



The Standard Bearer

***A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine***

As we love our children, catechize them! It is vitally important for the covenant of God with His people, a very means by which He realizes, maintains, and perfects it. Let us make this more concrete, more personal: Catechism is one of the main means by which God enters into friendship with our children and gets their friendship for Himself.

See "Catechism!"—p. 485

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In This Issue ...

Skipping catechism is not a great problem among us. Adopting special measures to enforce attendance by the children and young people, therefore, is not a matter of high priority with us. In fact, it is never discussed. Our parents see to it that the children attend catechism. With rare exceptions, our young people faithfully attend catechism until they make public confession of faith.

This is as it should be.

It has not always been so. While the Remonstrants were stalling in obeying the demand of the Synod of Dordt that they appear, the delegates at the Synod discussed ways to compel the young people to attend catechism classes. In his fascinating letters from the synod, John Hales reported that one delegation proposed that the minister refuse to marry young people if they showed that they did not know their catechism thoroughly. "If you do not attend catechism, you may not marry!" The Synod did not favor this proposal.

Even though truancy from catechism is not a problem among us, Herman Hoeksema's article on "That Wretched Truant" is profitable reading at this season, and not alone for catechumens. We adults can play truant as well. This is one of Hoeksema's striking, practical pieces in past issues of the *Standard Bearer* that we intend to reprint from time to time.

A sizable section of this issue is given over to the annual index. For the compilation and production of this valuable aid—really a difficult piece of work—we are indebted to Judi Doezema.

The reprinting in the previous issue of a lengthy passage from J.I. Packer's introduction to Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* was by permission of Baker Book House in Grand Rapids. Baker holds the rights to Packer and Johnston's translation of Luther's *Bondage* and has republished the work.

—DJE

The Vain Boast of Self-Righteousness

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?

Romans 2:17-21a

In the words of this text, the apostle takes away a religion. He takes away a religion as the basis of our righteousness before God. It is his purpose in the first part of his epistle to the Romans to take away all that we have, from the point of view of the question, "How can one be righteous before God in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men?" From this point of view the apostle removes everything from us, even our piety, our religion, our Christianity. This is the essential meaning of the text.

In the preceding verses, the apostle had laid down the general basis for the address with which he now approaches the Jew. He had addressed man and had laid down a general principle, which he now applies to the Jews. This general principle, which lies at the ba-

sis of all other principles, is that God will judge every man according to his works. From this follows that not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. Doing the law means nothing less than that by patient continuance in well-doing we seek for glory, honor, and immortality every moment of our life. There is no respect of persons with God. Jew and Gentile, both shall be judged according to their works.

This general rule the apostle had applied to the Gentiles when he said that the Gentiles which have not the law do by nature the things of the law. Therefore they are a law unto themselves, having the work of the law written in their hearts. For this reason we can say of the Gentiles that they who sin without the law shall also perish without law.

Now the apostle applies this same principle to the Jews. He takes away their religion. He takes away their religion as a basis of righteousness before God. He also takes away all their privileges. Then he takes hold of their conscience and says, "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?"

I must be careful in speaking about these words of the apostle, and you in listening, lest we become filled with indignation at the self-righteous Jew. If we do, we are more self-righteous than that Jew. For this self-righteous Jew is a picture of what we are by na-

ture. You and I are just what the apostle says here of the Jew. I am the worst Jew; next, the elders; then, the deacons; then, the teachers and leaders; then, the common members. But I am the worst Jew. I am not joking. I mean it. It is the mystery of the ministry of the Word that God chooses such a Jew as I am, who preaches but does not do as I preach.

Do you not see that we can read the text this way? "Behold, thou art called a Christian, and thou retest in Reformed doctrine, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed in Reformed doctrine. Thou trustest that thou hast the purest form of the truth, and that thou art an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, a guide of the blind, and a light of them who are in darkness. Thou hast not only the form of the truth, but thou hast the truth itself. Thou, therefore, who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou who teachest that we must glorify God above all, glorifiest thou not God thyself? Thou who teachest that we must not seek the things below but the things above, seekest thou the things below?"

Your religion; your piety; your baptism; your doctrine; your Reformed convictions; still more, your repentance; your faith; your hope—all these are taken away as a basis of your righteousness in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men.

Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the Standard Bearer.

A Rich Heritage

A rich heritage, the Jews had. The Jews had the law. They had the form of knowledge and of the truth, as taught in the law. The law here is not the decalogue, but the Old Testament law in its entirety. The entire form of Old Testament doctrine is meant here. It is the Old Testament form of the truth, as given to the people by Moses. It includes the entire relation of God concerning the Old Testament form of righteousness, not only the way in which the people must walk, but also all the shadows and types of Christ.

The apostle says, "Behold, thou art called a Jew." "Jew" means "glorifier of God." Behold, thou art called a glorifier of God. Thou hast the law. Because of this law, thou hast a form of the truth and of knowledge.

The apostle does not say that the Jews had the truth and knowledge. But they had a *form* of the truth and knowledge. This does not mean that the Jews merely had an appearance of truth and knowledge. But the apostle has in mind the old dispensation. Truth must be understood in the sense of the apostle John, when he says: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). What the Jews had was the form of the river through which the water of salvation was presently to flow. They had the form, the mold, the pattern of the truth. The form was waiting for the truth. They had the form of the truth and knowledge of God in the law.

We have more. Truth and grace have been revealed. We have the reality. We can, therefore, apply this word far more emphatically to ourselves. We can read it this way: Thou hast the truth and knowledge. We have a system of that truth. We have a system of the truth in our doctrine and confessions. We have the reality of the truth in such a form that it is ready-made.

The apostle does not mean to say that we should despise these things. But he means to say that the Jews had a rich heritage in these things. So have we. The riches of this heritage the apostle brings out when he says, "Thou knowest the will of God." The Jew knew the will of God as manifested in the law. We know the will of God as manifested in Christ. That is, *theoretically* we know the will of God.

A Great Zeal

Knowing the will of God, the Jews (and we) are pictured as being full of zeal. This zeal becomes manifest in that the Jews approve the things that are more excellent. The meaning is this. The Jews knew the law. They systematized the truth of that law. With that system of doctrine, they compared all other forms of philosophy.

We do the same. We know the truth in distinction from all false doctrine. Not only do we make this distinction, but, as a result, we approve of the truth. When an Arminian comes along, we condemn that Arminian and approve of the Reformed doctrine. That is, as the apostle means it, *theoretically* we do this.

The apostle adds: "approving of the things that are more excellent, they are confident that they are a guide of the blind." The Jews had a right to be thus confident. They had the form of truth and knowledge. They were a light of them who were in darkness and an instructor of the foolish. That is, they were a light to them who were outside of the light of the truth, as revealed in the law. Because they had the form of knowledge and of truth, they were teachers of babes. The Jews were the only ones to instruct their children.

The same is true of us. Any one who stands outside of the church does not instruct his children. But we instruct our children. We need not be ashamed of it. We say that we have the truth and that

we are a guide of the blind and a light of them who are in darkness. But we also instruct our children. With right, we claim that we are the only ones who instruct our children. The apostle approves of these things. They are a blessing. They are a tremendous heritage.

But from the point of view of the question, "How can I be righteous before God?" all these things are worthless, and that, for more than one reason. These things cannot possibly be the righteousness with which, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, you and I can appear before God and be justified.

