



The Standard Bearer

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

In This Issue:

Meditation — <i>Rev. Steven R. Houck</i> Suffering For Well-Doing	218
Editorial — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i> Preaching in Worship: Voice of God, Voice of Christ (3)	221
All Around Us — <i>Rev. Gise J. VanBaren</i>	223
In His Fear — <i>Rev. Arie denHartog</i> The Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31	225
Decency and Order — <i>Rev. Ron Cammenga</i> Funeral Services	228
Search the Scriptures — <i>Rev. Mitchell C. Dick</i> Love and the Footwashing	230
Ministering to the Saints — <i>Prof. Robert D. Decker</i> The Extreme Remedy	232
Taking Heed to the Doctrine — <i>Rev. Steven R. Key</i> Christ, our Prophet	234
Day of Shadows — <i>Homer Hoeksema</i> The Revelation of the Wonder of Grace in Paradise	236
News From Our Churches — <i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger</i>	239

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Suffering For Well-Doing

"For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God."

1 Peter 2:20

Before the apostle Peter lays down the positive principle of this passage, he speaks of a contrasting principle. He says, "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?"

Here the apostle speaks of the believer's faults. Even though the love of God is in our hearts, we still sin. The sinful nature with which we were born is always with us. Thus we sin all the time. That is what Jesus teaches us in His admonition of Matthew 18:15, "More-

over if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone...." Jesus would not have to tell us that, if we did not sin.

We sin as employees. We don't do the work which we are called upon to do. We talk back to our employers. We are careless in our work. We sin in our homes. Husbands are not very considerate of their wives sometimes. We fail to lead our family in devotions. We lose our tempers when we deal with our children. Wives sometimes disrespect their husbands. They are contentious. We sin in church. We don't listen to the preaching of God's Word. We don't sing and pray from our hearts. We don't love our brethren as we ought. We don't seek to help them and encourage them in the faith. We have many faults.

The apostle speaks of being punished for those faults. "...when ye be buffeted for your faults...." The word "buffeted" means "to strike with the fist." This is the word which is used of the soldiers who struck Christ in the face with their fists at the time of His trials. They buffeted him. When a slave misbehaved, it was common for his master to hit him with his fist or strike him with a stick. No doubt some of those to whom Peter wrote had experienced such treatment at the hands of their masters.

The same is true of us. When we sin against others, especially those who are in authority over us, sometimes we are punished for that sin. We have probably all had our employer scold us at one time or another. Maybe he punished us by giving us a dirty job to do. Wives who are contentious are rebuked by

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their husbands. Husbands are scolded for mistreating their wives and children. They are rebuked for losing their tempers. Even in the church there is some buffeting. The minister rebukes a person for his sins. The elders discipline a person who is wayward. Perhaps it is one brother dealing with another who walks in the ways of sin. All of us have been buffeted for our faults.

When we are buffeted for our faults, how are we to take that? Because we are sinners, sometimes our reaction is improper. We get angry, rebel, and strike back. A lazy employee will tell off his boss and then quit, or he will deliberately mess things up in his anger. A contentious wife will deny her faults and blame her husband. A husband who has mistreated his wife or children will tell the one who exhorts him that it is none of his business. He can take care of his own house. Church members, instead of heeding the admonition of the minister, elders, or fellow believers, become angry with the one who is trying to help.

That is sin. We add sin to our sin. First we sin in doing something which requires rebuking. Then we refuse to hear the rebuke. In doing so, we go against our Lord. For the implication of Matthew 18, where Christ tells us to go to an erring brother, is that he is to listen to the admonition. And that is what Peter says, "...when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?"

The words "take it patiently" mean literally "to remain under." The idea is not only that of bearing up under the buffeting, but that of continuing in it. We are to take the buffeting. We may be struck over and over again, but we bear it without getting angry, striking back, or complaining.

