

God Our Refuge

My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.

He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved.

In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.

Psalm 62:5-8

What marvelous words are set before us in these verses! How well they declare the strength and might of the Lord.

We think often of strength as ability or power to accomplish things. Surely the Lord is mighty after that manner! He is a God that doeth wondrous things. He is God, who delights to do those things that are impossible to men. He delights to humble the proud, who

rise up against God and His cause with their power, power that is but vanity before the might of God. He delights to exalt the humble, lifting them up from their lowly state. He delights to work wonders in behalf of His people, saving them from their enemies, even from sin, death, and hell. Knowing the power of His mighty works, His people are strengthened to put their trust in Him.

However, the strength made known in the verses before us is of a very different kind. By this strength, God reveals himself as a rock. That is a very particular power. It is a power of stability. He is solid. He is weighty. He cannot be moved.

How men have attempted to move God!

There are the avowed enemies of God. They have declared war on God. In their rage against Him, they curse and blaspheme His name. Whenever and wherever God's glory is made known, they loudly speak of chaos, fortune, or chance. Or, they boast of the works of man — what great things man has accomplished! But their speech

is vanity. They foolishly beat themselves against the rock that is God. God is not moved in the least! God is a rock!

There are other enemies of God. These labor for the destruction of His truth, while claiming fellowship with Him. They call themselves churches, theologians, believers, but they are far from those that honor God. These also attempt to move God. They make Him changeable. They make His will conditional, in one way or another, upon the deeds and thoughts of men. The faith of one and the unbelief of another, they say, cause God to elect and to reprobate. God wills one to be saved, but His will is frustrated when that one chooses not to be saved. But their speech is just as vain. It is mere illusion. God still will not be moved. He is a rock, immovable.

His enemies labor in vain against this might and power of God.



By wondrous grace this rock is the safe refuge of His people. His people are tempted and persecuted

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by these same enemies. As they assail the rock that is God, they turn also to the people of God. His people they persecute and oppress. His people they attempt to turn away from God and His truth.

Under that persecution and oppression, God's people find in Him their refuge. His strength becomes theirs! He is the rock of their strength.

God is a refuge for us!

To this refuge we are led by David, its writer, and by the Holy Spirit, its Author. By His providence God led David through the circumstances of his life. God led David through the events that form the background of this Psalm. Even when Israel's king took pen in hand to write the Psalm, God so guided him by His Holy Spirit that the words are the words of God. David leads us to God our refuge. Through David as the instrument in His hand, God our refuge leads us to Himself.

David leads us in a very particular way. He does not tell us to go to the places where he fears to go. He does not tell us to do the things that he fears to do. He goes before us. He leads the way. Then he turns and beckons us: Follow me!



Follow me to God our refuge!

In his guiding us, the sweet Psalmist of Israel is not afraid to show us his weakness. In the midst of his fierce enemies, he reveals the despair of his soul. So despairing of soul is he, that we hear his command to his soul: "My soul, wait thou only upon God." With that commandment he directs his soul to God. His soul was looking in the wrong direction. It was considering the wrath and devices of the enemy. With respect to those enemies, David's soul was filled with despair. It must instead be turned to God. It must wait only upon Him. With authority David commands his own soul: Wait thou only upon God.

To his soul David also gives a reason for his commandment. "My expectation is from him." To God he looks for every good thing. To God he looks for His chief good, the salvation of His soul. With these words David establishes his soul in that place of confident waiting. So great is his confidence that he places the hope of his soul all upon God.

He makes God a refuge...for himself.

That confidence is not disappointed. To its result he gives joyful testimony:

He only is my rock and my salvation:

He is my defence;
I shall not be moved.

In God is my salvation and my glory:

The rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

As unmovable as God is, now David knows himself to be unmovable. The psalmist is unmovable in the midst of his enemies, for God is his defense. As that rock of strength, unmovable, God has taken David into His protection. The enemies carry on in their rage against God's anointed, but now he is unmoved. With the strength of God, he is strong indeed!

So strong has David become, that he can find no other strength and no other power. There is no other rock. There is no other salvation. He commanded his soul, properly, to wait only upon God. Thus is also the answer to that waiting. God alone is his rock and defense. No enemy, not even all the enemies put together, can breach the fortress that is his God.

"I shall not be moved."

David proceeds yet further. He must, for he knows that God has given him this confidence and strength for a reason. That reason holds true for all of God's deliverances of His people in every circumstance. That reason is the praise of His name, the testimony of His great glory. Those praises

the psalmist raises from his joyful heart. With gladness he moves from himself to God. In God is his salvation and his glory. In God is the rock of his strength and his refuge.

As strong as he becomes, hiding himself in God, David also knows he is never strong in himself. God has not strengthened him so that he might now be unmovable apart from God. Such is not the way of faith. Neither is it the way of God's grace. May it never be! Only in fellowship with God is that strength to be known and enjoyed. How blessed is that fellowship in the strength that it always gives. Therefore David must write, "In God is my salvation." Therefore he must continue: "...and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God."

God is a refuge for David.

Now David, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, extends his hand to us. He calls us to follow after him. His example we must follow.

Trust in him at all times;

Ye people, pour out your heart before him:

God is a refuge for us.

David had commanded his own soul. "My soul, wait thou only upon God." Now he commands us: "Trust in him at all times."

Just as he did, we are to take our refuge in God. As David commanded his soul, so must we. "Wait thou only upon God." With that command we direct our souls to expect every good thing from His blessed hand. In the midst of our enemies, as fierce and strong as David's, we are confronted with our weakness. Confessing that weakness, we flee to God. We take Him for our rock and refuge. We hide ourselves in Him.

We are, however, given here the particular manner of that hiding. David shows us here the manner of this trust. We have these words given to us:

“Ye people, pour out your heart before him.”

What blessed words: pour out your heart before Him!

All the cares and anxieties, every point of distress and fear, all those things reside in the heart. In the heart they thrive and grow. Sadness grows greater, doubts and fears grow stronger. Before the enemy, our weakness is revealed. That weakness lays hold upon the heart, causing despair. The temptation is sometimes heard in the believer’s ear: these things are unworthy of God, for they signify a weak faith; do not speak of them before God.

Then you must hear the com-

mand of your leader: ye people, pour out your heart before Him. This you do, pouring out all before God, as a river of cares, concerns, anxieties, and fears. You show before Him all your weaknesses.

In that outpouring you are blessed. By it, you take your refuge in God. Confessing your weakness, you come to know and enjoy the greatness of His strength. In that blessed refuge, you have God for your defense. You shall not be moved.

Hiding yourself in God, surrounded by the rock of His strength, you find David next to you. He joins his voice to yours:

God is a refuge for us. You join your voice to his: God is a refuge for us! Others you also see next to you. You look further, and find a vast multitude. All of you have taken refuge together in God.

So great is His strength, so immovable is He, that He has taken unto Himself this great number, hiding them in Himself. By their weakness, He has determined to show His strength in them. He is a refuge for them, by sovereign, particular grace.

With what happiness we make that confession, together with God’s people of every age, of every tongue and nation!

“God is a refuge for us.” 

Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole

Marriage and the Culture of Divorce (3)

The Question of Remarriage

Last installment we focused particularly on Christ’s teaching about divorce itself. The gospel record makes plain that Christ went directly against the current teaching and prevailing practice of the Jews of His day, namely, divorce upon demand. This practice, with its justi-

fication, angered Him (cf. Luke 16:13-18). This is also why Christ, in explaining the occasion for this broader Old Testament Mosaic allowance, with sharpness used the phrase “for the hardness of your heart” (Mark 10:5). And notice the pronoun “your”!

The gospel record makes plain that Christ made but one allowance for a believer to seek divorce, namely, adultery, a cheating spouse (cf. Matt. 5:32 and Matt. 19:9). Why this is, is a question all to itself, and one we do not intend to enter into here. What we must understand is that Christ was making plain to those who would be apostles of His New Testament church, that He as Lord of the church would count all other reasons for seeking divorce as sin. The New Testament church in her spiritual maturity was to understand that.

This then is also Christ’s word against the scandal of our day, when in the name of misguided compassion, the church approves of divorce for nearly any reason, and then of remarriage as well. By this word Christ intended to block the way of the New Testament church becoming the mirror image of the apostate Jewish church (whose marriages were little different from the worldly society around it).

The trouble is, most of the New Testament church is busy ignoring Christ’s words. And so, she with her marriages has become the mirror image of what so angered the Lord Christ in His day.

It is to the matter of remarriage that we turn now, and, in particular, the remarriage of the ‘innocent party,’ that is, the one who has obtained a divorce (or the one on whom divorce was forced) for the

This concluding installment is an expansion and revision of the third section of my speech on the assigned topic given at a conference last summer. The focus is primarily on the recurring question about the remarriage of the innocent party (as it is known). It seems that justification for approving remarriage in an ever broadening circle starts with allowing the remarriage of the innocent party.

Previous article in this series: March 1, 2005, p. 244.

one biblically acceptable reason, a spouse guilty of adultery.

No one disputes the right to remarry once one's spouse has died. By death the God of marriage looses one from His 'yoke,' and from one's own vow. This is clearly scriptural (cf. Rom. 7:2, 3). The question is, is death the only thing that dissolves the bond?

Neither do we need to debate whether every divorced person has the right to remarry simply because one has obtained a state-recognized bill of divorcement. This is exactly what Pharisees were claiming in Christ's day. "We have obtained a lawful bill of divorcement! See! We have kept God's law." Christ's response was that before the eyes of God this bill was worthless. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her" (Mark 10:11). And again, "And whosoever marrieth her that is divorced [also] committeth adultery" (Matt. 5:32). Only the willfully blind can quibble with Christ's plain words (and, therefore, with the calling of His church in this matter as well).

But what about that divorce that was properly obtained for the biblical reason, an adulterous spouse? In that one instance surely one should have the right to marry again.

