

THE STANDARD BEARER

A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine

... Stripped of all ability to fight with the arm of flesh, Jacob wrestles in prayer and supplication, crying out for a blessing. The end result is that he receives that blessing and is assured of being a "Prince with God," literally "Conqueror with God."

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In This Issue...

The "Purpose" of the RFPA, as it was defined in its Constitution many years ago, is 1) "to witness to the truth contained in the Word of God and expressed in the Three Forms of Unity," and 2) "to reveal false and deceptive views repugnant thereto."

Polemics therefore has its rightful place in *The SB*. There must, in other words, be clear refutation of errors in doctrine and life, a zealous defense of the truth of the Word of God as it has been given us to understand it. A faithful "witness to the truth contained in the Word of God," however, is much more than theological disputation; for there is in the Scriptures, as John Calvin put it, a "perfect rule of a good and happy life." A periodical, the aim of which is to be thoroughly biblical, will therefore have a wide variety of articles, because the Word of God speaks to every situation in life, in order that the man of God may be, for every good work, thoroughly equipped. Scripture, for example, is clear on what characterizes true, fervent prayer. Do you in your prayers "hug" Jesus, by faith, and prevail? For inspiration, in that regard, read, in this issue, "Wrestling with God." Have you lost a loved one...and do you in your present great grief fear that you are losing also your faith? For reassurance, and to learn what are the normal stages of the grieving process, read, in this issue, "God's Work in Our Grief." Or, are you involved in your church's work of evangelism, and do you wonder sometimes to whom exactly we ought to direct our missionary efforts? Read "To Whom Shall We Go?" Do you wonder how recreation, sports, amusements fit in the life of a child of God? Read "Pleasure Madness, Sign of the End."

And that's only a beginning. Our hope is that this and every issue of *The SB* will serve in some small way for the "perfecting of the saints...the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith...unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, 13). □

Meditation

Rev. Jason Kortering

Wrestling with God

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me I pray thee, thy name? And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel; for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh (Genesis 32:24-31).

Jacob wrestled with God!
Have you ever done this?

The thought is both fearful and humbling.

Though the struggle assumed a physical form, its real intent was profoundly spiritual. The sacred history of the Old Testament is God's revelation to us of inner spiritual truth. The angel touched Jacob's thigh; but that touch went much deeper, for it reached his heart. The real wrestling was the cry, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!" With the blessing of God, Jacob could face the impending threat of Esau, and he could function as "Israel," a prince with God and with the power to prevail.

We often wrestle in the night with our prayers and supplications, as we seek Jehovah's blessing.

Peniel is the place of spiritual renewal. It was for Jacob. May it be for each one of us.

Lying in the historical background of this event is the approach of Esau. Jacob never forgot, during all those twenty years he spent with Laban, that he had been forced to leave Canaan because of his own dealing with his brother. He had tricked him by deceiving his blind father in order to secure the birthright blessing. His own mother had counseled him to flee for his life to their relatives in the land of Haran.

Now he was returning. The angel of God had appeared to him in Haran and reminded him of his place in the land of promise. Each step southward brought him closer and closer to Esau. To settle his fear, Jacob had sent his servants to Esau at Mt. Seir, in the land of Edom, to inform him of his return, to assure him that he had wealth of his own and was not interested in

taking anything away from him, and that he sought acceptance on his part. The messengers returned to Jacob with the troubling words, Esau is coming, and with him 400 men, soldiers, equipped to fight.

Quickly Jacob divided his possessions into two bands. The first was arranged as a present for Esau; the second included his family, arranged according to their personal significance to Jacob — the most precious coming at the end for safety. In the event there should be an attack, then, the one farthest removed might escape. At the end was, of course, his beloved Rachel.

Having helped them all to cross the Jabbok River, Jacob remained alone on the other side when it happened. Out of the dark there came a man who wrestled with him. We can divide this wrestling match into two rounds, if you will. The first round consisted of a real physical fight. The Angel assumed a human form, a real physical body. We should take note of the fact that the man wrestled with Jacob, not Jacob with the man. To be sure, Jacob wrestled, but the initiative and degree of resistance was determined by the Angel. Jacob was reacting to the exact amount of opposition the Angel produced. This ended therefore in a standoff. Neither Jacob nor the Angel won. The change came when, about dawn, the Angel touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh and it came out of joint. Jacob realized immediately that he could no longer fight on the level he had done before. Now he changed his methodology. He was a cripple, and the only way he could offer resistance now was to cling to the Angel. He, if you will, gave him a "bear-hug." He circled his arms around him and would not let go. In that position he cried

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out, "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me." This is the spiritual round of the wrestling match. Stripped of all ability to fight with the arm of flesh, Jacob wrestles in prayer and supplication, crying out for a blessing. The end result is that he receives that blessing and is assured of being a "Prince with God," literally "Conqueror with God."

Have you been to Peniel?

The Peniel experience is difficult. It involves *wrestling*, and that is hard work. But it is profitable. For Jacob became Israel. And that says it all.

Who is this Angel? Note he is called in Genesis 32:24 a man. In Genesis 32:30, however, Jacob says, "I have seen God face to face." In Hosea 12:4 we read, "Yea, Jacob had power over the angel and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto him; he found him in Bethel and there he spake with us." If we put this all together, we have God in the flesh, specifically called an Angel, which was the Old Testament designation of Jesus Christ. Jehovah, the God of the covenant, came to Jacob in physical form, the pre-figuration of Jesus.

This is critical in our understanding of this event. If Jesus did not do the fighting, Jacob would have been destroyed in a moment. The same is true for us. We can not wrestle with God and prevail, except it be in the arms of Jesus, and that too by hugging Him by faith.

You see, God came to Jacob to tell him something in this wrestling match. We do well to listen with rapt attention.

The first round of this wrestling match depicted the life of Jacob up to this point. Jacob had tried to supplant Esau, to take his rightful place in the covenant, with the arm of flesh. The significance of the family history that forms the background of this event is this: God is sovereign in saving whom He will in the line of the covenant. Remember, Jacob's mother Rebekah was barren. She and Isaac could not have children. They prayed earnestly and God opened her womb and she conceived twins. While she was carrying them within the

womb, they wrestled with each other. This made her upset. She turned to Jehovah and inquired what this meant? God told her that two nations were conceived within her (according to Romans 9:10-13, two spiritual lines, one elect and the other reprobate, one rooted in God's love and the other in God's hatred). The events connected with their birth confirmed this. For though Esau was born first, Jacob was holding his heel. Hence his name was given, Jacob, heel-holder or supplanter. God said to them, as He says to us, I will establish my covenant. Not all the children of believers are my covenant children. I will gather my seed from among their seed and will do it according to my sovereign elective love.

The family response to this information is significant. Isaac loved Esau for his venison. Esau was an outdoor boy who gave his old father the comforts of the wild. Rebekah loved Jacob, a tender homebody who had spiritual interests. The boys were aware of this divine distinction. Their spiritual differences came into focus through the value which each placed upon the birthright blessing. That blessing had a physical aspect, a double portion of the inheritance was given to the firstborn, as well as leadership of the family upon the death of the father. It also had a spiritual aspect, the Abrahamic blessing of God's favor and love. Esau valued it for the material part, Jacob for the spiritual.

The method Jacob used to obtain it, however, disappoints. Both he and his mother are guilty of taking into their own hand the strategy and the effort to obtain it. Jacob bought it from Esau when the latter was ravenously hungry. Jacob obtained it from his blind father when he, Jacob, posed as Esau and lied to Isaac. It was the arm of flesh that was on the foreground, and in reality they had not obtained it. The threat of Esau loomed before Jacob. Esau was coming with 400 men. Now Jacob wrestles all night with the Angel and does not prevail. Sinful, human efforts to gain the kingdom of heaven by force always fail.

Do you learn that as well? The touch of the thigh of Jacob, reducing him to a cripple, tells us that we must die to the flesh if we are to obtain the victory. In New Testament language, we must crucify the old man with its lust. We must confess our sins and weep for our own unworthiness. For Esau represents the spiritual opposition we face. What Esau was to Jacob, the beast out of the sea and out of the earth, as recorded in Revelation 13, are to us. Out of the apostate church there arises the present-day Esau, the kingdom of Antichrist. The arm of flesh will never obtain the victory over them.

Jesus came to Jacob and touched his thigh. He touched his heart, and thereby produced a change in the struggle. Jacob resorted to hugging him. What a wonderful picture of faith (embracing Jesus Christ). By embracing Jesus Christ, Jacob turned from himself and sought a blessing from God through Jesus Christ. He saw his need for divine blessing. He needed God's assurance of care if he was to deal with Esau. His own arm of strength did not gain the victory. By prayer and supplication he asks God for a blessing in the name of Jesus. What a struggle! How we identify with Jacob. Stripped of self-worth, we die unto ourselves to live unto the Lord.

The outcome shows that God is merciful.

What is your name? It is Jacob, supplanter. But, yes, your name shall be changed to Israel, conqueror with God! In the language of the New Testament, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

Peniel. I have seen God face to face. My life is preserved! That says it all. Jacob really says, "I saw God face to face and I escaped! I deserved to die, but God mercifully met with me and taught me a lesson of my own unworthiness."

Christ makes all the difference.

The sun rose. Yes, Jacob has to face the day. Esau is coming.

Jacob halts upon his thigh. Physically he is in even worse shape than before to meet his mortal enemy. But the amazing thing is that

he is ready. He does not run away; he will face him and prevail. This he did, as subsequent history shows. His strength was in Jesus,

in embracing Him by faith and seeking strength from Almighty God.

Peniel produces change.

Have you been there? Not just once in your life, but many times? We need this daily conversion — the change from Jacob to Israel. □

Editorial

The Approach to Covenant Children (3)

The Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC) view their baptized children as unregenerated. This is their view of their children because the baptism of the children means nothing more than that the children are brought into an outward connection with the covenant. Baptism is not a sign of the living, spiritual ingrafting of the children into Jesus Christ. The baptized children remain outside of Christ, lifeless and unholy, until such time as they may be converted through the gospel.

