

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

*A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine*

... There is no greater knowledge that a person can obtain than the knowledge of God. In our day when every other science (area of knowledge) is elevated and worshiped, we do well to remember that the science of God is the greatest knowledge one can seek and attain.

See "The Preciousness of
Knowing God" — p. 447

Vol. 67, No. 19
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In This Issue...

"Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord."

Perhaps those words of J.I. Packer help to explain why *The Standard Bearer* is what it is.

"No fluff," says a reader in "Letters."

But what is fluff? The idea is certainly not that every article, if it is to be solid stuff, must be a theological dissertation. Nor can it be that nothing of a more "practical" nature need ever come from the pens of *SB* department editors — for, after all, a man has only to have his theology straight, to be enabled to rise above life's difficulties.

No, the *SB* must address the issues of life. But how? In his eminently practical Meditation on the use of the tongue, Rev. Slopesma admonishes his readers in this issue to "consider who God is!" In his editorial, Prof. Engelsma notes that "the PRC enthusiastically plead guilty" to an "election theology of covenant." Rev. Miersma, in writing about the Protestant Reformed Church of New Zealand, reminds us that "our toil (in the work of missions), no matter how faithful, in itself avails absolutely nothing." In his studies in Ruth, Rev. Haak stresses the "underlying truth" of redemption — as that served in the Old Testament as a shadow of Christ and His work. As he continues his series on the end times, Rev. Gritters warns against the danger of thinking of the end in terms of "what will happen to us," rather than focusing "our attention on the Lord." And, conversely, in an article designed to deal with doctrine, Rev. denHartog stresses that "true Christian living is based on the true doctrine of Christ."

No fluff. For all points to God and to His great work in us and for us. May the *SB* never abandon that emphasis. And for such faithfulness, may His be all the praise.

D.D.

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

Blessing God and Cursing His Children

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

James 3:9-12

A little fire has the potential of burning down an entire forest. It has happened again and again.

In this respect the tongue is like a little fire. It is a relatively small member in our body. But it has the power to accomplish great destruction. The evil tongue has ruined reputations, crippled children emotionally, destroyed marriages, disrupted the peace of the church, incited riots

Such is the reality of the tongue which James has pointed out earlier in this chapter.

Continuing in that same vein James points out that in the church of his day the tongue was being used to bless God, even the Father, and to curse those made in the similitude of God. Those made in the similitude

(likeness) of God are God's children, the fellow saints in the church.

Out of the same mouth proceeded blessing and cursing. James rebukes the church for this and demonstrates from nature that those cursing their fellow saints can not with the same mouth truly bless God.

We do well to take this instruction to heart.

* * * * *

With the tongue we bless God, even the Father.

God is our Father for Jesus' sake. For in Jesus Christ God has adopted us to be His dear children. Furthermore, in Jesus Christ we have even been born again so that we are the very image of God. To use the words of the holy writer James in this same passage, we have been made after the similitude or likeness of God. All this makes God our heavenly Father, and us His children, in a very wonderful way.

James indicates that the saints to whom he writes blessed God as their heavenly Father. The church at this time was still of Jewish origin. Very likely they continued the Jewish practice of adding, "Blessed be He!" whenever they spoke the name of God. In addition to this they also blessed or praised God in their prayers, in their songs, and in their daily conversation. They praised God especially for His Fatherly goodness that they enjoyed day by day.

However, James indicates that with the same mouth they also cursed those who were made after the similitude of God.

Remember, those made after the similitude or likeness of God are those

born again in Jesus Christ. Through this spiritual rebirth they have been wonderfully changed so that they are Godlike in their character. They reflect (although imperfectly) the very perfections and virtues of God in their living. They are God's own children, the true members of the church of Jesus Christ.

According to James there was a tendency in the church to bless God on the one hand, and with the same mouth to curse His children, the fellow saints, on the other hand.

To curse is to pronounce the curse of God upon someone -- God damn you! This is exactly what the saints were doing to each other. In envy, bitterness, anger, frustration they were damning each other.

If they were doing this, they most certainly were tearing each other apart with the tongue in other ways. There was to be found among the members of the church gossip, backbiting, slander, railing on each other, harsh criticism James indicates in chapter 4 of this epistle that there were wars and fightings among the saints (vs. 1). This warfare consisted in speaking evil of one another (vs. 11).

And so, out of the mouth proceeded blessing and cursing. With the mouth they blessed God, even the Father. And with the same mouth they cursed their fellow saints, who happened to be the children of God, made after the similitude of God.

Well do we examine ourselves to see if the same prevails with us.

* * * * *

James calls our attention to the realm of nature to demonstrate that it is impossible truly to bless God and at

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

the same time to curse those made after the similitude of God.

Doth a fountain, asks James, send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? This is a rhetorical question. The answer is obviously, No. A fountain or spring does not produce sweet water and bitter at the same opening. Notice, incidentally, how that sweet water and bitter correspond to blessing and cursing.

James continues with his questions. Only now he goes deeper into the matter and asks concerning what can or can not be. Can the fig tree bear olive berries? The question is whether a fig tree can bear figs and olives. Again the answer is obviously, No. A fig tree can bear only one kind of fruit — figs.

Well, what about the vine? Can the (grape) vine bear figs? Again, the question is whether the vine can produce grapes and figs. The answer to this question is also obvious. No, a vine can bear only grapes.

So, concludes James, can no fountain yield both salt water and fresh.

From this simple lesson of nature we learn that from the same mouth it is not possible on the one hand to bless God and on the other hand to curse God's children, who have been made in the similitude of God.

Make no mistake! It is not possible with the same mouth to bless God and to curse those who are not the children of God.

We live in a world dominated by unbelieving men and women who have not been born again in Jesus Christ and who bear no spiritual resemblance at all to the living God. Rather than reflecting the virtues of God in their living, they show a striking resemblance to the Devil himself. Certainly it is possible to bless God our Father and at the same time to curse these who follow after the Devil. In fact, there are times when it is our calling to do so. But we must be careful how we do this. Certainly we may not curse the ungodly out of sinful motives. Nevertheless, there are times when the honor of God

requires that we pronounce the curse of God upon the ungodly.

However, it is a different matter with those who have been made in the similitude of God. Now we are talking of those who by the grace of God reflect the very perfections of God in their lives. Although they are far from perfect and have many faults, their lives are godly and upright. It is impossible on the one hand to bless and praise God for all His virtues and perfections and on the other hand to curse those who manifest the same perfections of God in their daily living! No more is this possible than it is possible for a fountain from the same opening to bring forth sweet water and bitter, or for a fig tree to bring forth figs and grapes.

So those who continue to curse the children of God without repentance can not be, and are not in actual fact, blessing God. They may mouth the praises of God with their lips. But these blessings of God are a mere formality, a sham, a terrible hypocrisy!

* * * * *

*At all times
we must seek
to build up our fellow saints.*

All this implies a very important calling.

Our calling is, first, to bless God, even the Father.

Consider who God is. He is the God of all perfection and virtue. He has also in grace become our Father for Jesus' sake, loving us, caring for us, providing for all our needs.

Certainly it is our calling to bless and praise Him. We are to do this in our prayers, in our singing, and in our everyday conversation. Often and unashamedly we should praise our heavenly Father with our fellow saints and before men.

The important thing is that this praise must be not just from the lips but from a heart that is overwhelmed with love for the Father, that adores Him for His goodness. Such praise is the inevitable fruit of the work of

God's grace that has transformed us into His dear children.

We also have a calling with respect to God's children, who with us have been made in the image of God and thus are our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Certainly we may not curse them. Certainly we may not seek to destroy or injure them with our tongue. We are often inclined to do so when their sins and weaknesses hurt or inconvenience us. But James condemns this: my brethren, these things ought not so to be.

Rather we are to bless those made after the similitude of God. When we see the virtues of God reflected in their lives, we are to commend them, encourage them, and praise God for them. At all times we must seek to build up our fellow saints. This is true also when their sins and weaknesses become glaringly evident. Even when we must rebuke them, we must do so in such a way that we build them up rather than tear them down.

Those who from a true heart of adoration for God truly bless God the Father will likewise in this manner also bless God's children, who walk in God's ways.

May God give us grace to bless Him as our Father.

And may that grace also lead us to bless His children who have been made in His own image. □

*Lord,
who shall abide
in thy tabernacle?
who shall dwell
in thy holy hill?
He that walketh uprightly,
and worketh righteousness,
and speaketh the truth
in his heart.
He that backbiteth not
with his tongue,
nor doeth evil to his neighbour,
nor taketh up a reproach
against his neighbour.
Psalm 15:1-3*

An "Election Theology" of Covenant (5)

The basic charge against the Protestant Reformed doctrine of the covenant of grace by Canadian Reformed ("Liberated") theologian Dr. J. DeJong is that it is an "election theology" of the covenant. In his letter in the March 15, 1991 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, Dr. DeJong wrote:

Engelsma is only perpetuating the same kind of "election" theology which refuses to entertain the Scriptural teaching of faith as the way or condition to salvation and the notion of God's wrath against covenant breakers.

He lodged the same charge in other words when he alleged "the typical Protestant Reformed interpretation that makes election dominate all other doctrines."

To the accusation that theirs is an "election theology" of covenant, the PRC enthusiastically plead guilty.

By an "election theology" of covenant, we understand, first, that God's establishment of His covenant with a people is due to His eternal election of that people. In harmony with this, secondly, eternal election determines who they are to whom God makes His covenant promise. Accordingly, in the third place, by His Spirit and Word God brings into His covenant, and gives the blessings of the covenant to, those men, women, and children whom He chose. Election is decisive for inclusion in the covenant. Therefore, fourthly, faith is not a condition unto membership in the covenant, or unto the salvation enjoyed in the covenant. Rather, faith is the way in which God unites elect sinners to Himself in the covenant, the means

by which God's covenant friends both embrace the blessings of the covenant and perform their part in the covenant, and the gift of God to the chosen in fulfillment of the covenant promise.

Apart from all other considerations, the reason why an "election theology" of covenant cannot regard faith as a condition is simply that the election upon which the covenant depends is unconditional. If election is unconditional, so also is the covenant unconditional, as well as the salvation that belongs to the covenant.

... if the covenant and its salvation are conditional, election also is conditional.

