibility of a so-called theistic evolution, or progressive creation. All things came into being not in six regular days (which is impossible according to this theory), but over the course of billions of years. The claim is, of course, that this is an *interpreta-*

tion of the term "day" in Genesis 1.

A third concordistic theory is called the *inter-period theory*. It does not tamper with the days of creation-week themselves, but inserts between the days long periods of millions or billions of years. This theory also allows the necessary time for a process of evolution. However, it is not very commonly held today.

Now the question is: are these theories Scriptural? Are they truly interpretations, or even *possible, plausible* interpretations of Genesis 1?

Let us put them to the test of Scripture, the test of Scripture without anything additional, the test of Scripture approached without any prepossession, except the prepossession of faith — the test of Scripture as any ordinary child of God can read those Scriptures and understand them.

Do this with the restitution theory. Where is there so much as a hint that there was a former creation which was destroyed in order to make room for the present creation? Where is there so much as a hint in the text of Genesis that there was a long period of time between the beginning of verse 1 and the creation of light in verse 3? It cannot be found in the text.

Do this with the period theory.

Genesis 1 speaks of six successive days in which God created. It speaks of days which are delineated by evening and morning. It speaks already in connection with the first day of a distinction between the light and the darkness, day-time and night-time. Here is a simple question: can those days by any stretch of *exegesis* be changed into periods

of millions or billions of years? Is that truly a matter of *interpretation*, or even of honest differences of interpretation among exegetes of Scripture who may be classified as orthodox? I am well aware of the fact that appeal can be made to statements by many otherwise orthodox theologians, men of stature, who claimed that these days were periods or could be interpreted as periods. That is not the issue. The question is: what does Scripture teach?

The answer is clear.

By *definition* this alleged interpretation of the days of Genesis 1 is impossible.

1. A day, particularly a day delineated by morning and evening and consisting of day-time and night-time, simply is not a period of years, of millions or billions of years. It is not even *one* year.

2. A year, on the other hand, is itself already a large number of days; and a period of millions (billions) of years obviously cannot properly be described as such a day.

This is very clear by *definition*. To claim anything else is to play with words in such a way that they lose all sense. And the Bible does not play with words!

You can test this by paraphrasing the text of Genesis 1 in terms of periods. Read Genesis 1 as though it spoke of periods of hundreds of millions of years or of billions of years. Men talk about the universe being 15 billion years old and of the earth itself as being 4 1/2 billion years old. Well, let us assign a value of a billion years for each day of Genesis 1. Then let us read Genesis 1, substituting that billion years for the days. What do you get? Read Genesis 1:5 this way: "And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

And the evening and the morning were the first billion years." Or again, in Genesis 1:8: ". . . And the evening and the morning were the second billion years." Or try this with the Fourth Commandment, which makes clear reference to the creation ordinance: "For in six periods of a billion years the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh period of a billion years: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath period of a billion years, and hallowed it." In fact, the commandment itself, on the principle that the same word in the same context means the same thing, would have to be read as follows: "Six periods of a billion years shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh period of a billion years is the sabbath of the Lord thy God . . ."

You object, perhaps, that I am using the method of *reductio ad absurdum*. I freely admit it! But it is, on exegetical grounds, a legitimate reduction to absurdity.

But the Bible is not absurd! Genesis 1 is Scripture! It is perspicuous Scripture! Any child of God is able to read it and understand it!

But what becomes of perspicuous Scripture when it is "interpreted" in this fashion?

The simple fact is that no one in his right mind would ever so much as guess — that is, when he reads Genesis 1 without prepossession and without the great learning of the scientist — that the Word of God is here referring to long periods of time. Where did the theory have its origin then? In the minds of those who concluded that the meaning of Scripture had to be adjusted to the theories of scientists.

It is probably because of its obvious exegetical flaws that men have largely rejected the period theory and sought refuge in other alleged interpretations. Among these is the "framework hypothesis," a theory appealed to also by Howard Van Till in *The Fourth Day*. This we shall examine, the Lord willing, in a later editorial. □ HCH

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Decency And Order

Ronald L. Cammenga

Ministering In Institutions Of Mercy

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Originally Article 6 read quite differently from its present form in our *Church Order*.

Persons engaged in the ministry of the Word in the manor of any ruler or baron shall be properly and lawfully called as the others, subscribe to the Confession and the Church Order, and appoint the ablest of the group they serve to the offices of elder and of deacon.

Reference is made in the original Article 6 to a "manor." A manor was a district over which a feudal lord or baron held authority, the territory that was subject to his jurisdiction. In the first period of the Reformation, feudal lords would select and appoint persons to minister to the spiritual needs of themselves and their families, as well as to their servants and tenants. William I, also known as William of Orange or William the Silent, seems to have been the first Protestant ruler to engage the services of his own court preacher. Many other nobles and barons soon followed his example.

The Synod of Dordtrecht, 1578, ruled:

Those who minister the Word at court of rulers or in the palaces of other lords shall be fairly and legally called as the others, subscribe to the Church Order and Confession, and appoint the ablest of the court personnel to the office of elder and deacon.

Although originally only the service of court preachers was mentioned in the article, soon the article began to be applied much more broadly. The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, applied the article to service in hospitals and orphanages. A Particular Synod of 1599 broadened the article to include service in a penitentiary.

The present article addresses itself to the service of ministers in what are strictly speaking non-ecclesiastical institutions. What is the status of such ministers? What rules govern their appointment? To whom are they subject?

THE SCOPE OF ARTICLE 6

The scope of our present Article 6 is significantly broader than the original article. Although the original article addressed itself to an extraordinary field of labor (the palace of some noble), it did not concern itself with what is strictly speaking a non-ecclesiastical field of labor (an institution of mercy). The original article even called for the organization of the individuals who made up the royal retinue into a congregation. The court preacher was to appoint qualified persons as elders and deacons.

The present article, however, concerns the call and labor of a minister outside of an organized congregation in work that is strictly speaking non-ecclesiastical.

In recent years several positions have been subsumed under the provisions of Article 6. Examples would be: hospital pastor; chaplains in the armed forces, orphanages, homes for unwed mothers, mental institutions, and prisons; instructors in Bible or Church History in the Christian schools; college presidents and professors.

Some of the specialized positions approved by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church include: Presidents of Calvin, Dordt, and Trinity Colleges; editors of church periodicals and educational committee workers; officers of denominational boards and committees; radio and television ministries; chaplains; Bible translators; and Bible teachers in high schools and colleges.

Serious reservations need to be raised, it seems to me, about the present application of Article 6. Not only has there been a rather drastic departure from the original intent of the article, but in many instances the article is wrongly applied. In many cases Article 6 is used as the ground for ministers of the gospel to be engaged in activities that really

have very little or nothing to do with preaching the gospel. Ministers are involved in work that could just as well, and more properly, be done by those who are not ministers. No justification for this can or ought to be found in Article 6.

STIPULATIONS OF ARTICLE 6

The election and calling of ministers to fill positions properly covered by Article 6 must proceed from a local consistory. Ideally, an organization would present such a request to the local consistory, indicating the reasons they seek the full-time services of an ordained minister. The consistory would then have to judge whether such a request fits under the stipulations of Article 6.

If convinced by the request, the consistory would then proceed to nomination, election, and calling of a man to fill the position. Article 6 can be criticized for not stating explicitly *how* a minister is to be called to serve in such an institution. This fact led the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1918 to rule that, "Spiritual Advisors for institutions shall be called by a neighboring church in consultation with the respective board." However, the procedure for calling is implied when the article states that they are to be "... admitted in accordance with the preceding articles" This implies that the calling of ministers to serve in institutions of mercy is to take place according to Articles 3-5.