This is the argument of some. They, too, see the scandal of divorce and remarriage in the contemporary church world. They, too, say that the church's irresponsible 'looking the other way' must stop. It is time for the church to start holding its members to their vows! But, having said that, they insist on the right of the innocent party (as they are known) to remarry. The door is to be narrowed down, but not completely closed.

With this we disagree. And to this we now turn.

It is beyond the scope of this article to enter into a lengthy exegetical examination of the various scripture passages dealing with

this matter. Fact is, there is really only one New Testament passage that even allows for raising the question about Christ possibly making an exception to His rule of no remarriage as long as one's first spouse still lives, namely, Matthew 19:9. And even there the exception clause "except it be for fornication" clearly can be applied simply to the putting away of one's wife, and not to the clause that refers to marrying another. In our judgment it ought to be. In the disputed passage the exception clause follows immediately upon the words "whosoever shall put away his wife."

Before one opts to take this one disputed passage and adopt a view that finds no support in any of the other passages, one ought to consider very seriously the following.

First, in none of the other three main passages does Christ hint at allowing for remarriage. As He flatly states in Mark 10:11, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her." (In verse 12 He applies the same to the woman.)

Second, it was exactly with an eye to cutting off the well-traveled road that led to *remarriage*, that Christ spoke His words against divorce.

In this connection it is important to remember that Christ's words on divorce and remarriage were spoken in a historical context where divorce was sought by men for one reason and one reason only, namely, in order to remarry. It was simply assumed that a lawfully obtained divorce terminated the marriage and freed one to remarry. This is why the Pharisees sought divorce! Not so they could live alone. What! and have to wait on themselves? And sleep alone? Are you kidding? But it was with an eye to marrying one more delightful and pleasing (or rich!). Divorce was all about re-

marriage. And therefore it was assumed that divorce dissolved the marriage and freed one to remarry. It is precisely the remarriage syndrome that Christ was addressing in the gospels. And is He now making an allowance after all? This must be kept in mind.

Third, it must be kept in mind that in Christ's day there were two schools of thought even amongst the Pharisees on what constituted legitimate divorce according to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. There was the school of Shammai (more conservative) and that of Hillel (promoting the liberal, prevailing view). The school of Shammai held "...that divorce was only legitimate for serious sexual offences such as adultery, whereas the more liberal followers of Hillel argued that any misdemeanor, even spilling food or talking too loud, justified divorce" (*Jesus and Divorce*, Heth & Wenham, p. 46) (cf. also *Divorce and Remarriage*, A. Cornes, p. 183 ff.).

The point is that Christ was well aware of this hot dispute. Quite likely, this in part was what prompted the Pharisees to put the question to Jesus about divorcing for every reason, to get Jesus to enter their dispute and take one side or the other. This is exactly what Jesus refused to do. His teaching was not in favor of the more conservative school over against the liberal one, but His teaching was revolutionary, new, unique.

This explains the disciples' amazement and stunned reply: "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good [better not - kk] to marry" (Matt. 19:10). They understood Christ well. What are you saying, Lord? If you marry a woman, you are stuck with (to!) her for life? Who would want to risk that possibility?

Cornes, in his book *Divorce and Remarriage*, puts it well. "[The disciples] were flabbergasted: they

...it was exactly with an eye to cutting off the well-traveled road that led to remarriage, that Christ spoke His words against divorce.

clearly never expected this.... [Their] surprise is quite incomprehensible if Jesus was allowing remarriage after divorce for adultery. He would then be saying nothing revolutionary but merely expressing views that were entirely in line with the well-known school of Shammai; he would simply be siding, in the contemporary debate, with one of the influential schools” (p. 221).

But if marriage is for life in every instance, that is revolutionary, and as Christ replies to the disciples, “All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given” (v. 11).

Fourth, those who argue for allowing the remarriage of the innocent party must come to grips with something, namely, that if a biblically-obtained divorce dissolves the marriage bond, then *it dissolves the marriage bond!* You see the implications? It does this not only for the one, the innocent party, it does so for the other, the unfaithful spouse. Not only is the innocent divorcee free to remarry, but so now is the fornicator. He too no longer has a spouse or obligation to his first vow. He too is free to remarry. And if he were to wake up one day in repentance, he would be free to remain with his significant other, and even come back to the church as such. That former marriage was, after all, according to the church, dissolved.

Is there not something wrong with this picture?

And fifth, the practical reality is that those who have thought to restrict remarriage only to the innocent party have found it impossible to do so. In

instance after instance the innocent party allowance has led to making more and more allowances along the way. Extenuating circumstances cry to be taken into consideration, and because in reality

the ruling principle is human compassion rather than God’s word, human compassion rules the day; and pretty soon the ‘whole camel’ is within one’s tent. This is reality, especially in our divorce-prone society.

The only remedy is a door closed all the way, not one left open a crack. Else, it soon ceases to be a door at all, except maybe a revolving one.

We say again, divorce, even properly obtained, does not dissolve the marriage bond. What it brings to an end is one’s spousal obligations and responsibilities to the other (that is, as long as the divorce continues in force). But in God’s eyes one’s spouse, though he has abandoned his spousal obligations, still lives. And believers are to address that unfaithful one as an adulterer until he turns.

That we insist on this view of the innocent party is not because we take issue with the words “innocent party,” questioning whether such a divorced person ever really existed. They do. I know several myself. And as a pastor I bristle when others call into question whether any are completely innocent in the breakup of their marriage. To be sure, everyone has sin to confess in marriage. But there are those who give their spouse no reason to bring a third party into their marriage. That is, other than confronting the spouse with his responsibilities and pleading with him to live according to his Christian calling, and then being called a nag and worse things as a result. Innocent before God, I tell you that. It was with such in mind that Christ taught what He did.

But to stand as the innocent party does not yet imply the right to remarry. Rather, it gives one the right to divorce the cheating spouse without being charged with

being guilty of unfaithfulness to one’s vow. And such a one does not have to make confession in the church of having sinfully put away one’s spouse.

What we are maintaining is not some peculiar, novel view. No less an authority than the apostle Paul validates this as the correct reading of Christ’s teaching. In the pastoral context of having to give practical instruction and counsel to believers in troubled marriages, specifically to questions raised by believers married to unbelievers, the apostle stated, “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband. But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried [sic!], or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife” (I Cor. 7:11, 12).

In the same chapter the apostle adds, “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord” (v. 39).

Surely in these statements the apostle is not Paul the obscure!

Hard, you say? Demanding? Yes, but not impossible. As Christ Himself responded to His questioning disciples, “All men can not receive this saying, save those to whom it is given” (Matt. 19:11). By grace such is made possible.

Finally, the question arises, why does Scripture insist on such a rigorous commitment to one’s vows and marriage (that is, in addition to this being in accordance with God’s character and Christ’s faithfulness to His bride and church)?

#1 — Have you considered the children! Christ as Shepherd certainly has what benefits them in mind. In divorce, with its violent ripping apart, they are the real victims. The resulting scars are lifelong. Children are injured worse by parents going their separate ways than by a believer suffering through an unhappy and difficult marriage. Staying together for the

The only remedy is a door closed all the way, not one left open a crack. Else, it soon ceases to be a door at all, except maybe a revolving one.

children's sake is worth it. This is Christ-like love.

#2 — The strict forbidding of remarriage is a powerful restraint on divorce, the inclination to simply opt out when problems run deep. When believers enter marriage knowing that remarriage is not an option, they have powerful incentive to work with might and main to save their troubled marriage. They have strong motivation to work for reconciliation rather than deciding just to call it quits. It sounds far easier just to find someone else to start fresh with again.

#3 — The calling to remain single following a divorce is prac-

tical in that it leaves open the possibility of reconciliation with the estranged spouse. Remarrying following divorce effectively closes that door. Even if the estranged spouse were to come to his senses down the road, if one has remarried, what is one going to do? Leave another spouse high and dry and possibly other children as well? Abiding in singleness according to the apostolic instruction is what leaves the door for reconciliation open and real.

#4 — This biblical stand is essential for the church's witness in a divorce-happy world. The church that insists that its members remain faithful to their vows is one

that will mark itself off from our self-centered society. Here is a Christianity that insists on true self-denying love. Such teaching and practice will have a blessed benefit on the marriages of the church. Such a church will show clearly that grace and Christ and Christian love do make a difference.

As Christ makes plain, marriage is for life. Holding to this is the need of the hour, for Christ's good name, for the children's sake, the church's witness to grace that renews, and the glory of covenant making and keeping God.

As Christ declares, "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matt. 19:12b). 

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. J. Kortering

Evangelism in the Established Church (3)

Hindrances to this work (cont.)

We are dealing with the first obstacle to effective personal witnessing, as begun in our previous article. That objection suggests that our befriending non-Christians with a view to influencing them with the gospel is spiritually wrong because we are to be separate from all the wicked and ungodliness. This objection reminds us of the need to be spiritually mature and to guard against such danger, which is that the wicked may have greater influence on us than we may have on them. However, though the danger is real, we may not use that as a reason to have nothing to do with our non-Chris-

tian neighbor. Rather, we must examine ourselves and do two things: first, we must recognize that witnessing to him is what God commands us to do, it is God's directive; and second, we must pray that we may be enabled by God's grace to do it properly as unto the Lord, and that the Holy Spirit will bless it unto the heart of the one we seek. Doing this we will be in a spiritual frame of mind and heart to overcome the temptations to stray because of the evil influence of the unsaved neighbor.

It may be helpful if we make a few suggestions on how that may be done. We are not going to develop methodology here. It is our goal to do that in greater detail in some future articles, but here we simply want to illustrate, so that you can better understand what we have in mind, and so that you can rest assured that personal witnessing to non-Christians does not com-

promise the doctrine of the antithesis.

Foundational to all attempts to witness to the neighbor is our *action*, how we behave in his presence. This means that we must live holy lives consistently and under all circumstances. It also includes our personal dealings with our neighbor. If we snub him, look the other way, avoid him, refuse to talk to him, we are sending out clear signals that we don't want anything to do with him. If the neighbor picks up on this, he will conclude that we don't care about him at all, about what he does, about what are his values, about what are his struggles in life — nothing. Even if our reason for this attitude is our judgment of him that he is evil and a great sinner before God, such response at this point is wrong because it is premature. We have not attempted to deal with him and his faults in a proper way.

