

THE STANDARD BEARER

*A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine*



John Knox

**SPECIAL ISSUE:
PREACHING**

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In This Issue . . .

On the cover of this special issue on preaching is the Scottish Reformer, John Knox, in his pulpit in St. Giles Church, Edinburgh. Knox preached with passion. James Melville said of Knox's way of preaching that "ere he had done with his sermon, he was so active and vigorous that he was like to ding that pulpit in blads and flee out of it." Roughly translated: "...he threatened to pound that pulpit to smithereens and fly out of it." Not all the great preachers were characterized by such a fiery pulpit-style. Jonathan Edwards, the New England Puritan, preached without display, without inflection, and without gestures, looking fixedly at the bell-rope above the congregation's heads. But the powerful content of his sermons moved his people deeply.

Every genuine preacher of the gospel of Christ preaches with intensity. When an old Puritan preacher was asked why he always preached with urgency, he replied, "I am a dying man preaching (the words of eternal life) to dying men." No man sent out by Jesus Christ gets on the pulpit, Sabbath after Sabbath, with a bored "here-we-go-again, let's-get-this-over-with" attitude. Nor does he bounce on the platform with shallow cheeriness — "my, isn't this a nice day; let everyone shake hands with his neighbor; let's have a joke or two to loosen everybody up," flashing acres of white teeth all the while.

Heralds of the risen King bringing comfort to citizens of the kingdom beleaguered by sin, Satan, and the world and carrying to the enemies of the King the summons to surrender in repentance and faith take their Master's business in dead earnest. So does His church.

The Master's business in the present age is the preaching of the gospel. ☐

— DJE

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

The Gospel of Christ

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith....

Romans 1:16, 17

It had been the earnest desire of the apostle Paul to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in Rome. In spite of his many efforts, however, he had not been able to get to Rome as yet. And lest the saints in Rome concluded that Paul's failure to come to Rome was due to the fact that he was ashamed of the gospel of Christ, Paul unequivocally states that this was not the case. He was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For this gospel is the power of God to salvation to every one that believes.

As we survey the church world of our day, we discover to our disappointment that the churches which preach the gospel of Christ are becoming fewer and fewer. Many have long ago become ashamed of the gospel of Christ and consequently replaced it with some other gospel.

May God keep us faithful to the gospel of Christ!

* * * * *

The heart of the gospel of Christ is the righteousness of God. For in the gospel of Christ, says Paul, is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.

The righteousness of God spoken of here is not righteousness as an attribute of God. That God is righteous means that all His actions are in perfect harmony with the goodness of His divine being. This truth alone, however, is not the good news of the gospel. For being a righteous God, God punishes man's sin to the extreme, with everlasting punishment in hell.

The righteousness of God spoken of here and in other passages of Scripture is rather a righteousness that comes from God and that God provides for His people in grace.

In that connection we must bear in mind that, if we will be received into God's favor and enjoy His blessings, we must appear before God in perfect righteousness. This means that we must stand before God without so much as one sin, in perfect obedience to the divine will.

This is obviously something we can not do in and of ourselves. For we have sinned against God again and again in many horrible ways. Nor are we able to remove our sins from before the face of God so as to stand before Him in righteousness. In and of ourselves we can only appear before God with the filth of our sins to receive eternal punishment in hell.

But God has graciously provided a righteousness for us in Christ Jesus. Through the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross God has

made perfect payment for our sins. Through the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ God has also obtained for us a perfect obedience and righteousness.

The question arises, How do we obtain this righteousness of God in Christ so that we may appear righteous before God to receive all His blessings and favors? Is this something of which we must make ourselves worthy? Is this something that we must somehow earn or merit for ourselves? The answer of Scripture is an unqualified, No! The righteousness of God is a gift of God, freely bestowed upon all those whom God has ordained to eternal life.

And therefore this righteousness of God is received by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Faith is a clinging to Christ, a complete reliance upon Christ for all things. Those who live by faith in Jesus Christ rely not on their own works nor on the works of mere men. In all their needs they look to Jesus Christ alone. They also do this when they stumble and fall into sin. With grieving hearts they confess their sins to God, begging God to forgive and receive them on the basis of the perfect work of Jesus Christ. In this way of faith God accounts the perfect righteousness of Christ as theirs.

This is exactly what Paul emphasizes to the church of Rome by saying that the righteousness of God is from faith to faith. This means that the righteousness of God is received by us by faith alone. Contrary to what certain Judaizing teachers were saying, this righteousness and salvation is not begun in faith and concluded with works. It is a matter of faith from

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beginning to end — from faith to faith.

Such is the gospel of Christ which Paul by revelation from heaven preached.

* * * * *

This gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation to everyone that believes — to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Notice, that God has the power to save. The power to save does not belong to man. It does not even belong to the angels. The power to save is God's alone.

And God saves His people through the gospel of Christ.

When Paul speaks here of the gospel, he has in mind specifically the preaching of the gospel. In verse 15 Paul states that he was ready to preach the gospel to the saints at Rome. Consequently, when in verse 16 Paul speaks of the gospel of Christ as the power of God to salvation, he obviously has in mind the gospel as preached.

The gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation exactly because God uses the gospel of Christ to work faith in our hearts.

Contrary to popular opinion, faith does not find its origin in us. Faith certainly does not arise from the heart of fallen man. Man lost everything in the fall, even the ability to believe in Jesus.

Faith is, rather, a gift of God. Believing on Jesus Christ to salvation is something that must be given to us of God (Phil. 1:29). God brings

us to faith in Jesus Christ and keeps us in that faith only through the gospel of Christ.

For in the gospel of Christ God presents Jesus Christ to man as the only foundation of and way to salvation. And in that same gospel God also calls all who hear it to believe in Jesus Christ. When that call of the gospel comes to the ear of God's own elect, it is accompanied by the inner working of the Holy Spirit, Who irresistibly brings the elect of God to faith in Jesus Christ.

But there is more. God also sustains the elect believer in his faith through the gospel of Christ. For through the gospel of Christ the true believer is directed again and again to Christ as the only way of salvation. And so the believer is led day by day by the gospel of Christ to cling to Jesus Christ to find the salvation of God in all its fullness.

This is true for the Jew as well as the Greek, for the bond as well as the free, for the rich as well as the poor....

It is the gospel of Christ that is God's power to salvation.

Other gospels there are. There is the gospel of works-righteousness which proclaims that man in his own goodness can work his way to heaven. There is the social gospel which proclaims that through the political process and education we can cure the social ills of the world and make a heaven here on earth.

There is the gospel of positive thinking....

But these gospels are powerless to save. For they all lead us away from Jesus Christ and the righteousness of God that is found in Christ alone.

The gospel of Christ alone is the power of God to salvation exactly because it leads us to the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

* * * * *

For this reason the apostle Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

Many opposed him for the gospel's sake. He was mocked and ridiculed; he was arrested and beaten; he would one day even suffer martyrdom for the gospel of Christ.

But in spite of all this Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For the gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation!

Sad to say, many churches of our day have long ago become ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For the sake of respectability before men they have, either partially or totally, abandoned the gospel of Christ for some other gospel.

Will you be ashamed also?

Laying hold of the truth that the gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation, unashamedly cling to this gospel. Unashamedly attend a church that proclaims the gospel of Christ without compromise. And unashamedly defend the gospel of Christ. □

Editorially Speaking . . .

This issue of *The Standard Bearer*, one of the three special issues published each year, is devoted to the subject of the preaching of the gospel. We consider aspects of preaching that are not always covered in treatment of the subject. We also present the views of those

who only *hear* the preaching.

The June 1 issue of *The SB* will feature the Protestant Reformed Synod, 1990. The editor will review the agenda, especially for the information of the members of the PRC. Certain matters coming up at Synod that may be of special inter-

est will receive indepth coverage in separate articles.

The July 1 *SB* will contain several of the speeches given at the Conference of Sister Churches scheduled for the second week of June in Grand Rapids, MI. We also hope to publish pictures of the Conference.

In the August 1 issue, we plan to give a full report of the PRC Synod. Perhaps, we can also report on the

decisions of other Reformed and Presbyterian synods and general assemblies in which our readership is interested.

Looking further into the future, our October 15, 1990 issue is to be a special issue on the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. The editorial committee of *The SB* has decided to devote this number of the magazine to some aspect of

church reformation yearly.

All of these plans are freely subjected to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ, Whom we desire to serve with *The SB*.

Our readers will remember that during the summer months *The SB* appears only on the first of the month. □ — DJE

Editorial

■ The Congregation's Regard for Her Preacher

■ The Congregation's Regard for Her Preacher

It is not out of place in a special issue on preaching, and therefore on the great task of the preacher, to remind our Protestant Reformed congregations of their responsibility toward their preachers. For not only does it follow from the importance of preaching that those who are engaged in the work must be honored, but it is also true that a sinful attitude toward the preacher can obstruct the benefits of the preaching for the believer and his family. Wrong behavior toward the preacher can even injure the glorious work of the ministry in a congregation.

The duty of the congregation is to honor the preacher. This honor is a very high esteem. For it is not merely regard for a man's personality and abilities, but it is respect for an appointed servant of Christ exercising the ministry of being a steward of the mysteries of God. This is the charge of Christ's apostle to the congregation in I Corinthians 4:1: "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." The same command is given in I Timothy 5:17: "Let the

elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." Whenever a preacher is installed in a church, the Reformed "Form of Ordination of the Ministers of God's Word" is not content to give a mandate only to the preacher. It gives a mandate also to the congregation:

Receive this your minister in the Lord with all gladness, "and hold such in reputation." Remember that God Himself through him speaketh unto and beseecheth you. Receive the Word which he, according to the Scripture, shall preach unto you.... Let the feet of those that preach the gospel of peace...be beautiful and pleasant unto you....

The "Form" concludes with the prayer that the congregation may have grace "that they may becomingly deport themselves towards this their minister...."