The consequences of the acceptance of such a call would be that the minister's ministerial credentials would be held in the congregation issuing the call. At the same time, the man's labor would be subject to the supervision of that consistory.

Two important corollaries follow from the stipulations of Article 6. First, it is implied that if a minister accepts an appointment to do work in some Christian institution WITHOUT receiving a call according to Articles 3-5 of the *Church Order*, by that very fact he forfeits his office. If he does not seek release from his office according to Article 12 in order to pursue a secular vocation, he makes himself guilty of desertion of office, which calls for suspension and deposition, Articles 79 and 80. Secondly, it is implied that no one can lay claim to the office of the ministry just because he has been engaged in work in some Christian institution. The only way into the ministry is the way of the lawful call, Articles 3-5.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING ARTICLE 6

In the first place, the church recognizes only one kind of minister of the gospel. There are not two kinds of ministers, one of which is lawfully called by the church, and another which is appointed by some organization or institutional board. There is fundamentally one ministerial office and one way into that office.

Secondly, the authority of the office of the minister resides, not in himself, but resides in the church which has called him. No person can hold office apart from appointment by the church, the local, instituted congregation. The local congregation issues the call, and the minister retains the status of his office only in connection with the local congregation. Just as one cannot be an elder or deacon without being an elder or deacon of a particular congregation, so one cannot be a minister without being called and sent by a local congregation.

Thirdly, even a minister who labors in an area of special calling must be lawfully called according to the stipulations of Articles 3-5 of the *Church Order*. There are to be no exceptions.

Finally, also a minister who labors in an area of special calling is under the authority and supervision of a local congregation. This would mean that his work is subject to the review of the calling consistory. This would also mean that he would be a member of the consistory of the calling church. He could take his turn by rotation in presiding over the consistory meetings, Article 37. He could also be delegated to the broader assemblies, Article 33. □

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In His Fear
Arie den Hartog

The Distinctive Traits of True Godliness: Love For the Truth Of God

That love for the truth is and must be one of the distinctive traits of true godliness is obvious. By love for the truth of God we mean first of all love for the truth about God, the truth that declares who and what God is in Himself. That is basic. Love for the truth of God is more than love for a certain system of doctrine about God. We say that not at all because we wish to minimize the importance of doctrine. Doctrine, systematic theology, is of utmost importance. All Christians should be schooled in the doctrines of God. The Bible, it is true, is more than a book of systematic theology and doctrine. Nevertheless it is possible and highly beneficial for our knowledge of God and our faith in Him to derive from the revelation of God in the Bible a carefully ordered system of doctrine. The Bible reveals the doctrine of God. At the same time it must be said that our love for the truth of God must go further than love for a system of doctrine

even if that system is in all points based on the Scriptures. There are those in the church, sad to say, who have only an abstract and intellectual interest in a system of doctrine, but show little real love for the God about Whom that doctrine speaks. We must love the truth of God as it reveals Who and what our God is. God is a living and personal God. He is the wonderful and blessed God of salvation. He is the covenant God of His people. He is known in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must know and love this God in a living and personal ways as our Lord and God, and the God of our salvation. As Christians, we must love the truth of God as much as we love God Himself. Anyone who denies or contradicts that truth cannot be said to love God. Anyone who imagines that this truth is not so very important to maintain and defend is not very serious about love to God, and lacks true godliness.

Love for the truth begins with a high regard for the Bible as the infallible revelation of God. The Bible is God's book that declares the truth about Him. It is the chief source of our knowledge of God. It is true that God reveals Himself in the whole of His creation. The ungodly man rejects

that revelation of God because he hates God and forms another God after his own vain imagination, which is an idol. After the fall of man into sin, God can only be known through His self-revelation in the Bible. Only the child of God who knows and loves the truth of God as found in the Bible can also see the revelation of God in His creation. The Bible reveals the truth of God in Christ Jesus. We know Him, through His Holy Spirit, by His wonderful self-revelation in the Bible. The Bible is the absolutely perfect and infallible revelation of God. All that can be known of God by man is found in the Bible. The whole of the Bible reveals the truth of God. There is no distinction of parts in the Bible, some of which reveal God and others of which reveal only man. God makes Himself known in the Bible from the beginning in the great story of creation, where He reveals Himself as the creator of heaven and earth, Who by divine fiat created heaven and earth and all things which they contain in six days. God reveals Himself in all the record of the history of His dealings with His chosen people and the revelation of His covenant with them. God makes Himself known in the history of the coming of the Lord Jesus

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Christ, in His wonderful person, in His mighty works, and in His great teachings as the God of our salvation, and especially in the cross and resurrection and exaltation of our Lord. God reveals Himself to us in and through all the letters of the apostles and the doctrine which they set forth. God reveals Himself in the glorious hope and prophecies of the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ that are recorded in the last book of the Bible. When the modernist denies the absolute infallibility of the Bible, he loses God. He arrogantly sets himself over the Bible, to judge it according to his own reason, and reveals his contempt for the truth of God. The truly godly man stands in fear and awe before the revelation of God in the Bible. For him the Bible is as true and perfect as God Himself is.

The godly man believes that the Bible reveals the objective truth of God. God is known absolutely as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. The self-revelation of God in the Bible is clear and plain, and can be known by every true child of God who has the mind and Spirit of Christ. Our day is a day of subjectivism. Men claim to know God by experience and feeling alone. These come to some of the strangest conclusions concerning Who God is. Everyone imagines that he has his own understanding of God which needs not to be judged by the truth that is in the Scriptures. According to many modern day Christians, God is only what I think and feel Him to be. How tragically mistaken this notion is. Many who claim to be Christians are in fact worshipping an idol-god, fashioned after their own imagination.

Love for the truth of God implies a great interest in the study of that truth as it is found in the Bible. The true child of God loves to study the great truths of God's attributes: His sovereignty, His almighty power and perfect and glorious holiness, His righteousness and faithfulness, His love and amazing grace and unfailing mercy. Few who call themselves Christians today have this interest. The vast majority of modern day Christendom is caught up with man and his concerns. They have made Christianity a religion that reaches no higher than the happiness and prosperity of man. Thousands of books are written every year advising man how to deal with this problem and that problem that he might face in life. Very few books are written about Who and what God is and even fewer books are being read that concern the great doctrines of the truth of God.

If we love the truth of God we will be diligent students of the Scriptures. It is true that the Scriptures are simple and plain. They can be understood by the common, ordinary child of God. But that is not the same as saying that the truth of God can be understood with little or no effort on the part of the child of God. The truth of God is deep and profound. He is a great God, infinitely greater than all our understanding of Him. Even with great effort we cannot comprehend the greatness of God with our small and limited human minds. If we are genuinely godly we will search the Scriptures daily to know the truth of God. The godly man delights to come to the house of God to hear the preaching of the Word. According to God's own ordination, He is pleased to have the truth about Himself explained and taught through the official preaching of the Word. The truly godly man

will also study the Word of God privately and personally in his home and with his family. The child of God seeks to know the great mysteries of God's predestination and providence, and of His wonderful salvation by sovereign grace alone in His Son Jesus Christ. There are a great many doctrines in the Bible. They all reveal the truth of God. They must be searched out by the child of God in their length and height and breadth and depth. After studying all of these things, the child of God stands in amazement and awe, in fear and trembling before the greatness of the truth of God. He is profoundly conscious of the fact that the truth of God is so much greater than all of his knowledge of God. He desires every day to grow and increase in that knowledge. Therefore he reads his Bible every day. Those who today imagine somehow that this is no longer necessary have lost this distinctive mark of true godliness.