If my choice of a woman to be my wife is an unconditional choice, the marriage that results from this choice is an unconditional relationship. On the other hand, if the covenant and its salvation are conditional, election also is conditional. If my contract as your employee is conditional, that is, depends upon my satisfactory performance of a certain work, so also is your choice of me to be your employee conditional.

It is the clear, pervasive, and massive testimony of the Bible that God's covenant with Israel and the Church is due to, based upon, and wholly determined by God's eternal election. Moses said to Israel, "The LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above (Hebrew: in distinction from) all people that are upon the face of the

earth" (Deut. 7:6). Paul tells the New Testament church the same thing at the beginning of the outstanding New Testament book on the church: "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him; in love having predestinated us..." (Eph. 1:3-5). The church's covenant position, covenant members, covenant blessings, and covenant responsibilities are determined by divine election in Christ.

This testimony of Scripture is made the creedal position of the Reformed churches in the Canons of Dordt. Although the Canons do not often mention the covenant of grace, the doctrine of the Canons is an "election theology" of covenant. For the saving of sinners is a matter of God's making His covenant with them (Is. 55:3); and the Canons ground the salvation of sinners squarely upon election (cf. I/7).

At one crucial point, however, the Canons make this explicit. This occurs in the second chapter, "Of the Death of Christ and the Redemption of Men Thereby." The central article is Article 8. This article sets forth Christ's death as a covenant death: He died as Head and Mediator of the new covenant in order to redeem to Himself a covenant people out of all nations. As regards its purpose to gather particular persons and as regards its securing all the benefits of salvation for these persons, including

faith, the cross of Jesus Christ was due to, based on, and strictly controlled by God's eternal election:

It was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation ... should confer upon them faith ... should purge them from all sin ... (and) should ... bring them ... to the enjoyment of glory in his own presence forever.

What makes this "election theology of covenant" of the Canons even more forceful is the Canons' repudiation of every attempt to cut the covenant loose from election. The Canons guard against the error of separating covenant from election in the "Rejection of Errors" section attached to the second chapter, especially Articles 2-5. Specifically, our Reformed confession condemns the notion that anyone has been accepted "unto the state of reconciliation and unto the grace of the covenant" except the elect. The creed also rejects that view of the covenant that sees it as nothing more than a conditional means unto eternal life, man's own faith being the condition.

Against this powerful witness of the Canons themselves to an "election theology" of covenant, the "Liberated" cannot appeal to Canons I/17 as though this article teaches that all the children of believers without exception, those who finally perish as well as those who are saved, are in the covenant. Dr. DeJong makes this appeal: "All the children are explicitly included in the covenant (in Canons, I/17)."

Surely Dr. DeJong sees that his appeal to Canons, I/17, in support of the "Liberated" doctrine that all the children are in the covenant in the same way, proves far too much, even for the "Liberated." For this article speaks of our children's being comprehended in the covenant of grace in the sense that the children are elect and saved. Does Dr. DeJong want to contend that all the children of godly parents alike are comprehended in

the covenant of grace as elect and saved?

Canons, I/17 is not speaking of all the children of godly parents without exception. The article refers to a specific, limited number of covenant children: "(those) whom it pleases God to call out of this life in their infancy." If this pastoral statement were to be formulated as a doctrinal proposition, the proposition would run thus: "All of the children of godly parents who die in infancy are to be considered elect and saved by virtue of the covenant of grace." So far is this article from supporting a doctrine of the covenant that pits membership in the covenant against election that, on the contrary, the article expressly grounds our children's comprehension in the covenant in election. "Godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election ... of their children," who die in infancy.

Above all else, the PRC are constrained to hold an "election theology" of the covenant by the ninth chapter of Romans. The Holy Spirit here addresses the exact issue that divides the covenant theology of the "Liberated" from the covenant theology of the PRC. The issue is decided by this chapter of Holy Scripture.

Romans 9 is not a theological treatise on predestination in general, but apostolic doctrine concerning God's covenant of grace. The great concern of the apostle is to demonstrate that the Word of God has not failed (v. 6). This Word of God is the covenant promise to father Abraham, to establish His covenant with Abraham and his children so as to be a God to Abraham and his children. This covenant Word might be thought to have failed because so many natural sons and daughters of Abraham reject Christ and perish—the thing that causes Paul "great heaviness and continual sorrow" (v. 2).

*... God never made
the covenant promise
to every physical descendant
of Abraham.*

But the Word has not failed. The

explanation is that God never made the covenant promise to every physical descendant of Abraham. The promise, "I will be the God of your children," did not refer to all physical Jews.

There is a distinction between two kinds of children of believing Abraham. There are those children who are merely physical offspring. The apostle calls them "children of the flesh" (v. 8). There are also the children whom the apostle refers to as "the children of the promise" (v. 8). These are the children who are born again by the power of the promise, so that they are living children of God.

The Word of God's covenant promise did not refer to the "children of the flesh." They were not in view when God said to Abraham, "I will be the God of your seed." Only the "children of the promise" are counted for the seed (v. 8). Since the seed of Abraham are exclusively the children of promise, the Word of God has not failed. God has kept and fulfilled His covenant promise with every one of the seed of Abraham.

Paul illustrates, and proves, the truth of this distinction from Old Testament history. Abraham had two sons, but God Himself said, "In Isaac (only) shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 21:12; Rom. 9:7). Also the Word of Jehovah to Rebecca concerning her unborn twins, grandsons of Abraham, "The elder shall serve the younger," was a Word that made radical distinction between two physical children of Abraham (Gen. 25:23; Rom. 9:12, 13). The promise of the covenant was only for Jacob. Esau was excluded.

This distinction between two kinds of children of Abraham is fundamental for the concern of the passage that the Word of God did not fail. If all the children of Abraham are the same and if the Word of promise came to them all alike, the Word *did* fail in numberless instances. It failed in the case of Esau.

The question then is, "What accounts for the distinction between the two kinds of children?" Specifically, "What accounts for the fact that some

of Abraham's physical children are children of the promise?" The answer of the apostle is: "The purpose of God according to election" (v. 11). Eternal election determines the true, spiritual seed of Abraham. Eternal election determines that the covenant promise is for them only. Inasmuch as the covenant promise is the promise that the covenant is established with someone personally—the promise of one's own inclusion in the covenant of grace—eternal election determines membership in the covenant of grace.

Romans 9:11ff. is not simply the classic passage in the Bible on the eternal decree of election and reprobation. But the passage sets forth God's predestination as the source and standard of all of God's covenantal dealings in history. The subject of the passage, it must be remembered, is the saving and the hardening of the children of believing Abraham. By implication, the subject of the passage is the saving and the hardening of the children of godly parents in every age.

Romans 9 is the Holy Spirit's

"election theology" of covenant.

Thus, and only thus, is defended and proclaimed the sovereignty, the grace, and the faithfulness of the covenant God of Israel and the church. Thus, and only thus, is maintained the reliability of the Word of promise for believers and their children today. The Word of promise by which we are saved and upon which we depend does not fail. □

(to be concluded)

— DJE

Letters

No Froth

The Standard Bearer is an excellent publication, thoughtful in its presentation of the Reformed faith and utterly free of superficial "froth." I look forward to receiving each issue. Renew my subscription.

Donald Granger
Garden Grove, CA

Unsaved Professing Christians?

Enclosed is a check so that I will continue to get *The Standard Bearer*. I enjoy the magazine. You are right on the mark.

I became a Christian six years ago and God led me to a good Reformed church. ... When I first became a Christian, I was afraid of being deceived. Therefore, I became an avid reader, starting with the Bible and continuing with Reformation writings. I have just finished John Owen's *The Holy Spirit* and *The Works of the Spirit*.

Could you answer a question for me? Do you think there are 60

million unsaved people out there thinking that they are saved? The doctrine being preached in most churches today is heresy. The same is true of most of the preaching on television. After reading *The Holy Spirit*, I am amazed at the number of people who claim to have Him in them, but who do not show the true work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Will Jesus Christ forgive ignorance of doctrine when He comes? Could there be some of the elect among them?

Mrs. Sandra Wittner
Otis Orchards, WA

RESPONSE:

We appreciate your encouraging remarks about *The Standard Bearer* and your renewing your subscription.

Your resolve to read and the kinds of material that you read are cause for rejoicing. It is no small contributing factor to the great apostasy of our day that professing Christians either do not read or read the

frothy religious literature being published widely today.

As to your question about heresy and salvation, the Bible takes heresy and belief of heresy in dead earnest. Heretics are servants of Satan (cf. II Pet. 2). The seriousness of the teaching of heresy is that many are led astray to eternal perdition, being deceived (cf. Matt. 24:4, 5, 24; II Thess. 2:3, 10-12; II Tim. 3). The way to salvation, established by election itself, is "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (II Thess. 2:13).

What this may mean concerning the relatively small size of the true church today does not justify our concocting a new way of salvation other than belief of the truth. Fact is, the Bible prophesies that the number of believers will be small in the end-time (cf. Luke 12:32; Luke 18:8). The ignorance of the truth on the part of so many should only motivate us the more energetically to bear witness to the truth -- the Reformed faith. □

— Ed.

Guest Article

Rev. Steven Key

Church Membership in an Evil Age (3)

Having considered the scriptural principles and responsibilities of church membership, we devoted the last article to the inescapable truth of corporate responsibility. Though many in this age of ecclesiastical departure and apostasy would like to ignore that truth, it is exactly the truth of corporate responsibility and corporate guilt that lies at the basis of the call, "Come out from among them and be ye separate." We must not continue in conflict with the holiness of God. I pointed out that, for some of you, that may mean separation *now* from the body where you currently have your church membership. That is a move that is extremely difficult. I know that — as a matter of experience.

But when I point out that exercising the responsibility of church membership becomes increasingly difficult in the advancing apostasy in the church today, I would remind you that God's people have often faced the same difficulties in centuries past.

That was the difficulty that our Reformation fathers faced in the bondage of Roman Catholicism. Do not think for a moment that they left that church on a whim! Do not think that they left the Roman Catholic Church without a struggle! And I refer here not to the fact that in many cases they faced physical persecution. Rather, I point out that the Reformers finally came to the decision to leave the Ro-

man Catholic Church only after tremendous spiritual struggle of soul. It ought to be clear that love for God's church and for His people should prevent any Christian from making separation *without* going through that struggle of soul. But once men like Martin Luther and John Calvin made that separation, they forcefully called God's people to follow them.

