

# “Occupy”

*“And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.”*

Luke 19:13

**S**ervants of the Nobleman! A blessed name, for it signifies your place. You belong to your Nobleman, your Lord. He has purchased you with His precious blood, making you His own property. He has given you a position in His blessed kingdom. He has made you His servants by His grace.

But your Lord, your Nobleman, has gone away into a far country. He has gone there to receive for Himself a kingdom. But He shall return. You know that, for it is your hope. And your hope shall not be ashamed.

Upon His departure He has given you something. He has given a pound into your hand. With that

pound He has also spoken a commandment in your ear.

“Occupy till I come.”

There you stand, watching your Lord leave, holding His pound in your hand. You contemplate that pound—what must you do with it?



Another year has passed away. You know that, in that older year, many possibilities were opened up before you. In that year you lived and moved. In that year you carried on in your business. You busied yourself with the work before you. To that work you applied your talents and abilities, finances and wealth, the strength and might of your hands. You were busy! You occupied.

But you also know that there were opportunities that you did not lay hold of. You were aware of them, but you passed them by. Perhaps you felt you had not the energy. Perhaps you felt they were too difficult for you. Now you look upon those things with a certain regret. For in them, you heard the

word of your Lord, “Occupy!” But you did not occupy.

A new year now opens wide before your eyes. What things does this new year contain in it? What things capture your attention and your imagination? What joys, what blessings, what points of prosperity shall be yours? What does it hold for you in the realm of the temporal, the earthly and material? What shall be brought before you in the spiritual, those things of the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness? What things shall be given you?

In this new year, one thing must be outstanding to you. One thing is constant. That one thing will not change over the course of this new year, come what may. That is the command of your Lord. He speaks to you, His servant. That voice does not waver or change. He says to you, Occupy!

Occupy till I come!



In your hand remains the pound that your Lord has given you. What must you do? Occupy!

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That means you must take stock. What is the pound that the Lord has given you?

That pound is found in the most basic things. It is your life, your health and strength. It may be those things in abundance. Or it may perhaps be those things in their lack. That pound is also found in the things that make you different from others. Perhaps your pound is a strong back, legs, hands, and arms. Perhaps your pound is a keen intellect. Perhaps your pound is a great heart overflowing in kindness. Perhaps your pound is a fertile imagination, or great talent in one area or another.

What is your pound?

Whatever it is, that pound has been given you by your Lord, the very same Lord who has commanded you, Occupy!

That command means you must be a keen observer. Look at this new year. It stretches before you, filled with opportunities. Opportunities abound in the classroom, from elementary to post-graduate studies. Opportunities present themselves in business and commerce, to purchase, manufacture, service, and sell. Opportunities arise in labor, to give good days, weeks, and months of solid and strong labor. Opportunities lie in the open field and pasture, to sow the seed and put forth herds and flocks.

Occupy!

Fill those opportunities with your pound! In the classroom, learn with diligence. Pursue your business with zeal and ambition. Fill the tasks of each day with eager strength, completing the labor set before you. In the field sow, irrigate, and cultivate!

Occupy till I come!



We occupy this year because this year is one of a certain number. There will come a time when the number of these years is finished. At its completion our Lord

shall come. At His coming He shall take account. He shall inquire concerning that very pound that He placed in your hand. He shall see what you did with that pound.

How did you occupy?

How blessed to give a good report: I have occupied! Oh, to be able to speak these words to your Lord: Thy pound hath gained!

Thy pound!

As the pound was given, so was it received. As it was given, so was it held. As it was given, so was it employed with utmost care and diligence. At the time of reckoning, with these words it is returned. Thy pound! Though you have labored with it, yet it was never truly yours, but your Lord's.

However, those two words, "thy pound," cannot be spoken alone. The wicked servant found that out to his shame and sorrow. He was disobedient. He heard; for he said, "thy pound." But he did not obey the command of his Lord. He did not occupy!

Oh, he had an explanation. With that explanation he was satisfied. Such was the nature of his Lord, austere, taking up what He did not lay down, and reaping what He did not sow. Therefore that servant might keep his Lord's pound laid up in a napkin.

But all his thinking was merely an excuse. He thought and acted upon his own wickedness. His disobedience brought him under the judgment of his Lord: "Thou wicked servant!" His excuse is stripped away, and exposed in all its wickedness. He was disobedient! He did not occupy!

You occupy!

Because of your occupation, you are able to add these glorious and blessed words: "Thy pound hath gained!"

You have occupied! You have laid hold upon the opportunities. You have put your pound forward. You have labored. Now you are also able to set that very gain before your Lord.

You have spoken. Now hear your Lord speak to you, "Well, thou good servant." Here is the approval you have sought, ever since you had that pound placed in your hand. The many years of labor and toil, the ceaseless searching for opportunities, the diligent investment of your pound — all these have their reward in these simple words. Your Lord approves your work. Upon you He pronounces blessing.

Hearing those words must give you pause. How can they be spoken? You think not only of your pound, that pound you clearly received from your Lord. But you think of the opportunities of the year gone by. That year came from the hand of your Lord. You think of this year now stretched before you with its opportunities. That year comes to you now from the hand of your Lord. You think of your watching for those opportunities. You think of all your labor and industry, your care and anxiety. You think of all that went into that final confession: Lord, thy pound hath gained! Even that gain you have gotten from your Lord. All things are from Him.

Yet, His word still stands. His approval is not diminished, but shines all the more clearly because of its rich grace. "Well, thou good servant." Receive the promotion that follows, given also in grace. "Have thou authority over ten cities."

What blessing! To occupy till your Lord comes. To be found faithful at His return.

Lay hold of your pound. Lay hold of this year. In its days, hours, and minutes employ your pound. Do so for the sake of your Master. Hear the word in hope. Keep its blessedness in your heart. "Well, thou good servant."

Occupy!

Occupy till I come! 

## Movies — Not A Question (2)

It is our contention that drama, as such, is wrong. In support of that contention, the standpoint taken was that the actor is wrong to take on the personality of another. It may be that the reader is not immediately convinced by that judgment. I can readily understand that. For many years, when the same argument was presented to me, I was not entirely convinced of it. I am now.

However, that is only one element in our contention that drama *per se* is wrong. Several other significant objections against drama must be raised. The validity of these additional objections does not depend on the main point of the previous editorial.

One serious indictment of drama is that it plays out real life situations. Leaving out for a moment that this will include dramatizing sinful deeds, consider the question: May one play the part of a righteous man? Is it legitimate to act out praying for forgiveness of sins and for grace, having family devotions, and going to church? Dear reader, think about this. Playing church? Acting out prayers? Having the director say in the middle of a “prayer” — “Cut! Start over. That did not sound right”? What blasphemy! Surely God is not entertained by such. Isaiah 29 reveals what God thinks of a people whose lips speak the right words, but their hearts are far from Him.

However, there is another element in drama that makes it utterly abhorrent to the transformed, be-

lieving mind of the Christian. That element is the portrayal of sin in all drama.

Sin is the transgression of the righteous and good law of God (I John 3:4; Rom. 7:12). God reveals His holy being and righteous will in His law. By giving the law, the holy God commands “that even the smallest inclination or thought contrary to any of God’s commandments never arise in our hearts” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 44).

Every sin is an act of rebellion against God (Ps. 5:10, *et al*). Therefore, “every sin deserveth God’s wrath and curse, both in this life and in that which is to come” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. & A. 84).

Drama plays out sin, deliberately and purposefully.

There are, no doubt, dramas containing relatively fewer sins in the plot than is found in others. There are plays about Bible stories, and movies about Martin Luther. In addition, there are the movies made for family viewing. But if there were no sin in these dramas, they would be laughably unrealistic, unfaithful to the record of history, and utterly boring to every (fallen) man, woman, and child.

As such, the depravity of man renders it impossible to produce a “sinless” drama. Besides, no advocate of drama, even within the Reformed church world, takes the position that the only “good” drama, one that the Christian may view, is one containing no sin.

Actors and actresses play out sin. They act out stealing, lying, fornication, murder, and taking God’s holy name in vain. They enact disobedience and rebellion —

of children against their parents, of wives against their husbands, and of citizens against their rulers. These entertainers portray envy, hatred, anger, and attempts at revenge, all of which, the Reformed believer confesses, God abhors (Heidelberg Catechism, L. D. 40).

These Thespians must perform all these sins convincingly or they will not get the part. They must make the audience believe that this is a real murder, a genuine act of rebellion, a truly adulterous kiss — otherwise the audience will scoff at the poor acting.

The very sins that God abhors and forbids, movies seek to portray realistically.

There is a horrible price paid for willful disobedience. Consider the spiritual damage done to the soul of an entertainer as he realistically acts out murderous hatred, slick deception, adultery against his “wife,” and blasphemy — as though he were doing them. In fact, he *is* doing them. Therefore, God’s wrath and curse come upon the actor and his acting.

There is good reason why Hollywood is the vile fountain of iniquity that it is today. The consciences of the actors, directors, producers, and cameramen are seared by the constant reenactment of sin. That their culture is utterly vile is God’s judgment on their sinful activity. When men seek sin with all their hearts, God in wrath gives them over to their sins. Ultimately, God gives them over to the most vile sin of homosexuality (Rom. 1). Do notice that drama has come to that. That God-cursed lifestyle is now openly promoted in the dramatic productions of the world — in plays, in movies, and

on television — and is made to appear glamorous in the personal lives of the entertainers.

And if it is wrong to portray sin, obviously it is wrong to enjoy it, and even more so to pay men and women to perform it. God is not mocked. What a man sows, that he reaps.

From the point of view alone of the sin against the third commandment, 99% of the world's drama is off limits to the Christian. Consider the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of the third commandment — *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.* The commandment is sobering. The catechism's exposition is penetrating.

Question 100. Is then the profaning of God's name by swearing and cursing so heinous a sin that His wrath is kindled against those who do not endeavor, as much as in them lies, to prevent and forbid such cursing and swearing?

Answer. It undoubtedly is, for there is no sin greater or more provoking to God than the profaning of His name; and therefore He has commanded this sin to be punished with death.