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Another, opposite action toward the neighbor might be this, that we jump on him with severe criticism every time we notice that he is doing something we see to be wrong. There is, of course, an important place for correction in the process of evangelism, but we do well to remember that in our initial contacts we ought to hold our mouth until we can build some trust. This is not compromise or unfaithfulness; this is wisdom, as we learn the art of communication and influence.

Rightful action is that we live a holy life as an example of godliness to our neighbor. As we do that, we take a real and sincere interest in his life, his beliefs, his values, his way of living. This means that we develop good communication between ourselves and him. Obviously, this will not be the same with every one of our neighbors; individuals have different personalities and spiritual responses. The point is that if there is a wall of separation between us and our neighbor, it must be because of our neighbor's response to our overtures of the gospel, and not because of the way we treat him. The Bible is full of such caution: "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Prov. 15:1). "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness and wisdom" (James 3:13).

This requires of us sincere interest in the person and life of our neighbor. We must build bridges of interest that allow us to demonstrate that we really care about him. These bridges are manifold: simply taking an interest in his life and inquiring of him how things are going, and turning everyday conversations in the direction of spiritual values and Christian response. This can be followed by certain levels of mutual activity. One wonderful way to build bridges is to help him with something that he needs and that we can supply. This demonstrates, both by

speech and by action, that we really do care about him and that he can trust us when we talk together of the deeper values of morality and eventually even of faith.

We can be sure that if we do this in the spirit of holiness before God and of love for our neighbor, the right person will be influenced to the glory of God. If the desire of our heart is the conversion of the non-Christian neighbor, if we make that a matter of daily prayer and seek wisdom of God, and if we conduct ourselves with that goal in mind, we can rest assured that his lifestyle and values will not influence us in an evil way. The antithesis will remain in place, and the barrier of spiritual separation will be overcome only when God changes the heart and life of the non-Christian.

Let's now proceed to the second possible obstacle to effective personal witnessing.

"2. Our doctrinal beliefs and practices make such attempts at personal evangelism useless. The doctrine of God's sovereignty and man's depravity are such hindrances that our neighbors are not interested in the Reformed faith. This increases when we add the biblical teaching that rejects labor union membership or the forbidding of divorce and remarriage, to name but two. Paul admitted that the offense of the gospel was great in his day, and we might as well come to terms with this today, since the non-Christian world and the church-world have increased in their depravity in these last days of history."

My answer to this proposed obstacle is that it is defeatist and is the devil's delight.

On the surface, and in light of what the Bible says about the increase of sin and apostasy in the church, there seems to be truth to the observation. Hebrews 6 makes

a strong statement concerning the inability of an individual to change when that person once knew the truth and experienced personally and close-up the benefits of the gospel, but turned from them. The same applies to churches, as taught in the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 2 and 3). The Lord Jesus gives stern warnings that unless they stop their sinful practices and return to Him in obedience, they will perish. America and Europe are full of people who in their generations have had something to do with Christ and His church, but have turned away and now show contempt of their past spiritual training. The explanation for this is not simply human behavior. It is God's judgment upon those who reject Him, even as Jesus instructed His disciples, "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet" (Matt. 10:14). In great measure, this explains why there is precious little fruit upon efforts to convert nominal Christians or those who in their generations knew the way but rejected it.

Even with all this evidence, however, we may never use this knowledge to stop evangelizing as individual Christians or as churches in doing our mission outreach. If we should do that, we step directly into the devil's trap and contradict the direct injunction of our Savior to keep on doing evangelism

until He comes again (Matt. 28:18-20). The Word of God does not give us this sober and very realistic assessment of human depravity in order to discourage us from doing Christ's work. Rather He gave that to us so that we would not have an unrealistic goal, which leads to discouragement and defeat. All outreach, evangelism, and mission work is hard work and,

One of the great evils in the church today is that methodology in the work of the church is determined by results.

humanly speaking, impossible. The more we realize this, the more we approach it in a proper spiritual way and get on our knees to seek divine help, for without it all our labors are in vain. The salvation of a soul, the gathering of the church, is God's work through Jesus Christ alone.

There is also, in this proposed obstacle, an inherent fallacy, that a duty assigned can be terminated by negative results. One of the great evils in the church today is that methodology in the work of the church is determined by results. If it works, it must be good; if it doesn't work, we need to change it. See the sad results of this kind of reasoning as it is applied to the worship service. Everything, from the informal dress, to the singing, to the casual environment, to the entertainment that replaces preaching, is justified because this is what people want. We must not be drawn into the temptation to abandon the work of the gospel because no one seems interested or because very few respond. Nor must we be tempted to change the contents of the gospel in order to make it more appealing to the general public. These evil responses may result if we suggest in any way that it is useless to spread the gospel because hardly anyone cares anymore to listen.

Rather, we do well to take a serious look at the gospel that constitutes the good news that we bear in our personal witnessing and our preaching. The Bible is the revelation of God, and whatever God says in His Word is the message that we bring to others. The great theme of the Bible is the majesty, sovereignty, and glory of God. In no other book, and from no other source, is there such knowledge of the one true and only living God. Yes, His handiwork, creation, testifies of His excellent glory and power to such a degree that if that is all any man receives from Him, it is sufficient for God to judge him and hold him accountable for all

his sinful actions (Rom. 1:18-21). As beautiful and powerful as the testimony of creation is concerning God, however, its message cannot and does not save the sinner. In the immediately preceding verses (Rom. 1:1-17), Paul expresses this. The power of God unto salvation is in the gospel that he preached. In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed, and in such a way that righteousness is necessary for salvation, for it replaces the unrighteousness of man. That ability to be right with God is merited by Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection, and is appropriated by faith alone. The only escape from the wrath of God is in Jesus Christ. Reconciliation with God and the peace that follows is the good news of the gospel.

I urge you, dear reader, not to discredit the good news of the gospel because it lacks public support or popular appeal. If God has saved you, you will recognize with grateful heart that your salvation is the most wonderful act of God's mercy to you, an undeserving sinner. Eternal predestination is the sweet fountain of God's love, from which flows every blessing of salvation. Christ's death on the cross is not a divine atrocity; rather, it is the supreme expression of love and reconciliation to all who believe. You will also come to realize that holy living is not an oppressive burden to be borne under a severe Master. No, it is as Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). When divine grace flows from a sanctified heart and affects the very being of a converted sinner, it is supreme delight to be spared sin and its consequences and to be brought into a liberty and freedom within the boundaries of God's law and Scripture. Just be-

cause many around you do not care about the gospel or express offense in its message does not take away from the fact that you know the beauty of its truth and enjoy the power of its deliverance. God expects you to understand this, and, out of an obedient heart and with the motive of love and joy to Him, to take up your calling to evangelize with thanksgiving.

There is a conclusion that we can draw from all of this. God is able to change hearts and save souls. He never promises to save the masses. His promise is that, "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). We must not decide whether we will evangelize our non-Christian neighbor on the basis of whether we think he is savable or whether we think that there might be some hope of changing him. If we do this, we are doomed before we start. The question

is not whether *we* think it can be done, but it is whether *God* is pleased to accomplish it. With this approach we never pre-judge anyone as to the possible outcome. We simply speak of the wonderful works of God, and in humility and in prayer seek God's blessing to work in such a heart if it pleases Him.

This will keep us both optimistic and humbly dependent on Him. We may even learn that the one we thought least likely is just the one God is pleased to save. He does this so that all the glory of such salvation is His alone and not ours. Paul concludes his teaching of this great truth in Romans 11:36: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." 

We must not decide whether we will evangelize our non-Christian neighbor on the basis of whether we think he is savable or whether we think that there might be some hope of changing him.

■ Evolution or Intelligent Design

There has been an effort put forth to introduce into public school curriculums the concept of “intelligent design” as an alternative to evolution. Both evolution and “intelligent design” would be presented as theories. Those who would want the “scientific” view of evolution, of course, strongly oppose this. They insist that the constitution does not allow it. There must be separation of church and state. “Intelligent design” implies God—which involves “church” and “religion.” They even do not want textbooks with attached notations that evolution is only a “theory.” Students must be taught that evolution is a scientific fact. That has been the emphasis for several generations in public institutions.

The *Washington Post* reports on a decision made in Dover, a small town in Pennsylvania, where the school board has taken measures to assure that the students receive a balanced presentation of origins. The report summarizes the debate:

A school board in Pa. has voted to teach both evolution and “intelligent design.”

“God or Darwin?”

Lark Myers, a blonde, 45-year-old gift shop owner, frames the question and answers it. “I definitely would prefer to believe that God created me than that I’m 50th cousin to a Silverback Ape,” she said. “What’s wrong with wanting our children to hear about all the holes in the theory of evolution?”

Charles Darwin, squeeze over. The school board in this small town in central Pennsylvania has voted to make the theory of evolution

share a seat with another theory: God probably designed us.

If it survives a legal test, this school district of about 2,800 children could become the first in the nation to require that high school science teachers at least mention the “intelligent design” theory. This theory holds that human biology and evolution is so complex as to require the creative hand of an intelligent force.

“The school board has taken the measured step of making students aware that there are other viewpoints on the evolution of species,” said Richard Thompson, of the Thomas More Law Center, which represents the board and describes its overall mission as defending “the religious freedom of Christians.”

Board members have been less guarded, and their comments go well beyond intelligent design theory. William Buckingham, the board’s curriculum chairman, explained at a meeting last June that Jesus died on the cross and “someone has to take a stand” for him. Other board members say they believe that God created Earth and mankind.

This strikes some parents and teachers, not to mention most evolutionary biologists, as loopy science. Eleven parents have joined the American Civil Liberties Union and filed suit in federal court in Harrisburg seeking to block mention of intelligent design in high school biology, arguing it is religious belief dressed in the cloth of science.