It is not only the NRC that hold this covenant conception. Other Reformed and Presbyterian churches maintain this view as well. In a little-noticed, but extremely important work, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant: An Historical Study of the Significance of Infant Baptism in the Presbyterian Church in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), Lewis Bevens Schenck points out that this exact view struggled for dominance in the Presbyterian Church in the United States during the 19th century. Schenck writes:

Many influential leaders and a large popular constituency held the historical Reformed doctrine of the significance of infant baptism in a "non-natural sense." Many held that children of the covenant were only "quasi" members of the church. There was no trace or recognition of a vital church relation until, by conscious conversion,

they came "out of the world" In the meantime they were regarded as "unregenerate baptized children." (For this quotation and those that follow from Schenck, cf. The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant, chapter III, pp. 80-103.)

The reason for this view of baptized children in the Presbyterian Church, says Schenck, was a doctrine of the covenant that differed from that of historic Presbyterianism:

Within the Presbyterian Church there were some theologians and leaders who contemplated the covenant of grace in an entirely different way from that which has been presented as the historic doctrine of the church. Those who took this divergent viewpoint believed that there were two aspects of the covenant: one, a spiritual aspect in which the covenant was viewed as a "communion of life"; the other, a legal aspect in which the covenant was regarded as a means to an end. The covenant as a legal relationship was thought to exist as a purely objective arrangement.... Children of believers entered the covenant as a legal relationship, but this did not mean that they were also at once in the covenant as a "communion of life." It did not even mean that the covenant relation would ever come to its full realization in their lives. In other words, it was believed that persons who were presumably unregenerate and unconverted could be in the covenant as a legal agreement.

The theologians who defended this view were mainly those in the church of the South, including Dabney and Thornwell. Charles Hodge and others opposed it strenuously.

Schenck calls this view "an aberration from the Reformed doctrine of children of the covenant and of the significance of infant baptism." It represented "a practical subversion of Presbyterian doctrine, an overshadowing of God's covenant promise."

In the editorial in the previous issue of *The Standard Bearer*, I demonstrated that this view of, and approach to, baptized children, as held by the NRC, is in direct conflict with the Reformed confessions. Schenck points out that viewing baptized children as unregenerate contradicts the Westminster Standards. The advocates of this view in the Presbyterian Church readily admitted that "in the Standards the baptism of an infant had this similarly high spiritual significance (with the baptism of an adult on the basis of his confession of faith — DJE) — that presumably the child was a child of God." Recognizing this, at least one of them "accused the Standards of inconsistency." Others, including the eminent J.H. Thornwell, tried to solve their problem by revising the Presbyterian Book of Discipline. Whereas the Book of Discipline originally stated that all baptized persons are members of the church,

the revision read merely that all baptized members are "under the church's government and training." The difficulty, of course, was not in the Westminster Standards, but in the thinking of those who denied real, spiritual membership in the church to baptized infants.

Not only does the view of baptized children as unsaved bring a church into conflict with the Reformed and Presbyterian creeds, but it also involves her in practices that are indefensible for a Reformed church and injurious to covenant children.

A Reformed church holding this view will allow the children in their teenage years to make a public confession of faith that both church and youth regard as mere intellectual assent to sound doctrine. The confession, it is recognized, does not give expression with the mouth to any living faith in the heart. It does not testify to knowledge of Jesus as Savior and Lord and to heartfelt trust in Jesus for salvation on the part of the young person who is making this confession. This cannot possibly be the nature of the confession because, on the view both of the church and of the young person himself, he is unsaved.

This is the practice of the NRC. The Rev. C. Hegeman, NRC pastor, flatly denies that all those who make confession of faith are required to partake of the Lord's Supper. They merely have "an ecclesiastical right" to come to the Table. The reason why they should keep themselves from the Table, even though they have made confession of faith, is that they do not "know the characteristics of the true life of grace" (*Explanation of the Reformed Doctrine*, 1965, p. 70).

The consistory receives the confession of faith of one who is known to be spiritually dead. The church permits, indeed encourages, young people to confess their faith whose confession includes their admission that they are unconverted.

Dr. C. Steenblok, theologian in the Gereformeerde Gemeenten (Reformed Congregations) in The Netherlands boldly defends the (public) confession of faith of bap-

tized young people who are unregenerated. Even though one cannot make confession of "his personal, saving faith," it *nevertheless remains his obligation as one who was baptized, when he has come to years of discretion, to come to membership in the congregation in the full extent (in volle omvang). Especially Articles 28 and 29 of the Netherlands Confession strongly insist on this. But what then does it mean to make confession of faith in this case? It is a confession of the (true) religion (de religie) that would declare in this way that one embraces the confession of the pure truth, as this is expressed in the Three Forms of Unity, in harmony with the Word of God. It is the declaration that according to his own conviction one intends to live and die by the truth. And it is the declaration that one places himself under the further pure administration of the means of grace in the true church of Christ. Just as baptism puts one in the outward relationship with the covenant and brings him under the administration of the covenant, so making confession (of faith) acknowledges and affirms the institutions of God that are ordained for the adult life in the local, established congregation. To give saving grace is a sovereign work of God, but to pledge oneself, in submission to the Word of God, to the use of all the existing means of grace, in the way of making confession of faith in an objective sense (in objectieve zin), is the calling of one who has been baptized. And this is the way ordained of God for those who are baptized to call for grace and salvation according to God's sovereign good-pleasure. There is, therefore, solid connection between baptism and the confession of faith by the unregenerated* (Rondom Verbond, Roeping en Doop, 1979, pp. 44, 45; my translation of the Dutch).

It is plain from this quotation that Dr. Steenblok approves the public confession of faith by unregenerated young people. There is a place for this in a Reformed church. In fact, this is the calling, presumably from God, of unregenerated, but baptized, young people. Such a confession is merely an intellectual assent to the doctrines that the church has taught them in catechism and a promise to use the

means of grace, i.e., to attend church. And such a confession of faith is the unregenerated young person's calling upon God for the grace and salvation that he presently lacks.

That this practice cannot be defended on the basis of Reformed truth should be evident to all. No unregenerated person, whether baptized or unbaptized, has the ability to make confession of faith. No unregenerated person, whether baptized or unbaptized, has the desire to make confession of faith. No unregenerated person, whether baptized or unbaptized, has the right to make confession of faith. For an unregenerated person to make confession of faith is grossest hypocrisy. The unregenerated is an enemy of God, His Christ, and the truth (Rom. 8:5-8). He does not desire God: "There is none that seeketh after God" (Rom 3:11). He cannot desire God: "They who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8). To affirm that the unregenerated person can make a confession of faith, which confession is an expression of a longing for the saving grace of God and a calling upon God for covenant fellowship with Christ, is principally the heresy of the doctrine of free will.

Making confession of faith is the activity of the converted, and therefore born-again, child of God. It is the confession with the mouth of that which one truly believes in the heart (Rom. 10:9, 10). It is the public declaration of one's personal understanding of, and wholehearted agreement with, the sound doctrine set forth in the Reformed confessions, to be sure. The first question put to her confessing young people by the Reformed church is, "Do you acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian Church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?" But this essential knowledge is such knowledge of the truth as loves that truth and as is accompanied by a heartfelt, Spirit-worked confidence that the Jesus revealed in this truth is one's own Savior (Heid. Cat., Q. 21).

A "confession of faith" that is nothing more than objective assent to certain doctrines is the very confession that devils might make (James 2:19). Surely, the Reformed church may not permit such confessions, much less encourage

them. Rather, she throws up her hands in horror, if ever she discovers that this is the kind of confession that one of the church's youth is making. To all who come to the consistory room to make confession of faith so that they may "come to

membership in the congregation in the full extent," the elders must put the requirement, clearly and firmly, that Philip put to the Ethiopian eunuch, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" (Acts 8:37). □ *(to be continued)* — DJE

The Day of Shadows Rev. John Heys

That Wonderful Covenant (4)

That wonderful covenant which God eternally decreed, and in time made known to those whom He chose in Christ to be citizens in the kingdom of heaven and to be members of the body of Christ, was presented three times in this department called The Day of Shadows.

This was possible because it pleased God to make that covenant known to us in the Old Testament and New Testament, which are rightly called Holy Writ. It was sometimes spoken directly by God, but also presented through a man to whom that truth was revealed, and in order that we today might know that He established this covenant that contains some wonderful promises. Many men were used from Moses through the apostle John to write books that number no fewer than sixty-six and present a wonderful covenant of our God with very precious and comforting promises.

That He made such a covenant the almighty God made known the very day that man fell into sin and became worthy of the very opposite of what is promised in that covenant. We can never overemphasize that pronoun "I" in what is called the Mother-Promise, namely,

Genesis 3:15. The almighty, unchangeable God said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." It is not a promise of what we will do to flee from under the curse which we received because of our sinful work. The gospel, the good news, begins with God's word as to what HE will do. Here very powerfully we are instructed that those who are going to be saved do not have to fulfill a condition, as we pointed out in the previous installment of these articles on That Wonderful Covenant. God's covenant promises us what *He* will do to spiritually dead sinners who cannot yet want what He promises. We ought to take note of the fact that our covenant God begins with that truth, namely, I will do this before you even want it. This He promised to those who strove to escape punishment by fig-leaf aprons, and thus by their own works. He promises covenant blessings to those who tried to hide from Him, not run unto Him in sorrow because there was yet a little love for Him in their hearts. Let us never forget how God began when He told the devil how we would *be* saved, not how *we* could save ourselves by fulfilling a condition. The simple truth we must hold on to is that God saves spiri-

tually dead people who hate Him before He begins salvation in them. Enmity against Satan means love of God. There can be no neutrality. It is always, in every work we do, as far as its spiritual significance is concerned, either hatred against God or hatred against Satan. Did God not tell Adam, and still tells us today, that when we disobey Him we reveal spiritual DEATH? "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). When we die our hearts stop beating. And our hearts cannot by us be made to begin once again to pump our blood through our bodies. Well, that is what God told Adam and us. Clearly He told Adam and us that if Adam ate of that fruit, he and we could not even want to have our hearts beat in love to Him again. HE would have to do that; and in His grace He does it.