Read it again, with televised drama in mind. Reformed people universally confess that God's wrath is kindled against them for violating this command — not only when believers personally use God's name irreverently. His wrath comes on us if we do not "endeavor, as much as in us lies, to prevent...such cursing." With that consciousness, how could the believer turn on the television set and watch a sitcom or a movie? God's name will be taken in vain — he knows that before he turns on the TV.

Yet, it is contended that while many Hollywood productions are off limits to the Christian, some movies are different. In some, sin is not so graphically displayed. Sin

is not made glamorous. In the end, the right triumphs. Such movies, it is argued, teach the difference between right and wrong, and teach that the good ultimately wins. Thus, it is maintained, Christians not only can profit from viewing such, they ought even to be encouraged to produce such dramas.

The fallacies in such an argument are transparent, are they not? Surely we can see that, to the holy God, "unglamorous" sin is yet loathsome in His sight. No doubt it is true that movies that make sin to appear attractive are more heinous to God than those that do not. But sin is sin. God hates all sin (Ps. 5:7, *et al*).

In addition, this notion that although movies portray sin, yet they can have a good effect because the movies end up on the side of right — what kind of reasoning is that? It is the same thing that virtually every child has tried at one time or another to defend his disobedience of his parents' rules, namely, the end justifies the means.

According to such reasoning, the Christian may (ought to?) play the lottery, for, what great sums of money could be won for the church! If the end justifies the means, the Christian father may certainly work on Sunday in order to pay for a Christian education for his covenant children. The Christian young woman could rightly justify marrying an unbeliever, since her goal is to convert her husband to be. The end justifies the means.

We must recognize that such is simply wrong thinking. God's people must think biblically. To suppose that the holy God is pleased to instruct His people through the dramatization of sin is not biblical thinking.

Such thinking is, on the other hand, the thinking molded by the pernicious doctrine of common grace. Common grace finds good in the works of men — good that pleases God. Not merely good in the sense that the ungodly can pro-

duce a good car or build a good house. That is good merely in the sense of being functional. No one ever yet denied that the ungodly can make useful products.

Neither does anyone deny that reprobate men can write a "good" symphony or paint a beautiful (good) picture. These things can be good because unbelievers can draw from the principles of creation and color imbedded in the creation and produce a beautiful work of art. The ungodly have the light of nature and are able to discern the difference between good music and bad, good painting and poor.

But common grace teaches that the good is also in the *activity*, and even in the *hearts* of the unregenerate. And proponents of common grace maintain that all the products of the ungodly, including drama, contain something good and pleasing to God, since His common grace is operating in all unbelievers. On that basis, it is argued that the Christian may view the drama of the ungodly.

We must recognize, however, that common grace does not merely allow the Christian to watch "Little House on the Prairie" and "Mayberry, R. F. D." If common grace equips the unbeliever to produce good in these programs, why not in every movie? Why not in the R-rated movies and in pornographic films? In fact, common grace has been the justification for Christian magazines to review all sorts of vile and immoral films, and for Christian colleges to show the same on campus.

The trouble with that argument is, common grace is not biblical. God is not gracious toward the reprobate. On the contrary, He hates all the workers of iniquity (Ps. 5:5). The Bible does not teach that the ungodly do good — morally good deeds that please God. The Bible's testimony is that when God "looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God," His evaluation was:

“They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:2-3).

Contrary to the teaching of common grace, all the activity of the ungodly — producing, writing, inventing, and manufacturing — is sin. Beethoven did not write his majestic symphonies out of love for God. Thus his work was sin. Not one of his inventions did Thomas Edison produce in order that God might be glorified. Thus his labor was all sin — in motive and activity.

Notice too, that drama is not a

product such as a car or a painting. It is an activity. It is acting out life — speaking, and doing. Actors express thoughts, desires, and emotions. And in all that activity, “there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” In the activity of acting, the ungodly entertainer reveals his hatred of God and expresses his delight in sin.

And may the believer be entertained by such activity?

The answer is obvious. The antithetical life of a Christian demands that the believer reject what God abhors, and seek what God loves. *Love not the world, neither*

*the things that are in the world*, God commands His children (I John 2:15). God demands that we *touch not the unclean thing* and calls the believer to a spiritual separation (II Cor. 6:17). *Be ye holy, for I am holy*, God enjoins (I Pet. 1: 16), also with regard to entertainment.

Movies, indeed all drama, are not a dilemma for the sanctified mind. Admittedly, there is a vicious struggle in the believer’s soul. His sinful flesh craves drama at the same time that his sanctified heart abhors it. But movies are not a question.

(...to be continued.) 

# Church Membership

One of the most common problems the church faces today is an ignorance concerning the importance and calling of church membership.

Many have separated themselves entirely from the instituted church, from the oversight of elders, and from the faithful preaching of the gospel.

Some have done so because they insist that membership in God’s church does not necessarily mean membership in a church institute. One can belong to the body of Christ, they say, regardless of whether or not he has anything to do with a local congregation. Or they take the position that gathering for family worship is itself a sufficient expression of membership in the body of Christ.

Others have separated from the

instituted church because they have stumbled at the sin found in every church that they have attended.

Before we proceed to consider the marks of the church, we must understand that those marks, according to the ordinance of God, belong to the church as it manifests itself in institutional form in this world. Marks, after all, are those things that indicate the presence and spiritual condition of the church as it is seen in the midst of this world. The church is not merely something invisible and intangible. The church is manifest. The one holy catholic church comes to manifestation in individual congregations under the leadership of God-appointed officebearers who serve that local body of believers and their children.

The invisible body of Christ that by faith we confess to exist throughout the ages and the visible congregation are not two separate entities, but two important as-

pects of one church. Although they may be distinguished, they are inseparably related.

The marks of the church, therefore, have to do with church membership, and particularly serve to direct us in answer to the question: Where must I belong as a member of the church of Christ in the midst of the world?

The Belgic Confession sets forth the truth of Scripture concerning the calling that is ours to belong to a faithful manifestation of the true church of Jesus Christ. The theme of Article 28 is that *Every One Is Bound to Join Himself to the True Church*. The Article reads as follows, and I include the footnoted Scripture references:

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and out of it there is no salvation,<sup>1</sup> that no person, of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself to live in a separate state from it;<sup>2</sup> but that all men are in

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duty bound to join and unite themselves with it, maintaining the unity of the church;<sup>3</sup> submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ;<sup>4</sup> and as mutual members of the same body,<sup>5</sup> serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them.

And that this may be the more effectually observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church,<sup>6</sup> and to join themselves to this congregation wheresoever God hath established it,<sup>7</sup> even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it, yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment.<sup>8</sup> Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God.

The idea of church membership is not that by joining a local congregation one makes himself a member of the true spiritual body of Christ. We considered in our last article the truth that Christ alone gathers His church by His Spirit and Word. But He gathers His church by His Spirit and Word particularly through the preaching of the gospel by the instituted church through her ordained ministers (Rom. 10:13-15). We are duty bound, therefore, to unite ourselves with the church as instituted in this world.

This truth is certainly well attested in Scripture. To the New Testament believer, faith in Christ and membership and participation in His church are inseparable.

In Acts, chapters 2 through 5, after that unspeakable gift of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, many were gathered into the church by the preaching of the apostles. They were not simply gathered into an intangible, invisible church. But they are spoken of as being added to that number

who were a part of the church at Jerusalem.

In Acts 20:28, Paul instructs the elders in the church at Ephesus to take heed to themselves and to all the flock over which God has made them overseers. Those elders were not in doubt as to who were members in that flock. Taking heed to the flock would be impossible, if there were no recognizable membership to that flock!

To that same church at Ephesus Paul wrote a letter in which he addressed them as a congregation, showing them the beauty of the place God had given them in the congregation at Ephesus, and pressing upon them the urgency of their calling to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The epistle of Paul to the Philippians is written specifically to the congregation at Philippi, “with the bishops and deacons” (Phil. 1:1). The same is true with many of the other New Testament epistles. They are written to give specific instruction and to address particular issues and needs in the congregations to whom they are written.

And that those congregations are instituted under officebearers is also evident in several passages. Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica (I Thess. 5:12-13): “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves.”

This truth of the compelling importance and calling of church membership, having been so thoroughly established by Scripture, was embraced and developed by the Reformers in the years following the Reformation. During that time, people did not merely reject church membership in favor of family worship. Nor did they offer other excuses for not belonging to an instituted church. Rather, be-

cause of fierce persecution, some did not dare join themselves to the congregations of believers. Nevertheless, the Reformed confessions spoke forthrightly and boldly: The one who is indifferent to church membership or who remains outside the membership of a local congregation where Christ’s body is manifest, gives expression to the sin of supposing to be wiser than God! Such a person acts in rebellion against the ordinances of God! For the love of his soul we call such to repentance.

The French Confession put it this way (Article 26):

We believe that no one ought to seclude himself and be contented to be alone; but that all jointly should keep and maintain the union of the Church, and submit to the public teaching, and to the yoke of Jesus Christ, wherever God shall have established a true order of the Church, even if the magistrates and their edicts are contrary to it. For if they do not take part in it, or if they separate themselves from it, they do contrary to the Word of God.

Every child of God, by his confession of being a Christian, is obligated to join the true church of God as it comes to expression in a local congregation — even if, because of the absence of a true church in a given location, it is necessary at no little sacrifice to move to another area where that church is manifest.

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1. I Peter 3:20; Joel 2:32.

2. Acts 2:40; Isaiah 52:11.

3. Psalm 22:23; Ephesians 4:3, 12; Hebrews 2:12.

4. Psalm 2:10-12; Matthew 11:29.

5. Ephesians 4:12,16; I Corinthians 12:12, etc.

6. Acts 2:40; Isaiah 52:11; II Corinthians 6:17; Revelation 18:4.

7. Matthew 12:30; 24:28; Isaiah 49:22; Revelation 17:14.

8. Daniel 3:17-18; 6:8-10; Revelation 14:14; Acts 4:17, 19; 17:7; 18:13.

But when I say that one is obligated to join a true church, that statement in itself does not clarify the matter of church membership. We are centuries beyond the rather simple distinction between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation. It is not as easy as saying that this one church is true and the other is false. Today we face a baffling array of denominations and congregations. And even there it is not a matter of saying that one church stands out alone as true, while all others are false.