In 1537, John Calvin wrote a very pointed letter of considerable length. That letter was titled: "On Shunning the Unlawful Rites of the Ungodly and Preserving the Purity of the Christian Religion," and you will find it in the third volume of his *Tracts and Treatises*. This letter was written to those who professed the Reformation gospel, but for various practical reasons remained within the Roman Catholic Church. In no uncertain terms Calvin pointed them to their sin of turning their eyes away from God's Word and demanding nothing more of themselves than could be performed without endangering either their safety or their conditions. But he also pointed to the truth that there is no difficulty too great to be surmounted by him who strengthens himself with the consideration that, though all men should threaten, their menaces cannot outweigh those which the Lord denounces against the deserters of His camp.

Calvin's view of the necessity of belonging to a church that manifests the marks of the true church is not only historically significant, but is also of great practical importance for Protestants in departing churches today.

Some 300 years later, in the face of rampant departure from the truth of Scripture in the Church of England,

and the influx of a mentality that sought reunion with Rome in many areas, Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote a review of two papers by the Reverend J.C. Ryle, the prominent and soundly Reformed pastor and bishop, whose writings many of us have read with pleasure.

The papers Spurgeon was reviewing were titled "Church Principles" and "Church Comprehensiveness." Spurgeon wrote:

There is no party within the Church of England with whom we are more nearly agreed than the Evangelical (i.e., the party to which Ryle belonged, SK), and yet they excite far more our wonder and pity than our sympathy. We wonder they are not ashamed of being connected with men who openly defy the law and preach the worst form of Popery. We pity them because, while they remain in the Establishment, their protests against its errors have but little power. ... Congresses in which Christ and antichrist are brought together cannot but exercise a very unhealthy influence even upon the most decided followers of the truth. We wish Mr. Ryle could review his own position in the light of the Scriptures rather than in the darkness of ecclesiasticism; then would he come out from among them, and no more touch the unclean thing (p. 143, *Forgotten Spurgeon*).

In 1864 Spurgeon addressed an issue that plagues many churches today, including the historic Reformed churches. There were professors in various colleges connected with the Church of England and ministers and bishops who questioned the divine inspiration of Scripture and limited its authority to a religious sphere, if they recognized any authority in it at

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all. This is how Spurgeon described the times, and I ask you: Do you see the likeness in the church today?

God's Word, in this age, is a small affair; some do not even believe it to be inspired; and those who profess to revere it set up other books in a sort of rivalry with it. Why, there are great Church dignitaries now-a-days who write against the Bible, and yet find bishops to defend them. (They tell us) "Do not, for a moment, think of condemning their books or them; they are our dear brethren, and must not be fettered in thought" (*Ibid.*, p. 147).

Do you not see the application? Miserable heretics have permeated churches with their swords of higher criticism, hacking the whole of the Scriptures to pieces. Spurgeon also called attention in writing to the consequences of the new teaching which had permeated the churches:

Attendance at places of worship is declining, and reverence for holy things is vanishing... (*Ibid.*, p. 149).

And, in closing, he raised the issue which others had declined to face:

It now becomes a serious question how far those who abide by the faith once delivered to the saints should

***"... Fellowship with
known and vital error is
participation in sin."***

fraternize with those who have turned aside to another gospel. Christian love has lost its claims, and divisions are to be shunned as grievous evils; but how far are we justified in being in confederacy with those who are departing from the truth?

A chasm is opening between the men who believe their Bibles and the men who are prepared for an advance upon Scripture. The house is being robbed, its very walls are being digged down, but the good people who are in bed are too fond of the warmth, and too much afraid of getting broken heads, to go downstairs and meet the burglars. ... Inspiration and speculation cannot long abide in peace. Compromise there can be none. We cannot hold the inspiration of the Word, and yet reject it; we cannot believe in the atonement and deny it; we cannot hold the doctrine of the fall and yet talk of the evolution of spiritual life from human nature; we cannot recognize the punishment of the impenitent and yet indulge the "larger hope." One way

or the other we must go. Decision is the virtue of the hour (*Ibid.*, p. 149).

Believers in Christ's atonement are now in declared union with those who make light of it; believers in Holy Scripture are in confederacy with those who deny plenary inspiration; those who hold evangelical doctrine are in open alliance with those who call the fall a fable, who deny the personality of the Holy Ghost, who call justification by faith immoral, and hold that there is another probation after death. ... Yes, we have before us the wretched spectacle of professedly orthodox Christians publicly avowing their union with those who deny the faith, and scarcely concealing their contempt for those who cannot be guilty of such gross disloyalty to Christ. To be very plain, we are unable to call these things Christian Unions, they begin to look like Confederacies in Evil. ... It is our solemn conviction that where there can be no real spiritual communion there should be no pretence of fellowship. *Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin* (*Ibid.*, p. 150).

May God forbid that we lose our children and children's children because of our own paralysis of indecision! □

In His Fear
Rev. Arie denHartog

The Importance of a Doctrinal Christianity (II)

There cannot be any religion without doctrine. That is especially the case with the true religion. In our day there are many advocates of religion without doctrine or any theological pronouncements. This they claim was the simple religion of Jesus.

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All the doctrinal pronouncements of the church through history are only human scholastic additions. Doctrine leads us away, they say, from the simplicity of faith in Christ Jesus. Sometimes sincere Christians might also be inclined to imagine that doctrine is not very important. Learning and understanding doctrine is hard work. It takes a lot of effort. Furthermore, those who seek to defend sound doctrine are often engaged in great, unpleasant debates. When the church

insists on sound doctrine she draws lines, she offends those who do not agree with that doctrine. Doctrinal controversies in the church have caused grievous division. Brother has been set against brother, families have been divided, those who were once close friends have become bitter enemies. Are we not better off to avoid all of this by ignoring questions of doctrine? We are not saved, it is emphasized, by theology and doctrine but by a right relationship with

Jesus Christ and by following His simple life style. Cannot we all be one happy family by allowing everyone to have his own opinion about doctrine? Or, perhaps, can we not just leave doctrine to the theologians of the church, since it really has nothing to do with our daily lives as Christians anyway? The important thing, it is claimed, is not the doctrine you believe but how you live and how sincere you are. All of that may sound good and even rather pious, but is it right? Is it possible?

Sometimes the word "doctrine" is used in a limited and narrow sense to refer to a cold abstract intellectual debate among theologians that is pretty well totally irrelevant to the Christian life of the common ordinary child of God. We are particularly anxious that we are not misunderstood in this regard. That is not the meaning of the word "doctrine" when it is used in the Scriptures. As we pointed out in our last article, according to Scripture, doctrine is simply "sound teaching." It is carefully formulated and expressed teaching about the truth of God and His Son Jesus Christ and the way of salvation. If we truly understand this as Christians, we will also see the importance of maintaining sound doctrine.

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It is true that at times in the history of the church, doctrinal discussion has degenerated into cold scholastic debate. Doctrinal discussion has at times fallen into arid, dry-as-dust discussion or hair-splitting, theological wrangling, without regard to the personal living God and rich and blessed and vibrant truth of salvation of which this doctrine speaks. The fault of this does not lie in the true doctrine of God itself but rather in the evil attitude of those handling that doctrine. Neither ought this drive the

church to the foolish and radical position that all doctrine must be rejected.

The true doctrine of God can be known only through the power of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of men. It can only be spiritually discerned by the born again child of God. Its blessed reality can only be known by the humble child of God who prayerfully searches the Scriptures under the guidance of the Spirit of God in complete submission to God's own revelation of Himself. The child of God earnestly prays that God will reveal to him all the riches and wonder of the doctrine of the Scriptures. But he also prays that God will teach him to be silent before God's Word and to add nothing to it which is the product merely of his own imagination or reason. He prays to be kept totally within the limits of God's own revelation and not to be allowed to go beyond that revelation into all sorts of vain speculation of his own mind.

It is important that we know the true doctrine of God. God has revealed Himself to us that we might know Him and worship and serve Him rightly. The truth that God has revealed concerning Himself is the doctrine of God. He has revealed who and what He is. He has revealed His mighty and wonderful and glorious attributes, His absolute sovereignty, perfect holiness and infinite goodness. Knowing God involves gathering the true knowledge of God from all Scripture through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is necessary for our faith to gather and summarize that knowledge as it is found throughout the Scriptures and not merely in one verse here and there. Through such labors we come to know the truth of God. All our thoughts of God, all our worship of God, our fear and love of God, our faith in God, is and must be based on the true doctrine of God, that God Himself has given us in the Bible. God has performed many mighty and wonderful acts through history, wonders of creation and providence, and wonders of our salvation. Doctrine means nothing more than a right knowledge

and understanding of the works of God. It is impossible truly to know God without knowing the true doctrine concerning Him. When we rightly consider the doctrine of God in the Scriptures, in a spiritual way, our knowledge of Him will grow more and more blessed and wonderful.

Almost all false doctrine is an attack on God, on His glorious majesty and the wonderful truth concerning who and what He is as God. That is why false doctrine is so very serious. That is why saints of God who love God have been ready to die for the cause of the true doctrine of God. Those who suggest that we can have a religion without doctrine want to reduce Christianity to nothing more than a mystic, subjective religion in which every one thinks his own thoughts about God, supposedly according to his own individual experience or perhaps the experience of the age he lives in.

God cannot be known except through the true doctrine He has revealed concerning Himself in the Bible. When men reject that doctrine or say that it is not important, they really make a god after their own imagination. The liberal drive to do away with doctrine strives to do exactly that. Modern man rejects the sovereign almighty and holy God of the Bible because he hates that God. In place of Him he makes a false image of his own imagination. The true child of God, together with the church of Jesus Christ, maintains and confesses the true doctrine of God whereby he in love knows and confesses the true God, and glories in and worships Him alone.

In our last article we emphasized that the essence of Christianity is not a vague and undefined relationship with Jesus. It does not consist of merely following the example of a humanistic Jesus by obeying a few generally defined ethical principles which He espoused. We are saved not first of all by what we do or by how we live but by believing who Jesus Christ is and what He did. Jesus is the Holy and Almighty Son of God who came to earth to reveal the true

God. He came to earth to save His people from their sins. When Jesus was on earth He declared the truth concerning Himself. Through His ministry on earth He performed the mighty works of God. He was crucified, He died, He was buried. He arose from the dead on the third day. He ascended into heaven and was exalted at the right hand of God. He promised His church that He would come again at the end of the ages to establish His everlasting kingdom of righteousness in the new heavens and earth. These are all mighty historic works that Jesus performed. They are the wonderful works of our salvation which He accomplished. Doctrine is nothing more than a true understanding of who Jesus really is as the Son of God and our Savior. Doctrine is the right understanding of the tremendous work of salvation that He performed and the hope of salvation that we have in that work.