When that day comes, and we shall be judged by our works, we cannot say, I have been a Christian. For then the Lord will say, that was a privilege, but it is not a work.

In that day you cannot say, I went to church and was a member. The Lord will say, that was a privilege, but it is not a work that can be the basis of your righteousness before Me.

You cannot say, I was Reformed and knew the truth. The Lord will say, that was a privilege, but it cannot be the basis of your righteousness.

You cannot say, I have rejected every heresy repugnant to the truth, and I have fought Arminianism and Pelagianism and all false teaching. The Lord will say, that was alright, but it cannot be the basis of your righteousness.

You cannot even say this, I have repented, I have repented of my sin. Because I have repented of my sin, I expect to be justified. For the Lord will say, did you? Did you always repent? Patient continuance in well-doing, did you always do that? All your life? Then you will have to say, no, I repented once in a while. And our impenitence will be so great that we will be worthy to go to hell with all our repentance.

You cannot say, I have sought the kingdom of God. For the Lord

will say, did you? And the times when we sought not the kingdom of God, when we sought the world and ourselves, will be so great, that we will be worthy of condemnation.

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, everything will be taken away from us.

A False Reliance

This, the apostle does here. "Thou retest in the law," the apostle says. That was a false reliance. "Thou retest in the law." What does this mean? It does not mean that the Jews did not care about the law, but that they would merely hear it. No, they rested in the law. They looked upon the keeping of the law as the basis of their righteousness before God. All the sacrifices told them differently, but they looked upon the law as the way to righteousness. Looking upon the law as the basis of righteousness, they kept it painstakingly.

The Jew did not have to be cut off from the church because he neglected his religious duties. Rather, keeping the law as a basis of righteousness, he rested in it. He said, "On the basis of keeping the law, I am righteous before God."

Do we not do the same thing? We do. If you will but candidly examine your heart and mind, you will find there that self-righteousness by which you rest in your religion. I do not mean merely that

you rest in your church-going and other external acts. Rather, you and I say, "I am pious, I believe in Christ, and on the basis of this I will be justified." This, the apostle takes away. This was the Jews' false reliance.

A Vain Boast

It became their vain boast. The apostle takes it all away. Remember, the apostle is preparing the way for the gospel. If the way is to be prepared for the gospel, then all must be taken away which is of us.

Why?

"Thou boastest in God," the apostle says. "Thou retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God." In other words, the Jew boasted that God was his God. The apostle goes on to say: Thou dishonorest God. Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, robbest thou temples?

The Jews would say, no, I do not. I do not steal; I do not commit adultery; I do not rob temples. I keep the law.

Putting the question to us, the apostle says: Thou that teachest that a man should repent, repentest thou not thyself? Thou that sayest that a man should seek the things above and not the things below, seekest thou the things below?

We say no. We are Reformed. We say, I do repent, I do seek the

things above, I do seek first the kingdom of God.

But the word of God does not let us go so easy. The question is not, what do we do now? The question is, what will we say in the day of the righteous judgment of God? God will say, didst thou steal? We will have to say, yes, in my heart I did. Did you commit adultery? You will have to say, yes, I did in my heart. Did you really always repent? Were you never impenitent?

The more we shall be questioned, the more we will say, where is my religion? If I come before God with my religion as the basis of my righteousness, I will be condemned. Therefore, away with all my religion as a basis of righteousness. Then there is nothing left but a poor, miserable sinner before God.

If this is understood and acknowledged, and we see and believe as a matter of living faith, then we have room for the gospel. In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, we will say: I plead not on my own righteousness, but on Thy righteousness in Christ. This is a righteousness which is perfect, because God has prepared it. He has prepared it in Christ. He has revealed it in the gospel.

I am not ashamed of the gospel. For there is no other righteousness than the righteousness of God which is by faith in Christ Jesus.

□

Editorial

Catechism!

Familiar word in Protestant Reformed families in the fall of the year. As in, "Learn your catechism"; "Do you know your catechism?"; and, "Let me ask you your catechism."

It makes up a big part of the work-load of every Protestant Reformed minister from the fall of the year through the spring of the following year. Every week he prepares for and teaches five or six

catechism classes, each of which is 50 minutes to an hour in length. Some of the classes require him to grade written work afterward.

Catechism is part of the weekly routine of every child in the church

from five or six years of age to the late teenage years. He or she attends a catechism class. To prepare for the class, the child must memorize an assigned lesson and often do some written work.

As an activity, catechism is the church's official instruction of the children of the congregation, sons and daughters of believing parents, in the Word of God. She does this also in the preaching on the Lord's Day inasmuch as the children are members of the congregation with their parents. But catechism is the church's teaching specifically of the children in classes devoted exclusively to them. The teaching is adapted to the children's capacity and level of spiritual and intellectual development.

Whether the method is question-and-(prescribed) answer or straightforward explanation of a lesson, catechism is indoctrination of the children in the truth. The church knows the truth by divine revelation in Holy Scripture and by the internal testimony and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. She teaches the truth to her children. The children learn what is taught.

The word "catechism" itself expresses the nature of the teaching as indoctrination. The church "sounds down" upon the children the Word of God. She does not share religious insights and values with the children, leaving to the children to choose for themselves among all the possibilities. She does not lay before the children all kinds of social and personal issues of right and wrong for the children's consideration. She does not merely make the children, especially the youth, aware of what the church of the past has believed, or even what she herself now believes. But in catechism the church binds the Word of God that she teaches upon the children. She calls them to know these teachings as the truth with their minds, to embrace them with believing hearts, and to live them with soul and body.

The only objection to this indoctrination could be that what the church teaches is not in fact the Word of God.

Implied, of course, is that a church has the truth and is absolutely sure that she has the truth. A reason why many Protestant churches have left off catechizing is that they have become doubtful whether they possess the truth and even whether there is truth at all.

The reason for catechism is God's covenant with believers and their children. Catechism rests on and serves the covenant. The covenant demands catechism. As revealed by the promise of the gospel (Gen 17:7; Acts 2:39) and as signified by their baptism, the children of believers are God's elect, redeemed, and regenerated children. They are God's elect, redeemed, and regenerated children *already as children*. They are God's elect and redeemed children already as *little* children, as *infants*, before their baptism. Question 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism teaches that the infants are to be baptized because they already are, before baptism, included in the covenant and church of God. The prayer after baptism in the Reformed form for baptism thanks God that He "hast forgiven us and our children all our sins through the blood of (His) beloved Son Jesus Christ."

As a rule, they are born again already as infant children. The first question to parents at the baptism of their children, in the Reformed form, is, whether they acknowledge that our children are "sanctified in Christ." Earlier, the form declares that just as our young children "are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again (understand: without their knowledge) received unto grace in Christ."

This must be the joyful answer of parents to a question about catechism that is not unknown in Reformed households at this time of the year: "Why must we go to cat-

echism?" Take the opportunity to tell the children who they are by the mercy of God in the covenant. Remind them of their baptism. Explain what their baptism means. The ministers might profitably make this explanation the beginning of every catechism class at the start of the season. "Children, young people, the church has catechism classes for you, because of who you are. *This is who you are.*"

The reference is not to all the physical children of believers. When the Reformed confessions and Scripture speak of the children of believers as elect, redeemed, and holy, they refer to the true spiritual children of believers. "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel ... but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Rom. 9:6, 8). The real covenant children are those in Christ according to eternal election (Gal. 3:16, 29). They show themselves by hearing and heeding the Word that is taught in catechism.