So the question that every Christian is compelled to face is this: Where must I belong? In which church must I serve Christ, and stand in willing subjection to the teaching ministry and the rule of elders? In which church must I express my thankfulness to God by my willing and liberal support for the ministry of the Word and the care for the poor and various kingdom causes? Where shall I bring to expression the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, contributing to the upbuilding of the congregation by my fellowship and time and prayers, and even brotherly or sisterly admonitions for the loving restoration of those who walk contrary to the Word of God? Where am I called to glorify God in my church membership?

The Belgic Confession gives valuable and biblical instruction concerning this question.

Many professing Christians today look at the matter of church membership as either a matter of birth — “I’ve been born into this church, and this is my family’s church” — or as a matter of “What’s in it for me?”

With regard to the first perspective, Scripture clearly teaches that the matter of birth and family and relatives may not be the determining factor when it comes to church membership. Jesus said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37). It is only in the way of seeking God’s glory and truth, that we also express proper love toward our family members. When it comes to church membership, the focus must be upon God, not ourselves.

That God-centered focus of our confessions and Scripture also exposes the second perspective as appallingly selfish and self-centered. It is a self-centeredness fueled by the apostasy that prevails in the church world today. Churches, long having taken the focus off God and His Word, and having rejected the truth of Holy

Scripture, have fallen all over themselves in the mad rush to establish themselves as “relevant” in society. They have established all kinds of social programs and attempted to meet the “needs” of every group imaginable. Every form of entertainment is presented to their membership and visitors — all in the attempt to respond to the question: “What’s in it for me?” Long forgotten is the truth that the church is not for man, but for God.

In answer to the question, “Where is that true church in which I must worship and live in active membership,” the Belgic Confession says in Article 29:

We believe that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the church. But we speak here not of hypocrites, who are mixed in the church with the good, yet are not of the church, though externally in it; but we say that the body and communion of the true church must be distinguished from all sects who call themselves the church.

The Confession then points us to the marks by which the true church is known. Those marks we consider next time, the Lord willing. 

## All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

### ■ But: Is It Genetic??

In last November’s election, doubtlessly the question of homosexuality and homosexual “marriage” played a sizable role. Whether the election would have turned out differently if this had not been an issue is questionable.

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The Christian recognizes that all of this is under the control of a sovereign God.

Because of the agitation for homosexual “marriages,” eleven states had on their ballots, and the electorate approved, the proposal that the state’s constitution be amended to include the definition of marriage to be that exclusively between a man and a woman.

The Christian who maintains the infallibility of the Bible (and can any Christian do otherwise?)

understands and confesses that Scripture teaches clearly that the thought and act of homosexuality are sin. But this is not simply a “religious” teaching or idea. “Nature” itself shows this. The male and female of mankind as well as in the realm of animals are physically different and complement each other. To have a desire for a relationship with one of the same sex is surely contrary to “nature.” This is not simply a teaching of “religious right-wingers.” None can

deny the reality of the relationship God created: one man marries one woman.

I have pointed out in earlier articles that Satan has rather effectively (so it would seem) destroyed the concept of marriage with the prevailing idea that divorce and remarriage is not sin. Not only the world would take such a position, but many in the churches do as well. Now to solidify that “victory,” Satan no doubt promotes the growing pressure to grant the homosexual the “right” to marry one of the same sex. It is a further attempt to destroy the whole concept of marriage—ultimately destroying the truth of Scripture of God’s covenant continuing in the line of generations. One can almost conclude that Satan has made vast strides toward the attainment of his goal.

But a question constantly resurfaces. Is this homosexual desire a matter of the genes? Is it genetic? If it is, the person cannot help himself, right? It is not a matter of “choice,” but rather the way he is “wired.” He ought, therefore, to have the “right” to act on this. After all, he cannot change his genes. Some Christians have maintained that *God* made him that way—therefore God must approve of a committed relationship between two of the same sex.

There is a perceptive article in *World* magazine (Nov. 6, 2004) written by Andree Seu that considers the question. She states the following:

“Is homosexuality a choice?” was the devilishly simple question posed by debate moderator Bob Schieffer, and the country held its breath. The president’s “I don’t know” was the best you can do under the circumstances, under a clock. Of interest to me was the poisoned premise embedded in the question, a premise so universally accepted, by friend and foe alike, as to be invisible—that if something is not a choice, then it is natural; and if some-

thing is natural, then it is not to be denied. But let’s think about that.

Let’s begin by conceding, for the sake of argument, the whole genetic ball of wax. Let’s not even contest studies claiming that INAH-3 hypothalamus cells of homosexual male cadavers are statistically larger than those of their heterosexual counterparts. (But is that size difference a cause or an effect of homosexual activity?) Let’s say there is an Xq28 genetic marker for homosexuality. Then let’s apply this to John Kerry’s assertion that the person living a lesbian lifestyle is “being who she was born as.”

...Genetic studies also show correlations with alcoholism and with violence. No one, as far as I know, is saying the active alcoholic is “being who she was born as.” We direct her to a 12-step program—and fast. Neither do we give a pass to violent offenders on the basis that “biology is destiny.”

Or what if, rather than genetics, it’s environment that drives a person toward violence or alcoholism (or homosexuality)? Do we then give those conditions a blessing? No, neither for chromosomes nor for abusive fathers do we excuse the human moral agent from being in the driver’s seat.

What is sin? Is sin only the acts I commit with full volition or is sin even things about myself that I was born with and that I loathe (Romans 7; Psalm 51)? Mr. X is saddled with a tendency to dis temper—right from the get-go. Ms. Y is born with a proclivity to gambling, something she’s been aware of from her first nickel bet on a hop-scotch game. These things come “naturally,” but given their way, they land us in crime or debt or neglect of family. No drunk or serial killer marches in a parade crying “Free to be me!” Indeed, are not these predispositions the manifold ways that the Fall falls on us?

The writer concludes properly:

Does a just God punish a tendency I was born with? Well, if not, then how can God punish any sin, since all sin is like that? I

have a theory that we are all born addicts of some kind or another, all battling (or not) our private besetting sins. We must all fight temptation by petitioning for grace.

“Fair is what a state has,” our local Ms. Wagner tells her first-grade kiddos. And annoying as that is to the alleege of unfairness, the point is well taken. What’s fair is what God says is fair. What’s sin is what God says is sin. And whether it’s difficult or it’s easy, and whether it’s curable or the battle of a lifetime, and even if it means never marrying and satisfying your physical yearnings (which is a big if), God’s words leave no wiggle room as He censures “Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire” (Jude 7).

We conclude then that the fact that homosexuality (or greed, or laziness) is with you from the womb, far from letting you breathe easier, makes your plight all the worse. It means that sin runs deeper than we thought! It goes deep in the fabric, like the mildewed cloth that Mosaic law threw on the pyre. “Wretched man that I am!” Paul exclaims upon discovering this (Romans 7:24-25). “Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

The battle, however, was not won when the electorate in eleven states passed constitutional amendments defining proper marriage. There is a generation arising that have impressed upon them in television, in print, through teachings in public schools that homosexuality and homosexual marriages are a matter of “choice” and “right.” It requires but little imagination to know what that generation will believe. The pressure on the church that condemns homosexuality as sin will likewise grow. Already some attempts have been made to silence the church in its condemnation of this sin—labeling such condemnation a “hate crime.” Per-

secution can quickly follow. But the far greater matter of concern is that increasingly within the churches there is a growing agreement with the world that homosexuality is a “right,” and that marriage ought to be part of this “right.” May God have mercy on His people and church!

## ■ Is Polygamy Next?

It would seem so. Jonathan Turley, in *USA Today*, writes of one court case dealing with this subject and gives his own evaluation:

Tom Green is an American polygamist. This month, he will appeal his conviction in Utah for that offense to the United States Supreme Court, in a case that could redefine the limits of marriage, privacy and religious freedom.

If the court agrees to take the case, it would be forced to confront a 126-year-old decision allowing states to criminalize polygamy that few would find credible today, even as they reject the practice. And it could be forced to address glaring contradictions created in recent decisions of constitutional law.

For polygamists, it is simply a matter of unequal treatment under the law.

Individuals have a recognized constitutional right to engage in any form of consensual sexual relationship with any number of partners. Thus, a person can live with multiple partners and even sire children from different partners so long as they do not marry. However, when that same person accepts a legal commitment for those partners “as a spouse,” we jail them.

Likewise, someone such as singer Britney Spears can have multiple husbands so long as they are consecutive, not concurrent. Thus, Spears can marry and divorce men in quick succession and become the maven of tabloid covers. Yet if she marries two of the men for life, she will become the matron of a state prison.

The difference between a polygamist and the follower of an

“alternative lifestyle” is often religion. In addition to protecting privacy, the Constitution is supposed to protect the free exercise of religion unless the religious practice injures a third party or causes some public danger.

After pointing out that 78% of the world’s cultures allow for polygamy, Turley concludes:

The first Amendment was designed to protect the least popular and least powerful among us. When the high court struck down anti-sodomy laws in *Laurence vs. Texas*, we ended decades of the use of criminal laws to persecute gays. However, this recent change was brought about in part by the greater acceptance of gay men and lesbians into society, including openly gay politicians and popular TV characters.

Such a day of social acceptance will never come for polygamists.... No matter. The rights of polygamists should not be based on popularity, but principle.

I personally detest polygamy. Yet if we yield to our impulse and single out one hated minority, the First Amendment becomes little more than hype and we become little more than hypocrites. For my part, I would rather have a neighbor with different spouses than a country with different standards for its citizens.

So the attack on marriage continues to grow in intensity. Even in the secular press there is indication that writers recognize that all is not well. In the *Grand Rapids Press*, September 17, 2004, Star Parker, president of CURE, writes:

As I see the unquestionable deterioration of family and traditional values in our society, I do believe we are in a “sorry” state of affairs. Perhaps my concern is that as we enjoy the unprecedented prosperity that our freedom has made possible, we are losing a sense that every benefit has a cost, and that the other side

of the coin of increased freedom is increased responsibility.