This high regard for the preacher is the simple, solemn calling of every congregation and of every member of every congregation. It is unspiritual to suppose that every member has the right to make up his own mind what he will think of the preacher. The minds of all of us are made up for us by the Lord of the church: "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (I Thess. 5:13). When we are

asked by curious souls, "How do you like your preacher?" we should answer, "We receive our minister in the Lord with all gladness."

It is downright carnal for church members to play one preacher off against another, preferring the one and rejecting the other. This was one of the sorest evils in the divided Corinthian church, and a cause of the division: "every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (I Cor. 1:12). The only time that the apostle called Christians "carnal" was when he was rebuking the congregation's sin of forming parties around their favorite preacher (cf. I Cor. 3:1-4). I dare say that it is not unknown to at least some of our pastors that certain of the congregation virtually refused their ministry because of the members "puffing up," as the apostle puts it in I Corinthians 4:6, for other of our ministers against them. The worst is not that such members deprive themselves of the mysteries of God administered by the rejected pastor. But they threaten division in the congregation and in the denomination. To such an extreme will these "carnal Christians" press their preferences.

Like Paul who suffered this treatment at the hands of the Corinthians (they preferred the eloquent Apollos), the pastor who is handled in this disgraceful manner by some in the church must endure in the strength of the conviction that it is a very small thing to him, how members judge his ministry. What matters to him is that his ministry is judged by the Lord (cf. I Cor. 4:3, 4).

But the congregation errs in this presumptuous, preferential judgment.

The church must esteem her pastor highly because of his office and because of the great things that are done through his office. By means of the office of preaching, the risen Christ speaks the words of eternal life to believers and their children. As the ground for his own exhortation to the people of Geneva, that they honor their preachers, John Calvin wrote, "the pulpit is God's seat, from which He will govern our souls" (*Sermons on Timothy & Titus*, Banner of Truth, p. 522).

"This man — our preacher — has been called of Christ to this office. Christ the King has sent him here to bless us by his ministry. In himself he is nothing. Neither is any of his co-workers anything in himself. To worship the man for his charisma is as great an evil as rejecting him because he is not somebody else. But he is a laborer from God in God's vineyard. He has his own gifts for the work he must do. He comes to us in Christ's Name. In Christ's Name we receive him." So must the congregation think about her preacher.

Esteem for the preacher is conditioned by the preacher's being faithful in his ministry: "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:2). The saints are not required to honor the preacher regardless of his teaching and regardless of his behavior. In this case the office would be divorced from the labor and service that belong to the office. This is the error of the Roman Catholic Church to this day: "Honor the pope as the minister of Christ even though he does not proclaim and defend the gospel of

Christ, but rather opposes and persecutes it." Protestants make the same mistake when they submit themselves to (and support) the ministries of the television preachers who live scandalous lives, or when they unprotestingly maintain their membership in churches that give them stones for bread.

The preacher must be faithful. He must be faithful in teaching the pure Word of God. He must be faithful in exerting himself strenuously on behalf of this teaching, especially as regards the public preaching on the Lord's Day. He must be faithful in his own personal behavior, living godly and giving offense to none. Then he must be honored. Otherwise not.

But the withdrawing and withholding of honor must be orderly. It must take place in the prescribed way. And it must be the decision of the church officially, not that of the individual member on his own.

The Word of God safeguards the preacher and his reputation in the congregation. It does this by the rule of I Timothy 5:19: "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." This protects the ruling elder as well as the elder who labors in the word and doctrine, but my concern here is the protection of the preacher. No one, not even a consistory, may so much as entertain, much less act on, an accusation against a preacher that does not have the support of two or three witnesses. (This must not be supposed to rule out the permissibility of a member's reporting to the consistory some public sin of the pastor in accordance with Article 74 of the Church Order, e.g., public heresy.)

The right way to deal with an unfaithful minister is the way of personal admonition, admonition with witnesses, and lodging the accusation with the consistory before the witnesses. Only when the preacher's unfaithfulness is established by the church officially may the member refuse him the honor due him for his office.

Of course, a consistory may itself make a pastor's unfaithfulness an issue with him. The body of elders

have the primary responsibility to see to it that the congregation is well served by a faithful preacher.

The reason for this protection of the minister's reputation in the church is not favoritism, or partiality, for the person of preachers. It is not what an old elder once suggested to me when he said with his tongue only partly in his cheek, "We oppose unions, but you ministers have the tightest union going." Calvin indicated the reason in his sermon on I Timothy 5:19:

And as for the privilege He (the Holy Ghost — DJE) gives, it is not without cause: for we see the ministers are more subject to slanders and false reports than others are. And who brings this but Satan only, who forgeth all this in his shop? For it is indeed the best means he has to bring us out of taste with God's Word, when any fault can be found with the ministers: "Ho, they are such men and such men." When such bruits (rumors) are sown and are received, then are we turned straightway from the Word of God, and we honor it and reverence it no more as we ought.... He meant not to favor their persons, but respected God and His truth, to the end there might arise no contempt, for men to withdraw themselves from the Gospel, under a color and cloak, that the men are evil spoken of, and noted and found fault withal (Sermons on Timothy & Titus, pp. 516, 517).

The glorious work of preaching the gospel may not be imperilled among us, as it would be if every member on his own could call into question the preacher's orthodoxy or godliness, and probably also turn others in the congregation against him.

For the churches, this safeguarding of the preacher implies that the denomination be rigorous in demanding spiritual and natural gifts of those who present themselves for the ministry. Once a man is ordained, it is not easy to remove him.

We preachers may not abuse this protection. It will go hard with us in the judgment that awaits all stewards of the mysteries of God if we do take advantage of this protection. We are to use it. We use it by working to the point of exhaustion, and then beyond the point of exhaustion, in preaching the gospel, for the sake of the church. □

— DJE

The Crux of the Matter

Prof. Robert D. Decker

What makes a church the church? To what church ought I belong? What should I look for in a church? Which considerations are essential and which are not? Is the worship style important? Ought I be a member of that downtown church which offers a "high church," structured, and very formal worship? Or should I be a member of that large church which features a much less formal worship style bordering on the charismatic? Ought I join the church that offers a wide range of "ministries" and support groups to singles, divorced persons, youth, *et. al.*? Or ought I be a member of that church which places a high priority on the preaching of the Word, the church that makes preaching the center of its worship and insists that the preacher proclaim the riches of the truth of the inspired, infallible, holy Scriptures? What is the crux of the matter in determining my church membership?

If the church must worship God as He has commanded in His Word, and she must, then all the elements in the worship (the singing, the reading of the Law, confession of faith, prayers, offerings, preaching) must be in harmony with the will of God revealed in Holy Scripture. But what is the one thing that really matters? What is it that distinguishes the true church from those churches which are apo-

statizing or which have become completely false? What is the crux of the matter?

The answer is, according to the Reformed Confessions, that the church is marked by the preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline (cf. *The Belgic Confession*, Art. XXIX). Of these three marks of the true church preaching is the chief. Preaching is the chief mark of the church because preaching is the chief means of grace. Preaching is the means which God, the Holy Spirit, uses to work His grace in the hearts of His people and to preserve them to everlasting life and glory. *The Belgic Confession* teaches that faith is wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God (Art. XXIV), and that there must be ministers to preach the Word ... that by these means the true religion may be preserved (Art. XXX). *The Heidelberg Catechism* teaches that the Son of God gathers His elect out of the world by means of His Spirit and Word (q. 54). *The Catechism* also insists that the Holy Spirit works faith by the preaching of the gospel (q. 65). Preaching is one of the keys by which the Kingdom is opened to believers and shut to unbelievers (q. 83, 84). Images are not to be tolerated in the churches as books to the laity, *The Catechism* explains, because we must not pretend to be wiser than God Who will have His people taught not by dumb images but by the lively preaching of His Word (q. 98). *The Canons of Dordrecht* teach that the promise and command of the

gospel ought to be published and declared to all nations and persons promiscuously to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel (II, 5). *The Canons* also declare that just as God uses means to prolong and support our natural life, so God uses means to nourish and support our spiritual life; and the means God uses are the admonitions of the preaching of the gospel (III, IV; 17).

The Reformed Confessions are true to the Scriptures on this matter. The inspired Apostle writes to the church at Ephesus:

And he (the crucified, risen, exalted Christ) gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ... that we ... may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. (Ephesians 4:11 - 16)

This passage teaches that Christ gave pastors and teachers to the church to make the saints perfect, complete. The people of God through the work of the ministry are edified, i.e., built up into the body of Jesus Christ. This is what preaching accomplishes.

In the marvelous tenth chapter of the Gospel According to John Jesus reveals Himself as the Good Shepherd Who lays down His life and takes it up again for His sheep, and Who gathers the sheep into one fold under Himself as the one Shepherd. What distinguishes the sheep of Jesus from all unbelievers is the fact that the sheep hear Jesus' voice, are known of Him, and follow Him (verses 14 - 30).

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The question is, how do the sheep hear the voice of Jesus? How do they hear His voice today? The answer is found in Romans 10:13 - 15 where we read:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

This passage teaches that in order to be saved one must call upon the name of the Lord. In order to call upon the name of the Lord one must believe on Him, and in order to believe on the Lord one must hear the Lord. In order to hear the Lord one must have a preacher who is sent. This means that we hear the voice of Jesus by means of a preacher called, qualified, or ordained by Christ through the church. This is the means God chooses to use to work faith in the hearts of His people enabling them to call upon His name and be saved. This is utterly crucial, for it means that without preaching there can be no believing, and without believing there can be no calling upon the name of the Lord, and without calling upon the name of the Lord there can be no salvation.

Standing firmly on the rock of Holy Scripture the Reformed tradition maintains, therefore, that

preaching is the chief means by which God works His grace in the hearts of His elect in Christ and preserves them to everlasting life and glory. If we as Protestant Reformed Churches are to continue to be a Confessionally Reformed Church it is absolutely necessary that we hold fast to this biblical truth. Preaching is not merely one man addressing all the others as some maintain. Preaching is much more than a lecture on some doctrine of the Bible. Preaching is that unique, mysterious miracle by which God uses a sinful, weak man in the way of expounding Holy Scripture to "save them that believe!" By means of preaching, the sheep of Christ hear His voice; and hearing His voice they know and follow the Good Shepherd into life eternal. It is crucial that we maintain this truth by the grace of God. Preaching must remain central in our worship; it must be the main element around which everything in the worship revolves.