“It’s not science, it’s a theocratic idea,” Bryan Rehm, a former science teacher in Dover and a father of four [said]. “We don’t have enough time for science in the classroom as it is—this is just inappropriate.”

Sadly, the report is presented in a very slanted manner. Why else would a supporter of creationism be labeled as “a blond”? What else, so the implication is, does one expect

of a “blond”? Why do many call creationism a “loopy science”?

The “loopy science,” it seems to me, is evolution. Right now I sit at my desk in front of my computer monitor. It is a system I wish I possessed some 48 years ago. It would have made work much easier. But if I were to tell an evolutionist that this marvelous invention took about 10 billions of years to evolve, he would declare me to be “loopy” indeed. A 100-billion years would not possibly be sufficient time for such an “evolution.” He would rightly point out that this invention is the product of “intelligent design.” Never could it be the result of any kind of evolution.

But a human being? The universe? That can evolve by change without “intelligent design” over billions of years?

One might contend that a person is a living being who evolved from lesser forms of living beings. But ultimately, the living (according to this theory) must have evolved from the non-living substances. If true, that would be a fantastic thing indeed. The human being (not even to mention all of the rest of the universe) is a vastly complex entity. A single cell, so I understand, contains more information than any computer can hold. Many of the scientists of this world, many of its doctors, seek to unravel its secrets. Hundreds of thousands of individuals seek cure of diseases and would remedy genetic “faults.” The end of such studies is nowhere in sight. Yet, the development of the universe and of human beings is a matter of chance or accident? A human being is not proof of “intelligent design,” but a far simpler computer could come into being only through an “intelligent designer”? The evolutionist and atheist need not speak of “loopy science.” He is a fool

even to equate “evolution” with “intelligent design.”

Even some former atheists and evolutionists have come to recognize this. There have been printed several interesting accounts of a noted atheist and evolutionist from Great Britain: Antony Frew. He taught much of his life in various universities there. He wrote books defending both atheism and evolution. He debated with those who taught “intelligent design.” But he has now reached the point where he concedes that evolution is not the answer. There must have been an “intelligent designer.”

I quote from the report found in *Christian News*, January 3, 2005 in an article by David Roach:

Christian apologist Gary Habermas had just finished debating noted British atheist Antony Flew about the existence of God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The two friends rode an elevator together as they left the Californian university where the debate was held in January 2002. As Habermas exited the elevator, he extended his hand through the open door. “Tony,” he said, “this is for now. I enjoyed talking with you. When you become a Christian, I want to be the first to know.”

Flew laughed and responded, “I think you deserve that right.”

The doors closed.

Most observers of the debate never thought that Flew would take steps toward Christianity. The former professor at Oxford, Aberdeen, Keele and Reading universities in Britain had argued against the existence of God for more than 50 years, publishing such books as “Atheistic Humanism” and “Darwinian Evolution.”

But in December 2004 the unexpected happened when Flew took a step toward Christianity, announcing that scientific evidence led him to a belief in God.

Habermas was among the first people he told.

Habermas, chairman of the department of philosophy and theology at Liberty University in

Lynchburg, Va., had known that Flew was reconsidering his position since the fall of 2000 when Flew sent Habermas a letter in which the atheist acknowledged the strength of arguments for theism and Christianity.

...Over a period of three years the two scholars corresponded about God. By January 2003 Flew began considering arguments from the “intelligent design” movement and was on the verge of belief in God.

Intelligent design is a theory arguing that some features of the natural world are best explained as the products of an intelligent cause rather than naturalistic evolution.

“He told me he was really rethinking theism and had corresponded with [naturalistic scientist Richard] Dawkins and was putting the ID arguments up against what Dawkins was saying and trying to compare the arguments,” Habermas said. “And he was going back and forth as to whether he should be a theist or not.”

By early 2004, Flew completed his transition to theism and indicated his change of mind to Habermas in a telephone conversation....

Surprising? In fact his position only confirms what God’s Word states in Romans 1:19-20: “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” Frew has come to recognize the obvious. He has compared the two: evolution and intelligent design. He who defended so strenuously the idea of evolution discovers that this theory can in no way explain the marvel of the universe. He is now convinced of an “Intelligent Designer.” However, this is not the same as acknowledging the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God, nor of acknowledg-

ing Jesus Christ, the Son come into the flesh. He recognizes the work of God in that he sees “intelligent design” as a better explanation of origins than evolution. He is, as some speak of it, a “theist.” That, however, is not a saving knowledge of God. One must know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Yet one is amazed at the change in this hardened evolutionist. He now sees that evolution is not even a viable theory.

■ Tsunami

Many have lamented the tragedy of the Tsunami that killed, we are told, over 150,000 people in a moment of time in western Asia. Doubtlessly there were Christians as well as many Muslims and Hindus among those who died and among those whose possessions were completely wiped away. Now many ask, “Why?” The scientific explanations have been given. The religious explanations are varied. Some have claimed, since nations that are largely Muslim were affected, that God is showing His wrath against that false religion and especially against the radical element in it. Others would claim that these “forces of nature” are happenstance and that God has nothing to do with them.

The religion editor of the *Grand Rapids Press*, Charles Honey, presented his opinion in the issue of January 8, 2005:

Of all the questions religion asks, the most persistent—and often pointless—is “why?”

It’s a good question, a natural question. It just very often has no answer. But we ask it anyway, hoping God will make sense of tragedies that seem senseless.

...I asked it in the smoldering aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, when everything seemed covered in soot. Why should all those mothers, fathers, sons and daughters be wiped out just because they were in the wrong building at the wrong time?

But I have not asked why a monstrous wave rolled out of the Indian Ocean and sucked close to 150,000 people to their deaths. It is not just because I know I won't get an answer. It's because there isn't any, so the question doesn't apply.

The "why" question, in a religious context, presumes God has the answer and implies he had a hand in the event, or at least a reason for allowing it to happen. Therefore, there is meaning in what happened.

I believe there are often God-reasons for things that happen. But in this case, I don't see it. The world just did what the world sometimes does—shifts plates, kicks up 500 mph waves, kills anyone unlucky enough to be in the vicinity.

The only thing God had to do with it was making the world the way it is—a wonderfully intricate ecosystem that occasionally un-

leashes incredibly powerful destruction.

I see no particular meaning in that. The only meaning is in our response, which also has been incredibly powerful. And I do believe God is present in that response....

What happens, then, with the truth of the sovereignty of God? Does He rule over all—or only over good things? The testimony of Scripture is unmistakable. What does it say of those events that happened to Job? (Job answered his wife, "What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?") What of Sodom and Gomorrah? What of the death of the Egyptians with the ten plagues? The psalmist states in Ps. 147:16-18, "He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost

like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow." The passages could be multiplied showing the sovereignty of God over all of His creation.

Often we cannot answer the question, "Why?" But then, who can know the mind of God? We see one little piece of a vast puzzle. God determines the whole. This we do know: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). We likewise know that all things ("good" or "bad") are given to the wicked in His wrath (Ps. 7:11). And these things that occur are in part the fulfillment of those signs that precede Christ's return (Matt. 24). 

Haggai: Rebuilding the Church (15)

The Fourth Prophecy (cont.)

2:23. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.

In this last verse of the prophecy of Haggai, Zerubbabel, the political leader of the Jews, is both the person addressed and the subject of the prophecy. Insofar as this promise applies to Zerubbabel himself, it is a promise

that Zerubbabel will be God's representative, the representative of His own divine rule among the people, and that God will use him in the work of rebuilding.

That God is speaking to and about Christ under the figure of Zerubbabel is also clear from the prophecy. Zerubbabel is referred to not only as a signet, but also as the servant of Jehovah and as His chosen. Both of these are important names for Christ, especially in the prophecies of Isaiah to which Haggai very obviously has reference (Is. 41:8, 9; 43:10; 44:1, 2). That these names refer to Christ in the book of Isaiah becomes clear when we realize that the servant passages all climax and come to their conclusion in Isaiah 53, which

describes this chosen servant of the Lord in His sufferings.

A passage that very obviously refers to Christ as the chosen servant of the Lord is Isaiah 42:1-3, which is quoted in reference to Christ in Matthew 12:18-21:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.

Such passages prove beyond any doubt that it is not finally Zerub-

babel but Christ of whom the prophet was speaking.

That Christ is spoken of as a signet ring on the hand of God refers first of all to the fact that He is the representative of the kingly majesty and power of God. He is that in a way Zerubbabel could never be, for Zerubbabel was but a man, and Christ is the one in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9).

There is a passage in the New Testament that comes very close to describing Christ in the same terms used here. Hebrews 1:3 speaks of Christ as the express image of the person of God. Those words, "express image," literally describe the stamp or impression left by a signet ring. That is what Christ is as God's Son come in the flesh, as the bodily representative of God Himself.

God speaks of Zerubbabel, and through him of Christ as King, to show how completely He would provide for His people and fulfill the promises that He had made to them. Not only would Christ be the true temple, the Desire of all nations, but He would also be the great temple builder. That was the role of Solomon and of every king of Judah, to build and keep in repair the house of God. Solomon fulfilled that task by building the first temple. Men such as Jehoshaphat and Asa kept the temple open and in repair, and later kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah restored it when it had fallen into disrepair.

That God has Zerubbabel in mind as the builder of the temple is especially clear from Zechariah 4:7-10:

Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this house: his hands shall also finish it; and thou

shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you.

Now God assures His people not only that the temple would be built and that its glory would be complete, but that He would Himself take the responsibility for seeing to it that the work was finished, not only in this earthly house that they were working on, but in the true temple, the body of Christ, the church. We have, then, in this closing prophecy of Haggai, God's word to the church of all ages that He, through our Lord Jesus Christ, will build His church. That does not take away the calling we have in His house, nor leave us idle, but the work is really His and is accomplished through His Son, even when He uses us in that work.

That Christ is both temple and builder is somewhat difficult to understand, but is true because all the Old Testament pointed to Him. He is both the temple and priest, both priest and sacrifice, both sacrifice and altar. There really is no other name but His. That He is both temple and builder is clear from John 2:19, 21:

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up...but he spake of the temple of his body.