Yes, it is true that through Paul He wrote in Philippians 2:12, 13 that we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, because God works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. But take note of these words. That we must work *out* means that it is already *in* us. Paul says that too. It is God that worketh it *IN* us and calls us to work it out. We must already have that salvation begun in us or we cannot even want it. We have already been

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born again, or we do not even want that new life. And when our almighty God told Adam and Eve, by letting them hear what He said to Satan, that He would make us hate Satan and his works, He told us what HE is going to do. He not only gives us what we do not want, but (and get this fact and hold on to it tightly) He promises to His people, as represented by Adam and Eve, that which they do not even yet know exists! Adam and Eve did not have the slightest idea that God had eternally decreed a covenant, will, and a testament, with that glorious promise of making us love Him and live with him in a more wonderful life, and with far more intimate fellowship with Him in the new Jerusalem than Adam enjoyed before he died spiritually. Yet our covenant God told them what was in His covenant. He would change them, not offer a change to them and give it if they asked for it. The conditional theology of Arminianism — so widely proclaimed today — denies the fact that Adam died spiritually that day, and that he had no spiritual life to hand down to any of his descendants. It maintains that God depends upon man to have His covenant promises fulfilled, rather than that man depends upon God for every bit of his spiritual life as well as every bit of his physical life.

In order to get to the bottom of our salvation, and in order to understand and see God's deepest purpose in making His covenant with those rich promises of bringing us where we can never, no never, sin again, we ought to turn to Isaiah 43:21. There we read, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." Get that! The believers, those born again, are completely different from Adam and Eve after they ate of the forbidden fruit and tried to save themselves from punishment by fig leaves — that is, by their own works — and tried to hide from God. This is so because God formed them, and did so before they even knew what His covenant promises were.

The awesome truth here is also that HE re-formed us — that is

what is meant when He forms us for Himself while we were in a devilish form which was realized by Satan — for HIMSELF. That is, for His own glory! And by all means take hold of that last part: God forms us for Himself in order that we may show forth His praises. His praise and His desire to receive our praise is behind the work of salvation which He realized in His Son. He established that wonderful covenant for His own praise and glory. There we have the deep purpose of our salvation. It is realized so that we do show forth and are able to show forth His praise. We are saved so that we may sing His praises, want to do so, and can do so! There you have the deepest reason for the covenant which He drew up and signed. There you have the purpose of God's covenant. He forms us for Himself. He planned and designed our salvation so that He might be praised by us constantly in the New Jerusalem.

And by all means get that last part of what He said through Isaiah. He will form us for Himself so that we show forth His praises. The idea is not simply in order that He may be praised by having His work a success. Rather the idea is that we consciously and willingly praise Him for having formed us so that we could and do serve Him with heart and mind and soul and strength. The deep purpose of our salvation is His praise. He drew up covenant promises and causes them to be fulfilled completely to have rational, moral creatures sing and say that He is God. As God He delights to hear that. He does not need us, but He made us so that through us He might cause His glory to shine beautifully through creatures made in His own image.

The Scriptures present that truth to us. God Himself moved men to write the Scriptures so that His praise may shine forth. And in all preaching must the truth of Isaiah 43:21 be expressed. The rising sun every morning, the twinkling stars, the beautiful mountains, and the gardens of flowers show forth His praises. He designed them and made them. But He made *man*, and

saved him, in order that *man* might praise Him with heart and lips. God's virtues of almighty power and of infinite wisdom that made the world do praise Him. But, O, let us take hold of it, our salvation so wonderfully and deeply reveals His goodness, His mercy, His love, and His grace which the earthly, material creatures do not display. He made us to show forth that love, mercy, and grace, that wisdom and covenant faithfulness, so that we would consciously and willingly cry out with the psalmist, "O God, how good thou art!" (Ps. 73:1). With the psalmist let us say, "I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Ps. 139:14). He saved us and drew up that covenant so that a people would be brought forth that knows right well His love, mercy, and grace, but also His wisdom, almighty power, and faithfulness. When we praise Him for it in the new Jerusalem the fruit of His covenant will praise Him fully in the life of every covenant believer.

The book of Psalms presents so wonderfully His praises and calls us to bless Him. "The heavens declare his glory," we read in Psalm 19:1. The reason for this is then presented: "The firmament showeth forth his handiwork." And although the unbelievers will not praise Him, what they see through their telescopes, through their journey to the moon, and experience through their satellites does display God's glory. And we are saved to proclaim it especially because of that wondrous work of saving us by the blood and Spirit of His own Son. His covenant promises us (and realizes the promises) that we with the angels sing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord" (Is. 6:3). The salvation which He designed and realized by the blood of His Son in our flesh presents works, thoughts, and desires of God that will bring forth His praise in the new Jerusalem that will never come to an end. Then all that are there will "sing a new song to Jehovah for the wonders He has wrought."

When that Son came in our flesh the angels cried out in the hearing of the shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest." Paul, writing to the Ephesians, expresses that praise. For he wrote in Ephesians 1:5, 6, "having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." But turn also to

what Peter wrote. In I Peter 2:9 we find these words: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

Showing forth His praises we are doing what He predestinated us to do. And all this we will do because He eternally decreed this in His sovereign and gracious covenant.

That He promises all His elect, and that He realizes fully in them. Let this be your song then:

All that I am I owe to Thee,
Thy wisdom, Lord, hath
fashioned me;
I give my Maker thankful
praise,
Whose wondrous works my
soul amaze.

Psalter # 383:1 □

Guest Article

Rev. Wayne Bekkering

God's Work In Our Grief

Grief is the keen suffering that one goes through because of an affliction or loss. It can be looked at as God's way of healing a broken heart.

Grief is universal and natural. Sooner or later everyone has a time of grief in his life. We want to explore the pattern in grief, our dealing with grief as Christians, and God's work in our grief.

Most people who are hurting, no matter what the cause, go through a similar grieving pattern. On the other hand, each person's loss and style of coping is unique.

Grief is usually thought of only in terms of a loss through the death of a loved one. However, any significant loss may cast one into grief even if one does not expect it. Some other losses that may be followed by grief can be mentioned. When one finds out that he or one close to him has a terminal illness such as cancer, the process of grief may begin. Serious injury that has long-range effects on one's life can cause grief — for example, if one is

badly injured in a car crash, so that disfigurement or paralysis occurs. The loss of one's job, or a forced retirement, can cause one to go through grief. Loss of property, such as a house fire, a car theft, or a burglary of one's home can cause grieving. Divorce is another loss experience that usually causes grief.

We do not want to look at these losses and grief apart from God's gracious work in our lives. Affliction is for our benefit, even though it hurts. In our great need, as Christians, we flee to our heavenly Father for help. God commands us in Psalm 50:15, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

We are going to look at grief as having three stages (though others have broken the grieving process into six or more steps). And we want to stress from the outset that the stages are indistinct. Not everyone moves through them at the same rate or with the same degree of intensity. Grief is as personal and individual as we are. We also want to stress that there is a pattern in the grieving process, a pattern which, if it is known and rec-

ognized, can be helpful and reassuring to the one going through grief. Sometimes those in grief can fear that they are losing their mind or their faith.

The first stage of grief is the initial shock, especially in the case of a sudden loss. Usually the shock, with numbness, lasts for a period of minutes to a day, but sometimes longer. During this time one may say over and over, "Oh, no...I can't believe it." One ought not to be embarrassed by his inability to function properly during this shock stage, but he ought to see God's provision in this shielding us from the intensity of a painful loss.

We must recognize that grief is a major trauma in our life and in the lives of others. A broken heart is a serious wound. It is equivalent to or greater than a broken leg or major surgery. Grief must not be minimized or ignored, but it must be allowed to take its course in our lives. The child of God recognizes God's work in grief. The psalmist says in Psalm 39:9, "I was silent, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." The child of God also expects and finds comfort in

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his deepest grief. David records one such prayer in Psalm 61:1, 2: "Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer...when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

The second stage of grief may be called the painful, longing stage. It overlaps the first stage, or it can begin days after the death or loss, and reaches its peak between the second and the fourth week. It subsides gradually after that. The manifestations of this stage are intense for about three months, progressively declining over the next six to twelve months.

The most prominent aspect of this stage is the recurrent, wave-like experience of tearful longing for the deceased, associated with thoughts, memories, or mental images of him or her. These waves are often triggered by any reminder of the departed one. Special occasions, such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays, and anniversaries frequently provoke such episodes. These wave-like episodes tend to be especially intense and painful at night, when the distractions of the day are removed. In addition to preoccupation with memories and visual images of the deceased, about half of mourning spouses and parents have illusions of seeing or feeling the presence of the departed one.

During this second stage there is the intense struggle to come to grips with the reality of one's situation after the loss, and to be reconciled with God's way. The pain of grief often produces anger — anger against the circumstances and causes of one's loss. Sometimes Christians are angry and disappointed with God. This ought not to be taken as a loss of one's faith or as committing the unpardonable sin.

Job, the man who was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, was brought to grief by God. In Job 2:13b we read, "...that his grief was very great." In Job's great grief he cursed the day that he was born and asked why he had not been born dead (Job 3:1-11). God patiently and powerfully answered Job in chapters 38-41, where He re-

counts all His wonderful works. Job's humble and submissive response is recorded in Job 42:1-6.

Another example of a godly man, who in the midst of grief misjudged God's work and way, is found in Genesis 42:36. Jacob had sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy grain because of the famine in Canaan. They returned with the grain, but without Simeon and with a message that Benjamin must come back to Egypt with them. "And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." Jacob was wrong. These things were *not* against him; but he did not know all the good that God had purposed for him, even through the way that caused his grief.

One more example, from the Bible, of a godly man who was disappointed with God and thus became angry is Jonah, who did not like God's direction to go to Nineveh and cry against it. After a detour, and after being rescued by a big fish, he went to Nineveh and preached as God had commanded him. Much to Jonah's dismay, the people of Nineveh repented because of God's word against them. That displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. He besought the Lord, "Take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." God challenged Jonah, "Doest thou well to be angry?" Jonah was looking at his life and situation only from his own viewpoint. God used the gourd vine, and Jonah's pity for it, to help Jonah to see God's viewpoint, and God's pity for Nineveh.

God graciously helps His grieving people come to an acceptance of their painful loss. There is help and hope for those who grieve. Even though we sorrow; we sorrow not as others who have no hope (I Thess. 4:13).

The third stage is the time of reconciliation and recovery. This usually takes about a year, sometimes shorter, sometimes longer. During this stage there is a gradual regaining of interest in the ordinary

activities of one's life. The gloominess of grief's night gives way to the dawning of a new day in which there is again pleasure, joy, and smiles. There will, of course, be occasional bouts of painful longings and memories, but they will gradually fade.

God's work in our grief is powerful. Through the situations that have caused us grief, God teaches us things, about Him and us, that we could not learn in any other way. He tests our faith in Him. He tries our trust that His way is good for us, even in the deep way of death. God puts us before the question, "Do you love me more than these?"