There are others. These show themselves profane by despising the Word that is taught them in catechism, whether at the time that they are being taught or later in life. They thus wickedly reject the Word in accordance with God's reprobation of them in eternity (cp. Heb. 12:16, 17 and Rom. 9:10-13). Our children should also know about this. The Bible story of Jacob and Esau, very early in the catechism program, teaches this to the youngest children.

God's sanctification of the children in the covenant makes instruction of them possible. The church cannot instruct boys and girls in the things of God who are spiritually dead. Unregenerated children cannot know the things of God. These things would be foolishness to them (I Cor. 2:14).

The church may (and *must!*) approach the children at catechism as elect, redeemed, and holy by virtue of the covenant. This must be her approach to all of the children. She brings the same Word of sal-

vation to them all, and she earnestly calls all of them to believe it. She leaves the outcome to God, confident that by her instruction in catechism all her children will be taught of the LORD (Is. 54:13).

The purpose with catechism, then, is the growth of spiritually immature citizens of the kingdom of heaven into full, spiritual manhood and womanhood. With this, the church aims at preparing her children for public confession of faith, so that they may partake of the Lord's Supper.

These purposes in no way rule out, but rather include, that the children are converted under the teaching at catechism. Only, this conversion is not the cheap acceptance of Christ of modern child-evangelism, which is the false gospel of salvation by man's will. Nor is it a matter of the teacher's unscrupulous manipulation of the child's emotions, which is the false gospel of salvation by man's feelings. But it is the daily, lifelong conversion of Lord's Day 33 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which begins in the covenant already in youngest childhood. The child turns from sin to God in Jesus Christ. She experiences sorrow over her sins. He is conscious of joy in the God who gave Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins. They desire, in a childish way, to please God by a life of good works.

At the same time that the church is working at these goals with the children, she is handing over to the coming generation the great, grand deposit of the Christian, Reformed, and, more particularly, Protestant Reformed faith.

These purposes of catechism are realized by the teaching of the Word of God. The Word of God must be the content of the catechism class. In the classes for the younger children, the Word is especially the history of the Bible. In the classes for the older children, the Word is the doctrine of the Bible. The Protestant Reformed

Churches, in an excellent program, teach the children the history of the entire Bible in three, increasingly more advanced stages over seven years. When the children are about 13, they receive instruction in doctrine, beginning with the Heidelberg Catechism for two or three years, going on to the study of Reformed doctrine in a systematic way, and concluding with a study of the Belgic Confession or the Canons of Dordt, or both.

I urge our ministers and consistories to require the young people to memorize the Heidelberg Catechism as part of their instruction in that precious statement of the faith. This will fix the truth in their minds in exactly the words and phrases used in that memorable catechism. This will help them to understand the doctrines taught in the creed. This will enable them to recall the comfort of the Heidelberg in times of need to the very end of their lives. This was the intention of the authors of the Catechism, as it was the intention of the Synod of Dordt that adopted it for the Reformed churches. It can be done. It can be done by almost all the young people. During my 25 years as a pastor in the churches, I required this of all the catechism students. They all did it, although the stumbling efforts of a few had to be borne with patiently.

Whatever the materials may be, the content of the classes must be the knowledge of God in Christ as made known in Scripture and systematically expressed in the Reformed confessions. The Holy Spirit, great Power of the covenant, works by and with the Word of God, and no otherwise.

When the "educational ministry" of a Reformed church consists of weekly fun and games in a gym, or of raising the social consciousness of young people by confronting them with all the politically correct views on current issues in society, or of teaching them the heresy that "God loves everybody,

Christ died for all, please let Jesus come into your heart, and now let's be nice to everybody," it is all over with the covenant in that church and among those families. If I can understand why men and women who profess to be Reformed stay in such churches, I cannot understand that they allow their very own children, not only to be deprived of sound instruction in the Word but also to be infected with drivel and false doctrine. They do not love their children. They hold the covenant of God in contempt. They will pay the price. In their children!

Catechism is vitally important. It is vitally important for the church. Catechism is in her own best interests. By it she grows spiritually and numerically. It is vitally important for the children. As we love our children, catechize them! It is vitally important for the covenant of God with His people, a very means by which He realizes, maintains, and perfects it. Let us make this more concrete, more personal: Catechism is one of the main means by which God enters into friendship with our children and gets their friendship for Himself.

This importance is indicated in the documents and life of the Reformed churches. The call-letter to every minister includes among his duties (the second mentioned, immediately following the duty of preaching on the Lord's Day) "attending to catechetical instruction." Three times at the annual visit of the consistories (or, councils) of all the churches, the question is put by the church visitors concerning catechism and its supervision.

Minister and church must take it seriously. The minister must do the teaching. He must prepare for the classes. He must put his heart into the teaching. Words fail to express outrage over the preacher who gives catechism a lick-and-a-promise, who comes to class totally unprepared, whose disinterest in this "drudgery" is plain for all the

children to see, and whose chief concern is obviously to get away as quickly as possible. What will Jesus say to such a man one day, the Jesus whose mandate to the apostle and thus to every minister was a solicitous "Feed my lambs"? We preachers should pray often for the catechism classes in our congregational prayers. Catechism is not inferior to the good, Christian schools.

The church must carefully supervise both the classes and the minister. She does this by her elders.

The supervision by the elders should extend to the time of the classes. As much as possible, the classes should last a full hour. This is especially necessary for the classes in doctrine. If there are a goodly number of children, this is

virtually necessary also for the classes in Bible history. Otherwise, by the time all the children recite their answers and memory verses, the teacher has a scant 20 minutes to tell the story. The classes should run a full 30 weeks. Consistories should watch against shortening the season. A 30-week season is barely over half the year. Catechism is deserving and demanding of this much time, surely.

When in the day the classes are held is important. The worst possible time for the younger children, it seems to me, is immediately after school. They are weary of learning. Their interest, an essential component in effective teaching, understandably flags. They are physically tired. The little children fall asleep. When catechism

cannot be coordinated with the classes in the local Christian School, the church should seriously consider having catechism on Saturday morning.

The importance of catechism calls the children and their parents to good, thorough preparation for the classes each week. The responsibility falls on the parents. We teach the little ones; help the older children; and make sure that the young people have memorized the lesson by having them recite to us before they leave for catechism.

Afterwards, the word "catechism" is heard yet again in Protestant Reformed households. As in, "How was catechism?" "Did you know your catechism?" and "What did you learn in catechism?"

□
—DJE

Letters

■ The "All" of I Timothy 2:4

I refer to your editorial, "A Candid Confession of the Character of a Conditional Covenant" (*Standard Bearer*, March 15, 1997).

Laying aside all prejudices, I believe that I Timothy 2:3, 4 means exactly what it says. "All" means all (cf. Isaiah 53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"), and "will" may mean wish or desire. That all will not be saved is supported by Scripture in many places, but, I believe, Scripture states that while God desires the salvation of all, the vast, overwhelming majority reject. Thus, while we correctly say, "Man proposes but God disposes," it can also be said, "God proposes but man disposes." This in no way detracts from the absolute sovereignty of God, for this is the way God has designed man in His own image with the power of choice. Before I give my supporting Scriptures, I thoroughly believe that all

men left to their own choice would refuse salvation, and only but for the grace of God and His foreordained counsel to choose whom He will to be saved, no one would enter into His Kingdom.