As to its content this means that preaching must declare and proclaim nothing less than and nothing more than the Word of God. And, because this is true, preaching must be exegetical or expository. Preaching must explain the plain, simple, yet utterly profound meaning of the Word of God as that Word applies to every sphere of human life and meets every need of the child of God.

Thus, because preaching is the chief means of grace, it is the chief mark of the church.

And this is the *crux* of the matter! I must be a member of that church which preaches the Word of God. Then I shall be hearing "Christ crucified" (I Corinthians 1:23). This explains our choice of the word "crux." It is derived from the Latin word for cross. In the cross of Jesus Christ is all of our salvation. Apart from the cross of Jesus Christ we are lost. This means that we must be and remain members of that church which faithfully proclaims nothing less or more than Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

How clearly the Scriptures speak to this! In response to the schism and party strife in Corinth Paul stresses that not baptism, but preaching is the chief means of grace. Christ did not send me to baptize, writes Paul, but to preach Christ crucified. The reason for this is that preaching is: "Christ, the power and wisdom of God" and: "... it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe ..." (I Corinthians 1:17 - 25).

For this reason no one has the right to separate himself from that church which faithfully preaches the Word (*The Belgic Confession* Art. XXIX).

Preaching is the *crux* of the matter! □

Rev. Carl J. Haak

Preaching: The Main Duty of the Preacher

Rev. Haak is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Lynden, Washington.

"The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those who published it."

The compulsion to preach the gospel is the greatest yearning and

desire which God works in a sanctified heart. Many are the holy desires which God works in the hearts of His children. Believing parents can confess that God gives

them a great jealousy and yearning to impart to their children the "praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done" (Ps. 78:4). A wife and mother is consumed in her soul for the good of her family and looks after the ways of her household. And believing husbands can testify of a yearning which God gives them for the fellowship of their wives.

But excelling them in intensity and in constraining force upon the heart is the yearning and compulsion God works in the heart of a true preacher to preach the gospel. Attend to these verses of the Scripture as proof....

"So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel..." (Rom. 1:15).

"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer. 20:9).

"...for necessity is laid upon me; yea woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16).

Why? Because "the Lord gave the word"! In an altogether special way Jehovah God entrusted His Word to the preacher who is lawfully called of God's church and inwardly called by the operation of the Holy Spirit in his heart. And when God calls, a man is under constraint to lift up his voice and declare unto Zion, "Behold, your God!"

Every sincere preacher can testify of this. The Word of God on which he has studied and meditated in the week gone by becomes a burden to him which he must get off his heart by preaching it. By a compulsion to preach I do not mean that the desire to preach is an irresistible impulse to perform an irrational act similar to what happens when a pregnant woman feels compelled to gorge on some rich food she normally would not crave. The preacher *knows* why he is under compulsion: it is owing to the Word of God which in a week's time of study has penetrated the hidden places of his heart and now simply must be proclaimed. The compulsion to preach comes from the Word God gives to be preached.

Here God's Word stands alone and unique. Nothing other than the Word of God can put a man under constraint — nothing other than the *true Word of God* summed in the Reformed faith, which sets forth the glory of our incomprehensible God and the greatness of His grace and mercy in Jesus Christ, His Son. The noble themes of man cannot produce this effect in the heart of a man. Bring the noblest of man's ideas, the height of his wisdom and learning, the most passionate of his virtues, and although men may speak of them with eloquence, they cannot put one under compulsion. They have no power to cause the heart to soar with love and praise to God and to bring the heart into subjection to His will and command. Nothing can place a man under constraint but the true Word of God. It alone shows the reality of this life of sin and evil in true light; it alone affords the solid and only ground of comfort in the mercy of God; and it alone furnishes the power sufficient to free us from our former slavery to the love of this world and to make us the willing servants of Him Who has redeemed us in His blood.

It must be the *true Word of God*. I have often wondered what motivates a man to preach the false gospel. I find nothing constraining about it. To preach a Christ and salvation which is a grand possibility if only the sinner will make it so by a decision of his free will; to proclaim a Christ Who died for all men without exception and thus for a countless number who now suffer the torments of hell; to herald a message that God would like to see things turn out alright for you but is powerless to see to it because He does not control the winds of trouble, death, sickness, etc.; such a word leaves me unmoved and is best left unsaid. I would feel under no more compulsion to look into that gospel than I do to open the junk mail I receive and disregard. If that is the word the Lord gave (a powerless god, an iffy salvation, a sovereign man whom I have learned is a beast at heart, and a well-meaning but impotent will of God), then I could well imagine

myself considering the possibility of showing slides this Sunday evening or asking the people to bring their musical instruments so that we could perhaps sing away the blues.

But under the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, a cross which shall not fail to accomplish all God intends it should, a forgiveness which hides my transgressions from view, a grace which surely breaks the bars of sin, and a God Who is God and sovereign over all — such a gospel must be proclaimed! Indeed, the soul of the preacher who has been given to see that Word grows impatient for Sunday. "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the LORD God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8).

This compulsion to preach will be seen in that a minister devotes his energies and strength to preaching.

To pursue successfully a goal, we must make that goal a great and absorbing object. A divided heart can never master the strength and energy needed to attain a single goal, but squanders its energy over many interests, none of which are ever attained.

Jesus observed that the children of this world, in pursuing their goals, understood this principle: "for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luke 16:8). The men of the world are absorbed in their object — the rich in their pursuit of gain, the ambitious in their pursuit of power, the scholar in his pursuit of learning. Once a man has set his heart on something and feels its tug on his heart, see how he can immerse himself in it almost to madness? His burning zeal attracts everything around it to feed the flame. His favorite schemes, his pet projects are hardly ever absent from his mind.

Something like this must characterize the preacher. With singleness of mind and zealous pursuit, the preacher must have preaching for his sole object. A minister today can hardly be called lazy when one stops to look at the list of duties required of him. Scripture calls him

to visit the sick and widows, teach the youth and children, open the Scriptures from house to house, lead the people of God in Bible study class, bring God's Word to the flock in their grief and gladness, counsel the distressed, admonish the wayward, and comfort the depressed. The flock may use him, they may spend him up, says the Scripture (II Cor. 12). Today countless other obligations are placed on him: committees, meetings, sub-committee meetings, and what not more. He must be a man for the youth, for the aged, and for all in between. He must be able to slide into second base, have time to fish and frolic at picnics, attend every church and school function, be an example in rearing his children in what is called "quality time," have a sound marriage, and be well-known and sociable in the community.

Now for everything there is a season, says the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, and none of the above activities are in themselves wrong; indeed, the Scriptural duties of a pastor are a must. Yet, a preacher must with one holy passion devote his strength and energy to the preaching — that is, preparing sermons, which is time consuming, mentally exhausting, and spiritually draining work. (If you ask now how a minister is supposed to do what he should, I have something to say. Please, now, for the love of God's Word, view your minister as a *Preacher* whose first, primary, central, all-important task is to preach. Elders, don't load him with calls

which you might want him to make with you because you are feeling inadequate. Your preacher is inadequate too; but he must not be that on Sunday when it comes time to preach. And he will be if he has not been given time to prepare. It is far worse for the preaching to suffer under neglect than any other aspect of the work of the church. And let all members of the church not look on their minister as the one to be involved in every nook and cranny of church life, but learn and discipline yourself to view him as the herald of God, which task he fulfills centrally from your pulpit.)

However, it is the ministry of the gospel that we must see as the target at which we are to aim and on which we are to have our eye fixed. We are set as watchmen to sound the alarm, to warn the wicked of their evil ways, to direct God's people to the place where they shall find their peace, to point out the snares and temptations to which they are exposed, to charge them to walk worthy of the gospel; in a word, to use the best endeavors both publicly and from house to house, in season and out of season, to build up our hearers in the most holy faith. We are to give an account for all of this and of the talents Christ bestowed on us to perform this. We should tremble at the thought of being obligated to acknowledge in that day, "while thy servant was busy here and there, the man was gone" (I Kings 20:40). To many of the proposals and pursuits which our own inclinations may lead us, we must use the lan-

guage of Nehemiah: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease while I leave it and come down to you?" (Neh. 6:3).

If the Lord gave the Word, what but the most sanctified determination to make the preaching of that Word the *one thing* in our lives is required of us? In comparison to this one thing, everything else is to be under-valued and neglected, if it should prove a hindrance to our task to preach the gospel.

God is the one Who works this compulsion in the preacher. Preaching is a calling which, in the face of continual exertion and expense, requires a continual supply of God's grace. The difficulties which attend this calling are more than enough to prevail against the best ministers, if they were left to carry on by themselves. There are frequent times when God teaches ministers to feel the meaning of Paul's words: "We were pressed out of measure and above strength, in so much that we despaired of life." There are peculiar trials for preachers in addition to the ones common to all Christians. They have the honor of bearing a double share of the "burden and heat of the day" and are marked out for the fiercest assaults of the enemy. Their only resource and hope is in the faithfulness and compassion of their Lord, under Whose banner and eye they fight, and Who has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." □

Two Men Went Up...

Head swelling and heart bursting with false pride,
(The Devil at his side)
Approaching to the temple gate, he looks about
And spies the wretched publicans that stand without.
"Thank God," says he, "that I am not of these."
He enters in and 'round him rise the sinners' pleas.
But he is unaware, so high his eyes are raised
Toward Heaven. "God be praised,"
His prayer begins, "that I am not as others are —
Extortioners, unjust, adulterers. So far
Have I removed myself from them.
Twice in the week I fast.
My generosity is unsurpassed.
And thankful even more I am to be
Not as this publican I see."