He builds the temple in all of His work. In His death and resurrection He lays the cornerstone, through His Spirit He gathers the living stones of which that house is built. He preserves His church in the world and brings her to perfection in glory, where His house is built unmovable and everlasting, and in that house He is the one in whom and through whom God dwells with His people as one family, taking them as His people and revealing Himself as their God and

giving them the blessed vision of His own face in the face of His beloved Son.

The promise of Christ under the figure of Zerubbabel is the encouragement of every true temple builder from now until the house of God is finished. It is the guarantee that our labors are not in vain in the Lord (I Cor. 15:58). It is the assurance that we too are chosen and precious in God's sight, and that we will receive from Him every blessing necessary for the work He has given us to do. It is the assurance that God's promises are not failing, even when it looks so to us — when all appears hopeless, and the cause of God is very small in the world, left like a hut in a garden of cucumbers and like a besieged city (Is. 1:8).

We must remember that in Zerubbabel the Jews could no longer see anything of the former splendor and power of the throne of David. Zerubbabel was nothing more than a minor official under a

foreign king. And because he had none of the power of David, there was in him no assurance that the temple would be built, and when built, be preserved. It is little different in these last days, now that Christ has gone away for a while and His church is left alone in the

world, small and despised. No wonder that so many have abandoned and given up on the church and forsaken her to run to their own homes. They have, however, forgotten that nothing depends on us, that God has promised to build His church through our Lord Jesus Christ, and that therefore and in Him our labors are not in vain.

God promises to raise up the throne of David once again, not in Zerubbabel, but in Him who is to come, to make Him the visible representative of the power and do-

That does not take away the calling we have in His house, nor leave us idle, but the work is really His and is accomplished through His Son, even when He uses us in that work.

minion of God Himself, and thus to insure the building and preservation of His house. That promise we have as we take up yet again in the New Testament, in the work of the church and in the work of church reformation, the building and rebuilding of the house of God.

Let us not be slothful, then, in these latter days, but build as we have been commanded — build in the assurance that the true temple, the Desire of all nations, will come soon, that God will build His church with a view to that coming day of Christ, when the church shall be, as the body of Christ, part

of that true temple, and in the hope that the true temple of God shall remain when heaven and earth and all things in them are shaken and removed.

May our prayer be that of Calvin as we consider what Haggai, through the inspiration of the Spirit of God, has written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come:

Grant, Almighty God, that...as thou hast favoured us with so great an honour as to make us the framers and builders of thy spiritual temple, may every one of us present and consecrate himself

wholly to thee: and inasmuch as each of us has received some peculiar gift, may we strive to employ it in building this temple, so that thou mayest be worshipped among us perpetually; and especially, may each of us offer himself wholly as a spiritual sacrifice to thee, until we shall at length be renewed in thine image, and be received into a full participation of that glory, which has been attained for us by the blood of thy only-begotten Son. Amen.¹ 

1. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. Rev. John Owen, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, n.d.), vol. IV, p. 326.

The Fundamental Work of the Deacons (8) Caring for the Poor Outside the Household of Faith

The first priority of deacons in the church of Jesus Christ must be the care of the poor in their own congregation. At their installation, the deacons were authorized to do their work within and on behalf of that congregation in which they were installed.

Their next priority, as we have demonstrated in our previous article, must be the care of believing poor in other congregations.

But Christ requires deacons in His church to be ready also to help the poor who are outside the

household of faith — that is, those poor who manifest themselves to be unbelievers.



Reformed churches have historically taught, on the basis of Scripture, that the church is required to care for the needs also of the poor outside the church of Jesus Christ.

Already in the Old Testament, Israel was required to care for strangers in her midst. Specifically, God's law in Leviticus 19:10 and Deuteronomy 24:19-21 required Israelites to save the gleanings of their harvest and vineyard for the poor, strangers, fatherless, and widows. Leviticus 25:35 reads: "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then

thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee." Whether these strangers (foreigners) took up permanent earthly residence in Israel, or were just passing through, Israel was to care for them. Some of these strangers were proselytes, having been circumcised, and therefore were brothers and sisters in the faith. But not all were proselytes; some were just sojourners. Regardless of the spiritual state and condition of these strangers, God required Israel to care for them.

A classic New Testament passage that indicates that the church must care for the needs of the poor outside of her number is Galatians 6:9-10: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we

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shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

In the previous verses, Paul teaches that believers must give for the good of other believers. Specifically, verse 2 requires the saints to bear each other’s burdens, and verse 6 requires the church to support her minister in earthly, material ways. Lest we think that such care of others is a burden, the Holy Spirit encourages us in our duty, by reminding us that what a man sows, he reaps (v. 7). In verse 9 Paul again refers to the hope of a harvest as encouragement not to be weary in well doing. Verse 10 contains the practical application: “let us do good to all men.”

The verse teaches that the church and believers are called to do good. This doing good involves more than, but certainly includes, relieving the poor. Applying the verse specifically to the work of the deacons, notice that it requires deacons to make the poor of the congregation their first priority (“especially unto them who are of the household of faith”); that it also requires the deacons not to limit themselves to the congregation (“let us do good to all men”); and that the deacons are to do this as they have “opportunity.”

The church’s opportunity to do good to others is an ongoing one. The “opportunity” of which the verse speaks is not primarily one of circumstance — that we happen to see one who has a need, and are ready to supply it. Literally translated, the word is “time.” It is the word translated “season” in verse 9: “for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” The “opportunity” of the church to do good to all, therefore, is that of our being alive on this earth, and having strength to serve God. Our days on this earth are God’s appointed time for the church to do good to all men. John Calvin writes: “Since, therefore, God has set apart the whole

of the present life for ploughing and sowing, let us avail ourselves of the season, lest, through our negligence, it may be taken out of our power.”¹ The church must do good to all always.

On the basis of such passages, Article 25 of the Church Order of Dordt originally required the deacons to distribute alms “to the poor among ‘inhabitants and strangers’.”² In the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons that was approved by the Synod of Dordt, deacons are still exhorted to “show liberality unto all men, but especially to the household of faith.” This phrase clearly refers to Galatians 6:10, and shows that Reformed churches permit their deacons to dispense alms to unbelievers.



Objections might be lodged against the position that the deacons may properly care for the needs also of the unbelieving poor in their vicinity.

Some might argue that the relief of the poor outside the church is really the work of the state. Israel as a nation, not as a church, was required to care for the strangers in her midst. And the Reformed churches in the Netherlands understood it to be their duty to care for the poor outside the churches, because they were state churches — the only church officially recognized by the government in the land.

Others might argue that the benevolent care of the poor who are outside the household of faith is a practical denial of the antithesis — the principle of the church living spiritually separate from the world.

In response to these objections, we acknowledge the possibility that the relationship of the Dutch church to the state contributed to the practice of Reformed churches helping the poor, whether residents or strangers. And we consider proper the concern that the church maintain the antithesis.

Nevertheless, the objections do not disprove the need for the deacons also to care for the needs of the poor who are not of the household of faith.

For, first, one can never separate Israel as a nation from Israel as a church. Old Testament Israel was the elect, chosen, redeemed church of God, whose life on earth took the form of a kingdom. In that kingdom and church, God’s everlasting, spiritual, heavenly kingdom was realized. So His kingdom is being realized in the church today. And the law of God’s kingdom still requires love to our neighbor (Matt. 22:39), even if that neighbor hates us (Matt. 5:43ff.). Christ says to the citizens of God’s kingdom, “Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away” (Matt. 5:42).

Second, the principle of the antithesis is not denied when the church ministers the gospel to unbelievers in the name of Christ. The principle of the antithesis is denied when the church helps the world of ungodly in the world’s cause, on the world’s terms, for the attainment of the world’s goals. But just as the church does not deny the antithesis when she undertakes the work of missions, preaching the gospel to unbelievers, so does she not deny the antithesis when she undertakes the

1. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, transl. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989 printing), p. 180.

2. Prof. William Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1928), page 327. One still reads a similar requirement in article 25 of the Church Order, found in the back of the 1991 edition of *The Psalter*, which was produced by special arrangement for the Netherlands Reformed Congregations. There the deacons are required “to distribute the same [alms, DJK] faithfully and diligently to the poor, both to residents and to strangers, as their needs may require it....”

work of relieving the needs of the poor unbelievers with material gifts accompanied by words from Scripture.

Finally, the objections do not disprove the need for the deacons to care for the poor who are not of the household of faith, because Scripture is clear that Christians must show kindness to all.



In much the same way as they care for the poor within the church of Christ, the deacons will care for the poor without.

This care has often begun, in particular cases, with these poor approaching the deacons of the church, or more often the minister of the church, who then ought to assure the person that he will refer the matter to the deacons. That the care of these poor has often begun this way is understandable, for the deacons do not always know the people of the community. Such requests of members of the community for assistance, deacons should take seriously.

But at times the deacons should take the initiative in caring for a person or family in the community. Perhaps the deacons are aware of a homeless person or family that is seen regularly asking for food, work, or a place to sleep, near the church. Or perhaps one of the deacons becomes aware of a particular family in the community who has needs, and discusses this matter with the other deacons.

The deacons will probably find it harder to assess the genuine need of the poor outside the congregation. Sometimes these poor, if they come to the deacons of their own accord, will simply ask for a certain amount of money to use in a certain way. When the deacons try to learn more about the person, their income, and their spending habits, such people often refuse to cooperate. Other times these people will ask to be given their money immediately — for ex-

ample, within the hour. These are often indications that the needs of these people are not genuine. Even when the people do cooperate, the deacons have little way of knowing whether or not they are telling the truth.

Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster have good advice for deacons in this connection.³ First, reminding us that professional crooks do go about asking the churches for handouts, Berghoef and DeKoster encourage deacons to communicate with other agencies about how these crooks work, and how they can be exposed. Some communities have organizations that keep a file of names of such crooks. Churches can inquire whether a certain person is in the file. But this requires of deacons, when they have been duped, to report the name for the benefit of other churches too.