Could you please consider the following Scriptures which indicate to me God's desire to save all mankind?

Genesis 4:7a: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door."

Matthew 22:9: "Go ye therefore into the highways and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage."

Matthew 22:12: "And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless."

John 6:64: "But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him."

Acts 10:34, 35: "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a

truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Romans 10:21: "But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."

In all fairness, however, there is one Scripture which prevents all men from being saved (as far as I know), and that is Isaiah 53:1, quoted in John 12:38. Otherwise, it is because of the hardness of their heart, because they will not come to Christ, because they reject the light that they already have and plunge themselves into greater darkness. Also in Matthew 25:34 and 25:41 is there not a contrast between "the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" and "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"?

Clearly, the apostle Paul, through whom the Holy Spirit gave the words of Ephesians 1:4 and Ro-

mans 8:28-30, said in Romans 9:3: "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

Did not our Lord preach in Luke 13:24, in answer to the question, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

The word "strive" in the Greek is *agonizomai* and according to Bauer's Greek-English Lexicon means "to fight, struggle." He translates it "strain every nerve to enter" (p. 15).

I love the great doctrines of election, predestination, the counsel of God and place these foremost in my thinking and believing, but I also believe that the venerable John Calvin went too far in his doctrine in not allowing the Lord to weep for sinners who reject the claims of Christ.

Charles B. Gross
Trenton, NJ

Response:

Your comments are helpful. They illustrate the truth of two important assertions that I made in the series of editorials, "A Candid Confession of the Character of a Conditional Covenant" (*Standard Bearer*, Jan. 1-April 1, 1997). The first was that everyone who explains "all" in I Timothy 2:4 as meaning 'every human without exception' is thereby committed to the heresy of universal atonement. I grounded this assertion in the obvious fact that two verses later the apostle declares that Christ Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all." If "all" in verse 4 means 'every human without exception,' so also does "all" in verse 6 mean 'every human without exception.'

You acknowledge the truth of my assertion when you quote Isaiah 53:6 in support of your contention that "all" in I Timothy 2:4 means 'every human without exception.' Isaiah 53:6 states that the

LORD laid on Christ "the iniquity of us all." According to you, the Messiah bore the iniquity of 'every human without exception.' Jesus the Christ, on your view, suffered and died to atone for the sins of 'every human without exception.' This is the necessary implication of your view that "all" in I Timothy 2:4 means 'every human without exception.' This is the necessary implication of your view that God desires to save 'every human without exception.'

But the doctrine that Jesus died for 'every human without exception,' many of whom perish nevertheless, is a denial of the cross of Christ and the overthrow of Christianity. I remind you that the Reformed confession teaches that "it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father" (Canons of Dordt, II/8).

The second assertion in the editorials that you explicitly corroborate was that the teaching, now rampant in supposedly Calvinistic circles, that God desires to save 'every human without exception' is the denial of the sovereignty of God. The doctrine that God desires to save 'every human without exception' denies the sovereignty of God in His greatest, grandest, most glorious work: the salvation of sinners. God is frustrated and defeated in multitudes of instances: many whom He wishes to save go lost. By clear and necessary implication those who are saved are not saved by the gracious will of God (for He wishes to save all alike), but by what you call their own "power of choice."

You acknowledge the truth of my assertion that the teaching of a desire of God for the salvation of 'every human without exception' denies the sovereignty of God when you boldly declare, "It can

also be said, 'God proposes but man disposes.'" That is, man is sovereign in his own salvation, and God is dependent upon sovereign man. Or, to put it differently, man is God.

But Christianity damns idolatry. If you call my attention to the fact that you also want to maintain that "man proposes but God disposes," that is, that God is God, I observe that you have two Gods, man and God. But the first commandment of the law forbids having any god in addition to God, as well as having a god instead of God.

I do appreciate your forthrightness, your honesty. Many of greater reputation who fully share your explanation of I Timothy 2:4 and your view that God desires to save 'every human without exception' hedge, dodge, twist, obfuscate, or take refuge in politic silence when it comes to the clear, inescapable implications of this explanation and view: universal atonement and the sovereignty of man in his own salvation.

I will be happy to explain the texts that you list *when you provide your own explanation of them showing how they are supposed to teach "God's desire to save all mankind."* Not one of the texts mentions any desire of God for the salvation of 'every human without exception' or any grace of God in the preaching for every hearer.

As regards your profession of love for "the great doctrines of election, predestination, (and) the counsel of God," God alone is judge of the heart. But I assure you of this: holding and publicly defending the doctrine that God desires to save 'every human without exception,' with its implications of universal atonement and the sovereignty of man in salvation, you are no friend of the great doctrines of election and predestination, but an enemy.

—Ed.

■ "Hypo-Calvinism" vs. the Reformed Faith

I was pleasantly surprised to open my mailbox recently and see the July, 1997 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. I read it cover to cover immediately.

I wish to state an opinion concerning the Protestant Reformed Churches being labeled as "hyper-Calvinist" by Iain Murray of the Banner of Truth recently.

I have read *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995) by Murray. It is so sad to realize more fully what I had already known: that Spurgeon and many "Puritans" were not orthodox Calvinists, but "hypo-Calvinists" ("hypo" meaning below or beneath). Anyone who believes that God in the preaching of the gospel desires the salvation of all who hear it or "all men" ("hypo-Calvinism") are closer to the Arminian camp than the true Calvinist camp.

I am also sad in realizing that many of our "Reformed revivals"

in history were brought about through anti-particular grace "marrow men," who preached the same message that Murray promulgates today.

Now for some truth. The Protestant Reformed Churches, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, and a few congregations in America and elsewhere hold to the true, orthodox, confessional, Reformed gospel of sovereign, particular grace. Those who do not hold to sovereign, particular grace are not in the truth. It is surprising to read Murray's book in which he correctly sheds light on the error of "hyper-Calvinism" only falsely to label the Protestant Reformed Churches as such!

I encourage anyone to read Professor Engelsma's *Hyper-Calvinism & the Call of the Gospel*, revised (RFPA, 1994). Therein is revealed the truth about gospel preaching. Read the *Trinity Review* of May and June, 1997 in which two articles, "The Banner of Truth versus Cal-

vinism," refute Murray and the "marrow men."

Praise God for the three seminarians available for call in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Is there another seminary which holds to sovereign, particular grace?

I have been blessed for some time through the tape ministry of the Protestant Reformed Church in Lynden, Washington. I also have been blessed through other Protestant Reformed Churches' tapes and periodicals. I believe God has chosen the Protestant Reformed Churches as a denomination to carry forth His truth in these days.

Craig Miklosik
Coos Bay, Oregon

Response:

The issues of *Trinity Review* referred to above are available from Dr. John W. Robbins, 1705 West Alabama, Hobbs, New Mexico 88242. □

—Ed.