Head bowed, heart aching, stands the publican
And smites his breast. "Oh wretched man
Am I!" he cries. "Merciful God above,
Look on me in Thy Love."
This and no more he offers. No defense;
No words of vain conceit. Just penitence —
Outpouring of a broken heart.
And, as the sinners part,
A sentence rings from Heaven's Judge. Each has been tried,
But only one is justified.
And only one knows Mercy's bright increase.
And leaves with joy and peace.

(Lord of the publican, destroy in me The Pharisee.)

— Sue Looyenga — 1989

Experiential Preaching

Rev. Jason L. Kortering

The preaching of the gospel speaks to the hearts of God's people. This is what makes preaching unique. Because preaching is the highest form of communication, all the rules of language, logic, and oratory apply. Through the preaching of the gospel, the congregation is instructed in the knowledge of the Bible and they become more familiar with the truth of that Word. All of this must lead them to worship the One True God, revealed in His Word. Worship is an act of faith, personal and corporate response to God. For this, the heart of the hearer must be touched.

Who can touch that heart, but God!

He does work in our hearts by means of the preaching of the gospel.

The preacher must be keenly aware of this dimension in his preaching. The goal of preaching is not accomplished if the members of the congregation congratulate the

preacher for a job well done (for a well-organized sermon which carefully expounded the truth of the text, which applied that text to the life of the congregation, and was eloquently delivered). Indeed the preacher needs encouragement in his work and must know that hard work is much appreciated by the congregation. He does not need a weekly "ego trip" which gives him the adrenalin for another week. Rather, the goal of preaching is accomplished only when the preacher and the congregation are brought to their knees in repentance and are reconciled to God by the good news of the blood of the Lamb. We must hear Jesus, not the preacher. Only then will the comfort of the Word produce lasting effect in the lives of God's people. The evidence of such growth in sanctification is the greatest reward for faithful preaching. The preacher and congregation know that such fruits are exclusively divine. Pride is dashed to pieces and thankful humility takes its proper place.

The preacher is a living tool in the hands of God. The more the message fills his heart, the more he comes to the pulpit with the burden of a message from God to His precious people. The more he wrestles with the Word of God and its significance in his own life and as he sees its impact upon the lives of the congregation, the more he will bring the living Word.

That preaching will not be a dry-as-dust lecture on abstract theology. Neither will it be a brilliant analysis of a certain historical event

recorded in the Bible, an analysis which contains a moral lesson for the congregation. In all instances, whether the passage is Old Testament or New Testament, whether historical or hortatory, it will be God's Word.

The term, experiential preaching (sometimes also called experimental), is not commonly used among us. It is more commonplace in the English and Puritan tradition — which has some connotations (a mystical tendency) which we would not endorse. As I listen to some criticism, read articles, enjoy discussions on how to evaluate the preaching in a given church or our churches in common, it seems to me that we are grappling for words. The old doctrinal-practical dichotomy for describing sermons just does not fit. Every now and then we hear a criticism that the sermon is just too doctrinal, that we need practical preaching. Most of us do not know what is meant by "practical" preaching. More helpful is the term "applied" preaching. This is helpful because the entire Word of God, whether the passage is of a more doctrinal nature or whether it deals with the daily life of the saints, must be applied to the church which has gathered in worship. The preacher fails in his task to expound the Word of God if he does not carefully and with much diligence tell the congregation how this affects their lives and how they are to respond to such truth.

The idea of experiential preaching must be distinguished from the foregoing along these lines. The emphasis rests upon the preacher

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experiencing himself what the gospel has to say. He personally knows the sorrow of repentance for sin. He knows the temptations of the flesh. He knows the amazing depth of forgiving love. He knows the joy of obedient living over against greed and self-seeking. This experience affects his own preaching, as he deals with the subject at hand. He shows proper emotions; his heart is involved as well as his mind. He has spiritual sensitivity which becomes evident in the pulpit. When the passage deals with conflicts, he can speak of them in a real and sincere way because he has had the same conflicts. When these are applied to the congregation, he does not say, "you people," divorcing himself from the message, but uses "we," and thereby speaks to himself as well.

Such experiential preaching builds a bridge between the preacher and the congregation as he brings the Word of God. The message of the sermon must always be a careful exposition of the Scriptures. If you will, solid exegesis is the skeleton of every sermon, it holds everything together. The message must always be what God has to say to His people. That is determined by His Word. It forms the content of our faith, and that in turn controls our life of obedience. As this is being done in the sermon, the preacher deals with this in such a way that everyone in the audience knows that what he is saying is important. It deals with life and death, heaven and hell, faith and unbelief; and that is most important to the preacher and everyone sitting in the audience.

If we look about in the Holy Scriptures to find examples of this, we could do no better than to sit at the feet of Jesus Himself. Think of these stirring words: "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd," and

this moved Him to say, pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He may send forth reapers (Matt. 9:35-38). The burden Jesus felt for His people affected the way He brought the message. When He began to experience the hostility of the Jews, He pointedly said to His disciples, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). As He led His disciples in prayer (Christ taught through His prayers), He identified the glory which He had with the Father as the glory He sought to give to them through the deep way of His suffering and death (John 17:5).

An Old Testament example of such experiential preaching is the use of the song Moses sang upon his departure at Mt. Nebo (Deut. 32). What a testimony of Jehovah's faithfulness as experienced by that man of God and expressed to Israel at his time of death!

When Paul "preached" to the Roman Christians concerning the salvation of the Jews, he expressed it so eloquently and passionately: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart. For I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh..." (Rom. 9:1-3). He experienced that sincerely and it showed in the way he said it.

Our Reformed fathers make reference to this same idea in connection with Lord's Day 35. The question is raised, "But may not images be tolerated in the churches, as books to the laity? Answer, No: for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have his people taught not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of his word." There are many factors in what makes preaching lively. The living God comes with the Word of life to quicken dead sinners. The vehicle of such communication is not dumb images, but a living minister as well. And since he is a living instrument, all his previous experiences, his upbringing, his own joys and sorrows, those which he shares with the people of God as pastor,

all contribute to and influence the way in which he relates the Word of God to the people of God.

Let me illustrate the truthfulness of this. When the pastor experiences the death of a member of the congregation and is asked to present a message at the funeral, that message is going to be highly charged with what he has just experienced concerning death and glory. The circumstances prepare him for the effective communication of the gospel. It is not theory, abstract, or just an idea. Death is real, and God's people need comfort in that reality. He will struggle with his own sorrows, but that will prepare him to bring the Word of God powerfully and meaningfully. The same is true in dealing with pastoral concerns during the week. If the pastor is going to preach experientially, as the Word lives in his own soul and as he desires the same word to live in the souls of the congregation, he will be spiritually enhanced as he cries with those who sorrow and rejoices with those who rejoice.

Another important aspect is to allow the particular passage to fill one's soul. An important discipline for the pastor to learn is to select the passage early in the week, to read the context carefully, meditate upon it while taking a walk, allow the Word of God to become part of his being as he goes about his activities as pastor. It is amazing how the different ways of saying it, ways to apply it, even specific illustrations which relate to the everyday experience of God's people can effectively communicate to God's people the message from God. When the pastor is aware of the need for the preaching to be experiential, he will incorporate these things in his outline and communicate them through the message.

In conclusion, it is important that however the personal experiences of the pastor affect his preaching, it must never draw attention to itself. The focal point of preaching must always be this: What saith Jehovah? □

Preaching on the Heidelberg Catechism

Rev. Marvin Kamps

Catechism preaching has a long and blessed history in the Reformed community of churches. For nearly five hundred years Reformed preachers have fulfilled their ecclesiastical responsibility to preach the Word of God as set forth in the rich confession of these churches throughout the world. It is without a doubt true that these churches have remained faithful to the truth of God's Word in the measure that they have also been faithful to her task to preach faithfully the catechism each Lord's Day. Centuries ago the great church fathers, assembled as delegates of the Dutch Reformed Churches, decreed that the blessed confession of these churches based on God's Word should form the subject material for the preaching of the Word once each Sabbath day. This, truly Reformed men have thankfully done in their desire to build up the church of Jesus Christ in the truth of the gospel of sovereign grace over against the errors of individualism, Pelagianism, and Arminianism. The Protestant Reformed Churches through her ministries of the Word have been committed to this same task for some sixty-six years.

This most significant practice

must continue, if we are going to continue in the Reformed tradition. Catechism preaching has not been our weakness but our strength as churches. Our people have been taught and know the Reformed faith and their calling in God's covenant of grace by means of the faithful exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism in the light of God's most Holy Word.

However, there are those who are, to put it mildly, uncomfortable with Catechism preaching. From time to time complaints are heard from the pew about this style or form of preaching. Pressure is brought to bear on the preacher. His preaching is often criticized as boring. His Catechism sermons are too doctrinal. The individual complains that when the Catechism is preached they are not hearing God's Word. The faithful Reformed preacher is informed that the neighboring, more popular, preacher does not preach on the Catechism. This more popular preacher exegetes a particular passage of God's Word and only once in a while during the course of his sermon refers to the Catechism. This is the way the Catechism should be preached, it is claimed. Some Reformed preachers have caved in to all this criticism and, in a desire to appease men, have abandoned Catechism preaching entirely. Dr. James Daane, writing in his church's periodical, *The Banner*, made the following observation:

During the last fifteen years many significant changes have occurred in the Christian Reformed Church. While some minor changes — because forced upon the attention of the churches — have received considerable attention, major changes have occurred by trends that quietly and unnoticed worked their transformation.

One such trend-working change has been the increasing discontinuance of preaching on the Heidelberg Catechism. No one is conducting a crusade, of course, or overturing Synod to eliminate it. It is being effectively eliminated by attrition from the pulpit with the consent of the pew. Slowly but surely catechism preaching is silently stealing its way out of Christian Reformed pulpit practise (Banner, Nov. 2, 1973).

I have a question: Is that where the complainers about Catechism preaching wish to have our beloved churches in the future? If we wish to have people who perish, as the great prophet Hosea said, "for lack of knowledge," then hasten the day when the Heidelberg Catechism will no longer be heard as the church's confession of the great truths of sacred Scripture.