Love for the truth of God is revealed in a readiness and willingness to defend the truth of God. When we as Christians do that, we are not merely defending an abstract system of doctrine that really has very little to do with God Himself. When we stand steadfastly for the truth of God and we refuse in any way to compromise that truth of God, we reveal a true love for God and a genuine godliness. All of this is very unpopular today in the church world. Truth and doctrine are considered to be very unimportant. It does not matter so much what you believe. We must strive for a vague and undefinable and unprincipled unity of the church in the name of evangelical and social concern. It does not matter if the church has in her midst the most damnable heresies concerning the truth of God. Let us all join hands, for we can all serve God

together, and ignore our differences, and do great things for God. Let the truly godly man know that this whole spirit and attitude is not of God; it in fact reveals a disregard and contempt for the true God of the Scriptures. The truly godly man loves the truth of God to such an extent that he is by the grace and Spirit of God ready to stand for His truth and to bear the reproach and mockery from the world, also and especially from the world of modern day Christendom. The godly man knows that he is involved in a great spiritual battle for the truth of God. He is ready, should the honor and glory of his God require it, to die in that battle. Let him be called a bigot or sectarian or whatever name the world may think up. The man who gives his

life for fighting for the truth and reveals a passionate hatred for the lie and false doctrine that contradicts the truth, that man is a truly godly man. And there are few, very few, of those today. The return of the Lord is near. Wickedness and false doctrine abounds in the church today because few today love the truth of God.

Love for the truth of God implies a zealotry on the part of the Christian to speak of the truth of God to others. He desires to do this chiefly that God may be glorified. He desires to do this also because he knows and believes in his heart that the truth of God, the gospel of salvation, is the power of God unto salvation to all that believe. He desires to see God's elect saved in the truth of God. The godly

man desires to stand together with those of like precious faith in promoting and defending the truth of God to the glory of the name of God.

The godly man who loves the truth of God is finally also one who earnestly strives to live according to the truth of God. That is in a sense the acid test of true godly love for the truth. The truth of God is also the law of God for the child of God. It governs the whole of His life. The truth of God is exalted and glorified in our lives above all when we seriously strive every day and in every sphere of our endeavor to put it into practice. That is the mark of true godliness. Do you possess this mark, dear Christian? □

Contribution

More About A Minister's Title

March 18, 1988

Dear Editor of Standard Bearer:

I couldn't resist responding to The Rev. Gise Van Baren's challenging last sentence in the Feb. 1, 1988 issue of S.B., and compliment him for interjecting some long overdue humor into the magazine, via Carl Tuyl's article: "The Reverend's Last Stand."

Well, here's what I think. The idea of a Pastor, and what the term means to me, should NOT be "an illegal alien in the Reformed vernacular". Rev. C. Tuyl says that the term pastor or

shepherd has a one-sided connotation; but what a beautiful side!! The picture of a shepherd is certainly rich in Biblical history. Jesus himself was the Good Shepherd. A shepherd is a humble occupation and one that requires the utmost dedication. A shepherd is a servant to the sheep, not an important mighty leader. It is also a lonely job. (We would do well to consider this as we remember our own pastors in prayer.) A Shepherd says to the sheep, "Follow me in the green pastures of God's Word." This

doesn't imply passivity on the part of the sheep, as Rev. Tuyl implied. They do have to put one foot in front of the other!

Scripture speaks of pastors and shepherds in regards to the people of God. In Jeremiah 3:12-19 we read: "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." This implies teaching. See also Jer. 2:8, 10:21 and Eph. 4:11. I

couldn't find anywhere in scripture where the words "Reverends" are mentioned.

Jesus, in fact, warns against being like the Gentiles in their use of authority in Matt. 20:28 — "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." Doesn't the term "pastor" typify this attitude better than "The Reverend"?

We don't have to go overboard on this attitude, and go around attaching a first name to Pastor, as in 'Pastor Bill'. Of course, ministers don't have to call us (older) women by our first names either.

To sum it all up, I have respect for the Reverends, but I have even more respect for those humble enough to desire the title "Pastor".

Sincerely yours,
Nancy A. Kuiper ☐

Bible Study Guide

Jason L. Kortering

Joshua — Receiving The Promised Land (4)

We are about to the end of outlining the first main division of the book of Joshua, which covers chapters 1-12. This gives the details of Israel entering into and possessing the land of Canaan. We pick up our outline at chapter 10:28. After the death of the five kings, Joshua took in succession the following cities with their kings, Makkedah, Lachish, Gezer, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir (10:28-39). He destroyed all their kings and all that breathed, from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza even to Gibeon and returned to Gilgal (10:40-43). Joshua next turned northward to

conquer the kings which had confederated under the leadership of Jabin, king of Hazor. They came out as the sand upon the sea shore with horses and chariots and joined battle at the waters of Merom. The Lord assured Joshua of the victory, and the next day they houghed their horses and burnt their chariots. Then Joshua captured their cities and killed all that breathed, and kept the spoil. This covered the area from Goshen to the area near Mt. Hermon. All were destroyed, even the Anakims. None made peace save the inhabitants of Gibeon, for the Lord hardened their hearts that they might be destroyed (11:1-23). We have a completed list of the kings which were destroyed, those east of Jordan and within Palestine itself (12:1-24).

2. The division of the land of Canaan, including the cities of refuge and Levitical towns (13:1-22:34).

This begins with the Lord appearing unto Joshua, who by now is old, and pointing out to him what land has yet to be conquered (13:1-6). He is instructed to divide the land to the west of Jordan among the nine and a half tribes (13:7). Detailed account is given on the territory covered to the east of Jordan (13:8-14), specifically what was given to Reuben (13:15-23), Gad (13:24-28), half tribe of Manasseh (13:29-31). Twice it is mentioned in the summary of the land distributed east of Jordan that Levi did not receive a portion. Their portion is the tabernacle and temple service (13:14 and 32, 33).

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An account now follows as to how the land of Canaan west of Jordan was to be divided. We are told that determination was made by the casting of lots (14:1-5). Caleb approached Joshua, reminding him of the promise Moses made that for his faithful activity of spying the land when he was 40 years old, he was to receive the land which he walked upon. Now he was 85 years old and still healthy and strong. He desired to receive the inheritance around Hebron as promised to him. Joshua gladly consented (14:6-15). The portion given to Judah is described, including Caleb's portion of Hebron. It is indicated that he defeated the three sons of Anak, during which he offered his daughter as wife to the one who would defeat Kirjathsepher. Othniel, the brother of Caleb took it and he married his daughter. She received a special portion (15:1-20). A complete listing of the cities included in Judah's portion is given. This excluded Jerusalem, for the Jebusites were there and Judah could not drive them out (15:21-63). We next have the portion given to Joseph described. The general borders are described (16:1-4), the portion given to his son Ephraim is mentioned (16:5-10), and this is followed by that for the other half of the tribe of Manasseh (17:1-13). Ephraim and Manasseh complained that their portion is not large enough for their families. Joshua instructed them to conquer the hill country and cut down the wood and there would be plenty (17:14-18). Interspersed between these accounts is mention of the tabernacle being set up at Shiloh (18:1). Then the details of the land inheritance for the remaining seven tribes is given. A survey crew is sent out, consist-

ing of three men from each tribe, which writes in a book a description of the land and proposed seven sections (18:2-10). By the casting of lot, Benjamin now receives his portion (18:11-28), Simeon is next (19:1-9), Zebulun's portion is laid out (19:10-16), Issachar's (19:17-23), Asher's (19:24-31), and Naphtali's (19:32-39). Dan received a portion too small so they conquered Leshem in addition (19:40-48). Joshua received from the children of Israel a portion, the city of Timnathserah, for which he had asked. The inheritances are then completed as the last lot was cast before the temple in Shiloh (19:49-51).