We seem to be going in the opposite direction. The more we get, the more irresponsible we become. The easier things become, the more we view our bounty as an entitlement rather than as a gift.

Certainly the traditional American family is under siege and the challenges for young parents have never been greater. Never before in the history of this country has there been a lower probability that a child of any race will grow up in a family with a father and mother present. We now approach, as a nation, one out of every three babies being born out of wedlock. Can we imagine a society, which Americans can anticipate, in which a large percentage of its working adults have no memory of growing up in a home with a father and mother?

For families that are intact, the percentage with both parents working outside the home is unprecedented. It seems reasonable to expect that this percentage will continue to grow. So as fathers and mothers go to work every day to meet the economic challenges for their families, the time and energy they have available for giving quality time and attention to their children has got to diminish in some way.

In all likelihood, while these parents are at work, their children will attend one of our nation’s public schools, where the only thing forbidden is to suggest to a child that there are any absolute rights or wrongs in this world. It is far more likely the child will be taught the virtues of not being judgmental, of tolerance and the absence of any absolutes.

So—what kind of generation is the nation producing? A generation with few moral values, without knowledge of the Word of God, will be a generation that hates the absolute rights of the church as taught in the Bible. It can be a generation that despises and persecutes the faithful of the church of God. 

## The Fundamental Work of the Deacons (7)

# Caring for the Believing Poor Outside the Congregation

Within their own congregation, deacons must manifest Christ's mercy by doing their utmost to care for the poor. This means they must collect alms, determine the need of those who seek benevolent help, distribute the alms as the need of the poor requires, and visit and comfort the poor with God's Word. This work involves more than that the deacons are willing and ready to help any who ask — it requires also that they be alert for signs that some in the congregation might be in need.

However, the fact that the deacons have been called to office by a particular congregation does not mean that their care of the poor is limited only to those who are members of that congregation. Deacons also serve their congregation and Christ by caring for the poor outside of their congregation. Some of these poor are fellow believers who are members of other churches. To this we direct our attention in this article. Others of these poor are unbelievers. To this we will direct our attention in our next article, the Lord willing.



The principle reason why deacons must be concerned about the be-

lieving poor outside the congregation is the unity of the body of Christ.

That Christ's body is one implies that Christ died to save one church, and that every child of God belongs to that one church. Christ's body is an *organic* unity; that is, it is a living body made up of many diverse members, each of which contributes uniquely to the unity of the body. Because the church is the *living* body of Christ, the well-being of the whole body depends on the well-being of every member of the body.

Therefore, it is the duty of every member of this body to serve the other members. This is the requirement of Scripture in passages such as I Corinthians 12:14-26 and Ephesians 4:8-16. This is also the confession of the Reformed believer. In the Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 55, the Reformed believer answers the question "What do you understand by 'the communion of saints'?" this way: "First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are, in common, partakers of Him and of all His riches and gifts; secondly, that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members." And the Belgic Confession, Article 28, sets forth the confession of Reformed people that believers must join the true church. Merely to join, however, merely to have one's membership in a Reformed church, is not enough. "We

believe ... that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it; maintaining the unity of the church; ... and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them."

Applying these principles to the relief of the poor, we conclude that individual congregations, and the deacons who serve them, must not limit themselves to the care of the poor in their own congregation, but must also have a concern for the poor in other congregations of the church of Jesus Christ.

The great example for us in this connection is that of the churches of Macedonia, when the saints in Jerusalem had become impoverished. Of this example Paul speaks in his epistle to the Romans and in both of his epistles to the Corinthians. We read in Romans 15:25-27: "But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things." Paul's commendation of the saints in Macedonia is this: that they remembered what they had received from the church of Jerusalem, namely, the gospel, and spiritual blessings. Therefore,

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*Previous article in this series: December 15, p. 135.*

hearing of the poverty that had come upon the church in Jerusalem, the saints in Macedonia thought it only right that they supply the material need of the church in Jerusalem.

In I Corinthians 16:1-4, Paul exhorts the saints in Corinth also to take a collection for the saints in Jerusalem. And in II Corinthians 8 and 9, after about a year had passed since his exhortation, he praises the Corinthians for having the desire to take these collections, but admonishes them for not having done so yet. In this connection he sets forth that beautiful passage that speaks of the grace of Jesus Christ: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Here is our incentive to give for the relief of poor Christians in other churches — Christ became poor for us!



Though the deacons must care for the believing poor in other congregations, they must not intrude into the work that properly belongs to other deacons in other congregations.

In other words, even though the churches must care for each other's poor, that does not mean that a member of one congregation may come to the deacons of another to ask for benevolence. And it does not mean that the deacons of one church must go actively looking for the poor in another congregation. It is not the duty of deacons to determine the need of a family or individual in another congregation, to supply that need with a personal visit, and to bring comfortable words from Scripture. These things deacons must do to those within their own congregation. And those who have need of benevolence must go to their own deacons to seek the supply of their need.

So how do the deacons care for the believing poor outside their congregation? Let us answer this

question, first from the viewpoint of the cooperation of diaconates within a denomination, and secondly from the viewpoint of the cooperation of diaconates of different denominations.



Within the same denomination, the primary way diaconates show their care for poor in other churches is by keeping in contact with other diaconates regarding their need for funds.

Article 26 of the Church Order requires this of deacons. The article speaks mainly of deacons cooperating with others who are devoting themselves to the care of the poor, these others being social and governmental organizations. But the last sentence of the article is pertinent for us: "It is also desirable that the diaconates assist and consult one another, especially in caring for the poor in such institutions."

Regarding this need for cooperation between diaconates, VanDellen and Monsma write the following in *The Church Order Commentary*.

Co-operation between our various diaconates, particularly neighboring diaconates, is certainly proper. There are practical considerations which make co-operation advisable. For instance: One Church may have many needy in the providence of God and but little ability to help. Another Church may have but few needy and numerous well-to-do members who can help those in need. Moreover, the inherent unity of all the Churches, and denominational unity, would suggest co-operation also. "Bear ye one another's burdens," holds here as well as elsewhere.\*

It is encouraging, then, to know that our diaconates do correspond with each other, both when a diaconate has a great surplus of benevolent funds, and when a diaconate has a severe shortage of funds. By offering and giving help

to other diaconates, deacons and churches show their concern for all the poor of Christ's body.

This, by the way, is one reason why churches that have a large balance in their benevolence funds ought never consider reducing the number of collections taken for benevolence. And it is one reason why it would be wrong to investigate other ways of using the money in the benevolence fund. The church must give for her poor. The money given for her poor may be used only for her poor. But her poor are not only those within her congregation. The deacons ought to see how they can help the poor in other congregations as well.

In other ways, too, the deacons might show their care for the poor in other congregations.

It happens sometimes that a member of a congregation moves away from the congregation for an extended but temporary period of time. College students who are away from home at college for eight months of the year are a case in point. Because the distance limits the elders' ability to watch for that person's soul, the elders ask a consistory of a church in the vicinity of the college to take the student's spiritual oversight. This does not mean that the consistory of the student's home church relinquishes its duty regarding that student; rather, it means that it needs the help of another consistory to carry out its task before God.

Similarly, deacons can help each other. Perhaps a member of one congregation needs medical help from an institution far away from his home; or a poor member moves away temporarily for work or other reasons. In such an instance, it is proper for the deacons of the home church to ask for assistance in caring for this family or individual, from the deacons of a church geographically closer to the needy. The deacons of the home church might ask the other diaconate to help assess the person's need, or to deliver person-

ally a check from the home deacons, with comfortable words from Scripture.

Another way in which deacons might help the poor in other congregations is by helping a diaconate in another congregation with a particular, ongoing, involved case — either by giving money for that particular case, or by giving advice with regard to it.

Or it might happen that a new congregation is organized in which the deacons are all new to church office, and they desire the advice and assistance of more experienced deacons to help them learn how to do the work. These deacons might ask a neighboring diaconate to help and advise them for a time.

In all of these instances, deacons must remember to operate within their sphere of authority. No diaconate may begin to help another without first being asked. A diaconate might offer to help another, but that offer must be accepted before this help is given.



Regarding cooperation of diaconates of different denominations, one might wonder if such is even permissible. I argue that it is even permissible, yet should not be done lightly.

Such cooperation would accord with the spirit of Article 26 of the Church Order. Article 26 requires

the deacons to cooperate with “others (who) are devoting themselves to the care of the poor.” This requirement is broad. These “others” might be Christian organizations, but they are not necessarily such; and they are not even diaconates. If Reformed churches require their deacons to cooperate with such, to be sure that those with greatest need are cared for, then surely such churches will permit their deacons to cooperate with diaconates of other denominations.

This cooperation will not be of the same character as is the cooperation with deacons in the same denomination. It will not be manifest by keeping in contact with other diaconates regarding their need for benevolence funds, or by giving them advice in regard to certain cases.

Such cooperation should be done only in special circumstances. It might be that the husband of a needy family attends a church in one denomination, while the wife attends a church in another. Both diaconates then might work together to help that family. Or a major calamity might strike a community, resulting in a sudden and dramatic increase in the amount of visiting and distributing of benevolence on the part of many churches. The deacons of the various churches might work together in such an in-

stance, to be sure that their work is not overlapping and that all in need of help might get it.

Such cooperation should be done only with regard specifically to the care of the poor in specific cases. Diaconates of some churches today turn their attention away from the care of the poor, to address social issues in the church and community — injustice, stewardship, etc. In such ventures deacons ought not join forces. Their duty is to care for the poor.

It should be done only when the common intent of the diaconates involved is to distribute alms, accompanied with comfortable words from Scripture — namely, the gospel of Christ as the revelation of the triune God, and as the only savior from sin.

We are not arguing, then, that deacons should be ecumenically minded with regard to diaconates in other churches. We are arguing that certain situations might arise in which the deacons may properly communicate and perhaps work together in a certain instance regarding the relief of the poor.

It is, after all, our duty to “do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). 