Bring the Parchments

Herman Hoeksema

That Wretched Truant

Through the window of my study, one Sunday morning, I saw a young man aimlessly walking the street, both hands in the pockets of his overcoat, coat collar up, evidently very uncomfortable; for the weather was chilly and a fine drizzle was falling. It was eleven o'clock. I had conducted the first (the Dutch) service, and so happened to be in my study

during the second morning-service, which begins at ten-thirty.

That young man was playing truant!

He should have been attending the service, listening to the preaching of the Word of God. But, rather than worship with the people of God, he would wander miserably and aimlessly about on the street in a cold drizzle!

No doubt he peeked in to know who was preaching on that particular morning; perhaps he will find out from others what was the text on which the sermon was based. If necessary, then, he will inform

his parents that he was in church, that so and so conducted the service, that he preached on such and such a text, but that the sermon was so dark and deep that he could not understand much of it!

How true, thought I, is that word "truant"! For, truant means literally: a wretch, a beggar, a tramp! He is one who, for no valid reason at all, stays away from any place where it is his business, his calling to be. To play truant is to stay away without reason from the place of our calling.

Truant is the child that makes his parents believe that he goes to

Standard Bearer, Volume 10, January 15, 1934, pp. 174-176

school but does not. In this sphere, however, the evil of truancy is largely overcome, since there are truant-officers and laws compelling the children to attend school.

But the evil of truancy is not eradicated from church-life. On the contrary it is but too general.

Truant are young men and young women, boys and girls (not to speak of adults), who should attend the services but are absent for no good reason. Truant are several youths who are supposed to attend catechism class and do not. Occasionally they come, especially when they have just been visited by a committee from the consistory or when the danger threatens that they will so be visited. But then they stay away again as soon as the "danger" is past.

Truant are they who are members of the societies that are organized within the bosom of the congregation, but who hardly ever attend, and who are usually reported absent when it is their turn to deliver an introduction to the Bible discussion, essay, or recitation; and the Sunday School teachers who never or seldom attend teachers' meetings and are careless about teaching their classes, as well as the children that are enrolled in those classes but attend very irregularly, though there be no reason why they should not attend every week.

Yes, sad to say, there are always a number of truants in practically every sphere of church-life.



Truancy is a sore evil!

First of all it is a great sin! Sin because of the fact that, whenever anyone stays away from that particular place where his duty calls him, he refuses to go and be where God calls him! It is, therefore, sin in itself, apart from the question where the truant spends his time while he is playing truant.

But sin, too, because of the places he evidently prefers to the things of the kingdom of God. It

is bad enough, a manifestation of carnal tendencies, when a young man prefers to walk in a cold drizzle, rather than attend the services of the people of God on Sunday morning. But the truant does not always walk in the rain when he plays truant. He prefers many things to the kingdom of God. Now the ice is just beautiful and the weather favorable and he prefers to go skating; now it is too warm to sit in church or to attend catechism and he prefers to take a ride; or he knows of a good movie, of a nice program, of a splendid baseball or basketball game; or he reads an interesting novel; or he hangs over a lunch counter.... A thousand and one excuses he can find why on a particular Sunday he should play the truant, or on a certain evening he should not attend catechism or society.

And every one of these reasons is perfectly carnal. The truant lives from the principle of the lust of the flesh. He does not seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. He will not be instructed in the truth of the Word of God. He sells his birthright for a mess of pottage. He is a fornicator. In as far as he is a truant he is closely related to Esau!

But truancy is also an evil, a sore evil, from the viewpoint of its effects. Truancy bears fruit! Evil fruit! First of all for the truant. For he learns little of the truth, if anything. Occasionally, as was said, he will attend catechism. But when he does attend, he does not know the lesson. His stale excuse is usually that he did not know what lesson he had to learn. Besides, he does not understand what the instruction is all about, for he lost the connection, or rather he never had it. Catechetical instruction is systematic instruction. One lesson is based on another. One cannot fruitfully attend catechism once in a while.

And the truant blames it to the instruction. It is too deep for him! At the same time, he found one

more reason why he should play the truant, this time a reason that apparently justifies him to an extent, justifies him, alas! also in the eyes of some parents!

But there is more.

In a sound Reformed church the preaching really presupposes sound catechetical instruction. It is expository and doctrinal preaching, as it should be. And the truant, in the same way and for the same reason that he loses hold of instruction in catechism, loses all contact with the preaching of the Word of God.

And again, he does not blame himself. He blames the preaching. It is too deep for him. He puts the blame on the preacher. Why cannot he tell some stories, as other preachers do? If only the preacher would be more interesting, he, the truant, would also reveal more interest in the things of the kingdom of God!

His truancy bears evil fruit for himself. But also for the body to which he belongs, for the church, for the catechism class, for the society.

Many a program of a society the truant spoils, unscrupulously! He is a member. His name appears on the program. He must deliver an essay. He is absent. The society has nothing else on its program for that evening. It depended entirely on the unfaithful truant. The evening is spoiled.

In catechism the instruction must more or less adapt itself to the needs of the truant, when he does attend.

The church will lower its standard of preaching if too many of these truants complain that they cannot understand it!

The truant is the dead fly in the ointment!

Truancy is a great evil, indeed!



What to do about it?

Usually very little is effective against the truant.

The church has no truant-officers, and it cannot put the truant in confinement.

But the consistories must watch, warn, admonish, and labor patiently with these truants, for their own sake and for the sake of

the rest, for the church's sake.

And parents must not defend their truant children, protect them, and try to justify them in their truancy. Rather they must try to be sure, much more sure than they ac-

tually are, that their children are where they are expected to be.

The church must not be tempted to cater to her truant children. For their sake the church may not be allowed to go to ruin! □

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

U.S. Supreme Court Strikes Down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act

Congress' power extends only to "enforcing" the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment. Legislation such as the RFRA which alters the meaning of the Free Exercise Clause cannot be said to be enforcing the Clause. Congress does not enforce a constitutional right by changing what that right is.

The courts retain the power to determine if Congress has exceeded its authority under the Constitution. Broad as the power of Congress is, the RFRA contradicts vital principles necessary to maintain separation of powers and the federal balance.

Boerne v. Flores
(Majority Opinion) (June, 1997)

Religious freedom suffered a disappointing setback this summer when the U.S. Supreme Court by a 6-3 vote in *Boerne v. Flores* declared the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) unconstitutional. This judicial repeal of the popular law adopted by Congress in 1993 caused consternation among those who had strived for and celebrated its passage only a few years before. Some evangelical leaders described the *Boerne* opinion as "disastrous" and "the worst religious liberty decision in the last 50 years." Although it could be argued that such an analysis is an exaggeration, there

is no question but that the *Boerne* decision is a discouraging blow to religious freedom in this country.

RFRA's Short History

Congress enacted RFRA four years ago in direct response to the Supreme Court's controversial decision in the earlier case of *Employment Div. v. Smith* in 1990. The *Smith* case was brought by two members of the Native American Church who were denied unemployment benefit when they lost their jobs for ingesting peyote, a hallucinogenic drug used by Native Americans for sacramental purposes in their religious ceremonies. *Smith* held that "neutral, generally applicable" laws may impinge upon religious practices, even though such laws are not supported by a "compelling governmental interest."