Many, if not all, the objections to Catechism preaching are rooted in a fundamentalistic conception of the church. Fundamentalism is anti-creedal. The shrill cry of fundamentalism is "no creed but Christ." They only want to hear the Word, they say. We must not preach anything but the Word of Jesus Christ. We may never substitute "the words of men" for the Word of God. To do so, the fundamentalist claims, is presumptuous.

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ness and disobedience to our Lord. On and on the fundamentalist goes in his harangue against Catechism preaching.

Now really, were our Reformed fathers so foolish and ignorant that they violated willfully the obvious when they decreed: "The ministers shall on Sunday explain briefly the sum of Christian Doctrine comprehended in the Heidelberg Catechism..." (Church Order, Art. 68)? Do those who remind us that the Word must be preached imagine that the great divines of old were ignorant of this fact — that maybe they were over-zealous and lost sight of their high calling? That too is not true.

No church on the face of the earth has had a higher view of preaching than the Reformed church. She has always been insistent that the Word must be preached, and that it be preached in the service of the exalted Christ Jesus, our Lord and King. Exposition of God's Word has always been for the Reformed church the foundation of God-honoring proclamation. Here is the point: Heidelberg Catechism preaching does not violate that most sacred calling. Catechism preaching is the preaching of God's Word.

The fundamentalist critic of Catechism preaching demands to hear the Word directly. This is impossible — unless one would consider the mere reading of God's Word to be preaching. Yet the fundamentalist critic of Catechism preaching fails to recognize that when the sermon material is presented as derived by the preacher from Scripture, he is then already one step from the Word itself. This cannot be helped, for it lies in the very nature of preaching. But when the church is responsible for the sermon material, we are then but one step removed from the text of Scripture. Whether the individual interprets Scripture, or the church interprets Scripture, we never have in the sermon just the naked text of the Bible itself. In the preaching, the Word is always mediated to the people of God, either by the individual or by the church. Non-Reformed preaching is individualistic;

Reformed preaching is church proclamation!

Catechism preaching is the proclamation of the Word by the church of Christ. The Reformed church studied, exegeted, and drew from the Scriptures the Word of truth. Reformed preaching is proclamation by the Church of Christ. All her preaching is that. But above all is that true of Catechism preaching. In our day individualism is exalted. People rush to hear what this or that preacher has to say. They want to hear the man. But the Reformed conception of preaching is not individualistic but organic. Believers as a body, the body of Christ Jesus in the world, preach the Word of God. The church preaches. Surely this is accomplished through a particular man, but he is one who is under the supervision and direction of the officebearers of the church.

Further, the Reformed church is a confessional church. Her pulpit therefore represents creedal preaching. We believe and therefore have we spoken. The many believers, yet one body, preach the Word in the service of Christ Jesus through the instrumentality of one called and ordained by the church. No individualism is there, no free-lance preachers interpreting the Word in isolation and to the exclusion of the church as a whole. The church has an authoritative interpretation of the Word of God that it has decreed shall be preached to all assembled to hear the Word.

We must not grudgingly acknowledge that this is indeed the Reformed church's conception of the catechism preaching. Rather we must be thankful for this conception and position. Is there any *one minister* who can give better answers to the questions which are presented in the Catechism, than has the church itself in that Catechism? How would unity of faith be preserved in the churches if each minister would present these doctrines as he saw fit? We would soon have a babel of conflicting voices. All unity in the faith would soon be lost forever.

In addition, how is it possible that believers complain that Cate-

chism preaching is boring, and that because it is doctrinal? Is not the church's confession in harmony with the doctrine of Scripture? Is it not true that to receive in faith the truth as it is in Christ Jesus is to confess the Reformed doctrines? The Christian faith is the Reformed faith. If one does not believe that, then I can readily understand his objection to Catechism preaching as too doctrinal. Non-Reformed people will ever be irritated by Catechism preaching. But then, they are not one in faith with us.

How can catechism preaching be boring? It is possible that the preacher does not carefully prepare his sermons? Maybe he treats the catechism as abstract dogma. Maybe the minister in his preaching busies himself with proving that what the catechism says is biblical and does this by proof-texting week after week. That would be boring. But that is not preaching either. And why should we feel obligated to prove repeatedly what we have "confessed"? But if the preacher proceeds from the viewpoint that the Catechism expresses the church's understanding of God's Word and preaches it as the church's proclamation, then his sermons will ring with power and conviction.

The people will know that they heard God speak to them His Most Holy Word through the means of the church's confession and proclamation. Then the church is given its rightful place in the work of the preaching of the Word. Then too individual believers will understand their personal responsibility thankfully to receive the Word when proclaimed. And they will raise their voices in protest when the Word of God is unfaithfully proclaimed because it contradicts the church's prior and authoritative proclamation in her creeds.

Let us make it our prayer to the great Lord of the church that we may be preserved in the blessed tradition of Catechism preaching, that His Name may be exalted, the covenant children instructed in the gospel, and all the saints edified and strengthened for their task in the world. □

Mr. Bernie Bruining

On Being Fed

Hunger leads to eating. Food always tastes better when I am hungry than when I *have* to eat again. Feeding on God's Word has the same effect. Being hungry for God's Word, and going to God's house because it is again time to go, are two entirely different situations on the Lord's Day.

Getting the body, mind, and heart ready to meet God and His Word is the subject of this article.

First the body. If my body is tired and demands my attention, the mind and heart suffer. If my eyes are closed because my body yearns for sleep, the mind and heart are unable to receive and learn and be blest. God tells us to open our mouths wide and He will fill them (Ps. 81:10b). This takes work and discipline. How we live our physical life indicates how

healthy our spiritual life is. They cannot be separated.

Next is the mind. It is true that the mind and heart work so closely together that it is hard to distinguish the outworkings of each separately. They influence each other greatly. Therefore these thoughts on mind and heart preparation may be interchangeable.

In order to receive a blessing from the preached Word, the mind has to be in the right frame. It cannot be busy with yesterday's problems or tomorrow's business dealings. Our prayer must be that God will take away anything that would hinder our worship of Him. In order to be filled we have to be emptied.

Peace and harmony at home also helps the mind to be able to receive God's Word. A fight or argument on Sunday morning takes away from it.

Children who learn their catechism lessons well will understand the preaching better than those who do not learn it well.

Learning to listen is not an easy matter but takes humility. In our relationships with our fellow man we receive very little learning when we do the talking. We learn when we listen. So it is with God. We have to learn along with Job that we must put our hand over our mouth and let God do the speaking (Job 40:4, 5).

Doing a fair amount of reading through the week on biblical matters and godly walk helps the mind to understand the preaching of God's Word and is able to translate it to the heart with fuller meaning.

Lastly we come to the heart. The heart constitutes the center of our being — out of which are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). Since we are to

keep it diligently, or above all keeping, we will examine it also in the light of the Word preached.

Before we can ever expect a blessing from God we first have to be reconciled with our brother. That is the order of the heavenly kingdom (Matt. 5:21-26).

Praying for the minister at the breakfast table on Sunday morning reminds the children that we have God's kingdom at heart, that she may prosper and grow until all God's children are gathered.

We must thank God for the minister — calling him by name — praying that the minister may have been faithful in his study so that he may speak with conviction, vitality, and vigor. We must pray that the minister may be an instrument of God's peace through His two-edged sword.

We must search the Scriptures to see that what was preached was God's Word, but never may we have roast minister for Sunday dinner.

How often we read in connection with God's house that we must be glad, joyful, singing, praising, thankful, blessing His name, playing with instruments. All these activities tell us something about the heart and its condition. The heart is joyful in the Lord because it sees its past condition and basks in its present state of being saved for evermore. St. Augustine once said, "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

In Psalm 84 we read how envious David was of the sparrow which had placed its nest so close to God's altar. Lord, fulfill our envy, now and forever. □

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Elder's Oversight of the Preaching

Mr. Don Doezema

It has been said that "there is no class of men on whom, under God, the prosperity of religion in our churches is more dependent than those who are invested with the office of the eldership" (McKerrow, in *The Office of Ruling Elder in the Christian Church*). And Berghoef and DeKoster have observed in their *Elders Handbook* that "the health and effectiveness of the church in the world will be in large measure dependent upon the dedication, courage, and perseverance of the eldership. As goes the elder, so goes the church."

In both instances the reference was to *ruling*, not *teaching* elders; and in neither instance did the writer overstate the case, for there can be no doubt that elders play a critical role in the welfare and good order of a congregation. So true is that, so great is the task and the responsibility, that were a nominee for the office to dwell for awhile on that alone, he might very well decide to decline the nomination.

Just why is that? What is there about the elders' work which makes it so important to a church's well-being? A look at the "Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons" may shed some light on the matter. Elders, according to it, must give diligent heed to "whether every one properly deports himself in his confession and conversation." That in itself is a pretty big order, including as it does the work of Christian discipline. Add to that, that elders are to "be assistant with their good counsel and advice, to the ministers of the Word, yea, also to serve all Christians with advice and consolation," and the task looms larger. Particularly however are the elders to "have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the Word, to the end that all things may be directed to the edification of the Church." Article 23 of the Church Order likewise declares that it belongs to the office of elders to "take heed that the Ministers... faithfully discharge their office." If there is one aspect of the work of elder, the weight of which is felt more keenly than that of others, this is it.

The form's use of the word "particularly," in this connection, is undoubtedly correct; for, if the preaching of the Word is the primary task of the church of Christ, it follows that the oversight of that preaching is the primary supervisory responsibility of the elders. That responsibility we make the focus of our attention in this article.

We might ask, first of all, what exactly is the responsibility of the elders with respect to that preach-

ing? What are they *able* to do? Who of the elders, after all, has had any training in homiletics or in hermeneutics or in exegesis of the Old and New Testaments in the original languages? What "good counsel and advice" can elders possibly give to men who have survived the rigors of three or four years in *seminary*? It would almost seem therefore that, if there is one aspect of the calling of elders which could be left pretty much to the *teaching* elder, this one would be it.