One Christian lady testified that she had learned some very important things through her grief at the loss of her husband. She learned a new appreciation for the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is the very ground of our faith and hope. Since Christ is risen we have the blessed assurance that we and our believing loved ones will be raised unto life everlasting. Secondly, she gained a new interest in heaven. Heaven, she said, now seems nearer and dearer, because her husband was there. Thirdly, she learned something new of the reality of God's presence in her life. In the time of grief God was there. Now she is without her husband, but not alone.

Finally, a word of caution to us who would help and comfort those who grieve. First of all, recognize that when our friends and family are hurting, we are hurting also. The danger is that we will find things that help us, and then say them to the grieving ones, without first asking ourselves the question, "Will this be a help to *them*?" The truth is that our hurt is very small compared to those with the loss.

What our grieving ones need is for us to be there with them in their great need. We need to listen. If they want to talk — we listen. If they want to be silent — we listen. Listening is done not only with our ears, but also with our hearts. Our listening will sometimes tell us it is better to say nothing to the grieving one for a while. Being there to

support them may be enough. Our love and concern can be communicated with a handshake or a hug.

We often feel so inadequate to help others in grief that we may come to the conclusion that it may be better if we don't visit them. Sometimes close friends of those in grief stay away for selfish reasons, such as, they are hurting also, they are too embarrassed to meet their friends in great distress, or they don't know what to do or say. Be assured of this, that those in grief

need the presence of friends and family for support! Go to them for their sake! Here is where the selfless character of Christian love is shown.

Remember that death is not the only source of grief in our lives, or in the lives of our friends and families. We need to be sensitive to others' losses as well.

Remember to remember those who have suffered loss. We have seen that the grief process usually takes about a year. During this

time, words of encouragement help. A phone call or a visit, a card or a letter, will be appreciated. The written word is often best because it can be read and reread. Cards are alright, but a handwritten note is best to express your love and sympathy. One man said that when he got cards he only read the name at the bottom, but he read every note or letter. Part of God's work in our grief is to move others to show His love to the grieving. □

A WORD FITLY SPOKEN

Rev. Dale Kuiper

STEWARDSHIP

Our New Testament words *steward* and *stewardship* come from a Greek word, the parts of which mean "house" and "manager." A steward is one who labors in the house of another, manages that house as to its business and affairs, with the calling to work for the welfare and advancement of his master. Joseph was such an overseer in Potiphar's household, and Chuza was steward in Herod's house.

Three things stand out in this matter of stewardship. First, God is the great Master of the universe, the absolute Owner of all that He has made. The cattle on a thousand hills, the silver and the gold, all things belong to God. Without relinquishing this ownership, God has given to all men a certain station in life and a certain amount of abilities, wealth, children, and opportunities. With the distribution of these things comes the calling to use them to the glory of God and the advancement of His great cause. And, finally, there comes the day of accounting or reckoning, when every man will give an account of his stewardship. These three points regarding stewardship are made vividly in the parables contained in Matthew 25:14ff. and Luke 16:1ff.

In general, therefore, all men stand in a steward-relation to God in the household of His creation. They have all received many gifts which are to be used in the service of God and His kingdom. And God will judge every man, as steward, according as his works have been, whether they were good or evil.

But Scripture speaks of the stewardship of saints in two particular areas. Ministers are stewards of the mysteries of God! (I Cor. 4:1). God has entrusted many mysteries to His ministers, truths which man could never attain unto had not God revealed them to us in Christ. There is the mystery of His will (Eph. 1:9), and in that will of God the mysteries of the incarnation (I Tim. 3:16), of the union of Christ and His church (Eph. 5:36), of regeneration (John 3:8), of the resurrection (I Cor. 15:51), and of the kingdom of God (Mark 4:11). Ministers are called to work with these mysteries of the gospel, teaching them and preaching them, calling to faith regarding them. And they must not change those mysteries in any way! They must not fail to proclaim them in their fullness, in their relation to one another, and in their application to the present day. God will ask every minister in the last day, "What did you do with My mysteries which I have showed to you? What did you do with all the details of My counsel that are revealed in Scripture and you were called to preach? Were you ashamed of these things, or did you proclaim them with joy and conviction?"

I Peter 4:10 makes clear that every saint is a steward of the manifold grace of God. God has revealed His saving grace in Christ to us and in us. That grace is rich and many-sided. But that grace is not to be hid or selfishly kept to one's self; it is to be ministered to one another in charity, in hospitality, in words of comfort. And the purpose is that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ. In the last day, God will ask of every member of His church, "What did you do with the grace that I showered upon you in My Son? What did you do with the many opportunities I sent your way to minister to those in need? How did you confess and live My manifold grace?"

The outstanding characteristic of a steward is faithfulness. Yes, we ought to be cheerful and content as we go about our labors in the kingdom of God. But it is required of stewards that they be found *faithful*. That is the chief thing. Faithful to God in Whose house we labor. Faithful to God Who is worthy of our best and far more. Faithful to God Who has saved us from the wrath to come by giving us a place in His covenant house. □

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Taking Heed To The Doctrine

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

To Whom Shall We Go?

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, nor into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not;

But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

And as ye go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Matthew 10:5-7

Christ has commanded us, Mark 16:15, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"; but in real and practical terms, what does that mean for us personally as Christians, as ministers, and as individual members of the church of Christ? To whom precisely are we to direct our evangelical and missionary efforts? To whom are we to go?

The Ministry of Jesus

In many ways the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as He lived and worked on this earth was a missionary endeavor, a microcosmic example of what mission work ought to be.

During his lifetime Jesus did His work in the land of Canaan, and confined His efforts to the Jewish people there, but in such a way that His life would form a pattern

which could be followed by His disciples as they carried on His efforts to the ends of the earth, and to the conclusion of all history. He never seemed to stay long in one place, but moved from here to there throughout the land. Nor did He limit His attention just to His followers. As He said to His disciples, Mark 1:38, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for therefore came I forth."

But Jesus' time on earth was limited; and He was hardly able to be everywhere. On at least two different occasions, when His own abilities had to be extended, He called His disciples to Him and sent them forth into those cities which He could not Himself reach.

In the first instance it was just the twelve; and He gave to them extensive instructions, Matthew 10:5-23:

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.... And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.... Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.... And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to

the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. Within this we find a number of things worthy of note:

1. The goal was to cover the whole of Canaan, to go to every city in the land, prior to the coming of Jesus Christ in His glorified power, that is, prior to His return in the Spirit on Pentecost. We are not given details, and rather little is recorded of this activity in the Bible, but it would seem there was a great deal more of coming and going by the disciples while Jesus was living than we ordinarily think. It must have been pursued with purpose all through Jesus' ministry.

2. As Jesus sent His disciples He told them what to say, "And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The command seemed simple enough, but its meaning was profound and its implications extensive. The New Testament church, that for which all of the Old Testament era had been but a preparation, was about to spring into existence. Just what that meant, the disciples themselves hardly knew, except that they could sense its impending wonder in every word and deed of Jesus. Certainly they had none of our understanding. Their concept could only have been most vague, much as ours is of the glory of heaven, which we believe but hardly understand. Still, they knew it was coming; and they knew the spiritual principles upon which it was to be built. Jesus was always explaining it to them, as in the Sermon on the

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Mount; and as much as they could, by the power of the Spirit, the opportunity was now theirs to explain it to others.

3. Furthermore, Jesus told them how to go about this. They were to bring the Word with a sensitivity to the response of the hearers: "And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet...." Their preaching of the gospel was to be a matter of willing persuasion, not a matter of force or imposition. Each and every one was to be warned, and with that their responsibility would be established; but persuasion is more than a mere rhetorical art. It must come from within and not without. For such willing response from Spirit-moved hearts they should look; and upon such they should concentrate their efforts.

4. This activity was to be pursued with utmost care and discernment. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." There is a certain defenselessness and vulnerability about the children of God as they go forth with the gospel; theirs is not to use the weapons and forces of the world. They must present themselves with an openness which can readily be taken advantage of and abused. And yet in this they must not be fools; the deceptions of the wicked are to be watched and deflected lest they fall out to the harm of the gospel.

5. But the battle is there; the dangers are real; and inevitably many are hurt. The disciples saw with their own eyes what wickedness did to Jesus; and it would be no different for them, nor for anyone who continues in teaching His Word. The hatred of God's Word is intense; and those who bear it will certainly feel its sting.

The Responsibility He Leaves

But what does that mean specifically for us?

It means, to begin with, that we have a responsibility to see to it that the truth of the Word of God is distributed as broadly as we possibly can. God has given to us the Reformed faith in a tradition which is remarkably rich and pure. This is not something that is to be kept to ourselves and to be used simply for our own well-being — no more than a light is to be hid under a bushel basket. Far too rich for that, it must be broadcast through every means available to us, to every possible corner of the earth, with a deep sense of urgency. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). Our responsibility lies here; and for it we must work.

Nor is the message any different. Now as then it is, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The forces of Christ, His angels, His Spirit, and His Word, are pressing down upon this world as they have done ever since His ascension into glory, and even more than they did while He was physically here on earth. This we must feel ourselves; and this we must seek to convey to others: II Corinthians 6:2, "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." World history is pressing on under His complete control; and there is no time for tarrying. Personally the time may come at any moment for any one; and for the world as a whole the end is always imminent. The day is well spent, and we must work before the night comes.

Our doing of this, moreover, must be with deep sensitivity. On the one hand, we must be fully aware of our own limitations. It is not for us to try to determine beforehand to whom the gospel ought to be brought, and to whom not. This is God's decision, not ours; and to try to do so will inevitably involve the laying down of conditions of judgment to which

we have no right. We are to preach to all, and sincerely we must seek to do just that.

Nevertheless, once the gospel is brought we are to show a sharp sensitivity to the results. There are those who clearly have no interest and are completely indifferent; to such God does not require that we give extensive concern. Forcing ourselves on them will not change their hearts. In turn, there are those whose response will be uncertain; they show interest without a clear willingness to change their lives. With such we must continue to work as long as we can, but with the realization that only God can finally move their souls; and it must be left in His hand. But above all our concern must be with those who show true signs of repentance and a longing to come to Christ. These are those with whom we are to have our chief concern; and to whom our greatest attention must be given, teaching, guiding, and encouraging them in the way of godly life.