We ought to note, however, that by reacting in that way we do not make ourselves worthy of any praise. The apostle Peter says, "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buf-

feted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?" If we sin and because of that are buffeted, and if we take that buffeting patiently, we are not worthy of praise. That is not something which will cause us to receive the praise and glory of men. There is nothing extraordinary about that. It is what is expected of a person. We have done wrong. Therefore we deserve to be buffeted. We may not think that just because we take rebuke patiently, we are exceptional Christians. We are not.

Since patiently taking the buffeting is nothing special, think how far we are from being good Christians when we don't take it patiently. That is a very great sin.

Now let us look at the positive statement of the apostle Peter. We read, "but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God."

Here the apostle speaks of doing well. The word used here means "to do good, do something which profits others or is a help to others." The apostle has already made it clear that we believers have a calling to do good deeds. Back in verse 15 he said, "For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Jesus tells us in Luke 6:35, "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." In III John 11 we read, "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God." Even though we are sinners, we have the calling to do good. Good works ought to be a big part of our life—not because we seek to earn salvation, but because we are grateful for the salvation given to us.

These good works ought to be seen at our place of work. Maybe no one wants to do a certain job, so we volunteer to do it. Perhaps the workers are picking on a per-

son, so we stand up for that person. Maybe we are asked to work on Sunday, but we stand fast in our conviction that it is a sin to work on the Sabbath. We may even have to take a cut in pay or have bad hours because we insist upon this Christian principle.

Good works ought to be seen in our home. A father ought to insist that his family have family devotions and personal devotions. Both parents ought to insist that their children do their catechism. The TV must be strictly controlled so that nothing ungodly is watched. And the same thing is true of the radio. A husband ought to be kind to his wife and she ought to be submissive and obedient to her husband.

These good works ought to be seen in the church. We ought to love the Word of God, love to hear it preached, and love to study it at Bible study and catechism. We ought to be helpful and kind to our fellow believers.

These good works ought to be manifested in our community. If our neighbor needs help, we give him a hand. We talk to him about the gospel. We try to show him the way of salvation and tell him about Christ. There is no end to the good works that we can do.

But when we do that, we are not always received well. One would think that everyone would appreciate the good works of another, but it is not so. Our good works often bring suffering upon us. The apostle says, "but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it..."

We must never forget that the world hates us believers. It hates us because we are light and the world is darkness. We are of God and the world is of the devil. Jesus says in Luke 21:17, "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." It is our good works which show forth the fact that we are light and of God. Therefore it is our good works which the world hates.

Because of that hatred, the world persecutes us. Jesus teaches

us in Matthew 5:10-12 that we will be persecuted. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." They persecute us by ridiculing us and making fun of us. Sometimes we are even persecuted physically or economically.

It is not just the world which persecutes us. We believers have the world inside of us. Our sinful nature is in perfect harmony with the world. Therefore, when we operate out of that sinful nature, we too hate and attack fellow believers for their good works. Sometimes the attack of a fellow believer can hurt much more than the attack of an unconverted person.

We are persecuted at work. Fellow employees make fun of us because we will not join them in listening to and telling dirty jokes, or because we do not swear and use four-letter words. They ridicule us because we stand up for someone who is being picked on. They play dirty tricks on us because we will not join them in neglecting the work. Sometimes we are forced to quit our jobs because we will not work on the Lord's Day or we will not agree to be a part of some ungodly practice.

We are persecuted in our community. When we do not allow our children to play outside with the neighborhood children because of the Sabbath day, neighbors scoff at us. If we tell our neighbors about Christ or humbly point out certain sins, they get angry with us and accuse us of interfering with their life.

Sometimes we are persecuted in our own homes. A godly wife or husband is ridiculed by the children for not letting them listen to ungodly music or watch something

sinful on TV. A husband might be mocked by his wife for believing that old-fashioned stuff about submission. A wife might be mocked by her husband for insisting upon wearing modest dress instead of short skirts or tight pants. Some members of the family might put up a terrible fuss because father insists that they spend a good deal of time reading and talking about the Bible.