Second, on page 179 Berghoef and DeKoster write: “When in doubt, give prudently and sparingly the first time, so you will not have mismanaged much of the Lord’s goods if you are misled.”

Third, on page 180 they give a list of questions to ask those who come to receive a handout, both to help assess the need and to detect frauds. I encourage all deacons to refer to this list, modifying it as they think necessary, when dealing with requests for assistance from people outside the church.



In relieving the needs of such poor, the deacons manifest the mercy that Christ bestows upon His people in relieving us of the misery of sin. This is not to say that Christ actually bestows mercy on these poor. He does not, if they are not given to Him of the Father. But the deacons still picture Christ’s mercy. In order that the recipients of their gifts understand this, the deacons must be explicit in bringing the Scriptures and in speaking of Christ to the poor out-

side the household of faith. The deacons must show these people that they need Christ, the bread of life, even worse than they need the material relief that the deacons give.

The deacons, in manifesting this mercy, must call the people to faith, obedience, and good works of gratitude. The deacons must impress upon these poor that they have a duty toward God. Their duty is not owed to the congregation — they are not required to repay the money, or to show any other favor to the church in return for the church’s gifts. But they must receive these gifts in gratitude to God, using them rightly as good stewards, not squandering them.

In manifesting this mercy, the deacons must also set forth the justice of Christ, warning such that if they do not believe and repent, Christ will condemn them. Moreover, the deacons must manifest this justice of Christ by refusing to help such as are not interested in Christ at all, but care only for earthly food. Such refusal to help, these people must understand, manifests Christ’s judgment on them for their impenitence in their sin.

Doing this work in all earnestness, the deacons must pray God’s blessing on their labors. By God’s grace, they will sometimes see that God still grants to Gentiles (heathen) repentance unto life (Acts 11:18). And often they will witness God’s sovereign work of hardening hearts, preparing them for destruction. Either way, the deacons may rest assured that God’s sovereign will is being accomplished through their faithful and obedient labors. 

3. Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster, *The Deacons Handbook: A Manual of Stewardship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian’s Library Press, 1980), pp. 178-180.

The Men Which Knew of It

No Secret

In Israel the relation between husband and wife was *exemplary*. Exemplary in so extraordinary a way, that now, after two thousand years, the *type of Jewish wedlock* still operates among the scattered children of Jacob, yea, is sometimes still so beautiful and attractive, in the high esteem of robust and paternal authority, in the honor of wife and mother, and in the affectionate union of “husband and wife and children” almost to the perfection of an articulated whole.

What we still see of this in our own surrounding is a fruit of what God’s Word wrought in Israel.

“He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel” (Ps. 103:7). “He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them” (Ps. 147:20).

Yet from of old the example of heathen women has worked evil in the life of Jewish women.

This was strongly evident, when, after the fall of Jerusalem, a number of Jewish families went into Egypt and took Jeremiah with them.

For then Jeremiah discovered that many Jewish women, on the quiet, wandered off to the luxuri-

ously appointed temples of the heathen and, with the strange women, offered offerings to the idol, which they called *the Queen of heaven*.

For this Jeremiah rebuked them and called them to repentance.

But the unholy association with those worldly women had already in a short time bewildered the spirit of these Jewish women in such wise that, boldly and recklessly, they said to Jeremiah: “We will not hearken unto thee, but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, and burn incense unto the Queen of heaven” (Jer. 44:16, 17).

This was provoking enough by itself, but there was evidence of still greater apostasy when, as though to taunt Jeremiah, they added: “Would you think, that we offered incense to the Queen of heaven, without our husbands being in on the secret?” (v. 19).

For this showed that, though the women committed this sin alone by themselves, yet their husbands, though they took no part in this, and held themselves as though they knew nothing of it, had truly been persuaded by their wives to contribute money toward it. For, of course, such outings to the heathen temples were expensive, both by reason of the costly garments they had to wear, to be in style with others, and the liberal offerings they had to bring.

Thus the women sinned grievously, but their husbands shared their guilt, for, says Jeremiah in verse 15, they were “men who knew of it,” knew that their wives despised God and bent their knee to the Queen of heaven.



By itself there was nothing strange in this.

From our sinful nature it springs, and in many ways we all practice this principle of reserve, “to cover one’s eyes with his hand,” to be blind to much that takes place in one’s own house, to hold oneself “as though he knows nothing of it,” and to act “as though it has not come to his notice.”

To some extent, it may be said, there is some good in this.

The “be not overrighteous” has a relative right. He who puts a restraint upon everything tires people and weakens the main-spring of admonition. He who always inhibits, in the end is no more heard. A clock that always ticks, strikes at last the hour and the half hour without anyone noticing it.

And the outcome shows that, in the end, family affairs are best managed when, as a rule, the reign is somewhat loose, and is tightened only when a matter is worth while, and then if needs be with the assistance of the lash.

But what is here told of the men and women in Tahpanhes is something altogether different.

What here took place was a creeping in stealthily among the women of an altogether sinful practice, but in such a way that their husbands were in on the secret, and, though they held themselves aloof, knew all about it.

Here was an evil which the man, as soon as he knew of it, should immediately and inexorably have stopped, and which he suf-

ferred to go on, yea, contributed money toward it, to prevent disagreement at home, and not to come to a footing of war with his wife.

Here the wife bore rule, and the husband, who by God's appointment as responsible, did as though he knew nothing of it, and, in opposition to God's law, allowed himself to be subjected to the sinful law of heathen practice by his wife.



This is a subversion of the order which God has appointed for family life.

The man *is* the head and so must remain.

He is responsible to God for the spirit in which his family lives at home and reveals itself outside.

He is not to rule in the sense that in his own house he is to set up some sort of a little kingdom for himself, but he should so rule his family that in his house all resistance against the *Kingship of God* is broken.

A family does not come of itself, God is the Author of it and created husband and wife and children for it. Therefore He has the right to declare what is best for the family and to appoint His ordinances with respect to it. In God's name and in God's stead the husband and father has been appointed watchman, to see to it that these ordinances of God come to their own.

In that appointment roots his authority; therein alone; and by reason of this he must resist every violation of his authority, neither should he neglect the use of this authority, but must apply it to this one great end.

All other rule of his family lacks higher consecration.

Only so does it take hold of the conscience.

And he who does not do this renders himself guilty before God, while he makes a mockery of his responsibility to the Knower of hearts.

Whether his word is heeded is another question. This they did not do in Israel, according to Jeremiah's word. The brutality of wife and children can sometimes go so far that, even as those women to Jeremiah, they say to husband and father in response to his admonition: "We will not hearken unto thee, but do our own pleasure."

Provided the man takes care not to throw away his authority, his conscience is clear, and the doubly guilty wife, with her tempted children, will bear double guilt before God.



Money here is of serious significance.

These Jewish women of Tahpanhes confessed this themselves, when they asked Jeremiah: "Do you think that we could allow ourselves this luxury, *without our men?*" (v. 19).

Not in Israel, but with us a wife can have money, and in the marriage contract have claims inserted to assure her independence, and in that case the husband is responsible, whether he did well to marry on this condition, but, once married, what his wife spends in such a way is beyond his province of authority.

As a rule this is *not* so.

As a rule the wife has no other money than what her husband hands out to her, and therefore he remains responsible for what his wife expends.

The urge after worldliness, the tendency to vanity, the trait to do what women do who do not fear the Lord, can almost in no case be gratified except by *money*.

So it was at Tahpanhes, so it is still with us.

Therefore the man who says: "I give my wife money, and what she does with it is her lookout," must once give account to God for this light-hearted play.

Truly, to the wife, as she should be, and for so far as she walks in the fear of God, largest

confidence and greatest liberty of action must be accorded.

But when the husband learns that things go wrong, and he knows that money is spent in sinful ways, he may not act as though he knows nothing of it.

For then, as regards his wife, the blood of her soul shall once be demanded at his hands.



This holds true also where no money comes into play, and it concerns evil practices, either in the training of children, or in dealing with servants, or in association with outsiders, or in expenditure of strength, of time and of life.

There is nothing in the home-life regarding which there is no will of God.

God created nothing and called nothing into being without giving an ordinance concerning it. An ordinance for the use of every power, for the spending of each day, for maintaining the purity of every relation. And certainly not the least power of the Christian life of our fathers consisted in this, that they recognized the obligation of the husband to see to it that *in all this* the Lord our God was duly honored.

Surely he must be priest in his own house, to lead in prayer, and to invoke the reconciliation of his God with respect to the affairs of his home.

But this cannot be all. It is also written: "The lips of the priest should keep knowledge" (Mal. 2:7), which here definitely refers to the knowledge of God's law. As it reads elsewhere: "The *law* shall not perish from the priest" (Jer. 18:18), or as is said to Israel: "Ask now the priests concerning *the law*" (Hag. 2:11).

So to stand in his house belongs to the *priesthood* of the husband and father in his family.

A living preaching of the Law of the Lord must be in the Christian family. If you will, the *public*

conscience of all who in his family are committed to his care.

And therefore it is a choking, a strangling, a searing of the conscience, when the husband makes common cause with his wife in evil, and well knows of it, but acts as though he sees nothing.

This is moral cowardice.

This is to throw away his honor as man, and his priesthood before God. A sinning against his own soul,

and against the soul of his wife.

Of course, this also applies the other way. A wife also must watch over the soul of her husband.

But yet this relation is altogether different.

Even a child is not free from the soul of his parents; and he who as child in a spiritual sense can be something to father and mother, and is not, is guilty. But this does not undo the fact that the respon-

sibility of a father for his child bears an altogether different character from that of a child for his father.

That of the father for his child is official.

And so is the responsibility of the husband for the wife.

Here is a *special* duty, a duty of a particular sort and order, imposed of God upon the husband.