The people are instructed to appoint cities of refuge among the tribes. On the western side of Jordan they are Kadesh in mount Naphtali, Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Hebron in the mountain of Judah. On the eastern side they are Bezer, Ramoth-Gilead, and Golan. They are also reminded what the purpose of these cities is: that the slayer of a person unawares and unwittingly may flee there for safety and remain there in safety until he stands in judgment before the congregation and the high priest of that place dies. Then he may return to his home in safety (20:1-9).

The fathers of the Levites approach Joshua and the heads of the tribes to remind them of the command that Moses gave for them to receive cities among the people (21:1, 2). By the casting of lots, the portion of the Kohathites is found among the tribes of Judah and Simeon and for the children of Aaron among Benjamin. The rest of the Kohathites are found among Ephraim, Dan, and Manasseh (21:3-5, 9-19, 20-26). The cities of the Gershonites are found among the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and the half tribe of

Manasseh east of Jordan (21:6, 27-33). Those for the Merarites are found in the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun (21:7, 34-40). This comes to a total of 48 cities scattered throughout the tribes east and west of the Jordan, (21:8, 41, 42). A summary statement is made of the goodness of God in realizing all the promises he swore to their fathers. And they had rest and peace: "they failed not ought any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel, all came to pass" (21:43-45).

Joshua then proceeded to tell Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh that they might now return to their homeland east of the Jordan. As he dismissed them, he urged them to keep the law of God to love God and walk in His ways. They returned loaded down with much of the booty of war which they were to share with their brethren at home (22:1-9). At the border of Jordan, they built an altar unto Jehovah, but when the children of Israel under the leadership of Phinehas, son of Eleazar the priest, heard that they did this, they called ten princes of each major house to go after them to confront them. They interpreted this as an act of rejection of Jehovah God at Shiloh (22:10-20). They quickly answered them that they did not intend this to be rejection. They were not going to offer burnt offerings upon this altar. Rather they wanted this altar to be a memorial for their future generations, that they might not forget their God (22:21-29). When Phinehas and the princes heard this, they gladly accepted the explanation and blessed God. As a result they named the altar ED, a witness between us (22:30-34).

3. *The third and final division of this book covers Joshua's farewell address and the account of his death (23:1-24:33).*

Joshua calls for the elders of Israel and all the leaders in Israel to stand before him as he rehearses how the Lord prospered their way by giving them the land and driving out their enemies. He warns them to have nothing to do with the nations that remain among them, but give wholehearted worship to Jehovah their God. If they should in any wise cleave to the remnant of these nations or intermarry with them, God will no longer drive them out from before them. He is about to die, and unless they continue to obey God, evil will come upon them. They are urged to be faithful to God (23:1-16). In a second address, he calls the leaders of Israel to come before him at Shechem. He reviews their history from the call given to Abraham, the deliverance from Egypt, the dwelling in the wilderness, the crossing of Jordan, and finally the receiving of the land of Canaan. He urges them to put away all strange gods and choose

this day to serve Jehovah. He delivers those stirring words, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," (24:1-15). The people freely resolve to serve Jehovah. Joshua calls them to witness that they have chosen Jehovah. This means they are to put away the strange gods which are among them. Joshua made a covenant and wrote these words in the book of the law. He also set up a great stone under the oak as a witness (24:16-28). The closing words refer to Joshua's death at 110 years of age. He was buried in his inheritance in Timnath-serah. Israel served the Lord during the days of Joshua and during the days of the elders that outlived him (24:29-31). The bones of Joseph which were taken out of Egypt were buried in Shechem in the parcel of ground Jacob brought from Hamor (24:32). Eleazar, son of Aaron, died and was buried in mount Ephraim (24:33).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Having studied the book of Joshua, is there any indication within the book itself why it is placed in the group of "former prophets?" Consider the significance of entering the land of promise in this connection.

2. Does the uncertainty of Joshua as being the author shake your faith in the inspired Bible? Why or why not?

3. The events associated with entering and receiving the land of Canaan is rich in gospel typology. Reflect upon the major events recorded in the book and make a list of them and show how they convey the message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

4. Connected with the success of taking the land (1:1-9) and retaining the land (23:8-16) is the specific warning not to forsake Jehovah for other gods, or He will give them over to the enemies. Is this a conditional promise, dependent upon Israel's obedience? Explain.

5. Consider whether the three and half tribes' desire to stay east of Jordan was wrong (see 1:10-18 and chapter 22).

6. Did Israel neglect in any way completely to destroy the nations that were in the land of Canaan? Explain your answer.

7. Discuss the significance of the standing still of the sun, chapter 10.

8. Demonstrate that God was completely faithful to His promise which he made to Moses and Joshua in giving them the land. ☐

Question Box

Cornelius Hanko

The Power Of Prayer

Cornelius Hanko is an emeritus minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

A reader writes:
There is power in prayer.
Prayer is a tool which God gave us, through which He blesses us.
Does not prayer change us,

change circumstances, and help others? Is it wrong for a group of saints to get together in prayer for a family in need, or when tragedy strikes, or when drought

or sorrow hits us? Is it not better to present our cares to the Lord than to wring our hands in frustration for things we cannot change? Reference is made to James 5:13-18, Ephesians 6:18, and I Peter 3:12, 5:7.

* * * * *

"Prayer changes things" is a familiar adage. This is taken to mean that prayer can heal the sick, avert a tragedy, bring an end to drought, or even prevent or deliver from the tragedies of war. This is understood to represent the real power of prayer, for, if this were not the case our prayers would be useless. With that in mind prayer chains and prayer groups are organized in order to stress before the Lord our needs or the needs of others. How this all fits in with the sovereign, unchangeable will of God who governs all of our lives is often a question. Also the passages of Scripture referred to are often misunderstood.

A superficial reading of the well-known passage in James 5:14-17 would seem to substantiate the idea that prayer will heal the sick, at least in some cases. James teaches us: "Is any sick among you? let him call the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

We should notice that the entire context deals with the subject of affliction, so that the believers are urged to be patient as they endure the sufferings brought on them by the world.

Thus in verse 13 James says: "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray!" When the burden of affliction weighs heavily upon us we are encouraged to seek our strength in prayer. This, no doubt, can well include the idea of physical suffering, pain, infirmities, loss of dear ones, or other trials that become afflictions which are difficult to bear. In that case we must certainly seek our refuge in prayer.

James adds to that: "Is any sick among you?" The word for sick means literally "to be weak". The same word is used in Rom. 4:19, "And being not weak in the faith". Also in II Corinthians 12:10, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake (the very opposite situation of that referred to by James), for when I am *weak*, than am I strong." See also II Corinthians 13:4, 9. In none of those passages does the word refer to physical ailments. The idea that James brings out is rather that the person is so burdened with his afflictions that he is spiritually weak. He can no longer properly pray for himself. In that case, let him call the elders to pray for him in the name of the Lord. It is true that there are times in our lives when we are physically ill or in such mental distress that prayer becomes difficult, but the fact remains that James is concerned about the spiritual welfare of the individual.

James goes on to say in verse 15 that more than likely sin enters into such a situation. "And if he have committed sins, it shall (upon prayer) be forgiven him." Thus again in verse 16: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another that ye may be healed (forgiven)."

It is in that context that James speaks of a "prayer of faith," verse 15. Does a prayer of faith

mean the confidence that whatever we persistently ask will also surely be granted us? Obviously not. A prayer of faith is a prayer that arises out of the true, saving faith of the child of God. This faith embraces God as the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ, who loves us, cares for us, provides for all of our needs as a father for his children, and withholds no good thing from those who fear Him. "He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think," Eph. 3:20. A prayer of faith is the same as praying in Jesus Name, on the basis of His atoning death, in the confidence that He even now intercedes for us before the throne.