But in all of this we must show great care. Jesus warned, "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." The defenselessness with which the child of God must go forth is very real. When one comes as a Christian, he comes with a kindness and openness which can readily be abused, and often is. People are not honest, they are not kind by nature; but they can be quick to pretend. Not uncommonly one will be used for a time, and then turned upon and taken advantage of in return. It is the price a Christian pays — and joyfully, for they did the same to our Lord. Nevertheless, we are to be discerning as well. There is not call for the Christian to expose the gospel unnecessarily to abuse.

While we must be willing to bear the hurt personally, we must do all we can to preserve the cause of Christ from misuse and shame. Jesus never allowed the gospel to be disgraced, and neither should we.

What we must not forget is that we are involved in a battle which is real and great, as Jesus said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." From a hu-

man point of view it is quite unequal, even unfair; and we will be assailed, we will be reviled, we will be hurt. But the vision is magnifi-

cent, the victory is sure, the glory is great. And the cause will be finished when the last of God's elect have been gathered in. Let us

never forget, Romans 8:37, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." □

Searching The Scriptures

Rev. Gise VanBaren

Self Evaluation

Read and study Philippians 3:1-11.

"Finally," says the apostle. It marks not the conclusion of his teachings but rather the introduction of another element or thought in the epistle. He commands them to rejoice in the Lord. This spiritual characteristic must be evident in one delivered from sin and death. Such a one can rejoice because of the glorious work of Christ for him on the cross. To these joyous ones, he has something serious to discuss, something presented to them before, that requires emphasis. But Paul would have it understood that he presents this matter, of course, in deep love for the church. He addresses them as "my brethren," another indication of the great personal attachment Paul had with the church at Philippi.

In rejoicing in the Lord, one rejects the false doctrine of the Judaizers. Paul had warned against these heretics before. Now he will do that again. Repetition is not a tedious thing for Paul when he knows the need of that — for this will prepare the church to resist the false doctrine.

Paul uses strong language in speaking of those who were teaching the need of circumcision also for the church of the New Testament. He warns of "dogs" — not the loving, affectionate house pet,

but the voracious, mean dog of the street (so common in Paul's day). Usually it was the Gentile who was called a "dog" by the Jews — but here Paul labels Judaizers in the same way. These seek not the welfare of the church, but would tear and destroy. They are "evil workers," workers indeed who put forth great effort. But these seek to work not the benefit of the church, but its destruction. They are of the "circision." Note the play upon the word "circumcision." The "circision" is the tearing of the flesh without any spiritual profit. The Judaizers would insist on the cutting of the flesh but not a cutting of the heart, mind, and ear. These are wretched, miserable leaders who deceive and harm.

Paul insists in verse 3 that he and the faithful church are "of the circumcision." Though many of them, including Paul, may have been circumcised, these considered themselves to be "of the circumcision" in a spiritual sense (read Romans 4). Spiritually, these properly worship God first of all, and do this in the way of rejoicing in Jesus Christ. All such have "no confidence in the flesh." Their salvation rests wholly in the blood of Calvary — not in any way in the works of the flesh.

In verses 4-6 Paul presents his own "credentials." Are there any who would boast in themselves? Well, Paul could outdo them all. If salvation were of the flesh, Paul would have been able to attain salvation sooner than any other. He

points to his own circumcision the eighth day. That would be according to the requirements of the Mosaic law. Some who were converted from the Gentiles unto Judaism would not be able to make that claim. Paul was of the stock of Israel — not only a son of Abraham, nor only of Isaac, but of Israel. He was of the tribe of Benjamin — a matter which elicits pride on the part of some who were such. He was a Hebrew to top all Hebrews. And he came from the sect of the Pharisees. In fact, he was an outstanding practitioner of their precepts. He had been known as one who kept the law perfectly. He was zealous above others his age and of his sect. Outwardly, and according to the judgment of men, Paul had "attained." He was judged "blameless."

There was probably no other who could match the credentials of the apostle. He had showed his zeal by his presence at the stoning of Stephen. He had been on his way to Damascus in order to find Christians there who could be persecuted. But then he was turned to the light of the gospel through the special revelation of Christ to him.

Now Paul has a completely different perspective on those things which had happened to him. There was a time when he prided himself in his own attainments. Now he understood that what had seemed so important was in fact nothing — and less than nothing. All of his accomplishments are

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"loss" and "dung." These works and honors of men are as garbage or refuse. Paul recognizes these as utterly useless. All these accomplishments put together can not serve to pay for even one sin. Three times Paul insists that he counts the material things to be "loss." Not only did all this *not* gain anything for the apostle, but they detracted from that which he thought he had attained. When one places his trust in himself and in his own works, he deceives himself. These very works of men only add to one's condemnation before God.

Paul sees rather the glory of the "knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He has the knowledge of true deliverance through the cross. Paul had emphasized in all the churches that he determined to know nothing among them save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:2). That knowledge involved the fact that he himself was the "chief of sinners." He knew that nothing less than the blood of the Son of God in our flesh could deliver him. His knowledge of Jesus was also a very personal thing: "My Lord," he says. All things he willingly relinquishes that he may win (gain) Christ. He himself did not first receive the Christ, but Christ came to Paul. Christ called and appointed him to serve as apostle to the Gentiles. Paul gained Christ through the direct intervention of Christ Himself.

Now Paul understands that it was not his own "righteousness" (vs. 9) but the righteousness of God in Christ by faith that counts. Paul believes the promise of God in Christ. He knows that Christ has cleansed him of all sin and has adopted him as His own.

Verse 10 presents a beautiful statement of that faith. Paul knows Christ personally. He sees the success of Christ's work. There is the power of Christ's resurrection. In resurrection, Christ shows that He fully satisfied the justice of God on behalf of His people. He could not arise unless full payment had been made for sin. Christ's resurrection has the "power" to raise all of His people also from the grave and de-

liver them from the wrath of God.

There is also that "fellowship of his sufferings." The Christian can not suffer in order to atone for sins as Christ did. But he suffers, as Christ did, for righteousness' sake. Those who hated Christ, also hate all those who belong to Christ. Many, including Paul himself according to tradition, were also put to death by the hands of wicked men. All such suffer with Christ and because of union to Christ.

Likewise, these are "conformed unto his death." In Romans 6:4ff. we are reminded that we become dead to sin through Christ's crucifixion. There is death to our sinfulness and evil deeds. His death results in the godly walk of His people.

The glorious result is that we attain to the resurrection of the dead. "If by any means..." does not express doubt about this outcome, but indicates that in every way we shall surely enjoy the benefits of Christ's resurrection: new life now, and the literal resurrection of our bodies in that day of Christ's return.

What is earthly attainment through man's striving compared to the blessed fruits obtained by Christ's perfect work on the cross? Truly, in the cross of Christ I must glory.

QUESTIONS:

1. Does "finally" mean that Paul intended to stop writing at this point — only to change his mind and write some 43 more verses?
2. Paul speaks of "rejoicing" (vs. 2). Where else does Scripture speak of rejoicing or joy?
3. What is the reason or basis for true joy?
4. Why is repetition of a good point advantageous?
5. What is the significance of "dogs" (vs. 2)?
6. In what other passages does Paul speak of circumcision and its value or lack thereof?
7. Can you find references to "spiritual" circumcision of the heart, etc. in Scripture?
8. In what ways might we today show "confidence in the flesh"?
9. Why might Paul take pride in being of the tribe of Benjamin?

10. Find the accounts (3), in the book of Acts, of Paul's conversion.

11. What was the teaching of the Pharisees?

12. What is "righteousness"? How is it obtained?

13. Find Scriptural passages which speak of the righteousness which the Christian must seek.

14. In what ways do we today have the "fellowship of his sufferings"?

15. When do we attain to the resurrection of the dead?

16. What is the great chapter which speaks of the resurrection body? □

The Mystery of Providence

O wondrous wheel of providence,
Held in Jehovah's hand;
Mysterious to the sons of sense,
Moved by divine command.

Each of time's changes, like a
spoke,
Proceeds from God, its source;
Each fills its station, none are
broke,
All aid its wondrous course.

Its circle reaches earth's wide
bound,
Its axis is God's will;
On His decrees it must go round,
Till He shall say, Be still.

Let Atheists vainly talk of chance,
I would this wheel adore,
Which rules and guides each cir-
cumstance,
Which angels can't explore.

Through seas, o'er hills it makes its
way,
Though earth and hell oppose;
'Tis hastening on the last great day,
Its wonders to disclose.

— SB, April 1, 1932

A Cloud of Witnesses Prof. Herman Hanko

Patrick, Missionary to Ireland

Our Lord gave commandment to the whole church when, just before His ascension into heaven, He said to His disciples, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The early history of the church of Christ is an exciting and moving history of her missionary enterprise. Scripture itself records for us how the gospel was brought to Judea, Samaria, and the entire Mediterranean world, so that the church was spread throughout the Roman Empire. The early annals of the church provide us with information of how courageous missionaries moved beyond the Mediterranean world into darkest Europe to bring God's Word to the many barbarian tribes who had moved into Europe and settled there.

Through the labors of the church the whole of Europe was Christianized, so that it was changed from darkest heathendom and paganism and became the cradle of Christianity. Although the work covered many centuries, it had its lowly beginnings in the lives of men who sacrificed all for the cause of the gospel.

This is the story of one such missionary: Patrick, missionary to Ireland.

Not a great deal is known of Patrick's life, and, indeed, many myths have been constructed concerning his labors. What is certain is what he himself wrote in his *Confessions*. He was born in Britain somewhere around the year 389. Although the precise place of his birth is not known, he was born in a small village somewhere on the western coast of Britain, across the Irish Sea from Ireland.

At the time of his birth, Christianity had already come to Britain, probably through Christian soldiers in the Roman army; for Britain formed the northernmost boundary of the Roman Empire. The Romans had succeeded in establishing in southern Britain a rather advanced civilization, and, through the spread of Christianity, many Romans in Britain were Christians. Within the sphere of the influence of Roman control, Patrick was born.

He tells us in his *Confessions* that his father, Calpornus, was a deacon and a local magistrate, and his grandfather was a priest in the church of that time. He received some Christian instruction, although he leaves the impression that this instruction was meager and unsatisfactory. He learned only the rudiments of the Christian faith, but true faith in God had not yet found a place in his heart.

At the age of sixteen, tragedy struck his home. Raiders from across the Irish Sea, crude and illiterate barbarians, raided the coast where Patrick lived. We can only imagine the suffering and pain which was the lot of the inhabitants when thousands of young men, including Patrick, were captured and sold as slaves in Ireland.