The Types of Scripture

The Garden of Eden (4)

Let us now attend to the knowledge of which the tree of life was a sign. Adam, let me repeat, was *commanded* to eat of the fruit of the tree of life. “And the Lord God *commanded* the man saying, of every tree of the garden, eating *thou shalt eat?*” (Gen. 2:16). It is plain that man was *bidden to eat* of the trees of the garden and also of the tree of life. Hence, to eat of the fruit of this tree was good, and in eating, man would live. The fact that after the fall the way of the tree of life was kept indicates plainly that man had eaten of this fruit and had discovered its nourishing properties. As often as man ate of this tree he experienced the

wholesome and invigorating effect of its fruit upon his frame. Hence, God’s statement relative to this tree was constantly verified by man’s experience. The nourishment that he derived from this fruit was a testimony that God had spoken the truth. Man’s discovery was that this tree was indeed good for food. Man’s own experience told him that the food value of this tree was such as to be greatly desired.

This tree, then, may be regarded as a symbol of the knowledge that is the product of an experiment. It is not the kind of knowledge that may be signified by the term faith. Consequently, the moral worth of the act of eating of the fruit of this tree was not very great, except that the eating of it implied a conscious rejection of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam’s eating of the fruit of the tree of life was, then, a declaration that he lived only by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, and that the tree of life was no independent source

of vitality — no second God. For this reason the tree of life, together with the other trees with the exception of one, were not called trees of *the knowledge of good and evil*. There was only one tree known by that name — the tree to which had been attached the negative commandment not to eat of its fruit.

Thus we have presented at least one of the reasons why this particular tree, in distinction from all the other trees of the garden, bore this name. There is still another reason, to which we shall come presently.

The tree of knowledge as a test of faith

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, by virtue of the prohibition in which it was involved, was eminently capable of testing man’s faith in God. Let us illustrate this matter. A father bids his son, let us say, of seventeen years, to take his place at the table supplied with an abundance of wholesome food. That son is bidden to eat, and he does so. It is plain that

George Ophoff was Professor of Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary in its early days. Reprinted here, in edited form, are articles that Ophoff wrote at that time for the Standard Bearer.

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a command of this kind is no test of that son's faith in his father. Nor can this command serve to exhibit the willingness or the unwillingness of the son to carry out the father's mandates. For the lad is hungry. He craves food. He knows that he is greatly in need of it and that what is set before him is good. He will eat without being told to do so. It would be a great trial to this son if he were forbidden to eat.

Adam knew, from experience, that the fruit of the trees of life was very good. He greatly desired that fruit. If it had not been for the presence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the command to eat of the tree of life would have been no test of his faith in God.

But supposing this father should forbid that son of his to leave the house for a week, adding that if he did so he would for certain come to grief. A prohibition of this kind serves to test that son's faith in his father as well as his willingness to hearken unto his father's words. And that for the reason that the prohibition may appear very capricious. Its reasonableness was not made plain to the son. It is possible that he may begin to regard it as unjust, and finally set it aside and leave the house. On the other hand, if this son keeps to the house, we know then that his faith in his father is very strong. If that son does as he is bidden, he shows that he is very capable of obeying on the basis of his father's testimony.

For the reasons mentioned above, the command to refrain from eating of the forbidden tree served to test Adam's faith in the Lord God, and to test his ability to obey for the sole reason that God had spoken. To Adam, the prohibition seemed arbitrary. When he looked at the fruit, he could not understand why he should die if he ate. For the tree was good for food, a desire to the eyes, and a tree to

be desired to make one wise. He was forbidden, we repeat, to experiment with the tree. He must endorse the testimony of God and refrain from eating for the sole reason that the Lord God had said so. This prohibition, it is plain, is admirably suited to put to a test Adam's faith in God. Add to this that it worked no hardships on him. It was but one tree from which he was forbidden to eat. There was still an oversupply of fruit.

The prohibition, then, not to eat of the forbidden tree, made necessary the exercise of faith. Faith is the conviction that the things that lie beyond the reach of our observation, the things unseen, are nevertheless there. Faith may be identified with these realities and thereupon substituted by the term knowledge. What were the unseen realities with which Adam had to do? The grim reality that the eating of the forbidden tree will result in death and the glorious fact that the Lord God is the true bread of life. It is these things upon which Adam must lay hold. Then he knows. And it was of this knowledge that the tree growing the forbidden fruit was a sign. Hence, it was called the tree of knowledge of good and evil. While Adam believed, God was unto him a living reality and he knew God.

Antithetical character of the two trees

Like the tree of life, the tree of knowledge of good and evil was located in the midst of the garden. "And the woman said unto the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the *midst of the garden*, God hath said, ye shall not eat of it" (Gen. 2:2, 3). Since both trees occupied a place in the midst of the garden, the distance separating them could not have

been very great. The position of the two trees means that both good and evil were constantly being brought to the attention of man. As often as he ate of the tree of life he did so in the near vicinity of the forbidden tree. If man would eat of the tree of life he must pass by and reject the forbidden fruit. For of both trees he was not permitted to eat.

It is plain, then, that, due to the presence of the forbidden tree, the act of eating from the tree of life was at once an act of faith. For it implied a rejection of the forbidden fruit, and amounted to a declaration that the testimony of God was being believed. Each time man ate of the tree of life he was rejecting evil and embracing the good. The tree of knowledge, it is plain, compelled man to choose ever again, either good or evil, either God or not-God. In a word, the presence of the tree of knowledge meant that man must walk by faith ... or die.

The presence of this tree, then, brought into sharp relief both good and evil, God and not-God. It meant that good was being represented as the opposite of evil, and evil as the opposite of good. Man's notion of good and evil was therefore much clearer than it

would have been if the tree of knowledge had not been there. Hence, when he finally chooses evil he does so very consciously. In this sense did the tree of knowledge teach man both good and evil. It sharpened up man's mind and compelled him to serve God consciously.

Let it be repeated that the tree of life pointed to God as the true bread of life. The tree of knowledge of good and evil may be regarded as a representation of all that which depraved man places in the room of God and worships as God. Scripture has more than one

In a word, the presence of the tree of knowledge meant that man must walk by faith ... or die.

name for this anti- or pseudo-god — the arms of the wicked that shall be broken (Ps. 37:17); man and flesh (Jer. 17:5); bread (Luke 4:3); chariots and horses (Ps. 20:7); antichrist (I John 2:18); the man of sin and the son of perdition (II Thess. 2:4); mystery of iniquity (II Thess. 2:7); Babylon (Rev. 14:8); mammon (Matt. 6:24). Hence, the two trees exhibit the antithesis God and pseudo-god, light and darkness, good and evil. The presence of the two trees meant that Adam was made to choose either one of the two powers represented by the trees. It is true that the tree of knowledge alone exhibited the antithesis. The positive exhibition of *light or good*, however, was the tree of life and, in a sense, every tree of the garden with the exception of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Choosing the evil, at the instigation of the devil

It did not take long before the tree of knowledge of good and evil became to man a stumbling block. The serpent entered the garden and persuaded man to eat of the forbidden tree. The serpent's argument is well known. "Ye shall not surely die, for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

The manner of approach of the devil was at once a demonstration of his cunningness. He refrains at the outset of accusing God of deception. Instead he sets out with a question. "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" It is clear that the devil's purpose was to make the divine prohibition seem unjust and oppressive. God's statement, "Of all the trees of the garden thou mayest freely eat," is changed to "Thou mayest not eat of every tree." The serpent, thus, sets out very cautiously. He is about to blaspheme God. Before he does so, however, he must know the

thoughts of the woman's heart and her attitude toward the divine prohibition. Satan is a creature. Hence, he cannot read man's mind or penetrate into the recesses of his heart. The woman must reveal herself to him, and that by means of the spoken word. She must be made to talk.

"Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."

Now Satan responds by railing at God. He contradicts God's statement and accuses Him of deception. He makes it appear as if God is depriving man of some higher good for the purpose of safeguarding His own interests. Amazing. How dare the devil blaspheme God in the presence of this friend of God. Was not this woman God's friend? She was not, at this juncture. Fact is, her soul was filled with disgust. The divine injunction aggrieved her. This is plain from her response. Attend to her reply and observe that the woman has distorted God's words. God had said, "Of *all the trees* of the garden ye may freely eat." The woman said, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden." It is plain that there was a conscious attempt on the part of the woman to reduce the blessings of God to a minimum. Further, God had said, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it." To this the woman added, "Thou shalt not touch it." This addition indicates that the woman was bent on making the commandment of God appear very offensive. It is plain that she was dissatisfied with God.

The serpent is very quick to perceive that the woman has lost her faith in God. He knows, then, that the woman will permit him

to assail God. And so he does. "Ye shall not surely die," saith the devil. And the woman believes ... the devil. That means that she too begins to shake her fist in God's face. Facing God she says, "You lie." "For God doth know (thus the serpent continues) that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened." Again the woman agrees. She turns to the tree and fixes her eye upon its fruit. The fruit was pleasant to her eyes. It was good for food, she saw, and a tree to be desired to make one wise. She takes of the fruit thereof, and eats, and gives also to her husband with her, and he did eat — without objection, so it seems.

When man ate of the forbidden tree he committed a heinous sin against God. We will not engage in a detailed delineation of the various elements of the event of the fall of man. Doing so we would be passing beyond the limits of the field that we are cultivating. It is our business, however, to point out the meaning and the implications of Adam's deed.

Let us set out with the assertion that the statements of the devil have the appearance of truth. For what he predicted happened. Man's eyes were actually opened. And we may hear the Lord God saying: "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." But, though the statements of Satan had the appearance of being true, yet were they pregnant with bald lies. Satan denied that man would die when he eats. He assured him that the opening of the eyes and the knowing of good and evil will constitute a higher good. In reality, however, the opening of the eyes and the knowing of good and evil constituted a great evil. They turned out to be the earmarks of spiritual death. Satan lied to man and deceived him. In our next article these matters will be further delineated. 



Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ, by John Bunyan (1628-1688). Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004 (first published in 1681, and republished in Bunyan's *Works*, Volume 1, Banner of Truth, 1991). 230 pp. (paper). \$8.99. [Reviewed by Prof. Barrett Gritters.]