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\* Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941), p. 123.

## Which Were Expressed by Name

### Man in his calling

**T**o hide behind dark figures in the *background*, or, without being called, to stand bravely and heroically in the *foreground*, are the two elements between which our natural impulse

continuously moves back and forth.

On one side timid fear so much as to hear one's name mentioned, and on the other side even ardent desire, where it concerns a noble cause, to have a place among “the men which are expressed by name” (II Chron. 28:15).

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Reprinted from *When Thou Sittest In Thine House*, by Abraham Kuyper. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1929. Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.

You know what happened in Samaria under Pekah, the son of Remaliah.

God let Pekah loose against Ahaz, the godless descendant of David who broke the covenant and as king led the already apostatized Judah in the cruel worship of Moloch, which he was the first to introduce into Judah.

In Samaria they bent the knee before Baal, but close by Jerusalem, in the valley of Hinnom, David's descendant knelt before Moloch, which was far worse.

Therefore God let the king of Samaria loose against the apostate Ahaz, and Pekah, with his well-disciplined army, slew Judah's neglected troops so dreadfully that of Judah there fell one hundred and twenty thousand in one day.

That was the vengeance of God upon Judah's apostasy, and Pekah was God's instrument.

But in his recklessness Pekah spoiled his own cause.

Not enough that he had humiliated Judah in so bloody a way, his victorious army would enrich itself further at the expense of Judah — not merely by spoils, but also by carrying away into slavery two hundred thousand men, women, and children, even in so shameful and heartless a manner as to drag many of them naked along the way.

And with this shameful spoil the army of Pekah, drunk with victory, returned to Samaria.



This was shameful, it was criminal, it was an outrage against the ties of blood that ever yet bound the men of Samaria to Judah.

Oded the prophet at once therefore set out to meet the victorious army, to stop them in their senseless course.

That they had vanquished Judah was right, so the prophet said. The Lord Himself had delivered Judah, by reason of its apostasy, into Pekah's hands. But to make slaves of the children of Judah

and Jerusalem was to defy the God of hosts to His face. This they must not do, but at once give these captured Jews and Jewesses leave to return to their own cities and towns. For unless they would so do, the fierceness of the wrath of the Lord would be terrible upon them.

Yet the army did not let go its spoil. The march went on. Already the boisterous and insolent host, with their degraded train of slaves, was approaching the capital city.

Even of Pekah it is not said that he gave counter order.

It seemed as though Oded's voice had not been heard.



Then there formed itself, as we would say, a commission of four brave men.

Their names were Azariah, Berechiah, Jehizkiah, and Amasa.

These four came together.

Deeply indignant over what took place, feeling that thus God's right was trampled underfoot, and determined at the risk of death to foil so wicked a purpose, they agreed, without further delay, and entirely on their own responsibility, to meet the returning host and to demand the immediate release of the captives.

This action called for dauntless courage, for ten to one the insolent army would meet them with scorn and contempt, and either push them aside or, because of their interference, place their heads at their feet.

You well know, in those days not much store was set by a human life more or less.

Yet danger does not scare them. They go out from the gate of Samaria, they go along the highway by which the army must come, and boldly and bravely meet it face to face. They offer no supplication, but briefly state their demand: "Ye shall not bring the captives hither. It would bring guilt upon us over against the Lord. Our trespass is great already. Would ye commit this trespass also and add yet more to our sins?"

And see, the effect of this heroic address is wondrous.

The whole army gives way to these four men. They halt. They stand as though bewildered. Not only do they release the two hundred thousand captives, but also make immediate surrender to these four men of the priceless spoil that they had plundered.

God blessed this heroic act.

The spirit of the whole army is changed. It is as though the general and other officers recognize that they have been outdone, and in a moment they all put themselves at the service of Azariah and his three friends, and instead of entering Samaria with shouts of triumph, under the blue skies begins a sacred work of brotherly love.

Read how beautifully and touchingly in Scripture this is narrated: They took the captives by the hand, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them. They arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink. And over and above all this they anointed them. And all the feeble of them they put upon asses, and so, as in arms of love, they carried these two hundred thousand men, women, and children to Jericho, the city of palm trees, back to their brethren. And only when that labor of love to the brethren was ended did the victorious army, with Azariah and his three friends in the lead, and with quieted consciences, return to Samaria, where was the palace of Pekah.

So Azariah, and Berechiah, and Jehizkiah, and Amasa were the first four *good Samaritans*, and even as the Samaritan in the parable, they were seen in Jericho, the city of palm trees.



Yet it is not their compassion that has assured Azariah and his three friends these many centuries a place among "the men which were expressed by name."

What distinguishes them, and places them in the full light of history, is their personal courage, their

personal initiative, their resolute attitude, their stand when every one trembled, their risk of everything for the sake of their fatherland.

Truly they performed an act of mercy, but presently multitudes have done this with them. You understand, that these four men did not personally clothe the two hundred thousand captives, feed and assist them. But what distinguished them from all the rest was their initiative; their daring stand against a menacing wrong; their courage to hold the people back from a dreadful national sin that would have become a judgment upon the people.

Their act tended to practice compassion, but it was first of all a deed of love of country, in a sacred sense of political tendency. They dreaded the judgment that, by reason of so great a sin, would come upon people and fatherland, and therefore with heroic courage they resisted the king and his generals and his army.

They believed, they confessed, these men, that their land and their king had an account with the Lord of hosts; that the anger of the Holy One of Israel would inflame against the people; and it is this approaching disaster that these sturdy men, by their heroic initiative, have diverted from people and native land.

Like as Phinehas did, when he thrust the javelin through the body of the adulterous servant of Baal-Peor (Num. 25), so, not by killing, but by saving, did Azariah and his

three friends, in the name of their God, make *personal initiative* glisten.



This sacred impulse, not to wait for others, not to sit still, and not to shrink back from trouble or danger, comes of itself from the fear of God, and has therefore always been the earmark of true Christianity wherever it has struck root.

Of course, such action is never justified except when the Lord calls. But the faithful servant of Jehovah does not wait for visions or for inspirations, so as to allow himself while waiting by passivity to be unnerved.

Where strong faith operates, that impulse works immediately, and only when faith is weak and timorous does that impulse remain wanting.

Then one hides himself, then one withdraws himself from everything, and lets God's flood inundate God's country.

So doeth not the sturdy Christian. He builds dikes. He constructs sea-walls against the flood and strengthens them by cofferdams when waters swell. Where there would be no ground to build on, he creates land by drainage, and when it is drained he thanks God and praises not himself but ascribes to God the glory.

To this sacred impulse alone the Dutch in times long past owe the restoration of their national existence. So long as that noble impulse operated vigorously the

cause of God has flourished in the land. And what in this century also has been won from the ancient enemy, God's people in every land owe almost exclusively to the Azariahs and the Berechiah's, who did not dally but took hold, did not sit still but heroically showed themselves men of action.

This nobler spirit has come upon whole sections of land in all parts of the world, and you can make whole rosters of all sorts of groups of people who have united themselves and bravely made advances in the name of the Lord to stand against *unbelief* and *revolution*, and to continue propaganda of principles so sacred to their hearts.

Yet it is by no means yet the case that courage and compelling power of a sacred conviction has made itself master of all hearts.

There are still many that are "at ease in Zion." "Peace, peace," sounds the song of slowness, "peace, for no harm is near!"

One loses himself in his affairs, and the needs of the cause of the Lord do not concern him.

Everything is expected and hoped for from the men who are in office. One leaves it with those who appear to have been appointed.

Always others, never yourself.

And if the spirit of the lukewarm and the slow to act had also unnerved Azariah and his friends, the trespass would have been committed, and the heinous wrong in Israel would not have been arrested. 

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Kortering

## Evangelism in the Established Church (3) Hindrances to This Work

Rev. Kortering is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Previous article in this series: November 15, p. 92.

**O**ur emphasis in this series of articles on evangelism in the established church is upon the role of every member. We made a distinction between the

preaching of the gospel in evangelism and the personal witnessing of every believer. These two are clearly taught in the Bible and are important in evangelism. We are

now concentrating on the personal witness of every believer and its role in evangelism in the established church. We thereby do not overlook or minimize the importance of the preaching of the gospel; rather, we recognize the supportive role that such witnessing has to the preaching. We emphasized this in our previous article.

As the title of the present article suggests, we focus our attention now on various issues that arise in connection with personal witnessing. I wondered, first, what to call these “issues.” It is possible to view them as *obstacles* — obstacles that must be overcome if we are actually going to busy ourselves in the important work of personal witnessing. Or, perhaps, we can view them as *objections* — objections, that is, that are based on biblical principles. The difference between the two is significant. The latter, if indeed they are based on biblical principles, can become more serious. Obstacles, on the other hand, can be overcome, as we allow the Word of God to shed light on the subject at hand. In the end, I opted for a different word. Because I am confident that the positions I take with regard to the issues that arise in connection with personal evangelism are true to the Scriptures, and because I do not imagine them to be so controversial that they will engender “objections,” I use the far more optimistic title of *hindrances* to personal evangelism.

By “hindrances” we mean those issues that can, because of misunderstandings regarding them, get in the way of, or interfere with, our engaging in evangelism as Christ would have us do it. Please note that, in listing them, I am not responding to or reacting against any particular practice or way of thinking in our churches. I present them only as hypothetical problems. In fact, many of them, as I wrote before, have been raised by G. Vandooren, in the booklet *Get Out*, first published in 1972.

First, then, we will list the “hindrances,” and then provide a response that we believe to be both biblical and in harmony with our confessions.

1. The doctrine of the antithesis forbids us to do personal evangelism with those who differ with us, and even more so with non-Christians. Personal witnessing will involve us in reaching out and befriending our neighbor. If we do this, we will violate the Scripture’s teaching of spiritual separation from the world.

2. Our doctrinal beliefs and practices make such attempts at personal evangelism pointless. 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 and 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.

3. We have not emphasized personal evangelism in the past, why do you seem to think it is so important today? Are we not to hold to the “old paths” and warn the people when new ideas are set forth in our churches? Why is this idea of personal witnessing so important all of a sudden?