Summing up, we can say that James teaches us that, whatever the cause may be, there are times in our lives when the trials become very severe. In times like that we must seek our refuge in prayer. But those trials may become so severe that we become troubled, despondent, even depressed, weak in the faith. In that case we must have others, particularly the elders of the church, pray for us. Often sinful desires, evil thoughts arise within us. We may speak foolishly in our distresses. Those sins must be confessed, and will also surely be forgiven. A prayer of faith will restore to a strong and sturdy faith, and will give assurance of God's forgiving mercies.

Thus James adds that the prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Notice that this refers to a prayer of a *righteous* man, one who is righteous in Christ, who loves God's law and precepts and humbly walks with God, committing his way to the Lord. His prayer is, therefore, also a righteous prayer, which is in harmony with the will of God. Such a prayer *availeth much*. The example is given of the prophet Elijah, who knew from

the law of Moses that when Israel departed from the Lord, God would visit them with drought and famine. That time had come in the days of Ahab. Therefore in his zeal for God's Name and honor Elijah prayed that these judgments might come upon Israel, to bring them back to the Lord. His prayer was heard, being fully in harmony with God's will, created in his heart by the Spirit. Under the instruction of the Lord, when Israel confessed, "Jehovah He is the God", the man of God prayed again, and the Lord sent rain. There is a close and intimate communion of life between God and His people in Christ, wherein our wills are completely surrendered to His will.

This is the teaching of our Lord in the model prayer He gives us. Addressing our Father Who is in heaven, we express our foremost desire by saying: "Hallowed be Thy Name." Unto that end we ask for the coming of His kingdom and make all the requests that follow. His will must be carried out in us, round about us and by us. We commit our physical needs to His care, knowing that in His wisdom and mercy He will bestow on us, His children, the necessities, the bread for each day. We trust in His providence, that almighty everywhere present power whereby He upholds and governs all things, so that all things come to us, not by chance, but from His fatherly hand, (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 10).

The question may still be asked: but is there no room for bringing our daily needs before God in prayer? The answer is: of course. We must make *all* our needs known in prayer and supplication. We must seek the Lord diligently, praying, seeking, knocking. But the purpose never is to impose our will upon God in the hope that somehow God's

will is flexible enough to fit our desires into His eternal plan. It would be arrogance on our part to impose our will upon God, just as it is arrogance for a small child to *demand* favors of its parents. We pray in submission to God's will, that His will may become evident to us and we may have the grace to surrender ourselves into God's hands. This means that sometimes our prayers are answered as soon as we have finished praying. The Lord hears at once. Sometimes He waits to impress upon us our need. Sometimes we must learn to pray, as the Lord did in Gethsemane, "Not my will, but Thine be done". Paul had to learn that he was to keep the thorn (whatever that may have been), but God would supply him with the necessary grace to bear it in patience.

The question may still be raised: Is there then no room for prayer groups in times of tragedy, drought, or sorrow? We read of something of that nature in Malachi 3:16. These were the dark days preceding the birth of Christ, comparable to the last days before the Lord returns. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."

One more instance from the New Testament. Peter was in prison, awaiting his execution by the cruel hand of Herod. "But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." Now it is very well possible that the church had poured out its soul to God, asking that Peter's life might be spared, since he seemed so sorely needed by the church. But as the time of his execution drew near, and Peter was still in prison, the church no longer pleaded for his deliverance, but rather that he receive grace to be faithful unto death in submission to God's will. Their prayer was heard, for Peter was sound asleep at the eve of his expected execution, and the church could not believe their ears when they heard that Peter stood at the gate.

Surely the prayer of the righteous availeth much, is very powerful. For God uses the channel of prayer to bless His people. True prayer is aroused in us by the Spirit, is communion with God, self surrender to His will, and child-like trust that He is the Potter and we are the clay which He is preparing through suffering for eternity. In that confidence we have peace with God and the assurance that we are always heard by our heavenly Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. □

Take the time to read and study the Standard Bearer. It is an excellent source of devotional reading material for your daily use.

Nefarious Letters Three Cheers for the Creationists!

All Around Us

Gise J. Van Baren

Nefarious Letters

The following letter was printed in *Journey Magazine*, Jan.-Feb. 1988. It was presented as "Special to Journey . . . (anonymous source)" on the letter-head of the "Presbyterian Church in Asia Minor, Committee on Missions". The letter does serve as a two-fold reminder. First, there is often criticism of that which condemns the false doctrine and evil walk of others. If it often forgotten, however, that Scripture itself does this very thing. Secondly, we have a reminder that criticism can easily become a criticism of the Word itself. While many dare not criticize the Word, there are those who rather freely will condemn servants of that Word who follow the example of Scripture in setting forth the antithesis.

*Paul the Apostle
c/o Aquila the Tentmaker
Corinth, Greece*

Dear Paul:

We recently received a copy of your letter to the Galatians. The committee has directed me to inform you of a number of things which deeply concern us.

First, we find your language to be somewhat intemperate. In your letter, after a brief greeting to the Galatians, you immediately attack your opponents by claiming they "want to pervert the gospel of Christ". You then say that such men should be regarded as "accursed"; and, in another place, you make reference to "false brethren". Wouldn't it be more charitable to give them the benefit of the doubt — at least until the General Assembly has investigated and adjudicated the matter? To make the situation worse, you later say, "I could wish those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!" Is such a statement really fitting for a Christian minister? The remark seems quite harsh and unloving.

Paul, we really feel the need to caution you about the tone of your epistles. You come across in an abrasive manner to many people. In some of your letters you've even mentioned names; and this practice has, no doubt, upset the friends of Hymenaeus, Alexander, and others. After all, many persons were first introduced to the Christian faith under the ministries of these men. Although some of our missionaries have manifest regrettable shortcomings, nevertheless, it can only stir up bad feelings when you speak of these men in a derogatory manner.

In other words, Paul, I believe you should strive for a more moderate posture in your ministry. Shouldn't you try to win those who are in error by displaying a sweeter spirit? By now,

you've probably alienated the Judaizers to the point that they will no longer listen to you.

By your outspokenness, you have also diminished your opportunities for future influence throughout the church as a whole. Rather, if you had worked more quietly, you might have been asked to serve on a presbytery committee appointed to study the issue. You could then have contributed your insights by helping to draft a good committee paper on the theological position of the Judaizers, without having to drag personalities into the dispute.

Besides, Paul, we need to maintain unity among those who profess a belief in Christ. The Judaizers at least stand with us as we confront the surrounding paganism and humanism which prevail within the culture of the contemporary Roman Empire. The Judaizers are our allies in our struggles against abortion, homosexuality, government tyranny, etc. We cannot afford to allow differences over doctrinal minutia to obscure this important fact.

I also must mention that questions have been raised about the contents of your letter, as well as your style. The committee questions the propriety of the doctrinaire structure of your letter. Is it wise to plague young Christians, like the Galatians, with such heavy theological issues? For example, in a couple of places, you allude to the doctrine of election. You also enter into a lengthy discussion of the law. Perhaps you could have proved your case in some other ways, without mentioning these complex and controverted points of Christianity. Your letter is so doctrinaire, it will probably

Gise J. Van Baren is pastor of the Prot. Ref. Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

serve only to polarize the differing factions within the churches. Again, we need to stress unity, instead of broaching issues which will accent divisions among us.

In one place, you wrote, "Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." Paul, you have a tendency to describe things strictly in black and white terms, as if there are no gray areas. You need to temper your expressions, lest you become too exclusive. Otherwise, your outlook will drive away many people, and make visitors unwelcome. Church growth is not promoted by taking such a hard line and remaining inflexible.