In the providence of God, however, this captivity, which lasted about six years, was to be Patrick's preparation for his great work as missionary to the Irish. He was sold to a farmer who assigned him the task of taking care of cattle. It was during this time of loneliness and suffering that Patrick was converted. He speaks of it himself.

*After I arrived in Ireland, every day I fed cattle, and frequently during the day I prayed; more and more the love and fear of God burned, and my faith and my spirit were strengthened, so that in one day I said as many as a hundred prayers, and nearly as many in the night.*¹

Although the time there, spent in loneliness and grief, was a time of suffering, it gave him a knowledge of the Irish language then used, and it instilled within his heart a love for these crude and heathenish people among whom he was forced to live.

After six years of captivity, he escaped from his master and, after a perilous journey over land and sea, arrived safely in Britain.² He speaks of his captivity as an interruption of his education, which he now pursued with some diligence.

He could not escape, however, the thoughts of the Irish from whom he had fled. He considered the Ireland in which he was a slave to be as far west as one was able to go, and on the very edge of the world. In his *Letter to Coroticus* he declared that he had been "predestinated to preach the Gospel even to the ends of the earth." He promised never to leave the people whom the Lord had "purchased in the farthest ends of the earth." Referring to Matthew 28:19, 20, he "sees his work as culminating the

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expansion of the Faith begun by the Apostles, to be followed by the coming of the end. He gives thanks to God, who heard his prayer, so that... 'in the last days' he undertook 'such a holy and wonderful work, imitating those who were sent to preach the Gospel for a testimony to all nations before the end of the world.... The Gospel has been preached to where there is nobody beyond.'"³

It was this burning desire to bring the gospel to the Irish which probably accounts for the dream which he claims to have had in which he saw a man who handed him some letters which included the plea: "Holy boy, we are asking you to come home and walk among us again."

He considered this to be a call from God. To this end he entered the ministry of the church and was ordained bishop and apostle to Ireland in 432. He spent the next thirty years of his life working in the land of his captivity. He found an Ireland "untouched by the Roman culture that had helped to mold the British society into which Patrick was born. The Irish had no towns; their primary social order was the tribe, or extended family. They raised cattle, lived in wattle-and-turf houses, and repaired to forts, mostly wooden, during raids and wars. Their lives were full of superstition and magic presided over by Druid priests who were Christianity's chief Irish opponents."⁴

It was difficult labor, filled with danger and hardship. His opponents were many and the people totally pagan. Yet the Lord was pleased to bless this work, and thousands were brought to the faith. Most of his work was done in Northern Ireland, that part of the island which is now called Ulster. The center of his labors was Armagh, and from it the gospel spread.

In his *Confessions* he writes:

I am greatly a debtor to God, who has bestowed his grace so largely upon me, that multitudes were born again to God through me. The Irish, who never had the knowledge of God and worshipped only idols and unclean things,

have lately become the people of the Lord, and are called sons of God."⁵

While undoubtedly his work was blessed richly by God, many strange traditions and stories have been woven into his life. He is said to have converted all the Irish chieftains and bards. He is supposed to have founded between 365 and 700 churches and consecrated 3,000 priests. Even miracles were ascribed to him: it is claimed that he healed the blind, raised nine persons from death, and expelled all the snakes and frogs in the island. But he himself makes no such claims. They are part of Romish mythology.

Nevertheless, his writings give evidence of the fact that he was a dedicated and humble child of God. A certain sweetness of character shines through his writings, and a humility is evident in them which is unmistakable. He never was a highly educated man, and he often bemoaned his lack of education. In fact, he was hesitant to write anything because his Latin was so inferior. But that very lack of education gave him a directness of speech which, even today, is moving. It was without affectation that he began his letter to Coroticum, "I Patrick, a sinner, very badly educated...." This letter, in which he speaks much of his calling and faith, was written to a certain king in Britain who, while professing to be a Christian, had captured many young boys and girls in Ireland. The letter was written to excommunicate King Coroticum until he repented and made restitution for his evil deed.

Patrick established a Christianity in Ireland which was a far cry from the Christianity of Roman Catholicism. It was orthodox and biblical, the Bible being Patrick's only book. It was a Christianity that was completely independent of Rome and the influence of Rome's bishops. In fact, it was several centuries later that Rome finally succeeded in bringing the Irish Church under her papal rule. It was the beginning of the church in Ireland which continues to the present — although only through great struggle and persecution.

The date of Patrick's death is not known. But he died peacefully somewhere between 461 and 493. He died a faithful servant of the Lord and was buried in an unknown grave in the Ireland which he loved.

He was one of many such brave men who sacrificed all to bring the light of the gospel into the dark regions of paganism where only idolatry and superstition ruled. He is a noble figure in the annals of the church's missionary calling, and is an inspiration to all those who are called by God to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. □

1 Quoted from Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church*, Vol. IV, "Medieval Christianity." Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950, p. 49.

2 There is some question about whether the ship on which he took sail landed again in Britain or on the coast of Gaul (now France). Church historians are divided on the question, and there seems to be no way to settle it.

3 The quotations are from John T. McNeill, *The Celtic Churches*; University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 59.

4 Quoted from *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, ed. by John D. Woodbridge, Moody Press, 1988, p. 96.

5 Quoted from Schaff, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

Jesus Only

Absorbed in Christ — yea, I would be

So occupied with my dear Lord,
That Jesus, only, would I see,
And only listen to His Word.

No one would note or mark my ways,

His glory only would I show
By word and act through all my days,
Till others would His beauty know.

My heart's Desire, my Lord and King!

Life of my soul, my joy, my strength!
My perfect Saviour's praise I'd sing
To all until He come at length.

— SB, May 15, 1932

*From
Holy Writ
Rev. George Lubbers*

Exposition of Isaiah 6:1-13 (6)

*But yet in it shall be a tenth,
and it shall return, and shall be
eaten: as a teil tree, and as an
oak, whose substance is in them
(stock, stem), when they cast
their leaves: so the holy seed
shall be the substance thereof.*

Isaiah 6:13

The Hope of Israel in Their Deportation

There is hope in the latter end for the Israel of God. This latter end is really the glory, the time when the whole earth shall be full of the glory of God's sovereign grace and mercy. It is the fulfillment of what we read in Isaiah 40:5: "And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."

Such is the secret of the hope of Israel in the captivity, whilst they hang their silent harps upon the willows growing beside Babel's streams where the righteous weep in their great love for Jerusalem and the temple-worship!

But we are anticipating. We are anticipating according to the sure word of the prophecy of father Jacob when he prophesies, "...until Shiloh come: and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10).

In our Scripture passage, taken from Isaiah 6:13, this glorious future hope is promised and foretold by Him who sits on the throne, Adonai. He is the One who gives preaching orders to Isaiah, the prophets, and even to the Christ, who was born from a woman and made under the law.

Is he not the LORD who visits apostatizing and unbelieving Israel with His chastisements for the exact duration of seventy years?

Yes, there is hope in Israel's latter end. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes, the Jew first and also the Greek. That is God's beacon light which shines more and more unto the perfect and great Day of the Lord.

The Remnant Shall Return to the Promised Land (verse 13)

There is a remnant in Israel. These are they who are born of the promise. These, and they only, are counted for the seed (Rom. 9:8). Such was the sure word of God to sorrowing yet believing Abraham (Gen. 21:12). Yes, in Isaac shall the seed be called!

We will come to this presently.

For the moment let us notice that the text speaks of a "tenth" which shall return. Of all the vast number which were taken captive to Babylon, only a fraction returned to the promised land, the land of God's Sabbath-rest. There is great wisdom in this selected number. These represent the full number of those whom God, in the purpose of His counsel, will bring back under Ezra's leadership upon the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia. Indeed, these are the tribe of Judah, in which the 3 x 14 generations from

the Captivity to Christ's birth shall be realized in the fullness of time. In this tenth, the Virgin Mary is the central consideration, according to Isaiah 7:14. The very core of this "tenth" is the future birth of the Son of God (born from a Virgin), whose name is Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace!

Yes, this Divinely designated number shall surely return! They shall return to the land of Beulah, the land of the Sabbath-rest of the God of Jacob.

Is not God married to Israel by His sure word of oath? Is He not her God, who in the greatest pathos says, I will never leave thee in my everlasting, sovereign loving kindness? The promise is that after seventy years, when the land has enjoyed its Sabbaths, then Israel shall return (Jer. 25:9; II Chron. 36:20-25).

Indeed, they shall return and rebuild Jerusalem, rebuild her walls, and resurrect the temple from her ashes and ruins. But she shall perform this only through the utmost trials and afflictions and persecutions. The text suggests this when it adds "and shall be eaten." The term makes us think of Psalm 27:2: "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." Surely these enemies were not cannibals. This is metaphor, expressing that they desired to slay David, the king, even as Goliath boasted he would do to David when David was but a stripling, a tender youth (I Sam. 17:44). And David returns the reply in his great confession, "This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee,

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and take thine head from thee: and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the vultures, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."

Such was the history of Israel under the reign both of the Persians and of the Macedonians, as we read of this in Daniel 10-12. Small wonder that the psalmist cried, "For thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom. 8:36; Ps. 44:22). Often the righteous in Israel, especially in the days of the Maccabees, must have cried:

Awake, why sleepest thou, O LORD? arise, cast us not off forever. Why hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth. Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake (Ps. 44:23-26).

Yes, they shall be eaten, devoured, and well-nigh cast off as the scum of the earth. Notwithstanding this, there is hope to Israel. She is not a mere useless vine, but she is as a teil tree, as an oak tree!

Yes, Israel is a nation which shall endure. When all the nations which plowed deep furrows upon her back are no more, having been destroyed from off the face of the earth by the fury of the Lord of Hosts; when the thrones of such nations as Egypt, Babylon, Medo-Persia have been cast down, and the mighty Macedonian power has been crushed forever, then Israel's throne shall be in the center of the universe, on the heavenly mount Zion, high and lifted up (Is. 2:2-5).

The reason? In the unchangeable faithfulness of Jehovah to His beloved Jacob (Mal. 1:1-4; 3:6), He has made them to be like a teil and an oak tree. That is the figure of speech here in verse 13. In chapter 5 Israel is portrayed under the figure of a "choice vine." In another, separate essay we will call attention to this. Yes, the Lord could have done no more to Israel than what He had. But the vine does not lend itself to what can endure the fiery trials of the persecution by

the heathen nations. But when strength, endurance is to be indicated, then the oak tree is a fitting symbol, as that which can resist the winds of opposition (Is. 1:29-31)!