At the time when Jesus walked on earth, and when He was crucified, even His disciples had only a limited understanding of who really Jesus was and of the meaning and purpose of His work. There were still many things that they did not yet understand. Therefore they were thrown into confusion when Jesus was crucified and they were not expecting His resurrection. On the day of Pentecost Jesus poured out His Holy Spirit upon His disciples, and suddenly they could understand and they could speak of the wonderful works of God. The Spirit which was poured out on the apostles according to the promise of Jesus instructed them in the true doctrine of Jesus and of the great significance of His work of salvation. The apostles later wrote of that doctrine by the inspiration of God. The letters of the apostles contain the true doctrine of Jesus Christ. God gave the apostles to understand in a profound way the finished and absolutely perfect work of Christ on the cross and the substitutionary and vicarious nature of that work. He gave the apostles to understand the perfect and unchangeable righteousness that was imputed to the saints through faith in

the work of Christ. Above all, God revealed to them the glory of His sovereign grace and mercy that shines forth in that work. All of this belongs to the true doctrine of Christ.

The doctrine of Christ is exceedingly important. Without that doctrine we cannot know Christ nor the blessed significance of His work of salvation. We are not saved first of all by following Jesus' example nor by living according to the ethical principles that He taught. We are saved first of all through faith in Christ and the truth that is in Him. We are saved by believing that Jesus is truly the Son of God and by trusting in His perfect work. True Christian living follows out of such faith. True Christian living is based on the true doctrine of Christ. Doctrine is a right understanding of who Christ is and what His work means. Through the history of the church many heresies have arisen in the church to deny and oppose parts of the doctrine of Christ. These heresies deny the glory of Christ and the perfection of His work. We cannot confess Christ and continue to believe in Him unless we confess and maintain the doctrine of Christ. If we deny that doctrine we deny Him.

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Some imagine that though it might be important to maintain certain basic truths concerning who Christ is and what He did, it is still not important to be so concerned about sound doctrine. All the doctrinal controversies that have plagued the church have been about unimportant truths, they imagine. This is however a grave mistake. It is true of course that some doctrines of Scripture are more major and fundamental than others. The great doctrinal controversies that have plagued the church

through history have been so major that the truth of God and Jesus Christ and the right understanding of salvation have been at stake. That still is true today. The issues of doctrinal controversy that divide various denominations and churches from each other are so fundamental that they involve a denial of the true God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal questions are of greatest importance for true Christianity. Today, for example, even the doctrinal differences between Reformed and Calvinistic churches and Arminianism are imagined to be of little importance. Even members in Reformed churches imagine these differences to be of only secondary importance. They imagine that most of these differences can be reduced to only slightly different perspectives and emphases. In reality however the differences are so great that the one system of doctrine, namely the Arminian system current in most modern-day churches, is thoroughly man-centered and man glorifying. It essentially teaches man to save himself through his own will and by his own works — whereas the true, historic doctrine of the Reformed faith exalts the truth that God saves His people whom He loves with everlasting love by sovereign grace and mercy alone and for His glory. These two systems of doctrine are diametrically opposed to each other. The one is false and the other represents the only true doctrine revealed in Scripture.

We intend to continue our discussion in our next article with the subject: "Maintaining Sound Doctrine in the Church."

True revival does not come to the church by a mystical wave of the "Spirit" that sweeps the church, nor by the stirring up of a false feeling of brotherhood among all men. It does not come through a resurgence of interest in evangelism or by getting the church involved in social action. True revival comes when the church, by the mighty operation of the Spirit of God, returns to the true doctrine of the Scriptures. □

Guest Article

Rev. Rodney Miersma

Fishermen Fishers of Men

Living in New Zealand one soon learns that the people of that land live close to the sea, both literally and figuratively. Most of the population lives along the coast, making access to the sea a matter of minutes. For those who live in the middle of the country, which are few, a drive of an hour or less will bring them to the coast. As one drives along the coast one sees a favorite activity of both New Zealanders and foreigners, that is, fishing. Some are fishing from shore, others from boats — little boats and big boats. Some are angling with rod and reel, others are letting out their nets. But all have one thing in common, catching fish.

Very often, then, one is reminded of the Lord Jesus Christ and the lesson that He taught us in the miraculous draught of fishes, a miracle performed once in His early ministry and then again after His resurrection. For our purposes at present we will limit ourselves to the first one as recorded in Matthew 4, Mark 1, and Luke 5. You should read these passages, especially Luke 5, in order to get the scene firmly before you.

The event is quite familiar to us. Two pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John, were on the shores of Galilee cleaning their nets after a fruitless night of fishing. Jesus was there also, teaching the people. Because of the press of the people Jesus took one of the fishermen's boats and pushed out a little from the shore,

using the boat as a floating pulpit as He spoke to the people on shore. When finished speaking, the Lord instructed Peter to take his boat into the deep and let down his nets for a draught. Even though he had toiled all night and caught nothing, yet Peter obeyed the Lord, with the result that so many fish were caught that the nets began to break and both his own boat and that of his partners began to sink.

Obviously Christ had demonstrated by this miracle that He was the Son of God, a truth reflected in the reaction of these four fishermen. They were all amazed, and Peter fell down at the knees of Jesus saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." In turn Jesus says to Peter, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

A beautiful parallel between the first part of the narrative and the second part cannot help but be noticed. First we see Jesus teaching the people and preaching the gospel of the kingdom in person from that little boat. Indeed, the Great Fisher of men! In the second part we see that Jesus indicates to these disciples something about their future calling. In the future Christ will continue to be the Great Fisher of men, but with this difference, namely, that He will accomplish this work through the instrumentality of the disciples. They will cast the net of the gospel into the sea, and He will cause a great multitude of men to be enclosed in it.

Briefly, we see a parable in this miracle. The sea is none other than the world of men and of nations in which the apostles and the preachers of the gospel do their fishing in the spiritual sense of the word. In this same spiritual sense, the casting out

of the net is the preaching of the gospel. The fishermen are the preachers of the gospel: first, these disciples who would be sent out as apostles, and later, all preachers of the gospel. And to complete the picture, the fish in the net are the saved in Christ, who are brought into the net through the almighty power of His grace and by His irresistible call.

What do we learn from this? The Lord is revealing the kingdom of heaven to us and is, therefore, teaching us something about that kingdom. A miracle is a sign, a wonder, pointing to the grace of God in the salvation of His people. So what is it that we can and do learn from this miracle?

First of all, it becomes immediately apparent that all human endeavor is absolutely hopeless as to the preaching of the gospel and the gathering of God's people. The disciples fished all night but caught nothing. However, when Christ sent forth His almighty word of power, such a multitude of fishes were caught that their nets broke and their boats began to sink. So it is today concerning the preaching of the gospel and the gathering of the church. Human endeavor, all by itself, is hopeless! Man may preach until he is blue in the face, yes, even God-fearing and faithful men may toil all the night long, but no fish, no men will be brought into the church of Jesus Christ. But in our day the call goes out for more preachers, more missionaries, as if mere men, the more the better, can convert the world by simply casting forth the net, preaching the gospel. Oh yes, there are results. Social improvement, economic improvement, all of which is no more than heathendom highly cultured.

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This, however, should not cause us to be lax in casting out the net. Oh no, cast out the net we must do, and very zealously. But what we must understand is that all *our* toil, no matter how faithful, in itself avails absolutely nothing.

What then? We first must notice in this miracle that we have to do here with a calling. At the call of Christ the disciples go out and they are given to enjoy a great catch. So it is with the preaching of the gospel. The Lord calls His servants. That the Lord does not call everybody is seen from the fact that He does not call the crowd that is situated on the seashore, but the four fishermen. Today the Lord is in heaven and He does not call His servants directly, but indirectly through the church. But call He does. Only those receiving such a call have the authority to preach. That is a truth that is largely lost in our modern society. It seems as if anybody and everybody can go forth as a herald of the Lord, speaking in the authority of His name. But this miracle, and later Paul, make it abundantly clear that no one can preach except he be sent. To the church Christ gives pastors and teachers; and through that church He calls and qualifies.

Note also the obedience of faith to this call. Though they had toiled all night long and had caught nothing, through Peter they responded, "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." So too it is with us today. It all looks so hopeless. As churches we are small. Here in New Zealand that is especially the case. The whole denomination of the Protestant Reformed Church of New Zealand consists of one congregation of seven families. So we along with the rest of the church of Christ sometimes believe that all is so hopeless. The world is so exceedingly wicked and becoming yet more so. What possibly can be accomplished by our small church in her letting down the net of the gospel into the sea of men? Surely there must be a better method than the preaching of the gospel, which appears to be an exercise in foolishness. It all seems to be for nothing. Certainly something

more could be added to or even substituted for the preaching in order to make it more pleasing to the pride of the natural man. But in the face of all this the church of Jesus Christ and her faithful ministers of the gospel respond in faith, the response of simple obedience and perfect trust: "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." The preacher keeps preaching, and energized by that preaching the members of the church form their evangelism societies through which they keep on printing and handing out pamphlets, sponsoring lectures, and the like. All of this is done in faithful obedience to the call of Christ.

And the Lord draws. As He drew the fishes into the net, so He now draws His people unto Himself. Even though He makes His servants fishers of men, He remains the Great Fisher of men. Men today do not catch men all by themselves, but it is always Christ who catches men through them. It is Christ who regenerates His people and who calls them with an irresistible calling. He calls irresistibly, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And all who labor and are heavy laden come and find rest. He gives faith and grace; He justifies, sanctifies, and preserves even unto the end. It is His work, even though He works that work through us. Therefore, it is His word, and His word alone, that brings men into the net of the gospel and saves them. All the glory, then, belongs to Him, and to Him alone.