Remember, Paul, there is no such thing as a perfect church. We have to tolerate many imperfections in the church, since we cannot expect to have everything at once. If you will simply think back over your own experience, you will recall how you formerly harassed the church in your times of ignorance. By reflecting on your own past, you might acquire a more sympathetic attitude toward the Judaizers. Be patient, and give them some time to come around

to a better understanding. In the meantime, rejoice that we all share a common profession of faith in Christ, since we have all been baptized in his name.

Sincerely,
Charles Phinney
Coordinator, Committee on
Missions □

Three Cheers for the Creationists!

The *Christian News*, March 14, 1988, quotes from a secular evolutionist (A.J. Mattell, Jr., "Three Cheers for the Creationists," *Free Inquiry*, Vol. 2, Spring 1982), showing his attitude towards "theistic" evolutionists. He does not value such highly at all. On the contrary, he regards the Christian "creationist" to be honest and consistent. It is one instance in which we can be in hearty agreement with an evolutionist!

... The compromising creationists are attacked as viciously as the strict creationists, by those with whom they are trying to compromise. And in the process, they are rejecting the plain teaching of the Word of God. Even the secular evolutionists can see this.

"Cheer Number One goes to the creationists for serving rational religion by demonstrating beautifully that we must take the creation stories of Genesis at face value Many Christians have taken the dishonest way of lengthening the days into millions of years, but the creationists make it clear that such an approach is nothing but makeshift that is unacceptable Biblically and scientifically Creationists deserve Cheer Number Two for serving rational religion by effectively eliminating 'theistic evolution.' . . . Creationists rightly insist that evolution is inconsistent with a God of love Three cheers, then, for the creationists, for they have cleared the air of all dodges, escapes, and evasions made by Christians who adopt non-literal interpretations of Genesis and who hold that evolution is God's method of creation." □

Walking In The Light

Herman C. Hanko

Drunkenness (3)

We have proved from Scripture that God's Word considers drunkenness a sin and not a disease. Scripture pronounces woes upon those who follow strong drink (Isaiah 5:11). It warns against drunkenness and includes this sin in the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). It tells the saints not to have anything to do with those who are guilty of the sin of drunkenness (1 Corinthians 5:11). It considers the sin so great that the drunkard cannot inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21). It compares spiritual lethargy and

worldliness with drunkenness (1 Thessalonians 5:6-9).

Whatever the world, therefore, may say about drunkenness being a disease, Scripture does not look at the problem from that point of view. Scripture says that it is sin, sin which is so serious that the one who commits it and does not repent goes to hell. The kingdom of heaven is closed to him, for the sin is great in the sight of God and will surely bring God's great punishment upon him.

Herman C. Hanko is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

We ought to pay attention to these things, for they are serious and involve our soul's salvation. We do not often consider these things as seriously as we ought. What happens in the world also happens in the church. Already at a young age children start to drink. They do it because they think it is "smart" and because their peers do it. They have their "Friday night parties" and their "beach parties" in the summer, when beer flows freely and drinking is really the only reason for getting together. They grow up in an environment in which drinking is common and considered the thing to do. And when they grow older, Saturday night finds them at bars until all hours of the morning, and the Lord's Day is desecrated because of sin on Saturday night. No evening meal, whether at home or in a restaurant, is complete without liquor. No visiting takes place without drinks being mixed or beer served. TV watching during the evening while several "six-packs" are consumed is common. And what is worse, people often make a joke of it all, laugh about drinking, poke fun of drunks, consider the whole thing as hilarious, and reflect in their speech the amusement which they have in their hearts about this dreadful sin. All this meets with God's strong disapproval, and those who do such things slam the door to the kingdom of heaven in their own faces.

In considering this problem, we are faced with several questions which we propose to discuss in this article. 1) Is drinking liquor always wrong? Must we assume the position of the temperance movements in this country and be tee-totalers? 2) If the answer to these questions is no, then the question is: Where is

the line drawn between proper drinking and drunkenness? 3) If drunkenness is a sin, ought not repentance and confession of sin be sufficient to deliver a man from this sin? I ask this question in connection with a rather lengthy quotation in an earlier article in which a Christian doctor who worked with people guilty of the sin of drunkenness said that although he testified to them of the truth of Scripture, and even was used by God to bring some to repentance and faith, he was unsuccessful in any single instance in helping these people escape from the sin.

That Scripture nowhere speaks of the calling of God's people to abstain from drinking altogether certainly emphasizes that drinking is not, in itself, wrong. In fact, God speaks of the fact that wine is His gift which can also be used with enjoyment and for profit. Jesus changed water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee, something which He would never have done if drinking itself was a sin. Paul urges Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities (I Timothy 5:23). The Scriptures speak of wine as a symbol of spiritual prosperity, and that the gladness of heart which wine brings is a picture of the joy of salvation (Psalm 104:15, Proverbs 31:6, Song of Solomon 5:1). Those who argue that these texts do not refer to fermented grape juice and are not references to alcoholic beverages are mistaken and impose their own ideas on the text. While their motive may be pure (they fear greatly the evils of over-drinking and the sin of drunkenness), their zeal is misguided and their efforts to condemn all drinking are wrong. They fall into the opposite error of condemning a good gift of God, something of great seriousness (See I Timothy 4:1-6),

and they lay restrictions on Christian liberty which cannot be endured by the child of God. This is not the direction to go.

But if it is true that also alcohol is a good gift of God which can be used by the child of God, where ought the line to be drawn between the good and bad use of this gift? I.e., when does the use of this gift become a sin? When does an obedient child of God become a drunk? What is the difference between one who uses this gift of God in the right way and one who so misuses it that he cannot enter the kingdom of God?

This is not such an easy question to answer. It is clear, of course, that the line can be drawn easily between those who only very occasionally drink alcoholic beverages and those who drink so much that they literally become drunk. The former is proper; the latter is flatly condemned. But the question is not quite so easy as that. Between these two extremes are many others: some who only periodically get drunk — say once a month or so; some who really never are drunk, but who drink to the point where they are nevertheless affected in their thinking and activity; some who really never get drunk, but who nevertheless always have their drinks close at hand: every night they drink several cans of beer. Every meal in the evening is accompanied by a drink or two. Every visit to friends and relatives begins with drinks. Every party or wedding has liquor as a part of it. If one would accuse them of drunkenness, they would solemnly assure you that they have never been drunk. But liquor is such a great part of their life that they cannot seem to be able to get along without it. Where does one draw the line?

In a certain sense, one cannot draw a line, simply because

Scripture makes clear that this is a matter of Christian liberty. Just as one cannot legislate how much a person ought to eat before he becomes guilty of gluttony, and just as one cannot legislate by rules and precepts what constitutes modest dress, so one cannot ever say: this exact amount of liquor is all right to consume, but if you step beyond that limitation you are guilty of the sin of drunkenness. Christian liberty is never a system of do's and don't's. If a child of God truly walks in liberty, the liberty wherewith Christ has made him free, then his life is controlled by the principle: what must I do to please the God Who has saved me? If he comes to his calling as a Christian in this way, the answers to all his problems are solved. He will never have any trouble with the question of how much he ought to drink.

But the opposite is true, too. If one is not motivated by this fundamental principle of loving and thankful obedience, then he will always attempt to get as close to the sin of drunkenness as he

possibly can, while hoping somehow that he will escape the actual sin itself. To such a man the battle is lost. Whether he gets drunk or not, the battle is lost. God condemns him already, for he comes at the problem from the wrong point of view. He does not live, in his heart, a life of thankful obedience which begins with the question: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?" God looks at the heart. God judges an act in connection with the motive. God sees not as man sees, and God knows, even better than we, what is in harmony with the great principle of the law: Love God and thy neighbor.