Infallibility however is not conferred along with the diploma at the conclusion of a man's seminary training. He can still err. In spite of his best efforts, for example, he might sometimes miss special needs of the congregation. Especially is that likely to occur when a minister is new to a congregation. Besides, the best of preachers carry their treasure in earthen vessels, and there will therefore in their ministries be times when these faithful shepherds do not speak and act in the best interests of the flock. Wise elders must make it their business to know the needs of the congregation and to evaluate the work of the pastor in light of those needs, both as to his preaching (to assure that the church of Christ is being fed to their spiritual edification) and as to his life (that the congregation may have before them an example worthy of emulation). If in any respect the minister fails to lead an exemplary life, the ruling elders must correct him. If the minister obviously spends insufficient time in sermon preparation, or if perhaps his pastoral work

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leaves something to be desired, the elders should do what they can to spur him on to greater zeal. If the preaching is in any respect not true to the Scriptures, the elders of course must not rest till that is corrected. Likewise, when a minister's sermons are doctrinally and exegetically correct, but he settles in his preaching for a kind of bland orthodoxy, or leaves to the congregation the application of the text to their daily lives, then too the elders are obliged to work with the minister toward a remedy.

Not to be forgotten is the church's catechetical instruction. If catechism is indeed a form of the ministry of the Word, and if, by the instruction they receive in catechism, children and young people are prepared to appropriate for themselves the Word as it is preached from the pulpit, it is of utmost importance that that instruction be both thorough and intensive. The responsibility for seeing to it that that in fact happens is the elders'. And the only way for elders to exercise that oversight is to be there — i.e., personally observing the catechism classes, with enough frequency to get a good feel for the manner and effectiveness of the instruction given. With the spiritual maturity of our covenant seed at stake, the elders must not in their oversight of this aspect of the preaching of the Word take anything for granted.

* * * * *

Now, if the foregoing were all that is involved in the elders' work of oversight over the life and doctrine of the minister, their task would be roughly comparable to that of the fire department. Elders then could rest easy as long as all is well in Zion. Only when their close scrutiny of the work of the pastor reveals that there are some deficiencies which must be dealt with do they swing into action. Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. For, having "regard to the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the Word" is not something that can be accomplished simply by sitting back and evaluating the minister's work and then, at the appropriate time, mak-

ing pronouncements concerning the same. Important as on-going critical analysis of the minister's work may be, elders should ordinarily, for the welfare of the congregation, direct most of their energies not to *scrutinizing* but to *facilitating* the work of the pastor. And there are a host of ways to do that.

How about, for example, protecting his time? ...time, i.e., which he needs and wants to spend in the solitude of his study. A minister who tries, commendably, to be "all things to all men," may as a result find insufficient time to wrestle with the Scriptures, not only in order to arrive at correct exegesis but also to develop sermons which make for *lively* preaching (with the kind of vivid imagery which characterized the preaching and teaching of the Master) and which speak compellingly to the needs of the people of God who must face in these increasingly evil days the threefold enemy. Time for that, we say, must be protected. And elders help, in that regard, not by decree ("You must spend such and such number of hours in preparation") but by *taking to themselves* labors in the congregation which will otherwise of necessity fall to the minister. Does the congregation have many sick, or aged, or infirm, or widows and widowers — all of whom are in need of being visited with some regularity? How many families are on the minister's family-visitation list? How many societies does the minister lead? How many catechism classes must he teach? On what synodical committee(s) does he serve? The minister must be neither obliged nor permitted to carry too heavy a congregational and/or denominational load.

What can elders do about that? They can be diligent in their visiting of the sick and shut-ins. This is a duty for which minister and elders together share responsibility. A conscientious pastor who sees neglect of the sheep in his congregation will sometimes himself take up the slack. Elders must therefore see to it that there isn't any. How about catechetical instruction? It's true that catechism is primarily the duty of the teaching elder. But it

need not be *solely* his. Capable elders ought not to shun opportunities to take charge of a class for the year, if some relief is necessary for the pastor. Elders, at any rate, should *look* for these things. All other things being equal, the congregation whose elders not only insist that the minister maintain a proper balance in the different aspects of his labor, but also are themselves active in the work of the congregation, to make it possible for the minister to achieve such a balance, will reap the benefits of it from the pulpit.

Then there's the matter of the minister's tools. He should have them within easy reach. His personal library must be large. That means more than just reference books. In order to maintain a freshness in his preaching, the minister must continue to read widely. The consistory (session) should therefore see to it that funds are available, beyond the minister's salary, for the purchase of books and for subscriptions to various periodicals. He should be encouraged also, for the same reason, to attend seminars, to take classes, to write for publication. If this requires a mini-sabbatical, for study purposes, or just a service or two off on occasion, the elders do well to consider granting that. They should, again, be ready and eager to provide both opportunity and incentive for their minister to grow. This is taking heed that the minister faithfully discharges his office.

(The point in all of this is that elders who have caught the spirit of their own office will be on the lookout for ways to assist their minister in the faithful discharge of his. Do we understand and appreciate that? This concerns the glorious manifestation of the body of Christ. This concerns Christ's sheep. The duty of the preacher is to nourish, to feed, to be a shepherd to that flock. And part of the duty of the elders is to assist him in becoming a better shepherd. From that perspective, we say, the elders will keep their eyes and ears open for ways to be of service to the minister...and the minister will welcome their "oversight.")

Elders should remember too that the pulpit can be a lonely place, and that the duties which belong to the minister's office are very demanding. A minister who is left to wonder whether or not he has the support of the elders will have a hard time fighting a discouragement which cannot help but affect his work. Berghoef and DeKoster address this in their *Elders Handbook* when they exhort elders to "stand firmly at the minister's side when criticism comes, even if you then must advise him against some fault of his own. Make the eldership the place where the minister can come for support, for honest discussion, for free admission of error and mistake. Yours must be a solidarity in continual search for livelier obedience to the Word." Not, in other words, should an elder feel obliged to defend always what the minister does, whether it be right or wrong. But he should in every circumstance be prepared to stand with the pastor, striving mightily to the end that, if mistakes have been made, all parties concerned *learn from them*, and even *grow through them*. An intimate, empathetic relationship between elders and preachers, formed early, and kept alive through good times and bad, will surely serve to strengthen the pastor's pulpit ministry and, thus, serve well the edification of the body of Christ.

Sometimes that kind of relationship evolves easily, naturally. At other times circumstances, or personalities of the parties involved, make it attainable only with great effort and determination. No effort should be considered too great. What higher incentive can there be, both for minister and elder, than that they are dealing together with the sheep, the lambs, considered so precious that Christ, for them, gave His life?

More often than not it is the minister who determines by his own attitude the spirit which prevails between himself and the elders. He provides too the inspiration necessary to get the best out of the church's elders. But if, for one reason or another, the working rela-

tionship between the teaching and ruling elders lacks vitality, the elders may not content themselves with the status quo, waiting for the minister to provide better leadership. In the interest of preserving the strength of the pulpit, and maintaining a godly zeal for the soul-care as that is exercised also by the elders, there must be an ongoing sharing of vision among the elders and the minister, there must be mutual sharpening of skills. Elders must therefore do all in their power to promote a creative, fruitful relationship between the session (consistory) and pastor.

Hardly least in the responsibilities of the elders is that of praying, fervently, frequently, for the blessing of God on the pastor in his work, asking also that God might prosper their mutual labors. Nothing can we hope to accomplish apart from that blessing; with it, there is every reason for confidence.

We mentioned earlier that a man who stares *only* at the responsibilities of the office would be disinclined to serve in it. But he must never do that. He does well of course to consider seriously those responsibilities. But he must recognize too that they are, besides, *opportunities*. Opportunities they are to be of special service to the church, in the service of the King. And further, he need not depend for the fruits of his efforts on his own wisdom and his own insight into and knowledge of the Scriptures and Confessions. True, he had better stay close to the Word, and he must be diligent in his study of the creeds; but it is the Lord Who gives the increase (I Cor. 3:6). The task of the elder is therefore a gift of the Lord, Who is pleased to crown also this gift, in that those who by His grace serve well in the use of it are rewarded with double honor. □

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

Complete in Christ! O blissful sound,
Let saints with wonder tell;
'Tis full redemption wrought by blood
That saves from sin and hell.

Complete in Christ! 'tis wondrous grace,
In God's electing love,
That gave the Church a hiding-place,
And sealed the same by blood.

Complete in Christ! are all the heirs,
Their names are writ above;
The price was paid on Calv'ry's hill,
In sweet atoning love.

Complete in Christ! 'tis heaven on earth
To feel the same within;
When unctuous power attends the word,
The saints rejoice therein.

Then let the Church now sing the song,
In strains of noblest joy;
And in the land of sweet repose,
Where bliss shall never cloy.

SB, December 15, 1930

Mr. Larry Huiskens

Who? Me?

Yes, you and I and every believer who sits under the preaching have a responsibility regarding the preaching in the church. This is not left up to the elders alone. Those in the pew have a very definite role in regards to the preaching. You see, we are the church. The church preaches. The church administers the sacraments. The church conducts discipline. Ultimately then, we are responsible to judge the preaching. This is not only our right but also our duty.

Our judgment is twofold. We must not only judge the correctness of the preaching, but also how this word applies to us personally.

When we judge the correctness, we must be sure it is authoritative, biblical, and creedal. When we judge for personal application, we must be sure to include ourselves and not be so sure that "that sermon" was for some of those "backsliders." Further, we must judge the preaching to be spiritual food. We must be sure that we are getting real food, and not some substitute. The real Word of God is not to be confused with the philosophy of man. The real Word of God, the Gospel, goes forth even as a two-edged sword. It draws some closer to God, and it hardens the hearts of others. It will convict some of their sin. It will condemn others. It will show us the mercy of God and also God's justice. When we hear the

real Word of God, we will not leave hungry, for we have been fed by Christ Himself. We will leave satisfied, for we have heard our Savior speak to us.