In deciding the *Smith* case, the Court declined to apply established precedent which held that when a law "substantially burdens" a religious practice, the law is constitutionally deficient unless the resulting burden on religious freedom is justified by a "compelling government interest." In rejecting the historic test, the Court held in *Smith*:

Government's ability to enforce generally applicable prohibitions of socially harmful conduct ... cannot depend on measuring the effects of governmental action on a religious objector's spiritual development.

The *Smith* Court's abandonment of the "compelling interest" test for laws burdening religious practices outraged religious leaders and many members of Congress. Reacting swiftly to the *Smith*

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decision, Congress in 1993 passed RFRA, a federal law purposely intended to revive the "compelling interest" test for laws that impact the religious practices of U.S. citizens. (See box on at right for text of RFRA.)

This resulted, of course, in an obvious tension between the Supreme Court, which had abandoned the historic test in *Smith*, and Congress' attempt to revive the test by enacting RFRA. The *Boerne* case gave the Court an opportunity to resolve this tension between Congress and the judiciary, and it did so by invalidating RFRA.

The Boerne Case

The *Boerne* case was initiated by a small Catholic parish church located in Boerne, Texas. The church building was erected in 1923 and its architecture replicated the mission style of the region's earlier history. Because the edifice could no longer accommodate the growing congregation, the parish applied for a city building permit to enlarge the structure.

The Boerne city council denied the permit application, claiming that the building was located in a designated historic district wherein alteration of historic landmarks or buildings was forbidden by city ordinance. The parish then filed suit challenging the building permit denial, arguing the city's refusal of its permit application was a violation of RFRA. The city responded by arguing that RFRA itself was unconstitutional. Although a federal appellate court ruled in favor of the church, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled for the city and held that RFRA was a bold attempt by Congress to exceed its power and thwart the Court's decision in *Smith*.

The Boerne Decision

The majority held that Congress' power extends only to "enforcing" the religious freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, not "defining" those freedoms:

Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)

Angrily responding to the Supreme Court's abandonment in the 1991 *Smith* decision of the historic "compelling interest" test for laws impacting religious practices, Congress adopted RFRA in 1993. But RFRA was short-lived. This summer the Supreme Court declared RFRA unconstitutional. (See text.)

Free Exercise of Religion Protected

(A) In General. Government shall not substantially burden a person's exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability, except as provided in subsection (b).

(B) Exception. Government may substantially burden a person's exercise of religion only if it demonstrates that application of the burden to the person —

1 is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest; and

2 is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.

(C) Judicial relief. A person whose religious exercise has been burdened in violation of this section may assert that violation as a claim or defense in a judicial proceeding and obtain appropriate relief against a government. Standing to assert a claim or defense under this section shall be governed by the general rules of standing under article III of the Constitution.

The design of the 14th Amendment is inconsistent with the suggestion that Congress has the power to decree the substance of [religious freedom]. Legislation which alters the meaning of the Free Exercise of Religion Clause cannot be said to be enforcing the Clause. Congress does not enforce a constitutional right by changing what that right is.

The Court argued that if Congress was given the power to alter the meaning of religious freedom, Congress could then also define its own power. Then the Constitution, instead of remaining a "superior paramount law, unchangeable by ordinary means," would be placed on a level with other legislative acts, to be altered whenever the legislature pleased.

Overbreadth

The majority also held that the RFRA was so overly broad, its scope so expansive, and its test so stringent, that its enforcement would be impracticable if not impossible:

Sweeping coverage ensures RFRA's intrusion at every level of government, displacing laws and

prohibiting official actions of almost every description and regardless of subject matter. RFRA's restrictions apply to every agency and official of the Federal, State, and local government. Any law is subject to challenge at any time by any individual who alleges a substantial burden on his or her religion.

Finally, in addition to its overbreadth, the Court also complained that because the "compelling interest" test is the most "demanding test known to constitutional law," the test would open the prospect of constitutionally required religious exemptions from "civic obligations of every conceivable kind." The Court remarked that the result would be a congressional intrusion into state and local prerogatives to regulate the health and welfare of their citizens.

The Minority Opinion

The minority opinion, written by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, urged the majority to reexamine its holding in *Smith* and return to a rule which would require government to justify any substantial burden on religiously motivated conduct by a compelling state inter-

est. Justice O'Connor's dissenting opinion reviewed the early American tradition of religious free exercise, and concluded that the original drafters and ratifiers of the Constitution viewed the Free Exercise Clause as a guarantee that government may not unnecessarily hinder believers from freely practicing their religion:

As historical evidence shows, the Free Exercise Clause is properly understood as an affirmative guarantee of the right to participate in religious activities without impermissible governmental interference, even where a believer's conduct is in tension with a law of general application.

Comment

It is readily apparent to the reader of the *Boerne* decision that, at least for the majority, this case, ostensibly addressing religious freedom, was in reality much more about the issue of separation of

powers—the political power struggle between the legislature and the judiciary. Although it appears the Court won this particular battle, religious freedom was the unwilling victim.

Secondly, religious freedom proponents are astonished to learn that RFRA was struck down by the Court partly because of its perceived overbreadth—because its “restrictions apply to every agency and official of the federal, state, and local governments.” But surely this is true of much federal legislation enforcing constitutional guarantees (e.g., anti-discrimination laws, free speech legislation, etc.). Why religious freedom laws must be subjected to a standard different from other federal laws enforcing constitutional guarantees is indeed puzzling.

Finally, serious proponents of religious liberty perhaps feel some resentment toward the peyote ingesting plaintiffs in *Smith* (the case

that precipitated the Court's abandonment of the “compelling interest” test for laws impacting religious practices). There is an old adage among lawyers that “bad cases make bad laws,” and perhaps *Smith* is an example. Peyote is a powerful drug that alters perception by producing vivid color hallucinations, inaccurate estimation of time, and feelings of anxiety. Large doses can have toxic effects. Thus, to argue that ingesting this illegal drug for “sacramental” purposes must be recognized as religious liberty is dubious indeed. Of course, religious liberty must by definition embrace peculiar, unorthodox, unpopular, and even despised practices. But when bizarre rites involving hallucinogenic drugs are characterized as a “religious” ceremony, then the courts become skeptical, harmful decisions result, and authentic religious freedom suffers. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

“The Good Shepherd, His Shepherds, and His Sheep” (2)

(John 10:1-21)

We have been engaged in good Bible study of the Gospel according to John. Good Bible study is focused on Jesus. He is the Word living of the Word written. He is the Word saving of the Word spelled out. Indeed, we have been studying the inspired John in order that, as John says (20:31), we “might believe that

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing (we) might have life through his name.” Good Bible study: beholding and believing Jesus!

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

In a previous study we have seen that John 10 teaches that Jesus is the Christ-Shepherd of God.

There are many other references in the Bible to God and Messiah being Shepherd. The good Bible student will, in his study of John 10, be aware of and refer to such passages as Psalm 23; 79:13;

80:1; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:1-6; and Ezekiel 34. But John 10 is the outstanding Shepherd chapter. In it Jesus, two times, declares, “I am the good shepherd” (vv. 11, 14). And there is much other instruction on His being Shepherd. This is the “fullness” of revelation, given in the fullness of the time. The incarnate Word is speaking and fulfilling all the truth about the Shepherd of Israel. Having considered in some detail Jesus’ “I Am” statements in verses 11 and 14 (cf. *SB*, April 15, 1997), we now

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turn to the first verses of this precious chapter of sacred writ.