We can even be persecuted in the church for our well-doing. If we stand up for the truth and for righteousness, most likely we will be criticized by someone. Even in the church, people tend to become more liberal and to slip toward the world, so that if someone stands up for the old paths he is put down.

Anyone who does good works knows that those good deeds bring suffering in every sphere of life.

The apostle teaches us that we are to endure such suffering: "...but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently...."

This is the same word which was used earlier in the verse. We are to continue to bear up under this kind of suffering too. We are to endure patiently persecution for the cause of Christ. The apostle Paul says in Romans 12:12, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation...." This is the true love of God. For we read in I Corinthians 13:7 that love "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

We are to endure persecution, even when we do not deserve it. Even when we are persecuted for our good, we are to take it patiently. That is extremely difficult. By nature we say to ourselves, "I do not deserve this. I have done good and they give me evil in return. That is not right or fair."

It hurts very much when we do good to a person and he turns right around and is evil to us. It hurts when we do our best for our employer and he returns evil, just because we are Christians. It hurts

when we help out a neighbor and he spits in our faces for it. It hurts when a father and mother do good in seeking to lead the family in the ways of God and one or more of the children buffets them for that good. Still, we are to take it patiently. We are not to strike back. We are not to ridicule back. We are not to complain. Silently, quietly, and submissively, we are to take it.

If we patiently take the suffering inflicted upon us for being a good Christian, "this is acceptable with God." We read literally, "this is grace with God." The word grace means pleasant, delightful, or beautiful. It is beautiful when someone patiently takes the suffering inflicted upon him because of the good which he does. Such a person is beautiful.

This passage, however, says more than that. It says, "This is beautiful with God." In the first part of this verse the apostle had said that patiently taking buffeting for wrongdoing was nothing for which to be praised. Now rather than talking about receiving the glory or praise of men, he speaks of being beautiful or acceptable with God. That we patiently take buffeting when we have done good is beautiful to God. It is delightful to God. This is pleasing to God.

That is because this beauty comes from God. We can do good only by God's grace. We can patiently suffer for well-doing only by the grace of God. Thus patiently taking suffering for the sake of well-doing manifests the beauty of God's grace in us. This is acceptable with God, because God receives all the glory and honor. Our beauty is but a reflection of His beauty.

Do you want to show forth the grace and beauty of God? Then pray that God will give you the grace to endure patiently the suffering which comes to you because of the good which you do. □

Preaching in Worship: Voice of God, Voice of Christ (3)

The contemporary movement for "liturgical renewal," that is, the revamping of public worship, which is now deep in the vitals of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, doubts that the preaching of the Word is the voice of God in Jesus Christ. This is its sin. This is its apostasy.

This doubt explains why this movement abandons the public worship of the triune God by His church that was taught and practiced by the Reformation.

On the basis of Holy Scripture, the Reformation confessed that the preaching of the Word is the Word of God. The Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 spoke for the Reformation:

The Preaching of the Word of God Is the Word of God. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful.

This conviction shaped the public worship of the Reformation churches, particularly the Reformed churches.

As the previous editorial demonstrated, the faith of the Reformation concerning the preaching of the gospel was solidly grounded in Scripture. Among other passages, I Thessalonians 2:13, Romans 10:14, John 20:21-23, and Ephesians 4:20, 21 teach that the preaching of the gospel by a man given to the

church by the ascended Christ is the living voice of God in Christ. Doubt concerning the preaching, therefore, as this doubt drives the contemporary movement for liturgical renewal, is another form of man's opposition to, and rejection of, the Word of God.

The preaching of the Word of God is the voice of God, the voice of Christ.

This has implications both for the preacher and for the congregation.