One of the most satisfying and refreshing things we do after a day's work is to sit down to a truly delicious meal — a meal prepared to satisfy the needs of our body, a meal designed to replenish the energy spent in our daily activity. Without nourishment, we die.

So to, it is true of our spiritual needs. We must be fed with spiritual food. A child of God needs spiritual energy to go out into the world every day, energy to fight off the devil and his host of demons. One does not have to leave his home to be accosted by the world of iniquity. The newspapers, magazines, radios, and televisions which we bring into our homes are permeated with the vileness and sin of man. Adultery, divorce, murder, mayhem, lewdness, homosexuality are [shown] made to be normal behavior. To fight this, we need spiritual food. In our family life, we are prone to bicker and quarrel with brothers and sisters. The same is true for husbands and wives. To fight this we need spiritual food.

The work place, the office, the farm, the factory are dens of iniquity. Filthy talk, cheating, lying, theft are commonplace. To fight this, we need spiritual food.

There is only one place to get this food and that is sitting under the preaching. If we leave hungry, we have a problem. Could it be I? Could it be my spiritual condition? Or could it be that I'm being fed stones for bread, skim milk, watered down soup and a meat substitute?

In order to judge the preaching, we must be equipped. A courtroom judge has to spend a good deal of his time learning the law. So too, a believer must spend a good deal of his time equipping himself. How can I judge if this preaching is biblical if I do not study my Bible? How can I judge this preaching to be creedal if I do not know the creeds and that for which they stand. How can I determine if this word is authoritative if I have not taken the time to examine the church of which I am a member? Is it really a church, the manifestation of God's people with Christ as its head? Or is this a sect with some man as its head? Daily we must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The apostle James says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jam. 5:16). Pray that the minister will be a herald, an ambassador, of Jesus Christ and that the word he brings will be that of Him that sent him.

Pray that you may have faithful elders, as true watchmen on the walls of Zion, men of conviction, of zeal, and of courage, men who will not waver when it comes to the truth. Without faithful elders, the church is in dire straits.

We must pray for ourselves, that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes of understanding and that He will give us grace to apply the preaching to our lives.

We must pray for the church universal, that the preaching will gather the church from every nation, tribe, and tongue.

If we leave the preaching hungry because we do not hear the whole of God's Word and are being fed

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man's philosophy, we have some choices to make. We can go the way of protest, which is open to all members of a "Reformed church" using the Presbyterian form of church government. Secondly, we must be true to the Confession of Faith Article 28 which instructs us to search out the truest manifestation of the church of Christ on earth.

If we look around, we find precious few churches who will be held to their Standards, Confessions, or Creeds, much less to the Holy Scriptures. Protesters are treated as trouble makers and are accused of living in the Dark Ages or lacking the new enlightenment of the Word. Protests are shelved, pigeonholed, or given to some committee to "study." As the years pass, the protests are forgotten or the protesters leave, frustrated. If we are put into this situation and become a searcher for the truth, we must pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us in finding the truth. Those who are searching for the truth have an appetite for good material, for forthright, clear, concise treatment of the doctrines of Scripture. Many have been brought under the preaching after reading and studying good material.

New converts to the truth, to the Reformed faith as we know it, continually amaze us with their quest for understanding. They put many of us to shame in their grasp of issues. They read, they listen, and they are ready to discuss their newfound faith. Thank God that He continues to gather His church through the preaching from every corner of the world, and thank God that we as churches are able even with limited resources to promote the truth to the ends of the earth.

If we leave the preaching hungry and unfed because of our spiritual condition, we have a problem, mainly because we do not know we are hungry. It may be that our walk may be in sin. Before long we will show some outward signs. We stop coming to the preaching, we stop going to catechism. We do not enjoy the communion and fellowship of the saints. There is always something else we would rather be

doing. The elders call this "the neglect of the means of grace." Before long, they will be at our door with the Word, with prayer, with admonition, pointing us to the error of our way, pointing us to the void in our lives and to our weak disposition because of the lack of spiritual food. They continue in this in love for the sheep over which Christ the King has given them oversight. It is with grief and sadness, when there is no repentance, that finally the wayward are cut off from the church. Equally true, there is much joy and rejoicing when one has turned from his evil way and returns to the fold.

"Now that the Lord has fed our souls at this table, let us therefore jointly praise his Holy name with thanksgiving" (paraphrased from the communion form, *The Psalter*, p. 95). This not only applies after communion but also after every service.

Preaching is the chief means of grace, and prayer is the chief means of thanksgiving. So then, living the Word preached will lead us into true thankfulness. "Therefore shall my mouth and heart show forth the praise of the Lord from this time forth forever more" (Communion form, p. 96).

Living the preaching is impossible without prayer, for we are still in this world and still fight the old man of sin in us. Because of this, the child of God is constantly in the strife, and he will be until death. Therefore, we look forward to each Sabbath, to the preaching, to the food, to the refreshment, to the comforting word of our Savior Jesus Christ. Then we say with the Psalmist, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go up to God's own house."

How we show this new life of Christ in us is manifested in all that we do for Christ's sake. A word, a helping hand, a smile, a prayer, a tear, a gift, a slice of bread, a drink of water, a visit done for Christ's sake — all of that reveals this new life in us.

This brings us full circle. Yes, you and I, the individuals that make up the church, our lives, must exemplify the Word of God in

our actions, our speech, and our relationships one with another. All that we think, say, and do must show forth thankfulness for the great salvation earned for us by the death of Jesus Christ.

Are we then personally affected by the shortage of ministers and missionaries? Are we affected by the opening in the communist block of Europe? Surely there are God's people there. Surely they are in need of spiritual food. Even in this country, the most prosperous nation in the world, we see hunger, not only physical hunger but true spiritual hunger. Churches that once maintained the sovereignty of God, the inerrancy of Scripture, the practice of pure preaching, faithful in maintaining the sacraments and unafraid to exercise discipline are gone by the wayside. What about God's people? Have we personally spoken to those we know who are in these circumstances? Have we hidden our light? Are we afraid to speak, afraid to declare? Many of us do not want to rock the boat. Many of us will look the other way. We will rationalize and compromise. Why should I? They will not listen. I do not want trouble with my neighbor or brother or sister. Are we active in promoting the Word of God in our family, our village, our town, our city? We can send men to the far reaches of the earth, but if we fail in being a witness to our neighbor, father, mother, brother, sister, all is in vain.

We think of the early church in Jerusalem. "And the Lord added to the church daily." Surely much of this was accomplished by activity among the first to believe and those who followed.

Our faith must be active. We may not hide it. We must declare it as an act of faithfulness (H.C. answer 86). "That we may so testify by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof; and that by our godly conversation, OTHERS MAY BE GAINED TO CHRIST." □

Book Reviews

BORN AGAIN: A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF REGENERATION, by Peter Toon; Baker Book House, 1987; 206pp., \$8.95 (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

Peter Toon, pastor of an Anglican congregation in England, has written on other theological subjects. In fact, this book is not the first he has written on the subject of regeneration.

The book is divided into two sections, the first dealing with the Scriptural data on regeneration and the second dealing with a historical survey of the doctrine. The second part I found to be the most interesting and valuable. In this part he deals with patristic and medieval ideas, the teachings of the major reformers, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican teachings, the views of Reformed theologians, Puritans, Pietists, and evangelists — the latter including our modern era. Much historically valuable material can be found in this section.

While the first section treats the doctrine as such, it has several weaknesses about it. Some of the more important weaknesses are: 1) It is not a sharp and concise discussion of the Biblical truth and does not come to grips with some significant and important aspects of regeneration. An example would be his failure to discuss the question of whether regeneration is mediate or immediate — although this may be because the question arose particularly in continental (specifically Dutch) theology and was not a significant factor in his own Anglican tradition. Yet, even then, a sharpness of definition is lacking and the discussion is general and, consequently, somewhat vague. Perhaps

his failure to make sharp distinctions is the reason for his ambiguity on the relation between faith and regeneration (pp. 186, 187). 2) While he has a good summary of the doctrine of baptism with the Holy Spirit (p. 47, 48), he is insufficiently critical of this view and even leaves the door open to charismatic teachings (p. 187). 3) Again, perhaps because of his Anglican tradition, he is not strongly condemnatory of baptismal regeneration (see especially p. 188). 4) He is not strong on the doctrine of infant baptism and seems to have no conception of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant (pp. 65, 66). 5) In my judgment he misinterprets Calvin when he says that Calvin taught a pre-regeneration work of the Holy Spirit (p. 104). 6) He seems to reveal some wrong conceptions of the relation between the Old Testament and the New (pp. 60, 61).

There are certain strengths of the book, however. Although somewhat inconsistently, he maintains that regeneration cannot be man's work (p. 28), and calls the conception of modern evangelists that John 3:3 is to be interpreted as a command or exhortation, a serious mistake (p. 188).

The book is well written, easy to read, and will be of value to anyone wishing to study this important subject. Especially the historical section is recommended. □

CHRISTIAN ETHICS: OPTIONS AND ISSUES, by Norman L. Geisler; Baker Book House, 1989; 335 pp., paper. (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

Because of the many ethical problems which are facing the people of God in these times of com-

plex social relationships and advances in science and medicine, many books on Christian ethics are being published, some of which we have reviewed from time to time in *The Standard Bearer*. This book is another such book, although it is a valuable addition to what has been originally written.

First, a bit about the author. Norman Geisler was formerly the professor of Apologetics at Dallas Theological Seminary, but is now dean of the Liberty Center for Christian Scholarship at Liberty University. He has written over 25 books, most of which are in the fields of philosophy and apologetics. His philosophical training is evident also in this book, for the arguments are carefully and succinctly crafted. One must pay close attention as he reads the book. Yet, it is not difficult to understand and can be read by all God's people with profit.

One of the great advantages of the book is that the first 132 pages are devoted to a discussion of various ethical systems, arising out of both unbelieving and believing thought. Geisler proceeds from the fundamental position that the absolute character of God's sovereign will determines all our ethics.