4. One might say that the critical need we face as churches is to preserve our strength and build one another up spiritually rather than reaching out and trying to bring new converts into the church. Their presence will not make us stronger but weaker. Look at the churches around us that have emphasized evangelism and see how weak they have become. Their

evangelism is a contributing factor.

5. I’m not convinced that it is my duty to share the gospel with others. It is the church’s duty to preach the gospel, and that is evangelism, period.

6. I lack incentive to speak about my Christian faith to others. If this is true, why should I force myself to do something that isn’t there? Are you saying that I lack spirituality and godliness in this regard?

7. Is not our emphasis on the covenant an obstacle to personal evangelism? We emphasize, correctly, the Christian home, the Christian church, and the Christian day school. This makes us introspective and self-focused as people of God. If we do this in obedience to Christ, how are we supposed to reach out to others who do not share this view and who even reject it? Won’t we lose our covenantal perspective?

8. Efforts of outreach and evangelism frequently lead to compromise of the gospel and wrong ecumenism. We need but look to other churches for evidence. If we are going to engage in personal witnessing, we are going to be tempted to soften the hard edges of the Reformed faith and make it more attractive so that it will be accepted by more people. This may very well relate to our Reformed distinctives in Christian life as well. Is it not better to be safe than sorry?

9. I don’t know what to say or how to evangelize with my neighbors. No one seems interested in teaching me or motivating me, so I just give up. What am I supposed to do?

As you can tell, these are sensitive questions, and questions concerning which there may be differences of opinion. We pose them, not to cause dissension, but to promote understanding, and therefore

harmony and unity of purpose in the church of Christ. To that end, I invite response. Responsible exchange of ideas regarding personal evangelism will be helpful, and we can grow together in our understanding of the Word of God and our putting it into practice in evangelism. This can only be helpful and positive in this area of our calling before God. I begin with this confidence and trust in you the readers.

Let's start with the first possible hindrance.

1. The doctrine of the antithesis forbids us to do personal evangelism with those who differ with us, and even more so with non-Christians. Personal witnessing will involve us in reaching out and befriending our neighbor. If we do this, we will violate the Scripture's teaching of spiritual separation from the world.

There are three concepts, here, that describe our relationship with the non-Christian world around us. We must be careful to understand each one and to discern which one correctly describes the biblical teaching of the Christian's place in the world.

The first is "isolation." This view advocates that we must have nothing to do with the world around us. The world is wicked and must be rejected. The Christian must find a retreat and, physically as well as spiritually, put space between himself and the non-Christian. For his own spiritual good, the Christian ought to have no fellowship with the ungodly except what is absolutely necessary for his own survival. This has been the view of those who produced the monasteries and nunneries. This is the world-flight of the Anabaptists, which can be seen in our country in the form of the Amish. The spirit of isolationism encourages Christians to avoid any contact with the world of unbelievers and retreat to covenantal spheres. The battle cry is "in sepa-

ration there is strength." They mean physical separation, which engenders spiritual separation.

The second view of our relationship with the world is called "synthesis." Supporters of this view suggest that the Christian has to mix in with the ungodly as much as possible in order that his presence may have a spiritual influence upon them for good. The expressed goal is to "Christianize" the world. It is to let one's light shine and thereby improve society by saving souls. There are no real bounds for this activity. In order to lend a godly impact, one can join ungodly organizations, one should send his children to public schools, and Christian teachers ought to penetrate those strongholds of Satan to be like a leaven for moral good. The same applies to our dealings with our non-Christian neighbors. We must get involved with their life and become genuine friends with them, so that the barriers of separation come down and we can influence them with the gospel of truth.

The third view, which I believe is the biblical viewpoint, is called "antithesis." This view rejects both "isolationism" and "synthesis" and advocates a different moral stance toward the world. It is summarized this way: we are in the world but not of the world. There is a distinction made between physical separation and spiritual separation, and it is vitally important, not only to know the difference, but to govern our lives by this difference.

The Bible is clear that we are not to love the world: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15). Similarly, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever

therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). I will refrain from quoting any more of the many passages of the Bible that emphasize such spiritual separation.

When we speak of our sharing the gospel with the non-Christian by befriending him, we have this in mind. We must never deal with our neighbor as if we do not care about our commitment to spiritual separation. All our dealings with personal witnessing must guard against their influencing us with sin. Rather, we seek an opportunity for our influencing them for good.

Let me quote from a few writers who explain this.

When believers are motivated by a desire for the approval and appreciation of unconverted people and seek to live just as they live, they show they are in love with the world.... The godly man does not turn to the worldly and unconverted for advice, nor does he mix with them in order to identify with them in their behavior, nor yet join in with their bad conversations (Ps. 1:1). Friendship with the world is always on our terms, not theirs (Crossley, *Everyday Evangelism*).

Similarly,

...indispensable as penetration is as a prelude to witness, it is no use to have the church identifying with the world if in doing so it ceases to be the church. In a word, identification is not to be identified with assimilation. If salt loses its saltiness, it is useless.... We are to manifest "holy worldliness" because we are called to be "in the world but not of the world" at the same time. We are called to live in natural surroundings a supernatural life to demonstrate in this age of the age to come (John Stott, in his *Our Guilty Silence*).

*We must never deal with our neighbor as if we do not care about our commitment to spiritual separation.*

And one more quote,

Fundamentally, sanctification is not a matter of geography (where we are) but of the heart (who owns it). A safe distance is main-

tained as we are constantly transformed by the renewing of our minds, through the truth of God's Word. This requires time alone with Him, when we are actively submitting our minds to the truth. If this practice is not part of our

lives, or if it is not effective, we are ill prepared for encounters with non-Christians in the world. In such a case, perhaps isolation would be best after all (Petersen, *Living Proof*).

... to be continued 

Church and State

Mr. Brian VanEngen

## Recent Legal Developments in the Battle over Homosexuality

The cultural war around us continues to rage, especially on the issue of homosexual rights. We have just witnessed a national election in which these issues were brought to the forefront. Eleven states had measures on the ballot to define marriage as being between one man and one woman. Many political pundits commented on the "values voters" who turned out at the polls in large numbers due to concern over moral issues. An overview of recent developments and trends in the United States demonstrates that there is cause for alarm among those who hold to biblical or "traditional" values. As we will see, the laws relating to homosexuality in our society are shifting from treating it as a criminal act, to treating it as a relationship entitled to the rights of marriage, and on to granting it a protected status so that those who oppose it may be at risk of committing a crime.

### A Battle Lost

In years past, most states had statutes prohibiting homosexual practices and prescribing punish-

ment for offenders. As homosexual practices became more widely accepted, or seen as a matter of individual "liberty," more and more jurisdictions rescinded these laws or increasingly ignored them, even when flagrantly violated. Yet, when a Georgia law prohibiting sodomy was challenged in the 1986 case of *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the United States Supreme court upheld the law. The Court ruled that there was no overwhelming privacy interest in sexual relations that would prohibit the state from prosecuting such cases. For a time at least, states could continue to prosecute homosexual activities as criminal offenses.

Then in 2003 the United States Supreme Court decided the case of *Lawrence v. Texas* (539 U.S. 558), ruling that states did not have the power to enforce such laws. In reaching this conclusion, the Court ruled that intimate consensual sexual conduct was part of the liberty protected by substantive due process under the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court also explicitly overruled its decision in *Bowers*. Justice Antonin Scalia predicted in his strongly worded dissenting opinion that the majority's ruling would lead to a push for recognition of homosexual marriage as a similar liberty interest.

The homosexual community

was ecstatic with the outcome of the *Lawrence* case. They realized, perhaps more than anyone else, the impact this decision would have and the momentum that it would lend to the homosexual rights movement. The Court's ruling exceeded their expectations. Lambda Legal, the gay rights legal organization that handled the *Lawrence* case, stated this concerning their victory:

What nobody could entirely predict, however, was that we would win a legal victory so decisive that it would change the entire landscape for the [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] community. In fact, what has become evident during the months since the Supreme Court's June 26 decision is that the *Lawrence* ruling is so much more than a courtroom victory. Instead, it is a transformative moment for our community.

<<http://www.lambdalegal.org/cgi-bin/iowa/documents/record?record=1356>>

The homosexual community saw its victory in the *Lawrence* case as a major part of its overall strategy in the cultural war, as is evident from the following quote from Lambda Legal:

Thanks to the constant courage of gay people in coming out, the

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dogged persistence of [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] political activists, and more recently the emergence of [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] faces on the country's television screens, our community has made slow but steady progress toward cultural acceptance over the past decade. What Lambda Legal accomplished with the Supreme Court victory in *Lawrence* was to take all that social progress and transform it into concrete legal rights — real protections that gay people can live their lives with.

### **The Assault on Marriage**

Having conquered the threat that homosexual behavior could be criminalized, the focus shifted to a different front. Even before the *Lawrence* case was unfolding, those pushing the homosexual agenda had launched an attack against traditional marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Whether termed as a domestic partnership, civil union, or same-sex marriage, the goal has been to have the state sanction relationships between homosexuals, and in addition, to extend at least some of the legal benefits of marriage to same-sex couples as well. They have also had success in this endeavor.

The Vermont Supreme Court's 1999 ruling in *Baker v. Vermont* held that the state's constitution required that homosexuals be allowed either to marry or to unite in some separate but equal status. The state legislature opted for the creation of civil unions in legislation passed in 2000.

In November of 2003, shortly after the Supreme Court's decision in *Lawrence*, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that denying same-sex marriages violated Massachusetts' state constitution. In deciding this case, *Goodridge et al. v. Department of Public Health*, the Massachusetts court ruled that Massachusetts may not "deny the protections, benefits and obligations conferred by civil marriage to two individuals of the same sex

who wish to marry." The court found that, because a clause in the state's constitution prohibits "the creation of second-class citizens," nothing less than equal marriage rights would be constitutional under Massachusetts law. The court then allowed the legislature 180 days to change state law to allow same sex marriages. On May 17, 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to issue same-sex marriage licenses. On November 29, 2004, the United States Supreme Court refused to hear a challenge to this law.