*What incentive
to keep letting down the net,
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of the almighty God,
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and unto Himself!*

What encouragement for the church, no matter how small she is here on the earth! What incentive to keep letting down the net, knowing that the power of the almighty God,

not our puny efforts, brings men into His church and unto Himself! That power is greater than all the power in the whole world! And what a promise! For out of the world, from which no human toil could ever call the church of the living God, the Lord will call His own elect church, a great multitude which no man can number! Not one given to Christ shall be missing. Even as it was the Father's will from eternity, so Christ shall raise them up at the last day. And they shall all appear before Him without spot or wrinkle, in the assembly of the elect, in life eternal. And all the honor and praise and glory shall be God's forever and ever. □

*Now thanks be unto God,
which always causeth us
to triumph in Christ,
and maketh manifest
the savour of his knowledge
by us in every place.
For them that are saved,
and in them that perish:
To the one we are
the savour of death unto death;
and to the other
the savour of life unto life.
And who is sufficient
for these things?
II Corinthians 2:14, 15*

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Church and State

James Lanting

Home Schoolers Appeal Certification Requirement to Michigan Supreme Court

Therefore, it is entirely irrelevant to inquire, as this Court did, into the question: is it a violation of the DeJonges' beliefs to hire a certified teacher? Certification is a red herring in examining the burden issue. It would be a violation of the DeJonges' religious beliefs to delegate the education of their children to their pastor, his wife, a school teacher, or anyone else. God requires them to teach their own children. To the DeJonges delegation of their children's education to anyone else would be a sin.

DeJonge Brief,
State of Mich. v. DeJonge, 1990.

1st Amendment Issue

Ever since 1984, Mark and Chris DeJonge of Allendale, Michigan, have been battling the state in the courts for their right to home school their seven children. Michigan law requires all students to be taught by certified teachers. Since neither of the DeJonges is certified, they contend the law prevents them from obeying God's requirement that they personally educate their own children. Both

DeJonges testified at trial that they have a "religious conviction that God commands parents to educate their children at home." They argued the Michigan law violates the First Amendment which forbids a government from passing laws that "prohibit the free exercise" of religion. The trial judge found them guilty of truancy, fined them \$400, and they have been appealing their case ever since.

A Michigan appellate court has twice affirmed their convictions and upheld the constitutionality of the certification law, but the DeJonges, represented by attorneys from the Home School Defense Association, are now appealing to the Michigan supreme court for the second time.

In constitutional terminology the issue in the DeJonge case is this: whether the state's teacher certification requirement which burdens the parents' religious beliefs about educating their children is "essential" and the "least restrictive means" for achieving the state's "compelling interest" in the education of children. The appellate court, ruling against the DeJonges, stated:

Maintaining and improving the quality of our education continues to be one of the most important issues in Michigan today. The teacher certification requirement is a backbone in the protection of this vital interest. ... The certification requirement is the least obtrusive means of achieving the state's interest.

Least Restrictive Means

The DeJonges disagree. Although they admit the state may have a "compelling interest" in an educated citizenry, they argue that teacher certification is not the "least restrictive means" of achieving that goal. The DeJonges note that out of the fifty states, only two—Michigan and Iowa—still insist upon the "archaic" requirement of teacher certification. All the other 48 states permit home schooling by non-certified parents, requiring only that the students periodically submit to standardized testing or a review of a portfolio of their work. Thus they contend that Michigan's requirement of certification of home schooling parents is an unconstitutional and needless violation of their religious liberty and beliefs which compel them to educate their own children at home.

The DeJonges also argue (somewhat convincingly, given the condition of the public school system) that the evidence is overwhelming that teacher certification does not necessarily guarantee performance of the teacher or the learning of the student. Several educational studies have shown that there is "no positive correlation" between educational performance of the student and the teacher's certification.

Accordingly, the DeJonges contend that since 48 states in the nation find it unnecessary to enforce teacher certification to achieve their educa-

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tional goals, and since there is no scientific evidence that certification enhances greater learning, Michigan should abandon its "sacred cow" of teacher certification.

Notwithstanding previous school decisions which indicate that the Michigan supreme court is evenly divided on the issue of certification, most observers speculate that the DeJonges will prevail and the court will now strike down the certification requirement (most likely on the grounds that it is not "essential" or the "least restrictive means" for achieving the state's educational interests). Meanwhile, the DeJonges continue to educate their children in the basement of their home, confident the supreme court will eventually rule in their favor.

The Sin of Delegation

One would certainly hope that the DeJonges will prevail and that Michigan's onerous and oppressive certification requirement will be struck down once and for all. This archaic and bureaucratic stipulation has long plagued private and parochial schools in Michigan who wish to establish their own teacher competency standards. And the DeJonges perhaps should be praised for their

tenacity and resolve in pursuing their legal appeals to have the certification law judicially repealed.

But what is troublesome about the DeJonges' view of education is not their disenchantment with certification but rather their insistence that God requires all parents *personally* to teach their children, and that it is a *sin* to delegate that task to a tutor or school teacher (see quote above from the DeJonge appellate brief).

*The practice of parents
delegating the task
of education
to a Christian teacher
who stands in loco parentis
is older than
Calvin's Geneva Academy.*

Although the DeJonges certainly have the constitutional prerogative to embrace such a belief, it would seem they may have a difficult if not impossible task of demonstrating that such an extreme view is biblical or Reformed. The practice of parents delegating the task of education to a Christian teacher who stands *in loco parentis* is older than Calvin's Geneva Academy. To insist that God com-

mands each parent *personally* to educate his children to the exclusion of Christian day schools is an unorthodox notion indeed. Refusing children attendance at a godless state school is one thing; to argue it is sinful for parents to hire trustworthy tutors or Christian school teachers who teach "in the place of the parent" appears to be untenable at best.

Moreover, this view smacks of selfish individualism to the detriment of the concept of a "community" of believers. The Christian day school movement in this country has had a long and noble history, evidencing the possibility of establishing excellent schools staffed by competent and professional teachers supervised by a community or association of parents cooperating together, financially and otherwise, to make such schools a reality.

The alternative is not attractive—hundreds of harried mothers, teaching their children correspondence courses in basements across the land, and our Christian day schools closing because of meager enrollments and lack of funds. Because we may have the *freedom* to teach our own children at home, does not necessarily mean that we should *choose* that option over a Christian day school in the area. □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Charles Terpstra

The Preciousness of Knowing God

"Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;

The proper study of mankind is Man."

These words of the English poet, Alexander Pope, found in his philo-

sophical work, "An Essay on Man" (1733-34), are certainly echoed by our modern-day evolutionists and self-esteem proponents. But in contrast to this view, the Reformed Christian says, "Know then thy God! Presume to scan the Godhead, for the proper study of mankind is God!" It is true, as John Calvin writes in the opening words of his *Institutes*, that all the wisdom we possess is composed of two parts—knowledge of God and

knowledge of ourselves. But as he says a bit later, "... It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself" (I, chap. 1, sect. 2). It is the knowledge of God which is first and foremost in all of life.

I intend in my brief series of articles under this rubric to have us make a "study" of God, to "contem-

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plate" Him. I have been assigned to write on the area of doctrine known as "theology," the doctrine of God. And the way I want to treat this subject is not dogmatically but practically, i.e., to consider what a blessing it is for the Christian to know God. This is not to downplay sound doctrine and right thinking, for as Sinclair Ferguson has written, "to be a Christian is not a mindless experience, but involves knowledge and understanding" (*A Heart For God*, p. 13). Yet as he goes on to explain, this knowledge and understanding are most practical; it means "a personal relationship and personal acquaintance with the Lord" (*ibid.*, p. 13).

This implies that our approach is that of *faith*. We do not approach the doctrine of God as unbelieving skeptics, wondering whether God can be known and inquiring into various proofs for His existence. We approach this subject as those who believe in the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We start with the basic belief that God not only is, but also that He is the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ. We begin with the understanding that He can be and is known by all those who believe in Him.

This is our starting point, not because the knowledge of God is something we have of ourselves naturally, but because God has *revealed* Himself to us. That is, He has *made* Himself known to us in His holy Word, the Bible, and He has *worked* in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, "that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:13). This truth of divine revelation is what Rev. Marvin Kamps has laid down as a foundation in his series of articles on the doctrine of Scripture. This is the only reason we can truly know God and believe on Him unto salvation.

With that introduction, I want us to see the great preciousness of the knowledge of God. To know God is to have something of great worth and value; it is something to esteem very highly and cherish. This is what the catechism students in the Protestant Reformed "Essentials of Reformed Doctrine" class learn. The first ques-

tion of their book asks, "What is above all things precious?" And the answer is: "The knowledge of the true God through Jesus Christ Whom He has sent."

*... the science of God
is the greatest knowledge
one can seek and attain.*

Knowing God is precious, first of all, because it is the HIGHEST KNOWLEDGE there is. There is no greater knowledge that a person can obtain than the knowledge of God. In our day when every other science (area of knowledge) is elevated and worshiped, we do well to remember that the science of God is the greatest knowledge one can seek and attain. Our Reformed fathers used to refer to the doctrine of God (theology) as the "queen of the sciences" (cf., e.g., the "Form for the Installation of Professors of Theology" in the *Psalter*). How many of us still consider it to be so? How many of us are seeking this queen?

Charles H. Spurgeon expressed it well in a sermon of his:

The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls Father. ... The most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the science of Christ, and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity (Quoted in *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer, pp. 13, 14).

This is corroborated by the holy Scriptures. In Proverbs 9:10 the inspired Solomon teaches us, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." The apostle Paul in Philippians 3:8 confessed what was most precious to him: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. ..." And this

apostle sought the same thing of the people among whom he labored, so that, for example, he prayed without ceasing on behalf of the Ephesian believers, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." And finally, in Jeremiah 9:23, 24 we read:

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD, which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD."

Notice this. Jehovah says that we must not boast in anything else but in the fact that we know Him. Is that true of us? What do you and I glory in? In our wisdom? In our might? In our riches? Or in our knowledge of the true and living God? Only the last mentioned boasting delights the Lord. All other glorying is vain.

In the second place, the knowledge of God is so precious because it is SALVATION and LIFE. As S. Ferguson has written, "The knowledge of God is the heart of salvation and all true spiritual experience. Knowing Him is what we were created for. It will occupy us throughout all eternity" (*ibid.*, p. 13).

This too is plainly taught us in the Word. In the prophecy of Jeremiah God promised that the essence of His new covenant with His people would be this: "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD" (31:34). And in that startling statement of Jesus' high-priestly prayer we find Him saying, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (Jn. 17:3). Notice that. According to our Lord, to know God is everlasting life! Do we understand this? The knowledge and skill we

have in our work will not save us. Our knowledge of math or biology or English literature will not save us. But the knowledge of God will, for it is eternal life.