Among evangelicals, who hold to the absolute authority of God's will, Geisler finds three ethical systems which he calls: 1) Unqualified absolutism, which holds that there are no moral conflicts in the believer's life, and the will of God for us is always clear and without exception. 2) Conflicting absolutism, which holds that the believer, when faced with moral conflicts, is always guilty in some measure no matter what he does. 3) Graded absolutism, which holds that in

many ethical situations one is faced with moral conflicts; that in such situations, the believer must choose the lesser of two evils, and that, having done this, no ethical culpability attaches to his choice.

Because this latter is the option which Geisler chooses, it might be of some interest to cite a few examples. He cites the great example of the Lord Himself Who, on the cross, was faced with the moral dilemma of mercy and justice: dying to show mercy for His people, and the injustice of the innocent being punished for the guilty. The Lord chose mercy over justice and so left us an abiding standard.

Geisler also finds additional examples in the lives of Daniel, of Daniel's three friends, and of the apostles when brought before the Sanhedrin. They faced the conflict of submission to those in authority and obedience to the command of God. Both are required. To do both was impossible. The lesser evil was chosen in contrast to the greater evil. No moral culpability attached to them because of this choice. In our own lives we face such conflicts when we are confronted with the need to break a promise to save a life, to kill in self-defense, to tell a lie to save a person's life.

This is a very interesting position which Geisler takes and it is worth our while to study it. I have not, however, found the line of argumentation totally convincing, especially when Geisler appeals to the example of our Lord.

The moral issues which he treats are: abortion, euthanasia, biomedical issues, capital punishment, war, civil disobedience, homosexuality, marriage and divorce, ecological moral issues.

Most of the time we are in agreement with the author's conclusions. Sometimes we were even pleasantly surprised at the positions taken. For example, Geisler flatly condemns civil disobedience to the point of condemning the Revolutionary War of 1775-1781 as being a violation of our calling to be in submission to those in authority over us. Geisler also inveighs fiercely against the whole concept

of "quality of life" as something determinative in the field of biomedical ethics, a passage which many evangelicals ought to read.

Sometimes the author takes positions with which we disagree, but which do not surprise us. For example, he takes a broader stand than the position of the Westminster Confessions on divorce and remarriage; divorce is permitted, though undesirable, in many different situations for many reasons.

Sometimes he takes positions which are disconcerting and surprising, as, e.g., his approval of AID: artificial insemination by donor.

We found the book helpful and worthwhile both because of the discussions of various ethical systems, and because of the analysis of concrete ethical issues. It is a helpful and interesting book. □

GETTING TO KNOW JOHN'S GOSPEL: A FRESH LOOK AT ITS MAIN IDEAS, by Robert A. Peterson; Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1989; 147pp., \$7.95 (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

If any individual child of God, any church society, or any group of believers would decide to study the gospel according to John, this is a very helpful book.

It is not (and is not intended to be) a commentary on the gospel. As the title suggests, it is intended to give an overall view of the gospel by treating some of its main themes. A brief review of the chapters will make this clear.

After the author explains the purpose of the book in chapter 1, and gives its basic outline in chapter 2, he deals in chapter 3 with the "I am" sayings. Two chapters are given to a study of the ten miracles, and all the material under chapters 3-5 are arranged under 1) Jesus the Revealer, 2) Jesus the Giver of eternal life, 3) Jesus the Savior. Jesus' "time" sayings (that is, those passages which speak of Jesus' hour) are treated in 6; the themes of faith and unbelief in the gospel (very important themes) are treated in 7; two chapters are devoted to a discussion of "portraits of Jesus' Per-

son"; two chapters are used to discuss the saving work of Jesus; in the final two chapters the Holy Spirit, and the teaching of John on the last things, are discussed.

Each chapter concludes with review questions and discussion questions, which aid in its use in discussion groups.

The book is written on a level that is appropriate for use also in high schools as a guide to an overall view of the gospel. It is interestingly written and easy to understand.

A couple of features of the book that should be criticized are: 1) the book is interspersed with brief stories that often have little point and little relation to the material under discussion. They are included, no doubt, to make the book more interesting, but often seemed to me to detract from its value. 2) One of the great themes of the gospel according to John is the truth of sovereign grace. Arthur Custance remarked in one of his books, e.g., that the gospel according to John, more than any other book, persuaded him of the truths of sovereign grace. This great theme is not discussed in the book, something which disappointed me.

The author is Associate Professor of Theology at Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, PA, and a teaching elder in the PCA church. □

THE UNFAILING FRIEND

O Lord, my Friend unfailing,

How dear art Thou to me!

Are cares or fears assailing?

I find my strength in Thee.

Why should my feet grow weary

Of this my pilgrim way?

Rough though the path, and dreary,

It ends in perfect day.

SB, October 1, 1930

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

MINISTERIAL CALLS

Rev. J. Kortering has declined the call he received from the Randolph PRC in Randolph, WI.

The congregation in Isabel, SD, where our Hope PRC is located, has extended a call to Rev. R. Flikkema.

SCHOOL NEWS

Supporters of the Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN were invited to reserve Friday evening, April 20, for a special P.T.A. commemorating that school's 40th anniversary.

The School Board of the South Holland Protestant Reformed School in South Holland, IL obtained the services of Mr. Dan Veldman, an excellent Reformed speaker, to speak to the students every day the second week in April. On Tuesday evening he spoke to the young people (high school and older) on "Battling for the Cause of Christ in an Anti-Christian Culture." On Wednesday evening he spoke in the church auditorium, to parents and all interested parties, on "The Strategic Role of Christian Education in the

1990s." He challenged all to recognize the enemy and to fight the battle for the cause of Christ.

Adams Street Protestant Reformed School in Grand Rapids, MI presented their All-School Program at the First PRC on April 20.

MISSIONARY NEWS

The Consistory of the Bethel PRC in Elk Grove Village, IL acceded to a request from the Mission Committee to use their pastor, Rev. R. VanOverloop, to help in the work in Florida. The Mission Committee has decided to ask Synod in June to call a missionary to labor in the Venice area. They want to use Rev. VanOverloop's experience as a missionary to evaluate and to help work in the area. Rev. VanOverloop will be there from May 3-11 and Rev. Woudenberg the following four Sundays, D.V.

Rev. and Mrs. Gise VanBaren and their daughter, Rachel, returned home to Hudsonville, MI on April 11 after bringing God's Word for six weeks to the Covenant Reformed Fellowship in Larne, Northern Ireland. He wrote in part to his congregation, "One cannot help but sympathize with the 'small flock' here in Larne. There are no other ministers in our churches who are scheduled to preach to them. These people await the decision of our Synod in June and, above all, await the will of God for them. May we, who are so richly blessed with the preaching of the Word, not forget to give God thanks for the spiritual advantages that are ours. Nor may we forget to pray for His people who lack so many of these same advantages."

The Council of the South Holland PRC in South Holland, IL has decided to develop the work in the

Ft. Wayne, IN area by holding preaching services there twice a month.

DENOMINATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Rev. R. Dykstra spoke on the theme, "What It Means to be Reformed," for the spring Ladies' League meeting held in the auditorium of the Doon, IA PRC on April 3.

On April 17, the Mr. and Mrs./Adult Bible League Mass Meeting was held in the auditorium of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. Mr. Jim Lanting, who writes here in the SB, spoke on the topic, "One Nation, Under God...How should we insist our government view Orthodox Christianity: endorsement, accommodation, or strict separation?"

CONGREGATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

The Young People's Society of the Lynden PRC in Lynden, WA invited their congregation to a night out. Featured were a basketball game between their married and unmarried men, and a volleyball game between their married and unmarried women. No information as to winners.

And on April 19 the Young People's Society of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI sponsored a travelogue entitled "America's Beckoning By-Ways" by Mr. Robert Brower. Proceeds were for this summer's convention. □

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

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of Ladies' Aid Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, extend heartfelt and sincere Christian sympathy to their member Mrs. Charles Pastoor and family in the death of their daughter MISS CAROL PASTOOR.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Mrs. Peter Decker, President
Mrs. Henry Baar, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory and congregation of the Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church extend Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Joe Brummel, and their family, in the death of his brother, MR. RALPH BRUMMEL.

May they be comforted by the words of the Lord in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
Allen Hendriks, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church wishes to extend its heartfelt Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer, elder Bernard Bruining, in the death of his father, MR. ABRAHAM BRUINING.

"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" Psalm 73:24.

Rev. Gise VanBaren, President
Peter Hoekstra, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church wishes to extend its heartfelt Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer, deacon Ralph VanderVeen, in the death of his father, MR. ITSE VANDERVEEN.

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

Rev. Gise VanBaren, President
Peter Hoekstra, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church wish to express their sympathy to Joe and Mary Brummel and family in the death of their infant daughter KATIE BRUMMEL, whom the Lord took to Himself at the tender age of 5 months. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Who has begotten us unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God..." (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Rev. Kortering, President
Tom Bodbyl, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Faith Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy to our fellow church members, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Noorman and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Noorman in the loss of their daughter and grand daughter RENAE SUZANNE NOORMAN.

May they be comforted in this, that the death of His saints is, in the sight of the Lord, precious (Psalm 116:15).

Jenison, Michigan

INTERNATIONAL REFORMED CONFERENCE

June 12, 13, 14, 1990

- Public is invited to all speeches except the Thursday evening program.
- All speeches begin at 9:00 AM; 1:30 PM; 7:30 PM.
- Public is invited to refreshment and fellowship breaks.
- Lunches will be limited to:
foreign delegates, foreign visitors, local delegates,
Synodical delegates,
and visiting Protestant Reformed ministers.
Wives included for all the above.

NOTICE!!

The faculty of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches is pleased and thankful to God to announce to the Churches that Seminarian Mitchell C. Dick has been licensed to speak "a word of edification" in the churches (*The Church Order*, Article 20).

The churches are urged to contact the Rector of the Seminary for their pulpit supply needs so that Seminarian Dick may become known to the congregations and be further prepared for the ministry of the Word.

Prof. Robert D. Decker, Rector