The Preacher Must Take Preaching Seriously

We preachers ourselves must take preaching seriously, that is, take our preaching as the voice of God. There must be careful, laborious preparation of sermons as the main work of our ministry. How even an orthodox preacher who dashes off his sermons, giving them a "lick-and-a-promise" (as though preaching were the easiest task in the world), dares to present himself to his Lord every Sunday and in the final judgment is a mystery to me. Luther's attitude toward the task of preaching was different:

The office of preaching is an arduous task.... I have often said that, if I could come down with a good conscience, I would rather be stretched upon a wheel and carry stones than preach one sermon. For anyone who is in this office will always be plagued; and, therefore, I have often said that

the damned devil and not a good man should be a preacher. But we're stuck with it now.... If I had known, I would not have let myself be drawn into it with twenty-four horses.

In addition, the consciousness of the sermon's being the voice of God will form the sermon, both in the writing of it and in the delivery of it, as *authoritative proclamation*. It is not necessarily that we thunder and roar, although there are times for this, but that we preachers address the congregation, ourselves included, with the *decisive* explanation of things; with the promises that are *sure*; with the summons that is *urgent*; with the rebukes that are *sharp*; with the commands that *brook no refusal*, of God Himself.

We do not "share" insights, no matter how fine. We do not, even earnestly, put forth our learned, theological opinions. Rather, "Thus says the LORD, not only in the Bible, but also this morning or evening, here and now, in what I am saying."

At the conclusion we may offer no apology for our message. The short prayer after the sermon must not leave the impression that the people have had to endure the weak and light words of the preacher, so that he was an imposition on their time and patience. Sometimes preachers do this, and sometimes, alas, there is reason why they do it. Luther said once that Christians may ask forgiveness

for everything, except that the minister may not ask forgiveness for his sermon, because that is Christ's own Word. An excellent prayer after the sermon is the brief request, "Father, Thy Word has been spoken. Apply it in the saving power of the Holy Ghost to our hearts and lives, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

The Congregation Must Take Preaching Seriously

Also the congregation must take preaching seriously. How they do this is described in Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism: "... that the ministry of the gospel and the schools (seminaries—DJE) be maintained" and, then, "that I, especially on the sabbath ... diligently frequent the church of God, to hear His Word."

The congregation are to receive the preaching with the reverence, submission, and obedience due to the voice of God.

There is no place for the odd notion that once the sermon is finished it is object of discussion in the sense that this one is free to agree and that one, to disagree; this one "likes" the sermon and that one "dislikes" the sermon; and anyone at his pleasure may rip the sermon to shreds before his family or other members of the congregation. The children of darkness are wiser in this matter than are the children of light. In noting that the present-day attack on preaching is the fruit of the Enlightenment's liberation of Western man "from the authoritarian shackles of Scripture and the church," Klaas Runia astutely observes that modern man does not want to be told what is true and worthwhile. He wants to join in the discussion. "But the sermon provides no opportunity for discussion" (*The Sermon under Attack*, Paternoster, 1983, p. 5). The ungodly are well aware that the voice of God does not open up itself to critical discussion.

Reformed people must not become sermon-critics, just as unbelieving professors of theology are

accomplished critics of Scripture. We have this tendency, as all too many Sunday afternoon dinners and Monday morning gatherings in the coffee shop prove. There is, in Reformed lore, even the tale of members who graded every sermon: B-; C; sometimes, F; occasionally A-.

Shall we criticize the voice of Christ? Did God get a B- today, or even, if He outdid Himself, an A-?

If we insist on being sermon-critics, can we not expect the judgment that God will close His mouth in our audience, perhaps by withholding the men who must be His mouthpiece? His judgments often run precisely in the way of our sin. In addition to all the other burdens of the office, what young man likes to subject himself to constant, destructive criticism?

I am well aware, and insist on it, that there is another aspect to the calling of the congregation as regards the preaching. Certainly the congregation must judge the preaching. Not only the elders but also every believer has both the ability and the duty to compare the preaching with the Scriptures to determine that the preaching is, in fact, the Word of God, and not merely the word of the preacher. Unqualified men must be kept out of the office of the ministry. Elders must insist that the minister work hard, *at his sermons*, forbidding him to engage in other activities that interfere with his great task. Elders and believers must see to it, not only that the minister does not preach heresy but also that his preaching is the full, rich, solid, penetrating exposition of Scripture that edifies the body of Christ.