Finally, in the third place, to know God is so precious because it is of great COMFORT to the child of God. C.H. Spurgeon again put this beautifully:

Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated (Quoted in *Knowing God*, Packer, p. 14).

And the Word of God substantiates this. Daniel 11:32 teaches us that "the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." Would we be strong to endure our sufferings and trials? We must know God. Would we be strong to overcome Satan and his temptations? We must know the Lord. Proverbs 18:10 further instructs us thus: "The name of the LORD (i.e., the knowledge of Him as revealed in the Word — CJT) is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." And to quote no more, it is in knowing God that "we know that all things work together for good" and that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:28, 39).

It is for these reasons that the knowledge of God is precious to the

believer. What an incentive then for us to know the Lord and grow in the knowledge of Him! Let us apply our hearts and minds to the continual study of our God, the knowledge of whom is the highest knowledge, is saving knowledge, and is comforting knowledge!

Since in this series of articles we cannot possibly cover the scope and depth of the doctrine of God, allow me to recommend some good reading:

1. Calvin's *Institutes*, Books I, II
2. J.I. Packer's *Knowing God*
3. Sinclair Ferguson's *A Heart For God*
4. A.W. Tozer's *The Knowledge of the Holy*
5. Arthur Pink's *The Attributes of God* □

The Strength of Youth

Rev. Barrett Gritters

The End Times (12) The Return of Christ

Jesus Christ is coming again! I believe that! Every Sunday evening, in our heart or with our mouth, we confess this: "I believe in Jesus Christ... he shall come to judge the living and the dead."

This same Jesus who came to planet earth some two thousand years ago, who gave Himself in love for us, will come back in that same love for us.

When?

The battle of Armageddon (or Gog and Magog) will be the last battle the world experiences. In this battle, the divided kingdom of Antichrist fights against itself. The nations of Gog and Magog which were joined to the beast (Antichrist) will come against the beast in battle.

This battle will end the persecution of the saints. Before this battle, the Antichristian kingdom was in the height of its power and glory — one world government and one world economy, with prosperity that this world has never known. In the middle of that prosperity will be the great tribulation. But when God pours out the vials of His wrath, the kingdom of Antichrist will be weakened, causing her to attend to her own suffering,

finally bringing about the last battle — Armageddon.

During this last battle, all the judgments of God come on this earthly creation (see Matt. 24:29). In the heat of the battle, God will darken the sun, make the moon like blood, and hurl the stars from the heavens. Also this planet will suffer. The foundations will shake with a great earthquake. Boulders of hailstones will fall to the earth. Pestilence will break out. Waters will turn to blood. The air will be polluted. Animals will die in great numbers. (See Heb. 12:26, 27; Rev. 6, and 16.)

Then, Matthew 24 says, will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. Then the tribes of the earth shall mourn. Then the dead shall be raised and we shall ever be with the

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Lord in His kingdom. Here, Jesus answers more directly the original question of the disciples: "When shall the end come?"

The Second Coming

There is a danger that we must try to avoid as we think about the end times. We have not entirely avoided it so far. The danger is that we focus our attention on what will happen to us at the end. That there are signs we must see, happenings to beware of, a duty to be engaged in, is all true. But that we lose proper focus is a real danger.

The disciples were concerned, remember, with the question, "What shall be the sign of *thy* coming?" Our calling is to focus our attention on the Lord. Basic to all our studies of the end times must be the attitude, "Lord, we look forward to being in glory with Thee, when Thy kingdom is established perfectly and all men bow the knee to Thee and every tongue confesses Thy name. When wilt thou come?"

Christ is coming again. But beware that you are not deceived about this either! Some explain the Bible's teaching about Jesus' second coming as the full coming of Jesus' ideals and teachings. Believe them not. Others claim that the personal coming of Jesus that Matthew 24 describes is a triumph of Jesus' gospel. Believe them not. Still others teach that there will be two separate "comings again" of Jesus, a secret coming at the "rapture," and a visible coming at the "revelation." This is based on I Thessalonians 4:17, which supposedly teaches that. Believe them not. There is one coming again of Jesus and one physical resurrection from the dead. Jesus' second coming is the end of this age.

Jesus' coming again will be a personal coming. In contrast to those who say that it is a coming of Jesus' ideas and teachings, or those who say it is a triumph of the gospel, we believe that Jesus will return personally. As He went up, so will He return (Acts 1:11).

Jesus' coming again will be a

visible coming. In contrast to those who say that this is a secret coming, we believe that all men will see Him (see Matt. 24:27, 30 and Rev. 1:7).

Jesus' coming again will be a wonder, an incomprehensible miracle. Every eye will see Him! But, you say, perhaps He comes "on the clouds" over our brothers and sisters in Singapore; yet we in America will see Him? Indeed! You explain this by satellite transmission of a television picture? Scripture explains it as a miracle.

Jesus' second coming will be a coming with splendor! In His first coming, it was with shame and weakness and dishonor. In His second He comes with power and glory! Oh, how I wait for that day when the tribes mourn (Matt. 24), Antichrist is consumed by Jesus (II Thess. 2), and the wicked hide from His presence and plead for the mountains to fall upon them. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, will come in great glory!

*All of earthly history
waits for this moment —
the coming again of Jesus
to usher in the eternity
of the new heavens
and the new earth.*

The End of the World

The disciples were surely right when they connected the end of the world with Jesus' second coming, as they did in Matthew 24:3. Earthly history and earthly creation come to an end at the moment of the return of the Son of Man.

But we must not understand this in this way: that Jesus stops everything when He comes again. The return of Jesus is the *beginning*! If we may speak that way, it is the beginning of eternity, the beginning of what God planned in His counsel eternally. All of earthly history waits for this moment — the coming again of Jesus to usher in the eternity of the new heavens and the new earth.

Jesus' coming again brings that goal to reality.

Will you look forward to anything else? Will you let your hope for any earthly event eclipse *this* hope? God forbid that we do! God grant that we have this hope burning in our breast!

The Rapture

Christ comes again to raise the dead. This is what Matthew 24 means when it says that the angels will gather together His elect from the four winds, and what I Thessalonians 4 means when we read, "The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds."

This is the resurrection of the dead bodies of men and women, bodies decayed in the grave, bodies scattered to the wind in ashes, bodies digested by lions and whales. These will live again.

Paul is speaking in I Thessalonians of the dead "in Christ." This does not mean that the dead outside of Christ will not be raised. They will. And their resurrection will take place at the same time, not a thousand years later. But Paul does not have them in mind here. He is comforting the saints. Paul speaks of the dead in Christ, and distinguishes the dead in Christ from those who are alive in Christ! First, those who are dead in Christ shall arise; then those who are alive in Him. (Those who have any contact with pre-millennialists ought to study this passage carefully and see what it teaches.)

We who die before Jesus comes again may be of good cheer! We die "in Christ" and we are dead "in Christ." In the grave, we and our loved ones who have died are really joined to Christ. Not only are we in Christ by faith so that our souls will go to heaven; we are in Christ in our bodies, so that our bodies must arise when Christ comes again.

It is so certain that our bodies will rise from the dead when Jesus returns, that the Bible refers to us as only "sleeping" (see II Thess. 4:13, 14, 15; Acts 7:60; I Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 51; etc.). This does not mean that when we die, our souls become unconscious,

and that when Jesus returns, He wakes us up. We will be awake immediately after death (Luke 23:43). When the Bible refers to us as sleeping, it points us to the certainty of our resurrection in the body. When you go to bed at night, you expect to get up in the morning. Unless something is dreadfully wrong with you, there is no doubt that you will get up. Now, when you lie on your deathbed, you must be *that* certain that you will rise again, *in your body!*

This is God's work. God will raise us from the dead when Jesus returns.

But God does this through Jesus. Jesus is the one by whom God will raise the dead. First, Jesus is the means of our resurrection because, having died for our sins, He gained for us the right to rise from the dead. Second, Jesus is the means because, having risen Himself, He has the ability to give life to others. He is the living Lord. Third, on that last day, Jesus Himself actually raises the dead by His almighty power. On that day, Jesus will speak a great word, a victorious command to the dead: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead!"

This is the rapture. The *dead* in Christ shall rise first. (At the same time, the dead outside of Christ will be raised). A moment later the living in Christ will be caught up in the air, ever to be with the Lord. We hold no secret rapture of living saints to be with Jesus for seven years, and then a thousand years later a resurrection. Jesus will come again to raise the dead — all of them — some to everlasting life, some to damnation.

Loved Ones Sleeping?

The Reformed teaching of the coming again of Jesus is comfort for us regarding our loved ones who have died. They will not miss out on the glory of Jesus' second coming. Paul puts that fear to rest in I Thessalonians 2 by showing that the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive and remain will be caught up to Him. This is what that peculiar statement in verse 15 means when it says, "we

which are alive and remain shall not prevent them which are asleep." *Prevent* simply means "to go before, or ahead of someone." We will not. They will rise first.

Comfort yourselves with these words.

God Will Be Glorified

But let us not forget the main purpose of Jesus' coming again. Jesus will be glorified in it, and God in Him. Jesus comes again, according to Matthew 24, "with power and great glory."

God will be glorified at this second coming because there the wicked will be condemned and punished. All those who rejected Him, who persecuted His saints, who worshiped the Antichrist, will be brought to judgment. They will "mourn" (Matt. 24:30). But God's elect will be gathered in. This will be the great glory of God. God saves His people, finally and entirely. Because it is completely His work, God will be adored by us for the sovereignty of His grace.

Look forward, then, to our meeting Christ in the air at His coming. Christ! We will go to Him then! We will forever be with Him in glory! Together we will enjoy Jesus into eternity! And then the prayers that God's people have been raising for thousands of years will be answered completely. "All glory be to thee, Father."