Here in verses 1-5 is a parable (cf. v. 6), or figure, of shepherds, their shepherding, and sheep. About this parable William Hendriksen, in his commentary on John, writes:

The figure which underlies the allegory is that of an Oriental shepherd, who in the morning seeks to enter the fold where his sheep are kept. The door-keeper opens to him, and the shepherd then puts out his own sheep, calling them by the pet-names which he has given them. Hence, a little later in the day we see this shepherd leading his sheep to pasture-grounds, and by his call assuring them of his constant presence. At nightfall the shepherd returns with his flock and protects them against wolves. He is willing, if need be, to risk his own life in their defence. Being a real shepherd he is deeply interested in his sheep (p. 117).

In giving this detail of shep-

herds and sheep, Jesus reveals many things about Himself as the good Shepherd. He also has much to say about His under-shepherds. Jesus Himself is described as the "door" of the fold which opens to these shepherds (vv. 2, 7, 9). The shepherds are Jesus' ministers of the gospel. They are appointed by Jesus, and on His behalf, to care for the sheep, the church, throughout the ages. These are distinguished from false shepherds, thieves and robbers, who seek to steal, kill, and destroy the people of God (v. 10).

Let us now turn to the truth of these under-shepherds—without losing our focus on the Shepherd. For though the presence and work of under-shepherds is very important for the church, yet they are only shepherd-ministers; Jesus alone is Shepherd-Messiah. They are ministers of the Word; He is the Word. They are shepherd-men, under the Lord-Shepherd, with all the sheep. They are under Him who is the Shepherd-God.

1, 2). This "entering" the sheepfold by the door is a reference to the minister's lawful calling or authorization and right to be a minister of Jesus. Explain what this lawful calling is. We distinguish between the subjective or inner calling, and the objective calling. The inner calling is a man's conviction in his heart that he has the gifts and is being led of the Lord to be a minister. The objective calling is the confirmation of the calling a man may feel in his heart by the church's approval and "sending" of this man to be a minister. Discuss how the following passages speak directly to the matter of the qualifications and calling of ministers: I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 13:1-3; Ephesians 4:11ff.; Hebrews 5:4.

* False shepherds do not enter the sheepfold by the door. They climb up some other way (v.1) to get into the congregation or onto the mission field. They are not, in other words, lawfully called by Christ and His church. How do such "fake" ministers get into the fold? In other words, what is the "other way" they climb? What are some motives which a false shepherd might have for entering the ministry? To what extent are congregations/denominations and seminaries to blame for letting such shepherds in? Why do you suppose Jesus, the Good Shepherd of the church, allows in the false shepherds?

3. The identity of true and false shepherds.

* Jesus speaks of the fact that all who came before Him were thieves and robbers (v. 8). To whom is Jesus referring? (Note the problem in interpretation: surely Jesus could not be referring to all the leaders there ever were in Israel—to a Moses or Elijah, or to John the Baptist! Might He be referring just to the present leaders in Jewry? Anything in the text to support this interpretation? Hint: note the tenses used.)

Questions and Comments for Meditation and Discussion

1. Main elements of the parable.

It is helpful first of all to have clearly before our minds who and what Jesus is referring to when He speaks in this parable. What is the sheepfold? Who is the door? Who are the thieves and robbers? Strangers and hirelings? The good shepherds? Some have thought that the porter, who opens the door (v. 3), is the angel Gabriel or Abraham or Moses. Who would you say, in light of Scripture, the porter is? What is the pasture? Who are the sheep? Who is the wolf (v. 12)?

(Note: An important point to remember in interpreting this parable is that, as in all parables, there are not always intended to be spiri-

tual meanings and references behind all of the elements of the story that is told or picture (as here) that is drawn. Some general rules of biblical interpretation to follow: First, interpret the parable in light of the main point or points that are being made. This should be obvious from the context. Second, come to your conclusions about the various elements in the parable in light of what Scripture teaches in the context and elsewhere.)

2. The authorization of shepherds under Christ.

* The main thing distinguishing true from false shepherds is, according to Jesus, that the true and good shepherds enter by the door but the false shepherds do not (vv.

* There is something about the voice, both what is said, and how it is said that denotes whether a shepherd is true or false. That is why the true sheep listen keenly for the voice of their shepherd (cf. v. 3, 4, 5, 8). For what voice, for whose voice are the sheep listening? What words and what manner of speaking distinguish true gospel ministers from false ones?

* Today: Who are the good and bad shepherds? What are the different sounds (gospels) going out from the pulpits today?

4. The work of shepherds.

* The work of the good shepherds under Jesus is to lead the flock out of the fold into good pasture by day, and then to lead them back safely into the fold at night. What does this work translate into from a spiritual point of view?

* The shepherds, as they go in and out from day to day, must always go in and out by the door, Jesus Christ (v. 9). What does this mean for ministers of the gospel (for example: what are the implications of this for their prayer-life, their studies, their preaching, their pastoral labors...)?

* The shepherds are devoted to their work, and to the sheep in their charge. They will, in fact, lay down their life for the sheep, though a wolf come and threaten both shepherd and sheep. In what way are the wolves threatening the church today? How do ministers show their selfless devotion to their calling? Why are they so devoted?

* False shepherds do the devil's work. They are described as thieves, robbers, strangers, and hirelings. They are not at all devoted to the flock of God, but, when any trouble comes, like a wolf they flee (v. 12). In fact, their sole purpose for being among the flock is to steal and to kill and to destroy the sheep (v.10). How do the false shepherds go about doing this? Can we see their work today?

5. The fruit of good shepherds' work.

* Ministers lawfully called of Christ, who enter in by the door, "shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (v. 9). There is reference here to a twofold fruit of the ministry of the Word: it is for the good of both shepherd and sheep. The shepherd himself is saved through the faithful execution of his calling (cf. I Cor. 9:27; I Tim. 4:16). And the sheep themselves are led to the pasture the shepherd is able to find for them—pasture which is their life and health! Discuss in this connection the following proposition: Ministers save, and Christ saves! (Cf. I Cor. 9:22; Lord's Day 31.)

* Life! Having life "more abundantly" (v.10)! This is the fruit of the work of good shepherds, Christ shepherding through them. What is the "abundant life" of the child of God (cf. passages such as John 1:16; Rom. 5:17, 20; Eph. 1:7, 8; II Cor. 8:2; Jer. 33:6. See also John 2:6, 7; 4:14; 6:13, 35—[cited in Hendriksen]).

* False shepherds, out to steal, plunder, and kill, actually do this. They are very good at their work. Do we see this today—carcasses of sheep, churches mauled and maimed, and little lambs devoured by wolves? Explain how this is possible in light of the doctrine of the preservation of the saints (John 10:28, 29).

6. Sheep

* As in John 10, Scripture often refers elsewhere to God's people as sheep (Ps. 23; Is. 53:6). List and discuss three main characteristics of sheep.

* What enables the sheep to have such good ears, and inclinations to hear and follow only the right shepherd? Cite verses from this passage and others for proof.

* Through the ministry of the under-shepherds, Jesus Himself calls His flock and feeds them. Such is the implication of Jesus' rather sudden transition from calling Himself

"the door" of the sheepfold, to declaring Himself to be the Shepherd who comes, in contrast to the false shepherds, to give life abundantly (v.10). What response toward ministers ought this identification of Jesus with His shepherds to evoke from the congregation? Are ministers truly "reverend" shepherds?