Annually, every consistory in the Protestant Reformed Churches must answer before Christ the King of the church, on behalf of the congregation that He bought with His blood, the question by the supervising denomination, "Does the minister faithfully explain God's Word so that the congregation is built up through his preaching?"

The question is not merely whether the minister avoids saying anything that is false. The question is not even whether all that he says is true and "spiritual." But the question is whether the congregation is "built up through his preaching." And this depends upon his faithfully explaining Holy Scripture.

The Reformed regard for preaching as the voice of God does not deify the preacher or place his work above the judgment of the church. This is plain from Acts 17:11, where the Holy Spirit praises the believers in Berea for their activity of comparing the apostle's preaching with Scripture in order to determine that the things preached by him were the truth. Those who judge the preaching in this way are "noble."

But the Holy Spirit does not praise *criticism* of sermons. Rather, in a passage that was dear to the Reformers, He inspired the apostle to thank God that the Thessalonians received the Word of God which they heard from the apostle and his co-workers, not as the word of men but as the Word of God, which, in fact, it was (I Thess. 2:13).

The Power of Preaching

Since the preaching is the voice of God, there may be no doubt about the efficacy of preaching. This is, in part, what moves churches today to replace preaching with "more effective means of (spiritual) communication." They conduct their surveys, listen to their carnal members, observe the culture, and create "contemporary" worship services, stripped of preaching.

We have but one question: can God's voice fail? is the voice of the risen Lord Jesus Christ possibly ineffectual?

Only, as genuine Calvinism has always maintained, the *saving* efficacy of the preaching is particular. The God who speaks is the God of the eternal purpose of double predestination, election and reprobation.

tion. The Christ by whom He speaks is the Christ who loved His church and gave Himself for her. The Holy Spirit who is the efficacy of the preaching is the Spirit who strictly carries out the will of Christ and of the Father who sent Christ.

There is another efficacy of the preaching than that which is gracious and saving. This is the teaching of John 12:40, quoting and applying to the ministry of Jesus the words of Isaiah 6: "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."

The gospel is the power of God to salvation to *believers* (Rom. 1:16).

But to believers it is a quickening, converting, comforting, warning, strengthening, glorifying, saving power.

Ah, the voice of God, the voice of Christ, cutting through all the babble, nonsense, frivolity, deceit, materialism, and wickedness of our earthly life, on the Lord's Day! Ah, the blessed, precious voice of God in Christ speaking truth, speaking heavenly things, speaking words of eternal life, speaking peace. "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country" (Prov. 25:25).

Eternity will reveal how the preaching gathered, preserved, and built up the church.

Eternity will reveal how the preaching changed each of the saints into the image of God in Christ from glory to glory.

In the face of the doubt of our age concerning the power of preaching, the Reformed church still defiantly and confidently makes her confession:

What a glorious work the ministerial office is, since so great things are effected by it; yea, how highly necessary it is for man's salvation, which is also the reason why the Lord will have such an office always to remain ("Form of Ordination of the Ministers of God's Word"). □

(to be concluded)

— DJE

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ "...And Shall Deceive Many."

So Christ declared several times in His final instruction to His disciples before His death on the cross. In Matthew 24:5 He declared, "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." And again in verse 11 He states, "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many."

That time has come. Though throughout the ages these false prophets and false Christs have appeared, never has that Word been fulfilled more than in the present day.

Earlier we have called attention to the apostasy evident in the United Church of Canada. Additional information appears in *Macleans'* magazine, December 15, 1997. I quote parts of that article to indicate the extremes to which apostasy has gone.