Here the hellish assaults of the enemies of God's church in the wise providence of God over His church is likened unto a burning fire. The term used in our text is that this tree, to which we have called attention earlier, shall be eaten. The remarkable feature of the tree's being eaten by fire is that the end result was not that all is ashes and ruins. Such seemed to be the case when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem; but the result was rather that there was still a "stock" left, a living (substance), a spiritual entity, which would grow out as wonderfully as did the mustard seed in Jesus' parable of the mustard seed. It is the root of David out of dry ground (Is. 53:2). Or, again, we read that there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots (Is. 11:1); and the beautiful promise is added in verses 10, 11 of this same chapter, "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious (a sweet smell)."

Pinpointedly the text speaks of the *holy seed* as being the substance of this "eaten teil tree."

The term *holy seed* sometimes refers to Israel as the remnant according to the election of grace. In chapter 41:8 we read, "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.... Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away." Yet, for the deepest sense of the term *seed*, we must read the Holy Spirit's own interpretation as written by Paul in Galatians 3:16: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not unto *seeds* as of many; but as of one, And to thy Seed, which is Christ!"

This is, therefore, the infallible interpretation of the term "holy seed" in Isaiah 6:13!

Christ is the end of the law of righteousness to every one who believes. All were included (shut up) under sin that he might be merciful to all the Seed of Israel, both Jew and Gentile.

Here is the great capstone, the unfolding of the mystery of godliness, when the glory of Christ, who sits on the throne in His temple, shall fill all the earth! □

Chastening

I know not why His hand is laid,
In chastening on my life,
Nor why it is my little world
Is filled so full of strife.
I know not why, when faith looks up
And seeks for rest from pain,
That o'er my sky fresh clouds arise
And drench my path with rain.
I know not why my prayer so long,
By Him has been denied;
Nor why, while other's ships sail on,
Mine should in port abide.
But I do know that God is love,
That He my burden shares,
And though I may not understand,
I know, for me, He cares.

I know the heights for which I long
Are often reached through pain,
I know the sheaves must needs be
threshed
To yield the golden grain.
I know that, though He may
remove
The friends on whom I lean,
'Tis that I thus may learn to love
And trust the one Unseen.
And, when at last I see His face
And know as I am known,
I will not care how rough the road
That led me to my home.

— SB, August 1, 1932

The Strength of Youth

Rev. Barrett Gritters

The End Times (7)

Pleasure Madness, Sign of the End

Entertainment. Leisure. Amusement. Recreation. Sports. Spare time. Fun.

Is there any more proof needed that our day is mad for pleasure?

As Matthew 24 indicates, "iniquity shall abound, (and) the love of many shall wax cold." Paul spoke of this to pastor Timothy in II Timothy 3 when he said, "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous...heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God...."

Young people must be reminded that this is taking place as a sign of Christ's coming. Paul made that clear as well, for he begins this chapter, "This know also...." That is, be aware of what will come. Do not be surprised, young saints, if the world becomes mad for pleasure. The *ministers* need to be reminded of this; the *elders* must be aware of it; *parents* should be warned to watch out for it. But the young people need to know what the Word of God says about the world in which they are growing up or find themselves presently. Do not be shocked if this is what you find.

Men are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

Pleasures are things that please men, not heavenly pleasures, but earthly pleasures. There are many of them. But the danger that must be warned against is not the plea-

REVIEW

We've seen that the end will be marked by a departure from the faith, the rise of Antichrist, a great persecution the likes of which the world and church have never seen, the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth, and world calamities which the Lord uses to hinder the Antichrist and prevent him from developing prematurely the Antichristian kingdom.

Yet another sign, pleasure madness, must be added.

sure themselves! It is not Reformed, but Anabaptist and monastic, to say that pleasures are evil. We may enjoy pleasures, earthly pleasures too. We may enjoy a husband or wife, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a ball game or good music; for Paul says to Timothy in the first letter, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." (Young people, "set apart" your earthly pleasures with the Word of God and prayer!)

No, the evil to beware of is not the pleasures, but the *loving* of these pleasures, and loving them more than one loves God. The last days are marked by this. People are mad for pleasure, live for it. "Thank God It's Friday" is not only the name of a popular restaurant, but the motto of much of the world. Young people (and all of us), do you live for the weekend to fill yourself with earthly pleasures? Or do you desire to end your week of work so that you can worship God and fill your life and soul with spiritual pleasures?

This evil is a sign of the end of the age especially when it becomes evident in the church. Paul says that the last, perilous days come

when men have a "form of godliness," but "deny the power thereof." This is not a description of the unbelieving world. The world *openly* bows to pleasures, gladly admits she loves this life and no other, and boldly proclaims "TGIF" to be her motto. But this is a description of the "church." Their confession is "We love God"; their outward life is probably exemplary; they come to church regularly (except when vacation or the big ball game gets in the way); they have a *form* of godliness.

But they "deny the power thereof."

Do you see it? Drunkenness, drugs, fornication, dancing, movie attendance, wasting time with trash on television and VCR? This also takes the form of enjoying legitimate pleasures, at the expense of obedience to God. There is more time on the ball field or fishing stream or hunting blind than with the family; more money spent on one's own pleasures, unnecessary food, drink, toys, so that there is only a dollar or two left over when the plate is passed on Sunday.

When young men and young women are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, the fruit that grows on the branches of their lives

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is rotten fruit. They become "covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded."

Why? Because they are "lovers of their own selves."

The root of the problem is not "pleasure-madness." Below that branch is the *root* of self-love. If we are to remove pleasure-madness from our lives and our churches, we dig deep to this problem.

Whom do you love more, yourself or God? Let us take a test with the ten commandments:

Loving Our God:

1. Do you worship idols (of sports and liquor)?
2. Do you make graven images (that look more like you than God)?
3. Do you take God's name in vain (because yours is more important)?
4. Do you desecrate the Sabbath (when the fourth commandment pinches)?

Loving Our Neighbor:

5. Do you dishonor your parents (when they "cramp your style")?
6. Do you kill your neighbor with thought or deed (if he stands in your way)?
7. Do you fornicate (if it "feels good")?
8. Do you steal your neighbor's property (to hurt him or add to your wealth)?
9. Do you lie to your brother (to save your own skin)?
10. Do you covet what he has (because God hasn't given it to you)?

We are living in the last days! Is there any doubt in your mind?

There is another teaching about the last times that claims the world will improve, that there will be great godliness in the earth, that the church will prevail, that the gospel will have an effect on the general population of the world that it will be Christianized and most will follow the teachings and power of Jesus. II Timothy 3 says otherwise.

We are living in the last days. There is evidence of that right be-

fore our eyes.

What is especially convincing is that what was condemned by the churches only 25 years ago, and for hundreds of years before that, is now approved. What was unthinkable 50 years ago is now so commonplace that if you question its propriety, you are questioned as to your sanity. Rock music (with Christian words), dancing, theater attendance, all used to be condemned by the church, but now are approved and promoted.

Do you young people understand that? Does it sink in? Never before did the church condone movie attendance, and dancing, or take the music of the world and put it to "Christian" use. Now she does. That is important for us to know if we love the Lord and His church. It was important for me, when I was in my teens, to know that the church always did (on the basis of the Bible) stand against movie attendance, dancing, and worldly music. Even though I didn't like it at the time, I knew that the weight of history (the leading of God's Spirit in history!) was behind that stand.

And why has the church changed its stand now? Has more serious Bible study been done? Has the church become more spiritually minded? On the contrary. The church was pressured into changing its position because pleasure-madness had caught on and everyone was doing it anyway. We are living in the last days. Will you put pressure on the church to silence its witness against the worldly pleasures?

These are perilous days! Dangerous days!

Danger for the church is not persecution. The church is not in peril because of poverty and hard times materially. Those days were always good days for the church, days that strengthened the church, days of oceans of grace for the church! Perilous days for the church are days of pleasure-madness.

These are *grievous* days, when parents, pastors, and elders vex their souls over the weakening of the flock and the pleasure-mad be-

havior of the young people, when families see it in their own lives that they have been caught up in the race for Friday, not because the Lord's day is coming, but because Saturday can be filled with pleasure.

But these are *perilous* times.

God's people are weakened by exposure to this kind of life-style, because this life-style becomes ours so easily. The danger of television and movies is as much in the life-style they teach as in all the vile behavior and language they present. Perilous times! Children become used to this life-style and find out soon they have no room for spiritual things. Young couples caught in this spirit want no children, or few, because there are things to buy, places to go, times to live. These are dangerous times for the church because the pressure is on to change, to adapt the teaching of the church to the life of the people, instead of the life of the people to the teaching of the church.

Oh, for the power to turn away from this!

Turn away from this spirit in your life. Turn away from those persons who would tempt you to have a form of godliness but deny the power of it. Have no friends whose lives are geared for pleasure. Do not date the young man or young woman whose principal good is to seek pleasure of this world, whose life shows that he is a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God.

"No!" to the frantic pleasure-seeking that never has enough. Like the horseleach's daughters crying, "Give, give," and the fire that will never be satisfied, the pleasure-mad young person never has "enough." "Yes!" to God and His kingdom. Live the antithesis, young people!

And the possibility for all this is the cross of Christ.

The cross crucifies your self-love. The cross destroys your ego. The cross makes you a lover of God more than a lover of self. This does not mean that you will not want these pleasures, will not seek this worldly entertainment. But the cross means that this drive for plea-

sure will not dominate your life, will not be the all-consuming force it once was.

Fly, young people! Fly for your life! Fly to the cross of Christ! There is hope! There is forgiveness!

There is power! There is your God! There is salvation from the perils of these last days! □

Book Reviews

PURITAN CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA: RELIGION AND LIFE IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MASSACHUSETTS, by Allen Carden; Baker Book House, 1990; 239pp, paper (no price included). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

The history of the Puritans has always been a fascinating subject to Reformed and Presbyterian believers. This is partly because the Puritan experiment (as it is sometimes called) has entered into the warp and woof of our own country's national heritage, and partly because the history of the Puritans is part of our own ecclesiastical history, though admittedly indirectly.

The author takes issue in some respects with current thinking about Puritanism in this country as represented, e.g., by Perry Miller, an acknowledged authority on the subject. His book is intended to give a more balanced view of the Puritans. It is my judgment that the author succeeds admirably. He has written an interesting and enlightening book which is easily read and which will give the reader a good idea of what Puritanism in this country, especially in the 17th century, was all about.