Discussion questions:

1. What does the Heidelberg Catechism say ought to be our attitude towards the second coming? (See Lord's Day 19.)
2. What hinders young people from hoping for Jesus' second coming?
3. What helps young people think more about (hope for!) the second coming of Jesus?
4. If there is nothing left of a body, as in a fire or being devoured by an animal, how can *that* body be raised?
5. Practice explaining how I Thessalonians 4:17 does not teach a rapture as the pre-millennialists believe it. □

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Search the Scriptures

Rev. Carl Haak

The Book of Ruth

Lesson V

"My Redeemer"

Ruth 4:1-10

Boaz had promised Ruth that he would see to her rights as a widow in Israel. Naomi had assured her that Boaz would not rest until he had done it. And so it was; the very same day found Boaz at the gate of Bethlehem, representing the cause of Ruth before the elders of the city.

The gate of the city in that day was the near equivalent of our present county court house. Here all business was transacted. There contracts were publicly verified, trials were held, judgment made, verdicts were given and carried out. Boaz evidently was one of the elders of the city, and went to take up his seat at the gate of the city. By this action he gave notice that he had a legal matter on his mind, which he wanted transacted. (On the "gate of the city" see Deut. 16:18; 17:9ff.; 22:15ff.; Job 29:7ff.; Prov. 31:23; II Sam. 15:2, etc.)

It was not long before the nearer kinsman answered. His name is never mentioned. That is not without significance; for the man shows that, though outwardly a member in Israel, he has no true inheritance, his name is not found written (Phil. 4:1-4). In the presence of ten elders, Boaz asked the man if he was prepared to buy back Naomi's property for her. The man declared that he was willing to do so. He had it all figured out; although he was buying the field for Naomi, it would surely revert to him and his family when Naomi died. Boaz responded that the man would

also have to take Ruth as his wife. This the man refused to do, for the field would then wind up in the hands of Elimelech's family, which would be represented in the first son Ruth bore. If he married Ruth and she bore him a son, the parcel of land would be lost. In fact, he would "mar his own inheritance," that is, jeopardize it by mortgaging it for the money to redeem Naomi's plot, and all for naught as far as he would be concerned. For the nameless kinsman, it was simply a financial consideration. Love for the covenant and continuation of Elimelech's family played no role in his consideration (Matt. 6:19-21).

Following the custom prevailing in Israel, Boaz then asked the man to take off his shoe, the shoe with which he would otherwise step onto the field to be redeemed. The removal of the shoe was a sign that he waived his right to the parcel of land and his right to serve as redeemer (see Ps. 60:8). In the presence of the elders and the people standing at the gate, Boaz solemnly accepted the obligation to serve as the redeemer of Elimelech's family by marrying Ruth and returning the land to its original owners. The people and elders call upon the Lord to bless Boaz and Ruth.

Do not fail to see the underlying truth here of *redemption*. The passage is a beautiful shadow of things to come, our redemption by Jesus Christ. Rev. Heys touches on this when he writes, "wonderfully, this was a shadow of the reality that Christ would come and take His church to Himself as His bride, so that she can live with Him in His house of many mansions. He takes her away from Satan and the firm grip that he has upon us. This he did in a very legal

way of buying us by His precious blood from the awful punishment we deserve, and from the spiritual death into which we fell with Adam."

Memory Work -- I Peter 1:18, 19

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

"But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

Points to Ponder:

1. From your understanding of the principles of "redemption" by the "near kinsman" as given in the book of Ruth, formulate the doctrine of *our redemption* by our "elder brother," Jesus Christ. (Look up New Testament passages on Redemption, Redeem, Ransom and try to state in 4-5 steps what it means to be redeemed by Jesus Christ.)
2. What went on at the "gate"?
 - a. What was the nature of this meeting place?
 - b. How did Boaz know the kinsman would be there?
 - c. Was this gathering the same as a court?
3. Is there significance in the fact that the kinsman is never named? (What does it mean to have one's name mentioned in God's book?)
4. Why did the kinsman first say he would redeem Naomi's land and then change his mind?
 - a. Was the kinsman wrong in turning down the opportunity to redeem Naomi?
 - b. How would he have "marred his own inheritance"?
 - c. Give an evaluation of the mo-

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tives and principles governing the near kinsman, and apply them to ourselves as temptations we face and warnings we must heed.

5. What did the taking off and giv-

ing of the shoe signify?

6. What is the significance of Boaz's calling the people to be witnesses of the transaction that has taken place?

a. How are we faithful witnesses

to each other?

b. What obligation does this place on the people and us?

7. Review your memory work. Now write it from memory! □

BOOK REVIEWS

Christian Life Classics, Jay P. Green, Sr., Editor. Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Trust Fund, 1990. 758 pages. Hardcover. \$24.95. (Reviewed by the Editor.)

This is Volume III of a twelve-volume set entitled "The Fifty Greatest Christian Classics."

Seven different works on the holy life of the child of God by seven different authors are bound between attractive gold and green covers. Most are well-known writings by old worthies in the church: "Holiness" by J. C. Ryle; "The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment" by Jeremy Burroughs; "Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices" by Thomas Brooks; "The Art of Meditation" by Joseph Hall; and "How to Prepare for Communion" by Matthew Henry.

Overall this volume will be helpful to the believing reader in promoting what has been called "experimental religion" — personal Christian experience. An excerpt from "The Art of Meditation" will give the flavor of the whole:

For it is by meditation that we ransack our deep and false hearts, find out our secret enemies, come to grips with them, expel them, and arm ourselves against their re-entrance. By meditation we make use of all good means, fit ourselves for all good duties. By meditation we see our weaknesses, obtain redress, prevent temptations, cheer up our loneliness, temper our occasions of delight, get more light unto our knowledge, add more heat to our affections, put more life into our devotions (p. 427).

If this were the only book from which one learned holiness, his life would tend to be self-centered, individualistic, and morbidly introspective. Read with other works on holi-

ness that emphasize the glory of God in sound doctrine; that do justice to the Christian's life and practice in relationships with others; and that place the holy life in the fellowship of the church, this book will be profitable to correct a weakness in some of us, namely, our neglect of fervent, personal, experiential spirituality.

The work by Frances Havergal (author of "I Gave My Life for Thee"), "Kept for the Master's Use," is shallow. What is worse, it skirts the heresy of the "second blessing," i.e., the teaching that some Christians obtain a distinct, higher level of salvation at some point after their conversion by consecrating their life wholly to the Lord: "a fuller and further blessing" (p. 260). Like all forms of the error, it holds before the saint the real possibility of virtual perfection in this life. Exactly this is one of the dangers that ever dog the heels of an "experimental religion" that allows itself even the slightest separation from a thoroughly and solidly doctrinal Christianity. ♦

The Concept of God, by Ronald H. Nash. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983. 127 pages. Paperback. \$9.95. [Reviewed by the Editor.]

The doctrine of God has become a hotbed of theological debate in both Protestant and Roman Catholic circles. Theologians are challenging the classical (and creedal) Christian doctrine concerning the being and attributes of God. God's being must no longer be thought to be perfect, transcendent, and spiritual. Rather, He is developing, dependent upon the world, and, at least in part, identified with the world. Every one of God's

essential attributes is under attack: omnipotence; omniscience; eternity; simplicity; and immutability. These attacks are not veiled and implicit, but bold and explicit. Denying the eternity of God as that attribute according to which God is above and outside of time, Nicholas Wolterstorff writes:

The biblical writers regard God as having a time-strand of his own on which actions on his part are to be found, and that some at least of these actions vary in such a way that there are changes along the strand The God who acts ... seems clearly to change Temporality embraces us along with God It is not because he is outside of time — eternal, immutable, impassive — that we are to worship and obey God (pp. 81, 82).

The Concept of God, one of Zondervan's "Academic Books," is a fine, little work for acquainting ministers and other inquiring theological minds with these contemporary issues. Although the book is not easy reading (by virtue of its topic), it is characterized by the clarity that marks an author who thoroughly understands his subject and is intent on teaching others. The new theology that is radically reconstructing the Christian conception of God is "process theology." Nash gives as lucid a description and as keen an analysis of process theology as I have seen.

The value of the book lies in its description of the doctrinal developments of the present day, not in its uncompromising defense of the faith concerning God. Nash is quite concessive toward the attacks on the attributes of God, although at the end he sharply rejects process theology as such:

A being who is not essentially omnipotent or omniscient, who is not

the sovereign and independent Creator, is neither worthy to receive our worship nor to bear the title "God" (p. 115).

Of particular interest to a Reformed reader is the discussion of "Divine Omniscience and Human Freedom" in chapter 4. Contemporary theology, as well as contemporary philosophy, struggles mightily with the question, how man can be truly free, if God knows everything.

Of special interest to the Protestant Reformed reader is Nash's defense of the logical nature of God: "A supralogical God would be unknowable and unintelligible. ... A supralogical God is a God about whom nothing can be said or known. Moreover, a supralogical God would introduce devastating implications into any religion promoting such a concept" (p. 40). Nash is taking issue with those who introduce contradiction into the being of God by asserting that omnipotence means God's ability to do the logically impossible, e.g., squaring the circle. But his rejection of a supralogical, or illogical, God applies as well to the doctrine that God both predestinates some only to be saved and wills (desires) every human to be saved. Such a God would be a "supralogical" God, "about whom nothing can be said or known." We may expect that advocates of the well-meant offer in Calvinistic circles will fall upon Ronald Nash with the same fury that they pour out on the Protestant Reformed denial of a will in God to save every man. ♦

Today's Evangelism: Counterfeit or Genuine, by Gordon H. Clark. Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1990. 145 pages. \$6.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Rev. Ronald VanOverloop.]

This world's society places heavy emphasis on emotions and feelings. People do or do not do things, simply because they do or do not "feel like it." Dr. Clark effectively deals with this emphasis as it has touched evangelism.

It is Dr. Clark's contention that reliance on emotion and personal experience is destructive of the Gospel. In fact, reliance on emotion and feeling was the source of modernism. The apostasy of the large denominations today resulted from a deliberate emphasis on feeling and personal experience (p. 25).

Much evangelism is characterized by an attempt to "lead" people into making a decision. In this book Dr. Clark does not teach about evangelism in general. Rather it is his stated purpose to examine today's evangelism from the unique, but most interesting perspective of how it plays up to human emotions. He analyzes the methods of modern evangelism, ala Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, Billy Sunday, and Robert Schuler (whose pictures appear on the book's cover). As Dr. Clark says,

There are all too many points at which this study (of evangelism — RVO) could begin. The one chosen here has to do with the *tone* of the evangelistic service. We shall examine the place of emotion in evangelism. This matter is really more important than it may at first seem. It brings to light elements of great significance in the life of the church that holds these services (p. 3).