Christian liberty is profoundly a matter of the heart. It all begins in the heart, and man is judged by God according to what his heart desires. Does he desire to get as close to sin as he can? He is condemned. Does he desire to stay as far away from sin as he can? He is blessed.

But this is not completely an answer to the question. And it is not the answer to the question, because drunkenness is an addic-

tion, if we may for the moment use that word. It appears to me to be true that, though drunkenness is indeed a great sin against God, repentance and confession do not necessarily free one from the sin. This is not to say that repentance and confession are not necessary. Without question they are. No one who is guilty of the sin of drunkenness can escape from the sin and find peace with God and forgiveness without confessing his sin and repenting of it. Scripture is clear on this, for Scripture always leads us to the cross of Christ in Whose perfect sacrifice alone can be found forgiveness. And the only way to the cross is the way of heartfelt confession. The way to Calvary is a way drenched with the tears of sorrow for sin. There is no other way than this. And salvation is only in that one great sacrifice which Christ offered of Himself for the sins of His people. □

Book Reviews

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS, by Robert C. Harbach; Privately published by Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, 1987; 934 pp., \$21.00. (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

In my Seminary days I studied with Rev. Harbach under the instruction of Revs. Hoeksema and Ophoff. Over the years in the

ministry he has been an esteemed colleague and it is with a sense of grief that I see his active ministry brought to a close by retirement. In a certain sense, this commentary by Rev. Harbach is a continuation of his ministry in our churches and his labors of love to believers throughout the world who love

the Reformed faith. We are thankful that it has been published and wish to commend the congregation of Grandville for undertaking this work. It will be of abiding value for all those who love the Scriptures and who know that the Reformed faith is the truth of Scripture.

It is impossible, of course, to review the book in detail. But Rev. Harbach has made the study of the book of Genesis a project which spanned many years. His commentary on this book is not, therefore, hastily thrown together, but is the culmination of many years of thoughtful study and prayer, and has undergone the testing of societies and Bible classes which Rev. Harbach has led. It is a book which gives evidence of much thoughtful contemplation of the divine text.

As far as the format is concerned, a few things may be said. It is a detailed (though never tedious) and faithful exposition of the text itself and shows the author's commitment to the truth of inerrant inspiration. It is interspersed with graphs, charts, quotations from other writers and from various poets. It has several notes on various doctrinal questions which arise out of the text which are, in themselves, important and interesting. At the end it contains an appendix which deals with the unbelief of higher criticism, especially applied to this book.

When the book is reprinted, I would suggest a couple of changes in format which would, I think, enhance the value of it. There is a certain lack of uniformity in format which, if corrected, would make the book better. For example, the first part of the book deals with the text verse by verse; the second part is written in more essay-type form.

Sometimes the author includes a long list of questions at the end of his discussion of a chapter; other times he does not. Sometimes a chapter begins with the author's own translation of the passage; other times it does not. Perhaps these inconsistencies in format are the result of a long period of labor, but they ought to be changed in future printings.

The book is scholarly, thorough, and very interesting reading. It gives evidence of a wide range of learning in many fields and demonstrates clearly the terrible error of vicious higher and destructive criticism, something sorely needed in our day. It is written by a man who is not only deeply committed to the Reformed faith, but who is not averse to setting forth the Reformed faith over against those who deny it. It is, in a good sense, polemical.

Rev. Harbach comes from a different ecclesiastical tradition than that of the Dutch Reformed faith. To me this is one of the strengths of the book. Because of our upbringing, we are sometimes not as aware of ecclesiastical currents outside our Churches as we would like to be. Rev. Harbach, speaking from a different background, has something to say to us which we ought to hear. And he has not lost his ability to speak to others outside our own tradition in a way which we cannot. I find this refreshing and enriching.

While the commentary goes into various technical questions of Hebrew grammar and syntax, as well as various scientific questions which arise out of the attacks on the historicity of Genesis 1-11, it is never written in such a way that it lies beyond the understanding of all God's people. Rev. Harbach had the believer, not learned doctors of theology, in mind when he wrote the book. All our readers, there-

fore, ought to have a copy in their libraries, not only to support the work of Grandville Church, but also to enrich their own understanding of this important book of the Bible.

Note: Books may be ordered from Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, c/o Mr. Dennis Dykstra, 3228 Chestnut S.W., Grandville, MI 49418; or Protestant Reformed Seminary, 4949 Ivanrest Ave. S.W., Grandville, MI 49418; or Reformed Book Outlet, 3505 Kelly, Hudsonville, MI 49426. □

FAITH AND FORM: A UNITY OF THEOLOGY & POLITY IN THE UNITED METHODIST TRADITION, by Robert L.

Wilson & Steve Harper; Zondervan Publishing House, 1988; 214 pp., (no price), (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

While the book is an enlightening picture of Methodism since the time of Wesley, its main purpose is to demonstrate that the genius of Methodism has always been a close relationship between theology and polity. The authors are convinced that the last century has demonstrated a breakdown in Methodism between these two aspects of the life of the church. The authors hope that the book will lead to a return to a strengthening of the more traditional position of Methodism, while not failing to meet the needs of our modern world.

If one is interested in learning about Methodism, this is a good book to read. It is enlightening and instructive, and gives a sure sense of what Methodism is all about and the role the Methodist Church envisions for itself in our present world. It gives a brief sketch of the doctrinal position of Methodism and clearly shows its anti-Calvinistic position. It demonstrates how Methodism has always been and is now basically

Arminian, holding to such doctrines as prevenient grace, perfectionism, resistible grace, etc. (See pp. 52-55). The book spends a great deal of time on church polity and describes its hierarchical system of church government and its vast and powerful bureaucracy.

The historical section of the book is brief, sketchy, and vague, and has as its intended and stated purpose to promote ecumenism. I found a great deal of ecclesiastical jargon in the book, a characteristic of ecclesiastical bureaucrats, but a heavy burden for an interested reader.

One of the big problems of Methodists is to define the limits of what a Methodist may believe. The authors write:

It is increasingly evident that pluralism really means a range of acceptable beliefs and practices that must, in fact, have limits. There are some things that a United Methodist cannot believe or do and still remain a member in good standing. The range may be broad, but there are limits. The problem the church now faces is how to define the limits of acceptable belief and action. There is a core of beliefs that has traditionally been part of the Methodist heritage. However, the contemporary church has serious dif-

ficulties accepting what might be interpreted as inflexible rules. The affirmation of pluralism as a principle makes it difficult to define what is appropriate belief and practice.

While the book is written by Methodists, for Methodists, it gives an outsider a glimpse into the tensions which now trouble this large denomination. □

News From Our Churches

Ben Wigger

July 1, 1988

Rev. M. Joostens has declined the call he was considering from the First P.R.C. of Holland, Michigan.

Rev. B. Woudenberg has also declined the call he received from the Hope P.R.C. of Isabel, S.D.

At a special congregational meeting held May 22, Rev. Barry

Gritters, pastor of the Byron Center P.R.C. in Byron Center, Michigan received the call to serve as our churches' second missionary to Jamaica. This call was extended from the First P.R.C. in Grand Rapids, Mich. And along with Rev. Gritters on the trio were the Revs. C. Haak and K. Koole.

On May 17 Rev. G. Van Baren, pastor of the Hudsonville P.R.C. in Hudsonville, Mich. underwent surgery on his right (blind) eye. Due to increased pressure in this eye it was decided that removal was necessary. Since surgery Rev. Van Baren has worn a patch over that eye, and six weeks from surgery he expects to be fitted with a prosthesis.