The creation of homosexual unions in states such as Vermont and Massachusetts affects other states as well. Under the Full Faith and Credit clause of the United States Constitution, states recognize the laws of other states, and this applies to marriage as well. For instance, a couple of seventeen year olds may be able to marry in one state, but may be too young in another. If the marriage is legal in the state where it occurs, the marriage will be recognized in other jurisdictions where it would otherwise be illegal. The question arises as to whether the same holds true for homosexual marriages or unions.

### **The counter attack**

Several attempts have been made to stem the growing tide of state-sanctioned homosexual unions. These attempts include passage of the federal and state Defense of Marriage Acts, the Federal Marriage Amendment, and state constitutional amendments. None of these measures have dealt a decisive blow to slow the trend towards legally recognized homosexual relationships.

The federal and state Defense of Marriage Acts (DOMAs) were intended to allow states to preserve the traditional definition of marriage within their borders, and to eliminate questions regarding the effect of "unions" legalized in other states. The federal act basically

provides the opportunity for the states to recognize or deny same-sex relationships, and defines marriage for federal law as the union of one man and one woman. Thirty-eight states have enacted corresponding defense of marriage legislation at the local level, refusing to recognize any sort of same-sex union. However, many legal experts have questioned whether the legislation would be ruled unconstitutional under judicial review.

A Federal Marriage Amendment was recently proposed that would amend the United States Constitution to protect marriage. The impetus behind this bill was the concern that the DOMAs would be declared unconstitutional. The text of the proposed amendment was as follows:

Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman.

H.J. Res. 106 (108th Congress 2004) and S.J. Res. 40 (108th Congress 2004).

The bill failed to pass in either the House of Representatives or Senate. But even if it had, experts are divided on whether this amendment would prohibit other variants of homosexual unions that do not confer the exact same rights as marriage.

Many states have passed ballot initiatives to define marriage as being between one man and one woman, including eleven states that had such provisions on the November 2, 2004 ballot. However, these initiatives are also susceptible to attack. Louisiana passed such a ballot initiative earlier, in September of 2004, only to have the courts declare it invalid within weeks.

## The Continuing Advance

Even while the debate rages over homosexual “marriage” and its variants, those driving the homosexual agenda have recently gained ground in a different direction by the passage of legislation criminalizing speech against homosexuality. Previous articles in the *Standard Bearer* have noted the new Canadian hate speech statute that could be broadly interpreted to prohibit biblical statements against homosexuality. Sweden has similar laws, and Swedish authorities reportedly sentenced a minister, Ake Green, to jail for one month recently for statements he made against homosexuality in a sermon.

Legislation introduced in the United States also demonstrates a trend towards penalizing those who interfere with the homosexual lifestyle. On September 22, 2004, California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed the Omnibus Hate Crimes Act of 2004 into law. This statute includes civil penalties for those who interfere “by threats, intimidation, or coercion with the rights secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States....” After the *Lawrence* case, these rights include the right to ho-

mosexual activity. The question then becomes “What constitutes ‘intimidation’ or ‘coercion’?” If an employer refuses to hire a homosexual, does this constitute intimidation intended to interfere with his rights? The law does provide that “speech alone is not sufficient to support an action” under the statute, but the underlying trend is obvious.

## Commentary

Sadly, recent decisions in American jurisprudence, and changes in statutory law, including those cited above, demonstrate an underlying trend in our culture in which all vestiges of Christian morality are being stripped away. The attitude seems to be that individuals may differ in their opinions of what is “moral,” and others are expected to be quietly tolerant, as long as those morals don’t “harm” anyone else. Whatever two consenting adults wish to do with one another may not be judged or deemed illegal by anyone else, as long as they keep to themselves. Everyone is basically allowed to do what is right in his own eyes. Under the same reasoning, if two women and a man wish to form a “marriage,” this

would be accepted because all three consent and no one is “harmed.” In fact, Justice Scalia argued in *Lawrence* that the majority’s rationale could also be applied to legalize bigamy and a host of other morally reprehensible actions.

Although many argue that the laws of the United States were founded on Christian principles, the drafters intentionally excluded any provision in the Constitution that would require adherence to any particular religion. As a representative democracy, the laws of the nation will represent the changing views of the populace. If an apostatizing population grows more tolerant of homosexuality and less tolerant of those who condemn it, the laws will reflect this trend. As demonstrated above, the current trend of the law is in a direction away from the criminalization of homosexuality, and towards the legalization of homosexual marriages or unions. A trend also seems to be developing to penalize those who would in any way interfere with homosexual practices. At the present time, it appears that those opposing homosexuality in the cultural war are rapidly losing ground. 

Day of Shadows

George M. Ophoff

# The Types of Scripture (13)

**W**e are engaged in examining typical events and transactions in sacred history for the purpose of ascertaining the principles of interpretation that these typical materials exhibit. There remain two rules, to which we now desire to call attention.

## Fourth principle of interpretation

The first of these may be stated thus: The meaning of the type should not be confined within the

limits of the knowledge of the Old Testament believer. Scripture does not support the view that the believers clearly perceived and understood all the realities of which the types were figures. Think, for example, of Jesus Christ’s fulfillment of the sacrificial lamb. The utterances of the prophets of the old covenant do not indicate that, already then, the type was understood in the light of the antitype, that the sufferings of the man of Jehovah were

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thought to have meritorial and atoning value. Hence, the knowledge possessed by the ancient believer cannot be used as a guide to the meaning of the types. Doing so we would, to a large extent, be compelled to disallow the typical character of the shadows of the old dispensation. We therefore now add to the list of principles the following rule: *In contemplating the meaning of the shadows, we should inquire, not into the mind of men, but into the mind of God.*

Fairbairn states the matter thus:

In determining the existence and the import of particular types, we must be guided, not so much by any knowledge possessed, or supposed to be possessed, by the ancient worshippers concerning their prospective fulfillment, as from the light furnished by their realization in the great facts and revelations of the Gospel.

Let us illustrate this rule. We have Christ's word for it that the brazen serpent was a type of Himself. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14, 15). It is now the task of the typologist to unveil the meaning of this type. His first step must be to bring before his mind the various elements of the meritorious labors of the Savior. He should, further, acquaint himself with the peculiar properties of the Christ, as well as with the character of sin. In a word, one dealing with this particular type should be thoroughly familiar with the Christology of Scripture. He should know the import and meaning of the following Scriptures: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21). "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth

on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). "...Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a faithful and merciful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17). "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). "He is despised...and we esteemed him not...and with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:3-5).

These and similar Scriptures set forth the properties of the Christ, as well as describing His work. The type should now be placed in the light of these and similar Scriptures. And the next step is to determine, by the help of this light, to what extent the type reflects the person and work of Christ.

#### **Fifth principle of interpretation**

In order to arrive at satisfactory conclusions regarding these matters, our next step must be to study the type itself. The following questions must be faced and answered: What was the value and meaning of the type in its immediate relation to the church of the old covenant? What was the service it rendered? What were the circumstances attending its appearance? What were the properties peculiar to this type? *Now, of all the properties of the type, and of all the elements of its service, those that are plainly realized in the person and work of Christ, the antitype, must be regarded as constituting the meaning of the type.*

Let us now apply these rules to the type in question, viz., the brazen serpent. What were the circumstances attending its appearance?

The hardships attending the journey from Mount Hor grieves and exasperates the children of Israel. The feeling of bitterness is so intense that they unjustly accuse God of having brought them up out of Egypt with the evil intent of letting them die in the wilderness. The people know better, and their complaint must be regarded as an outburst of

hatred for God. From the day that God had heard their cry, there had been a marvelous display of Jehovah's mercy. Yet, in the very presence of the gracious manifestations of God's power in their behalf, the people accuse God of seeking their ruin. The wrath of the Lord is kindled. He sends fiery serpents with a fatal bite among them. Many are bitten, and die. The people come to Moses and, acknowledging their sin, beseech him to plead their case before God. Moses does so, and in answer to his intercessory prayer, Jehovah instructs him to make a fiery serpent and to set it upon a pole, adding that those bitten shall live when they look upon the raised reptile. "And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived" (Num. 21:9).

The fiery serpent, the bite of which meant death to its victim, is, plain enough, an image or symbol of sin. The sinner himself is likened unto a poisonous creature. Paul, in describing the moral corruption of man, asserts that the poison of asps is under his lips. And John the Baptist, addressing the Pharisees and Sadducees, exclaimed: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7).

Let us now consider the following matters: 1) The brazen serpent was not one of the reptiles that had bitten man, but was a serpent of pure brass in which there was no poison. 2) This non-poisonous object is raised and exhibits the curse of the entire brood of loathsome creatures unto which it was made like. 3) The brazen serpent *had* to be raised and exhibited. 4) The victim, focusing his gaze upon the brazen serpent, lived. 5) The disorder resulting from the poisonous bite is cured by a serpent of brass made like unto the living serpent.

Now, then, how many of the above elements may be viewed as prefiguring the person and work

of the antitype, Christ? The answer is ready: As many of them as exhibit an inner and worthwhile relation to corresponding properties of the antitype. Due to the presence of this inner agreement, every one of the above elements may be linked up with some phase of the person and work of Christ. We mention the following: 1) Christ was not taken from among men. Hence, in Him there was no poison; He was the Lamb of God without spot or blemish. Although not taken from among men, He was nevertheless made like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted. 2) The sinless Christ exhibited the curse resting upon the sinner. 3) Christ was raised up and His elevation was a matter of divine necessity. He had to be bruised in order that by His stripes we might be healed. 4) The sinner who fastens his gaze upon the Christ shall live. 5) The sinner is healed by one made like unto himself, by one who was made sin (not a sinner).

It appears, does it not, that the elements enumerated above constitute the picture of Christ in His relation to God and to the elect sinner. Thus the meaning of this particular type has been discovered. Thus we have set forth the principles of interpretation capable of guiding the typologist if properly observed by him.