* When Jesus speaks of "other sheep" which He has which are not of this fold (v. 16), to whom is He referring? Cite texts from both Old and New Testaments to support the teaching of the "other sheep." Give proof from verse 16 itself for the election, universality, holiness, and oneness of the church.

* Devils call the Holy Deliverer a devil. Madmen call the Mediator mad. We see this in the immediate reaction of many among the Jews to Jesus' shepherd-talk (vv. 19-21). These Jews showed by this that, though they were in the outward fold, the church institute, they were not true sheep (Rom. 9:7,8). Is this true also today—that some or many in the church are not true sheep of God? Discuss in this connection the concept of the remnant in Scripture (cf. Is. 1:9; 10:20-22; Rom. 9:27; 11:1-5). In what way do the false sheep in the church slander the remnant, the true sheep, as the Jews in John 10 slandered Jesus?

7. Perspective

Review the passage, John 10:1-21, in light of the fact that these things are written that "ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name"! How does this passage show clearly that Jesus, and only Jesus, is the Christ? What are the main characteristics here set forth of those who believe Jesus is the Christ? What one blessed feature of the believer's life as a sheep of the Shepherd is underscored? How is this a comfort and delight to you? □

Young People's Activities

The 1997 PRYP Convention was held this year from August 18-22 at Camp Miniwanca on the shore of Lake Michigan, about an hour's drive north of Grand Rapids, MI. This year's convention was hosted by the young people of the Hudsonville, MI PRC. Being a member of that congregation, I had the privilege of spending that week at the convention, and what an enjoyable week it was!

We at Hudsonville thank God, first of all, for keeping all the conventioners and adults safe before, during, and after the convention, and for providing us with a delightful and profitable week. Although the weather was not warm or sunny much, the testimony of the young people was that they had a fantastic time. The four speeches were excellent, and the behavior of the young people was commendable. In fact, those who ran the camp and other facilities told us that our young people were the best behaved that they had seen this summer. We can be thankful that the Lord gave us this good witness. I would also add that, personally, I saw these 300 plus young people who attended as mature, God-fearing young Christians. They were ready for a good time, but they could also quiet down within seconds when the conversation swung around to spiritual things. They continually witnessed to each other of the love they have for the Lord Jesus Christ and for each other. As churches, we have much to be thankful for. Let us pray for each of these young people, that the Lord will use this week for long-term Christian

growth and friendships. He alone can give the real fruit.

We also know that as quickly as one convention passes, another church begins laying plans for next year. Such is the case again this year. Our Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI will be hosting our 58th annual convention. It will be held, the Lord willing, at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, MI, July 20-25, 1998.

Mission Activities

This past month many of our church bulletins contained weekly up-dates concerning Rev. J. Mahtani and his investigatory trip to Ghana.

Mrs. Mahtani was not able to accompany her husband as originally planned because she could not receive the necessary vaccinations since she is early in her pregnancy. So Rev. Mahtani spent from July 29 through August 14 renewing contacts with Rev. Gabriel Anyigba and many others. He was able to visit Accra and Kumasi. He also held a public lecture/slide presentation in Accra, where 50-60 visitors were anticipated. Rev. Mahtani was also able to preach on Sundays and was able to attend the annual synod of the EPC of Ghana. He also spent time checking out the schools, hospitals, and housing, as well as talk with the Ghanaian Immigration Office.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI sponsored a Summer Seminar entitled, "The Rock Whence We are Hewn." This seminar traced the very interesting developments in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands after the Synod of Dordt to the founding of the PRC in America. The series was held on four successive Wednesdays in July and August. Rev. R. Cammenga, pastor at

Southwest, spoke and answered such questions as, What was the Afscheiding? What was the Doleantie? What were the issues involved in the founding of the CRC in 1857 and what were the issues involved in the founding of the PRC in 1924?

The Church Extension Committee of our Loveland, CO PRC has been busy this past summer making up pamphlet-booklets to include with their city's "Welcome Wagon" program. Included was the pamphlet, "The Family: Foundations are Shaking" by Rev. B. Gritters. On August 11 the young people of Loveland distributed these pamphlets in their neighborhood, inviting those interested to attend one of their services.

Congregational Activities

The committee charged with the building of the new parsonage of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada received and accepted an offer to sell their old parsonage. The new owners were to take possession on August 7. Immanuel also approved the purchase of pews and a new organ for the sanctuary.

The Building Committee of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI reports that site preparation has begun and it is hoped that it will be completed by the middle of October. The committee also continues to look at various church buildings in order to obtain ideas.

Minister Activities

Rev. Mahtani has declined the call he received to be missionary to Ghana.

Candidate Martin VanderWal has accepted the call extended to him from our Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ. Candidate James Laning has accepted the call extended from the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. Both are scheduled to be examined at Classis East on Sep-

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

tember 10, the Lord willing, with their installation following soon after.

Food for Thought
 "To be in Christ is the source
 of the Christian's life; to be like

Christ is the sum of His excellence; to be with Christ is the fullness of His joy." —Charles Hodge □

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 17, we celebrated the 25th wedding anniversary of our loving parents, **KENNETH and DORIS HOKSBERGEN**.

We thank the Lord that He has kept them so close to our hearts; they have been, with the help of God, our love and guidance, and always will be.

With love,
Edwin, Sarah, Melissa,
Kurt, and Bethany

Hull, Iowa

NOTICE!!

The Fall Meeting of the Eastern Men's and Ladies' League will be held on Tuesday, September 23 at 8 p.m. in Hope PR Church. Our speaker, Rev. C. Terpstra, will speak on the topic, "God's Word and Man's Revising: How Must We Respond to Inclusive Language and Gender Neutrality." A collection will be taken for Foreign Missions. All Men's/Ladies' Society members as well as any other Adult Bible Society members and young people who may be interested are cordially invited to attend. See you there!

NOTICE!!!

The Annual RFPA Meeting will be held in Southwest Church on September 25 at 8 p.m. Rev. M. Dick will speak on the topic "The RFPA and Religious Stew." Also, election of new board members will be held from a nomination of Bernie Bruining, Don DeJong, Mark Engelsma, Jon Hop, Henry Kamps, Leon Kamps, Jim Koole, Dave Kregel, Mark VandenBerg, and Joel Vink. Members and non-members, young and old, men and women are invited to attend this meeting.

NOTICE!!

The issue of September 15 is the last in Volume 73. Bound volumes will be made available for \$20.00 (+postage) each. Or, if you bring or send to the SB business office soon your own loose issues for binding, you can obtain the bound volume for just \$9.00. (The latter service can be provided if we have your copies by October 15.)

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 19, 1997, our parents, **JOHN and GRACE WIGGER**, will, the Lord willing, celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them. We thank our heavenly Father for them; and for His love, care, and instruction given to us through them. May the Lord continue to bless them and keep them in His care in the years ahead.

"The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.... The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, even for evermore" (Psalm 21:5, 8).

- ❖ Kaye Wigger (Born in glory)
- ❖ Ben and Judy Wigger
- ❖ Chuck and Barb Ensink
- ❖ David and Linda Wigger
12 grandchildren
4 great-grandchildren

Hudsonville, Michigan