Also on Tuesday, May 17, the Revs. Steve Houck and Ron Van Overloop arrived in Denver for

an investigatory visit with numerous contacts that the church extension committee of the Loveland P.R.C. in Loveland, Colo. has made in the Denver area. Various meetings and personal visits were planned. One public meeting was planned for May 19, with Rev. Houck speaking on "Salvation by Grace."

First P.R.C. in Grand Rapids, Mich. has donated the dishes used for catering, which have been replaced with a new set by the Priscilla Society, to the Covenant P.R.C. in New Jersey. And perhaps it won't be long before they can use them. In a recent note from New Jersey I learned that the hardwood floor is about to be sanded and stained, interior walls painted, and benches and pulpit furnishings installed. They hope to be in

Ben Wigger is an elder in the Prot. Ref. Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

the new sanctuary by the end of this year.

The Pella P.R.C. in Pella, Iowa is 60 years old this year. She was originally organized in April of 1928. The consistory decided to appoint a committee to prepare a program to be held late this summer.

Dr. Dwight Monsma, his wife, and his two nurses, did some volunteer dental work for the people of the churches in Jamaica. Dr. Monsma and family are from the First P.R.C. in Grand Rapids. Four solid days were spent cleaning, repairing, and extracting teeth. In these four days, Dr. Monsma treated approximately 110 people.

There was an interesting note in a recent bulletin from the Trinity P.R.C. in Houston, Tx. It seems there was a letter from some of the fifth graders of South Holland P.R. Christian School in South Holland, Ill. asking for letters from children in Trinity's

congregation who are in the fourth, fifth or sixth grades. It sounds like a good idea: pen pals from all our churches and schools.

It looks to me as if some students in the Hope P.R. Christian School had a good assignment recently. They were involved in a soft drink testing project. How come things like that never happened to you or me when we were in school?

May 20 and 21 the mission in Norristown, PA held their annual spring lectures. The topics for this year's lectures revolved around The Marks of the True Church. Rev. A. den Hartog, Prof. H. Hanko and Prof. H.C. Hoeksema were the scheduled speakers.

The Young People's Society of the Lynden P.R.C. in Lynden, Washington invited their congregation to a "Talent Night" Fri-

day, May 13. This was an evening of special instrumental numbers, readings, and singing by various members. Ice cream was served afterwards. A collection was taken to help cover the cost for the newly-ordered Bibles and Psalters.

To follow up on another news item from our last issue, the congregation of the Randolph P.R.C. in Randolph, Wisc. has decided to purchase a new church organ.

The members of the Loveland P.R.C. in Loveland, Colo. held their annual Spring Auction and Family Fun Day Saturday, May 7. Everyone was encouraged to come and join in a day of fun and fellowship.

The Ladies' Guild of the Hull P.R.C. in Hull, Iowa sponsored a congregational request program in June. Church members were asked to give their requests for their favorite Psalter numbers, hymns, or special numbers to the committee in charge.

"Public Worship and the Reformed Faith"

A 28 page pamphlet based on the text of a Reformation Day lecture held October 29, 1987, delivered by Rev. Barry Gritters, Pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. The large and positive response to the lecture, as well as the message presented, we believe, warrants the publication of this pamphlet.

In this pamphlet, Pastor Gritters explains the principles of Holy Scripture regarding public, or corporate, worship. Because God has placed us here on earth to praise and worship God, it is vital that we answer these three questions:

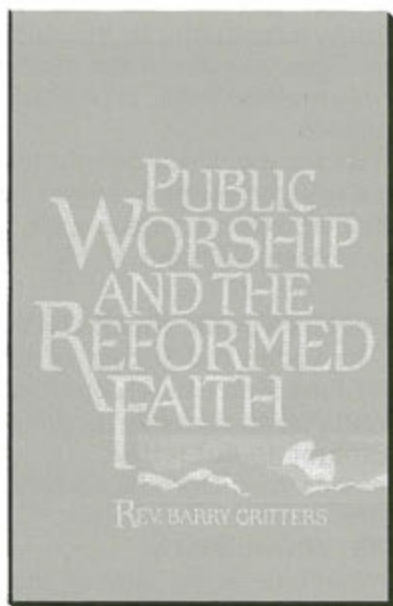
- 1) What is worship?
- 2) How does God's Word regulate our worship?
- 3) What characterizes true Reformed (Biblical) worship?

This pamphlet sets forth the biblical and historical answers to these important questions.

This is a very high quality pamphlet which can be used for distribution or in libraries. It is also excellent for each individual to order and read for himself.

Cost of the pamphlet is \$.75 cents per copy plus postage.

THE EVANGELISM SOCIETY
Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church
1945 84th St. (P.O. Box 71)
Byron Center, Michigan 49315
Phone: (616) 878-3255 or 878-1811



The congregation in Holland's First P.R.C. in Holland, Mich. approved a motion to spend up to \$3500 to reroof the church auditorium.

The choir of the First P.R.C. of Edmonton, Alberta was invited to present their program in Lacombe, Alberta at the Immanuel P.R.C. The children of the congregation were also asked to come and sing their numbers as well.

One last thought from the Southeast P.R.C. in Grand Rapids, Mich.: "Funny how people scramble to get a front seat at the ballgame, but scramble to get a back seat at church services." □

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On July 21, 1988, the Lord willing, our parents, MR. AND MRS. C.M. DOEZEMA will celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary.

We, their children and grandchildren give thanks to our Heavenly Father for preserving them for us through these years and pray He will continue to strengthen them.

"We will show forth Thy praise to all generations." (Psalm 79:13b).

Steve and Neva Feenstra
Joshua, Travis, Jeremy, Brandon
Robert and Deborah Doezema
Kathy, Brenda, Kimberly, Keith, Jared
Roger and Anne Veldman
Ruth Ann, Geoffrey, Randall, David
Dorothy
Glenn and Beth Feenstra
Rebecca
Charles
Joan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On July 30, our dear parents, DEWEY AND DENA ENGELSMAN, will celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. We, their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren rejoice with them on this happy occasion. May Jehovah continue to bless them as He has so graciously cared for them in the past.

"The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." (Zephaniah 3:17)

Rev. David and Ruth Engelsma
Lammert and Mary Beth Lubbers
Donald and Lenore Cook
Michael and Brenda Engelsma
Timothy and Lois Pipe
John and Ruthanne Fliikkema
Jonathan and Floretta Engelsma
Mark and Deb Engelsma
Edward and Elizabeth Ophoff
Kenneth and Pam Engelsma
Mark and Sara Looyenga
Jordan Engelsma
52 grandchildren
2 great-grandchildren

NOTICE!!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Loveland, Colorado on Wednesday, September 7, 1988, at 8:30 a.m., the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk, 30 days before Classis convenes. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the Clerk of Loveland's Consistory.

Rev. R. Hanko, Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan, hereby expresses its Christian sympathy to its fellow office-bearer, Elder Gordon Wassink and his family in the recent passing of his father, MR. HENRY WASSINK, on May 12, 1988, at the age of 94 years.

May they find their comfort in the Word of God, knowing also that it was his confession: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Psalm 17:15)
Erv Kortering, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Study of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church expresses their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Tony Talsma in the death of his mother, MRS. GERTRUDE TALSMAN.

"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Psalm 17:15)

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Aid Society of the First Prot. Ref. Church of Grand Rapids, Mich. extends its sincere sympathy to our fellow member, Mrs. Dorothy Decker, in the death of her mother, MRS. TINA JANSEN.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Ps. 116:15

Mrs. G. De Vries, Pres.
Mrs. R.P. Ezinga, Sec'y.