The book treats many different aspects of the life of these "pilgrim fathers." It defines Puritanism "as primarily a reformist movement comprised of individuals who took issue with the Church of England in matters of polity, style, and to a lesser extent doctrine, and who desired to discard 'Romish' practices, to exercise congregational autonomy and authority, and to build their society on the Bible as the final authority" (pp. 11, 12).

The book gives some information on the background of the Puritan movement in England and the biblical basis for Puritan life and thought. It deals with the theology of the Puritans, their church structure in preaching, government, and polity. It describes the life of the Puritans in their piety and social ethics. It speaks of their views of education, culture, and recreation. It concludes with two chapters on challenges in Massachusetts to the Puritan way, in which are discussed the history of Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson with her antinomian ideas, and the legacy they left us.

As one reads the book, one is struck by how near to us the Puritans were in many matters of doctrine and life. They were Calvinistic in their doctrine; their worship was much like ours — although they practiced purity of worship in some respects; they resembled what we hold true in matters of family, church life, and walk in the world. In their early years, according to the author, they even held a sound view of the assurance of salvation (pp. 85-87). One feels a deep kinship with them on these matters.

There were, however, significant differences. In the light of covenant conceptions current in Puritan circles, they held to an external and internal covenant, something which was to give them grief in later years. Already early in their history (and this too was in keeping with current Puritan ideas), they held to what is basically an Arminian conception of preparationism, i.e., the view that the Spirit of Christ works generally

in the hearts of all who hear the gospel a certain preparatory grace which made the hearer more susceptible to the preaching (pp. 85-87). In church polity they held to a strict congregationalism which was characteristic of the "Separatist" brand of Puritanism. And in keeping with their whole purpose of coming to this country, they held to a certain post-millennialism.

While their views of the church were originally sound (they held, e.g., to the idea to which Calvin also held, namely, that the visible church was composed of more than the company of elect), these views changed over the years. More and more they tended towards the view that the church ought to be composed only of the company of the elect. In keeping with that conception, they began to require various testimonies of one's experiences to judge whether a given applicant for membership was truly an elect and worthy of church membership (pp. 101, 102).

It was this view which led to their well-known view of the "half-way covenant." Many, while baptized in the church, could not give a satisfactory account of their conversion. Yet they were married and had children which needed to be baptized. To accommodate this, the notion of a "half-way covenant" was introduced. It referred to the fact that some were "half-way" into the covenant by virtue of their baptism, but were not yet "all the way" into the covenant because they could give no account of their conversion.

Christian high schools ought to have this book in their libraries, and those of our readers who de-

sire to know more of these American Puritans can very profitably add this valuable work to their home libraries. □

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE: FOUR CHRISTIAN VIEWS, by J. Carl Laney, William Heth, Thomas Edgar, and Larry Richards. H. Wayne House, Editor. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990. 267 pages. Paperback. \$9.95. (Reviewed by the Editor)

Of late, evangelical Protestantism has been looking into the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage. One reason has been the appallingly high rate of divorce and remarriage among professing evangelical Christians. Francis Schaeffer pointed to this scandalous situation in his *The Great Evangelical Disaster*: "Do we not have to agree that even much of the evangelical church...has bent Scripture at the point of divorce to conform to the culture rather than the Scripture judging the present viewpoints of the fallen culture? Do we not have to agree that in the area of divorce and remarriage there has been a lack of biblical teaching and discipline even among evangelicals?" (p. 63). Carl F.H. Henry mentioned it in his autobiography, *Confessions of a Theologian*: "While evangelicals seek to penetrate the culture, the culture simultaneously makes disconcerting inroads into evangelical life. This is specially evident in the widening notion that divorce and remarriage are simply matters of free moral choice" (p. 388). At the evangelical "International Council on Biblical Inerrancy" in Chicago in 1986, some publicly confessed with shame of face that the divorce rate in the evangelical churches is the very same as in the surrounding society.

Divorce and Remarriage is one of the most recent evangelical examinations of Scripture's teaching on the subject. Four theologians present their position. Laney holds that Scripture forbids all divorce and all remarriage (the exception clause in Matthew 5 and in Matthew 19 is supposed to refer to "marriages" that are invalid because they are incestuous relation-

ships). Heth explains Scripture to allow for divorce in the case of adultery, but absolutely to forbid remarriage while the original mate is living. Edgar argues for divorce and remarriage in the case of the fornication ("illicit sex") of one's mate and in the case of desertion. And Richards, a sheer antinomian in this area of Christian life, thinks that all divorce and all remarriage are sinful, but that the grace of God permits and justifies remarriage for any and every reason: "Persons who divorce for any reason do have the right to remarry" (p. 243).

It is interesting that two of the four maintain that the Bible forbids all remarriage while an original mate is still living.

Adding to the liveliness of the book is the immediate response to each of the positions by the other three.

Some of the authors share serious weaknesses. One is the failure to define marriage. One cannot treat divorce without having first established from Scripture what marriage is by institution of God. This is not true of Laney and of Heth. Laney begins by denying that marriage is merely a legal agreement. "Marriage could be defined as God's act of joining a man and a woman in a permanent, covenanted, one-flesh relationship" (p. 20). Exactly!

Another weakness is the notion that believers under the new covenant may still appeal to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 as a ground for their remarrying after divorce. As though Jesus did not ascribe those goings-on under the old covenant to Moses' tolerating them because of the hardness of Israelite hearts! As though Jesus did not at once direct attention to the will of God at creation from which the behavior described in Deuteronomy 24 deviated! And as though Jesus had never cut off all appeal to Deuteronomy 24 by the New Testament Christian by His own lordly, "And I say unto you..." (Matt. 19:7-9).

Yet another persistent error is the stubborn refusal of evangelical writers to recognize that "is not under bondage" (Greek: *doulouo*) in I

Corinthians 7:15 is a completely different word from "is not bound" (Greek: *deo*), so that the apostle is not teaching there that a believer deserted by an unbeliever is no longer bound in marriage and therefore free to remarry.

In his zeal to prove that marriage is dissolvable, Edgar overlooks that I Corinthians 6:16 does not say that sexual union with a prostitute makes the two one flesh. (His argument is that the one-flesh bond of marriage is as much dissolvable as the one-flesh union of a man with a prostitute.) Paul does not, however, say that the union of a man with a prostitute is one flesh. Rather, he says that it is a "one-body" relationship. This is serious enough — a dark parody of marriage. But it is not the establishment of a one-flesh union, that is, a genuine marriage. For this, more than sex is required.

As soon as Edgar has argued for the permissibility of the remarriage of the "innocent party," Richards asserts "the contradiction of holding that an innocent party is unmarried, and free to marry again, but a guilty party is somehow still 'married,' thus can never marry again" (p. 212). He then insists on the right of all to remarry, guilty as well as innocent. Indeed, he expressly states that an imaginary "Tom" may remarry for the fourth time and, I must assume, for the fortieth time.

There are two possibilities for a Protestant church at the end of the 20th century: either no remarriage or remarriage for all, regardless of the reason for the preceding divorce. Most of the Protestant church, evangelical as well as liberal, is enthusiastically or grudgingly practicing the latter today. And the practice is at the same rate as the practice of the ungodly world. That this is abomination to the God of Scripture and transgression against the will of Christ and the apostles, he who runs may read. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Ministerial Calls

Rev. M. DeVries has declined the call he received from the Hope PRC in Isabel, SD.

Rev. R. Cammenga has declined the call he was considering from Randolph, WI. The Council of our church in Randolph subsequently produced a new trio from which their congregation was to call a pastor: Revs. M. DeVries, R. Hanko, and R. Moore.

Congregational Highlights

Many of our churches sponsored Reformation Day Lectures in late October.

In the West Michigan area the congregation of the Byron Center PRC sponsored a lecture on October 30 held in the auditorium of the South Christian High School. Rev. B. Gritters, Byron's pastor, addressed the capacity crowd that evening on the timely subject of the Antichrist. Rev. Gritters answered many questions, including, "Is it proper to connect any of the current religious and political develop-

ments with Antichrist?" His answer? "Yes!"

Byron Center planned to follow up this lecture with two related classes held at their church on November 8 and 15, D.V. The first, taught by Rev. R. VanOverloop, dealt with a comparison between A-millennialism and Pre-millennialism. The second, taught by Prof. H. Hanko, would look at a comparison between A-millennialism and Post-millennialism.

The Reformed Witness Committee of our Doon and Hull, IA, and Edgerton, MN PRC's sponsored their annual Reformation Lecture. Rev. R. Moore spoke in our Hull PRC on the topic "Reformation for the Church Today."

Rev. J. Slopsema was the featured speaker of a Reformation lecture sponsored by our Bethel PRC in Elk Grove Village, IL. His lecture was entitled, "Sola Fide — Faith Alone."

The Dayspring Christian School in Greeley, CO was the setting for the lecture sponsored by the Loveland PRC. Their pastor, Rev. Cammenga, spoke on "The Reformation and Christian Education."

Our congregation in Redlands, CA also sponsored a lecture dealing with an aspect of the Reformation. Prof. D. Engelsma was the guest speaker.

And the Lynden PRC in Lynden, WA sponsored their lecture on October 31. Pastor C. Haak spoke on "Sola Scriptura."

Mission News

The original plan for the first "Interim Guidelines Conference" in Jamaica was to send Rev. Joostens and Mr. Clare Prince for four weeks in October-November. Due to the injury to Mr. Prince (he fell and broke his hip) the conference has been postponed to January. In consultation with the Mission Committee, the Council of First Church in Grand Rapids, MI has alternatively approved sending Rev. Joostens and Jamaica Committee chairman, Mr. Dan Pastoor, for one week of preparatory work. They left October 17 and returned on the 24th.

The Council of our Hudsonville, MI PRC has decided to begin video taping all of their services. This decision comes as an answer to a request made by the group in Larne, Northern Ireland. Now, instead of just receiving an audio cassette of a Sunday service, the group in Ireland will be able to experience also visually the blessing of the worship service. Plans call for this to continue until a missionary is sent to Larne.

After a return home for about six weeks, emeritus minister Rev. C. Hanko, along with his daughter, have once again returned to Venice, FL to carry on, as much as possible, the work in the area until a missionary of God's choosing is sent there as well. □

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