The Calvinistic Puritan John Bunyan, best known for his *Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote a fine exposition of John 6:37, which the Banner of Truth has recently republished in a small paperback. If the reader is hesitant to pick up a Puritan work because of expected tedium, he may find himself happily surprised at the sound exegesis, pointed applications, and non-tedious reading. For a work on this one verse ("All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out"), 200 pages is not too much.

John Bunyan's interest was a defense of a Calvinistic interpretation of the text over against Arminianism, exalting God's sovereign grace in election and salvation. The book is full of memorable lines of powerful defense of the Reformed faith, easily understood by all believers.

More so, Bunyan was determined to explain the gospel to troubled sinners, especially sinners troubled by the possibility that they are not God's children. He succeeds powerfully. No arm-chair theologian (he spent most of twelve years in prison for his faithfulness in the gospel ministry), Bunyan knew the struggles in the battle against sin, doubt, and the great Adversary.

Bunyan is wise in his pastoral applications. He avoids the temptation to ignore the causes of doubt.

Although doubts are sown by the devil, there are reasons for doubt that require repentance and sorrow. In a pastoral manner, the sinner is brought to comfort in the way of a confession of his own sin and real need for Jesus Christ. The "big-bellied promises" of God come with full force on pages 177ff., where ten causes are given, in unforgettable language, why some should "be so lamentably cast down and buffeted with temptations."

It may be for several causes. 1. Some that are coming to Christ cannot be persuaded, until the temptation comes, that they are so vile as the Scripture says they are. True, they see so much of their wretchedness as to drive them to Christ. But there is an over and above of wickedness which they see not.... 2. Some that are coming to Christ are too much affected with their own graces, and too little taken with Christ's Person. Therefore God, to take them off from doting upon their own jewels, and that they might look more to the Person, undertaking, and merits of His Son, plunges them into the ditch by temptations.... Yes, God often, even for this thing, takes as it were our graces from us, and so leaves us almost completely to ourselves and to the tempter, that we may learn not to love the picture more than the Person of His Son.... 3. Perhaps you have been given too much to judging your brother, to condemning your brother....

Of most interest to this reviewer was the expressed desire of the publisher that the book have wide readership because it is another salvo against the enemy hyper-Calvinism. The opening statement of the "Publisher's Foreword" notes: "The Baptist preacher and theologian, Andrew Fuller (1745-1815), was raised un-

der a ministry which had become unbalanced due to its Hyper-Calvinistic emphases." The blurb on the back cover has Andrew Fuller finding help from this work to "set his denomination free from the grip of hyper-Calvinism."

Because the Protestant Reformed Churches are often charged as being hyper-Calvinist, I read with greatest interest to find whether what Bunyan would say opposed PRC theology. But there is little, if anything, in the book, that does not harmonize well with Protestant Reformed teaching. A distinction between conditional and unconditional promises will make a Protestant Reformed reader sit up carefully. An apparent inconsistency at the very end of the book that has one "coming to Christ" but not yet "come to Christ" and far from the Spirit of regeneration will leave one bewildered for a moment. But of a "well-meant offer of salvation" that has God desiring to save everyone because Christ is available to them all, there is nothing.

There is a hyper-Calvinism about, which denies that faith may be called for in the unregenerate, that denies that the gospel may call to Jesus Christ those who are not elect, that denies that faith is the *duty* of unbelievers. Against that theology, Bunyan's exposition of the passage is a strong and effective counter-measure. Reformed and Protestant Reformed preachers will grow from a reading of the book.

The Banner of Truth editors or members, perplexed as they may be by this positive review in the *Standard Bearer*, are invited to point out what, if anything, in PRC theology is effectively countered by Bunyan's *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*. My invitation is sincere and well-meant. 

Evangelism Activities

On Friday evening, February 11, the Wingham, Ontario PRC sponsored a Winter Lecture. Their pastor, Rev. M. DeVries spoke on the theme: "Contending for the Faith in an Age of Tolerance." Nearly all the adults and young people of the congregation were in attendance. And there were 25-30 visitors present. These included a couple from Grace PRC in Michigan, a couple from Brampton, Ontario (near Toronto), as well as invited relatives and acquaintances from the mid-western Ontario area. Refreshments were served and fellowship was enjoyed following the lecture.

We are also happy to report that the Reformed Witness Hour, the half-hour radio broadcast sponsored by our denomination, can now be heard in southwestern Ontario at 11:30 A.M. each Sunday on radio station CKNX 920 AM, thanks to the evangelism outreach of our Wingham congregation.

Beginning with the first Sunday in February, the Reformed Witness Hour broadcast supported by our congregations around the Chicago, IL area changed radio stations. The program can now be heard on WYLL 1160 AM at 3:30 P.M. Sunday afternoon.

Mission Activities

The PRC Mission in Spokane, WA is in the early stages of beginning a library. If you are interested or able to donate new or used RFPA publications, good Bible reference works, commentaries, Re-

formed devotional literature, or books on church history, contact Missionary Rev. T. Miersma at 509-976-0372, or tem50@comcast.net.

Rev. R. Kleyn, representing our churches' Domestic Mission Committee, and Elder H. Boer, representing the Hudsonville, MI PRC, the calling church for our denomination's work in Northern Ireland, visited the field from February 4 through 14. In addition to meeting with our missionary, Rev. A. Stewart, and his wife, Mary, the men also had occasion to visit with families of the Covenant PR Fellowship in Ballymena and to travel with the Stewarts on February 9 to Limerick, in the Republic of Ireland, where Rev. Stewart presented a lecture entitled "The Lord's Day." Rev. Kleyn preached for the Fellowship on Sunday, February 13, and the saints enjoyed a time of fellowship with the emissaries after the evening service before they left for home the next morning.

God is blessing the PR Fellowship of Fayetteville, NC. They continue to receive the DVDs of the weekly services of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI and are appreciative of them. Some visitors have begun to attend the worship services of the PRFF and also the Wednesday catechism sessions that Dr. LeMaster leads. Another family will soon be moving up to Fayetteville for a while and is planning to attend the services. Let us continue to remember before God the needs of our brothers and sisters in Fayetteville as well as all those whom our Heavenly Father gives us the privilege of working with.

Elders B. DeKraker, D. Rau, and B. Zandstra, as well as Deacons T. DeVries and S. Kamps were in Pittsburgh the first full week in February as delegates from the

Council of Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, the calling church for our mission work there. During their visit they met with their missionary, Rev. J. Mahtani, and his family and with the Steering Committee. They hoped also to conduct family visitation, as well as make pastoral and diaconal calls.

Young People's Activities

The Young People of the Wingham, Ontario PRC invited their congregation for a time of fellowship and skating on Saturday, February 5 at the Belgrave Arena.

The Young People of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta hosted a skating party at Les Walker on Saturday, February 12. Everyone at Immanuel was invited to join the young people for an afternoon of fun and fellowship.

The Young People of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI planned a Bowl-athon for Friday evening, February 11, from 9 P.M. to midnight. All young people were invited to join in this time of fun and fellowship. Money raised was to be used for the 2005 YP Convention.

The young people of the South Holland, IL PRC invited the young people from surrounding PR congregations to join them Saturday, February 5 for a ski outing at Bittersweet Ski Resort in Kalamazoo, MI.

Soup and a sandwich were on the menu for a fund-raiser for the Young People's Society of the Randolph, WI PRC. Donations were taken to offset some of the expenses of this year's activities.

Congregation Activities

The Prince Center at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI was the site of this year's annual Georgetown PRC Conference. The

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

Conference was held February 4 and 5. Dr. Feddes, from the Back to God Hour, was this year's featured speaker. He looked at "Blessed to be part of the Family of God" from three different points of view: Family Life at Home, Family Life at Church, and Family Life in Heaven.

School Activities

Parents of Hope PR Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to Hope's PTA meeting February 10. Prof. H. Hanko

spoke on "Distinctive PR Education."

Start with a mix of hungry supporters. Add a cold winter's night to the mix, find an empty school gym, provide bowls and bowls of hot soup, and you have all the ingredients needed for a successful fund-raiser. In West Michigan this combination is known as the annual Adams Christian School Soup Supper, sponsored by their Mothers Club, held this year on February 10.

Minister Calls

First PRC in Holland, MI has extended a call to Rev. S. Key to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. D. Overway received the call to the Doon, Iowa PRC.

The Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL called Rev. G. Eriks.

First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada extended a call to Rev. J. Mahtani.

Prof. D. Engelsma declined the call from Hudsonville PRC.



Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 14, 2005, our parents, **RICH and JANE VAN TIL**, celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary. We, their children, are grateful to our heavenly Father for blessing us with godly parents. We are also thankful for the godly instruction and Christian guidance they have given to us. We pray that God will continue to bless their marriage and care for them in the years to come. "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * David and Sara Bleyenbergh
- * Tim VanTil
- * David VanTil
- * Jason VanTil

Byron Center, Michigan

NOTICE:

The Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee is offering scholarship awards to prospective Protestant Reformed teachers and ministers. If you are interested in receiving a packet, please contact Brenda Dykstra at (616) 662-2187 or e-mail brendadj@juno.com by April 1, 2005.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. Charles Loux on the passing away of his wife,

MRS. GRACE LOUX.

May he be comforted by God's Word in Psalm 27:14: "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD."

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
Jack Brands, Assistant Clerk

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2005, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 28, 2005,

CALVIN and CHRISTIE HASSEVOORT,

the Lord willing, will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary.

We, their children and grandchildren, are so thankful to our heavenly Father for the years He has given them as husband and wife and for their love and godly example in our Christian upbringing. They have made and continue to make many sacrifices to ensure that we are taught and guided in the fear of the Lord. They have taught us how we, as God's children, must humbly live our life both in our walk and our talk. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to bless them in their life together and as our parents and grandparents. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- * Aaron and Erin Gunnink
Drew, Cristyn
- * Russ and Karisa Lotterman
Bradyn
- * Joel, Chelsea, Kyndra, Kylar,
Ethan, Caitryn, and
Ashlinn Hassevoort

Byron Center, Michigan