### **Application of principles not an exact science**

Yet it must not be supposed that the observance of the above rules enables one to reach conclusions that in every detail will satisfy all. Nor is it true that the application of these rules is a guarantee that this particular field of biblical science is being cultivated with mathematical precision, and that the conclusions reached are, in every detail, infallibly correct and, for that reason, compel recognition. There will always be the dissenting voice. Some typologists of the past have regarded the inferiority, the solidity, and the dim luster of

the brazen serpent as belonging to those properties that constitute the type. The inferior metal was regarded as a prefiguration of Christ's outer meanness, while the solidity of the material spoke to them of Christ's divine strength.

Fairbairn, on the other hand, is of the conviction that it was of no moment whatever that the serpent was made of brass. According to Fairbairn the above typical exegesis militates against the following rule:

The religious truths and ideas which were embodied in the typical events and institutions of former times, must be regarded as forming the ground and limit of their prospective limit to the affairs of Christ's kingdom.

The author means to say that, when engaged in determining the meaning of the type, one must confine himself to the properties that are ideally related to the antitype. A very worthy rule indeed. Now then, is the typical exegesis found above in conflict with this rule? Fairbairn is of the conviction that it is. Says he:

What did it avail to the Israelite, or for any purpose the serpent had to serve, of what particular stuff it was made? A dead and senseless thing in itself, it must have been all one for those who were called to look to it, whether the material was brass or silver, wood or stone.

To this, one may reply that the material of which the serpent was made was not a matter of indifference. As has already been said, the serpent might not be taken from among the brood of vipers that had bitten the Israelites. This is certain, had Jehovah indeed instructed Moses to make the serpent of brass, and had Moses thereupon made the serpent of wood, no one looking to it would have lived. The question, then, is whether the material from which the serpent was to be made

was a matter upon which Jehovah had failed to express Himself? Fact is that in the divine instructions the term *brazen* is not found. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live" (Num. 21:8). Since the material from which the serpent was to be made is not specified, one is inclined to conclude that the peculiar properties of the material used are without typical meaning. On the other hand, when God the Holy Spirit informs us that the man Moses did as he was bidden to do, He, the Spirit, asserts that the serpent was of brass. "And Moses made a *serpent of brass*, and put it upon a pole... (Num. 21:9).

One should not be too hasty, therefore, in concluding that a certain property or incident is too trifling to partake of a typical character. Fact is that, in the realm of the typical and symbolical, a trifling incident may embody a big idea. What can be more trifling than the breaking of a morsel of bread in Holy Communion. Yet this incident was made to signify an event of tremendous significance, viz., the sufferings and death of our Savior. Again, the Israelite was forbidden to eat the flesh of the Passover-lamb raw, nor was he permitted to sodden it with water. He was instructed to roast it with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. He might let nothing of it remain until the morning, and that which remained until the morning had to be burned with fire. These, all of them, were trifling incidents, yet not without a meaning. Further, one of the kinds of animals used for the sacrifice was the sheep. Now, one of the peculiarities of the sheep is its submissive temper or disposition. Also concerning the disposition of the sheep we may ask, What did it avail the Israelite, or for any purpose the sheep had to serve, of what particular temper

it was? Yet there is this passage in Isaiah, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Is. 53:7).

The point that we are making is that these rules must be applied and that the application of them is a matter of judgment. Barring the types that have the sanction of Scripture, the matter to be decided each time is whether the event, transaction, incident, or property should be regarded as partaking of a typical character. In determining the matter, it must not be supposed that the indicated principles will, when applied, automatically lead one to the correct conclusion.

## Summary

Thus we have arrived at the end of this particular branch of our subject. We have presented our views of the nature, character, and purpose of the shadows of the old dispensation. The principles by which the best typologists of former days were willing to be guided were set forth. We repeatedly stressed that the offered gifts and sacrifices could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience. The shadows were there to train the believers to Christ. The question arises whether the shadows, in their immediate relation to the Old Testament worshiper, were merely the schoolmaster of the church of that day. Our answer is that these typical transactions and institutions

had still another meaning for the worshiper of the old dispensation. Being covered by the blood of the sacrificial victim, the Israelite was actually justified — however, only in a ceremonial sense. Having been justified, he was permitted to retain his position in the theocracy. He was ostracized if he refused to attend to the prescriptions of the law. It is exactly this ceremonial justification and the subsequent ceremonial good to which the worshiper attained that constitute the inner agreement between the shadows and their corresponding realities. Due to the presence of these elements, the symbols were at once prophetic types of future events. This phase of the subject shall receive an adequate treatment in the sequence. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Young People's Activities

The young people of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada were invited to the home of one of their members for a bonfire on Saturday, December 4. Soft drinks, hot dogs, and fixings were provided.

Here in western Michigan, summer may still seem an eternity away, but come it will, and with it will come another young people's convention, the Lord willing. If you as a parent, or someone else in your family, is interested, we can report that the 2005 Young People's Convention will be unlike any previous convention. The young people and congregation of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI will serve as host, but the convention will not be held in west Michigan, or anywhere in Michigan for that matter. Not even close. This year's convention will be held June 27 through July 1 in Lake Ozark, MO at Windermere Camp. The theme for the convention is "Royal Citizens in God's Kingdom." The theme text

is I Peter 2:9, and the theme song will be Psalter #394. Speech topics are: "The Kingdom and Its Royal Citizens"—Rev. M. VanderWal; "Our Worship of the King"—Rev. J. Mathani; and "Our Kingdom Allegiance"—Rev. A. Spriensma. So, young people, make your plans early and be part of a historical convention.

### School Activities

The Senior Class of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI invited parents to leave their children at Covenant while they enjoyed a night out on Friday, December 3. Fun, games, crafts, and snacks were provided for infants through children 12 years of age. Hours were from 6:00 P.M. to 11:00 P.M. and the cost was \$2.50/hour per child, with a family maximum of \$25.

The Student Council of Covenant this past Christmas season again sponsored a Gift Certificate Drive intended to give assistance to those with need in the PR Churches around Covenant. Suggestions included certificates from area grocery stores, gas stations, etc.

The Hull and Northwest Iowa PR Christian Schools presented their Junior High combined band and choir program on Friday evening, December 3 in the auditorium of the Hull PRC.

The Ladies' School Circle of Faith Christian School in Randolph, WI made arrangements to clean a newly constructed apartment complex in nearby Beaver Dam for a school building fundraiser. Supporters of Faith were asked to sign up to help, and indicate what time of day or night worked best for them. Men and women were welcome to sign up.

### Congregation Activities

Sunday evening, November 21, members of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA were invited to stay after the worship service to enjoy a short choir program featuring songs of praise and thanksgiving to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

There was a special Thanksgiving concert put on by the choir of Grace PRC in Standale, MI on Sunday morning, November 28, after their service. The young people of

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*Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*

Grace also added some numbers and there was congregational singing.

The year 2004 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rev. R. Hanko's years in the ministry. To remember this milestone and to give thanks to God for His mercies in providing for Rev. Hanko, the congregation of the Lynden, WA PRC, Rev. Hanko's present congregation, gathered together Sunday evening, November 28, for a time of fellowship and celebration. A brief program was presented and refreshments followed.

Sunday, November 14, the choir of Randolph, WI PRC sponsored a singspiration. A collection was taken for a new piano.

This past Thanksgiving and Christmas season two of our churches, Georgetown and Hudsonville, both in Hudsonville, MI, held their annual Thanksgiving Food and Gift Certificate Drive for the needy within their own congregations. Congregation members were encouraged to drop off food

donations in their church kitchen or place gift certificates in a Sunday collection or give it directly to a deacon.

The Byron Center, MI congregation took part once again this last November in sponsoring their annual Seniors Thanksgiving Dinner for the mature members of their congregation. This evening always provides a time for good food and good fellowship.

Members of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada were invited to join the congregation of First PRC in Edmonton on November 11 for their church's annual Car Rally/Scavenger Hunt & Soup Supper.

#### **Mission Activities**

Rev. A. Spriensma, missionary pastor to the Philippines, expressed the thanks of the saints in the Philippines to the Sunday School children of Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI for their generous giving through collec-

tions for the needs of the children in the mission field there.

Rev. A. and Mary Stewart planned to fly to South Wales on Friday, December 3, and return the next morning. Rev. Stewart spoke on "Irresistible Grace" at The Rest Convalescent Home in Porthcawl.

Rev. J. Mahtani preached for Grace Presbyterian Church in Lanham, MD on Sunday, November 28.

#### **Minister Activities**

Rev. J. Slopsema declined the call that had been extended to him to serve as the next pastor of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada. Following that decline, the Council of First formed a trio of the Revs. G. Eriks, J. Mahtani, and D. Overway. On Sunday, December 5, they extended a call to Rev. Overway to serve as their under shepherd.

Rev. A. Brummel declined the call he had been extended to serve as pastor of the Doon, Iowa PRC. 

## *Announcements*

#### **25<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

With thanks to our covenant, faithful God, the council and congregation of Southwest PRC, and, after December 19, 2004, Faith PRC, express their gratitude to our pastor,

**REV. RONALD L. CAMMENG,**

for twenty-five years of faithful ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Timothy 4:2).

William DeKraker, Vice-President  
Darrel Huisken, Clerk

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their sincere Christian sympathy to Mr. Art and Mary Bleyenbergh on the passing away of her mother,

**MRS. JACOB KUIPER.**

May they find their comfort from God's Word in Psalm 23:6, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Rev. Steven Key, President  
Brian Kroese, Asst. Clerk

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The faculty and student body of Hope PR Christian School express their Christian sympathy to Carol Huizinga, her son Kevin (7<sup>th</sup> grade), and the family in the death of their husband, father, and dear loved one,

**DAN HUIZINGA,**

on November 29, 2004. We pray the Lord will comfort them in their sorrow with words from the Scriptures. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm 73:24).

Ron Koole, Principal

### *Reformed Witness Hour* **Topics for January**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Text</b>
January 2	"Watchful Servants"	Luke 12:35-38
January 9	"I Will Give You Rest"	Matthew 11:28
January 16	"He Is Altogether Lovely to Me"	Song of Solomon 5:16
January 23	"Trusting and No Fearing"	Psalm 56:3, 4
January 30	"With Jesus in His Glory"	John 17:24