It is Dr. Clark's contention that today's evangelism neglects the mind and truth, and appeals to emotions and feelings.

If insistence on personal experience is a reaction to dead orthodoxy, then, Dr. Clark says, "I wonder whether perhaps even dead orthodoxy might not be preferred to living heresy."

In his typical style Dr. Clark has a chapter entitled "What Is Emotion?" — and in it no clear definition of emotions is given. The reviewer wonders if this is not Dr. Clark's way of emphasizing the futility of building evangelism on something, the definition of which is so evasive.

Dr. Clark's excellent emphasis is that evangelism, along with everything else, must be based only on the Bible. "Experience teaches us nothing. The Bible does" (p. 32). On the basis of Scripture Dr. Clark

insists that evangelism is preaching

the Gospel; that a few sermons are inadequate; that as much elucidation as possible must be given (p. 61). ... The Gospel is a message, not an emotion. And as a message it is received by the intellect, not the emotions. ... Now, since as Colossians 1:5 says, the Gospel is the word of truth, its reception has to be an intellectual act. Truth cannot be received by the emotions (p. 35).

It is also Dr. Clark's point that any evangelism is counterfeit when and if it defines faith only in terms of emotion and not of

an act of the unitary person, in Scripture called the "heart," or the "soul," of whom the activity of the understanding and of the will are essential. ... If an evangelist holds to this position he will preach the Gospel. If he has other ideas of faith, he will almost necessarily adulterate the Gospel, alter the message, and handle the Word of God deceitfully (p. 88).

For the reviewer, some matters of difference or of question did arise. Understandably, Dr. Clark stands in the Westminster tradition of not including assurance in his definition of faith, as the Heidelberg Catechism does. He maintains, although no proof is given, that God has laid the obligation to evangelize upon every Christian (p. 7), rather than upon the church through its ministry of the Word. He seems to neglect the growth of the church which comes by means of the salvation of the seed of the covenant when he states that evangelism is indispensable because without its continually winning people the church will die (p. 1). Sadly, no proof is given in this book for the declaration made three different times that seventy-five per cent of the time the Bible defines "heart" as "mind."

These questions and a few others do not detract from the value of this book. It is a vigorous and necessary warning. It underscores the truth that God's people perish for lack of *knowledge*. It makes clear that the mandate of the Great Commission is to *teach*. And it alerts the readers about the constant temptation to follow our emotions and feelings. Trinity Foundation is to be commended for this publication. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism News

The Church Extension Committee of our P.R. congregation in Lynden, WA sponsored a six-week study class beginning April 30 on the subject of "Origins." The class, led by their pastor, Rev. Haak, studied the origin of creation, man, sin, etc. All members of the church were welcome, as well as friends and interested people from the community.

The Evangelism Committee of our Southwest PRC in Grand Rapids, MI reported to their congregation that they had received over 60 requests for tapes of the lecture they sponsored recently in their church, which was also printed here in *The Standard Bearer*. The committee is busy mailing out the tapes, along with pamphlets and invitations to attend their worship service.

We want also to add here before another issue goes by that the Evangelism Committee of our Peace PRC in Lynwood, IL sponsored a lecture held at the Illiana Chr. High School. Rev. B. Gritters gave his excellent biblical presentation on the subject of "The Antichrist."

The Evangelism Committee of the First PRC of Holland, MI sponsored the Reformed Bible Studies project in Holland. These studies were conducted in a neutral place — a rented hall. The topic for this particular study was "The Church: her marks, the preaching, the sacraments, and discipline." Classes were held every other Tuesday evening, and the four-week outline was handed out at the first meeting so that people could prepare for discussion. Members from the congregation were also encouraged to attend to meet the visitors. Classes were held for an hour and a half and refreshments were served. Deane Wassink co-chaired the meet-

ings with Rev. Bruinsma.

Mission Activities

Plans have been approved by the Council of First Church in Grand Rapids, MI that Rev. den Hartog, along with First's pastor, Rev. Joostens, will conduct the next seminar for four weeks this August-September in Jamaica. This seminar will again focus on the fundamentals of the Reformed faith.

Denominational Activities

On June 18, the members of the West Michigan area P.R. churches were invited to attend the annual Sunday School Teachers and Parents Mass Meeting, held this year at the First PRC of Grand Rapids. Rev. Koole spoke on the subject, "The inability and refusal of the disciples of Jesus to understand Jesus' teaching of the nature of His kingdom."

Congregational Highlights

In an effort to stay in touch over the summer, the congregation of the Grandville, MI PRC is again sponsoring "Coffee-time at Wedgewood Park." The ladies and children plan to get together every other week for coffee, refreshments, and fellowship in the park.

All ages were welcome to attend a summer Bible Study beginning July 9 at the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. On every Tuesday for the remainder of the summer, Prof. David Engelsma hopes to lead the class on the subject of the Reformed doctrine of the "Order of Salvation": Regeneration, Calling, Faith, etc. ...

Ministerial Calls

Rev. J. Kortering has declined the call he was considering to serve as the pastor of our Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. We can also mention here that Rev. and Mrs. Kortering have agreed to go to Singapore beginning sometime in September for at

least four months, with the possibility of spending two more months there depending on the progress of the work. Their purpose in going is to assist the Evangelical Reformed Church in dealing with certain problems that relate to their developing as Reformed churches, and to appraise the opportunities for further mission work and theological training.

On June 16, the Hudsonville, MI PRC extended a call to Rev. C. Haak to serve as missionary to Larne, Northern Ireland.

Rev. R. VanOverloop has declined the call to serve as missionary pastor to the island of Jamaica from the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI.

The Hope PRC in Isabel, SD extended a call to Rev. R. Hanco to serve as their pastor.

And, finally, we want to add our congratulations to Mr. Mitch Dick, who completed his seminary years by successfully passing seven and one half hours of oral exams. His examination began with a sermon, followed the next day by an examination in Theology, followed by exams in Bible History, Church History, Church Order, and Practica.

Maybe by the time you read this, Mitch Dick's name will be added to one of the above calling churches' trios.

CONGRATULATIONS!

August, 1991, the Lord willing, will mark 50 years that the Lord has sustained our father,

REV. JOHN A. HEYS,

in the services of the Protestant Reformed Churches. We thank God that His covenant blessings have been with our father and our prayer is that God will use him for years to come.

"While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being" (Psalm 146:2).

Burton and Ardess VanProoyen
John and Sandra Heys
Sidney and Joyce Niemeyer

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

THE STANDARD BEARER

P.O. Box 6064
Grand Rapids, MI 49516

SECOND CLASS
Postage Paid at
Grand Rapids, Michigan

NOTICE!!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Edgerton, Minnesota, on Wednesday, September 18, 1991, at 8:30 AM, the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk, 30 days before Classis convenes, that is, by August 19, 1991. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the Clerk of Edgerton's Consistory using the forms provided for that purpose.

Rev. R. Hanko, Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On July 25, 1991, the Lord willing,

MR. and MRS. ARNOLD HAVEMAN

celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. Their children and grandchildren give thanks to our heavenly Father for Christian parents. We are grateful for their Christian instruction and pray the Lord will continue to bless them and keep them in His care. "For the Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting and his truth endureth to all generations," (Psalm 100:5).

Chet and Sharon Haveman

Janna, Mike

Betty Haveman

Will and Sue Haveman

Jennifer, Nicole, Derek

Laverne and Mary Haveman

Geoffrey, Elizabeth, Amy,

Carrie, Catherine

Dale and Ruth Kraker

Ryan, Luran, Lisa

Holland, Michigan

ADVANCE NOTICE!

Plan for the RFPA Annual Meeting in Grandville Church on Thursday, September 26, at 8 PM. Rev. K. Koole will speak. Ladies are welcome for the non-business portion at which time 3 new board members will be elected.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

It is with thankfulness to God that we announce the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents

DAVE and SUSAN ZYLSTRA

on July 13, 1991. They are members of First Protestant Reformed Church of Edmonton, AB. We are grateful to the Lord for blessing us with parents and grandparents who have persevered to lead us by a godly walk and example in wisdom and in truth. May our Lord and Savior preserve them in their marriage, and may He continue to bless us with their guidance.

Their wedding text of 40 years ago is very applicable to the life they have led together and with us as a family. "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer," Romans 12:12.

John and Hilda Zylstra (Saxsmith, AB)

Adam, Rachel, Mark,

Aaron, Joshua

Martin and Adeline Zylstra

(Chilliwack, BC)

Venessa, Darrin, Daniel,

Sharmain, Angeline

Herman and Geraldine Klaassens

(Ardrossan, AB)

Michael, Sara, Rebecca,

Heather, Pamela, Alison

Clayton and Jacqueline DeGroot

(Lacombe, AB)

Clinton, Heidi, Laura

Richard and Arlene Schmidt (Ardrossan, AB)

David, Beverly, Wilfred

Edward and Patricia Huizing (Edmonton, AB)

Jonathan, Justin, Stephanie

Richard and Marsha Span

(Rocky Mountain House, AB)

Robert, Matthew, Maria

Timothy and Jill Zylstra (Lacombe, AB)

Joel, Cameron, Megan

Joe and Valerie VanGelderens

(Edmonton, AB)

Rhoda Zylstra and

Peter Hendricks (fiance)

(Sherwood Park, AB)

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 11, 1991 at the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids. Mate-

rial for this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk no later than August 12, 1991.

Jon J. Huiskens

Stated Clerk

NOTICE!!

Bible Study at Dordt College

A group of students dedicated to the historic Reformed faith is making plans to meet together again this year for a Bible study. The meetings, sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Churches in the area, are held on Monday evenings at 7:00 in the Dordt College library. For this coming year the students have chosen to study the first 11 chapters of Genesis. Any student at Dordt is welcome to attend. If you have any questions, please call Rev. Russ Dykstra (712) 726-3382.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 20, 1991, the Lord willing, our parents and grandparents, **REV. and MRS. JOHN A. HEYS**, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them and also thank our gracious Lord for the years they have shared and for the constant love, covenant instruction, and guidance they have given us. Our prayer for them is that they may continue to experience the blessings of our faithful God in the years that He may give them.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

Burton and Ardess VanProoyen

Duane and Debra

John and Sandra Heys

John, Lorinda, Sonja, and Trisha

Sidney and Joyce Niemeyer

Laura, Heather, and Eric