In the translucent glow of a stained-glass window, Jesus hov-

ers, larger-than-life, behind the pulpit where Rev. Bill Phipps prepares to address his congregation on the first Sunday of Advent. The dark-stained oak pews are full. And the 300 members of Scarboro United Church in Calgary wait with more than their usual anticipation to hear what their minister has to say. Only a few weeks earlier, Phipps—the newly elected moderator of the United Church of Canada—caused an uproar when he denied that Jesus is God and that he physically rose from the dead. "Some say I am a heretic," the genial pastor tells his flock. "And I've even got the wrong stole on for Advent," he confesses, pointing to his unseasonably green vestment. Purple is the proper color for Advent and for penance. But Phipps is unrepentant. In a 20-minute sermon, titled "I Believe," the moderator, with well-measured passion, explains his controversial beliefs. "The truly remarkable thing," he declares, "is that there are literally thousands of conversations taking place—at the dinner table, in the workplace, wherever people gather—about Jesus."

The article goes on to state:

North Americans have been wearing their spiritually needy hearts on their sleeves for decades. And many, even nominal Christians, are favoring more worldly, less demanding gurus than Jesus. Promises of peace, energy and enlightenment have, for some, more appeal than life everlasting and the forgiveness of sins. Jesus, long associated with strict commandments, may have an image problem—but there are signs of a make-over in the works. "There are accusations of a watering down of dogma," says Thomas Bandy, head of the United Church's evangelization ministry. "But everybody is trying to make Christianity more relevant to contemporary culture."

...In fact, for more than a century, scholars and thinkers have been exploring Jesus' humanity. Christology—the study of the nature and meaning of Jesus—now embraces such issues as feminism, liberation theology, the black freedom movement, the environment and even New Age philosophy. "Every age has to answer the question Jesus posed to Peter in the gospels, 'Who do you say that I am?'" says the Vancouver-based theologian Sallie McFague.... "That means reframing the question in terms of the most pressing

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issues of the day. Is Jesus Christ important for the planet or just for human beings?" For some, Christ's gender has proved to be a barrier. But call it the Christian mystique: in the eyes of many devout feminists, Jesus is a modern, sensitive kind of god, as considerate of women as men.

...Theologians and scholars are amazed by the fierce response to Phipps' sentiments, first aired in an interview with the Ottawa Citizen's editorial board on Oct. 23. Says Bater, a retired United Church minister: "Many previous moderators and many in my profession have said similar things for decades." Michael Steinhouser, professor of New Testament studies at the Toronto School of Theology, agrees. "The virgin birth and the Resurrection are theological beliefs expressed in narrative form," states the Roman Catholic.... No scripture scholar, he says, would say they are accurate accounts of what happened. As Phipps told *Maclean's*: "The body dying and coming back and walking around the earth and then ascending into heaven in a three-storey universe—if I have to put the Resurrection in those terms it loses its power because it's not credible to me."

And what is the reaction to Phipps and his heretical views?

"I might be a little more traditional," says Ken Hodgert, 69. "But I'm very happy with what he's doing for our church. Rev. Phipps has woken people from their comfortable pews."

...But many ministers strongly disagree with the moderator's stance. "I hope Phipps will do what Jimmy Bakker did and write a book entitled *I Was Wrong*," says Rev. Graham Scott, a minister in Wainfleet, Ont., and president of Church Alive, an orthodox United Church theological association. "My only question now is, 'Why, if Jesus is not God, should we pay any attention to him?'" Many who disapprove are reluctant to openly criticize Phipps. "We try to be as inclusive as possible," says Rev. James Crighton, pastor

of Ottawa's Westboro United. "Nobody wants to see a witch-hunt. The Christian thing to do would be to pray for his conversion."

But in late November, the executive of the general council, the governing body of the United Church, voted to support Phipps' right to express his beliefs. "Our strength is our diversity and the freedom that we give people," says Peter Wyatt, general secretary for theology, faith and ecumenism. "But the shadow side of that is that people wonder whether there are any boundaries? In point of fact, we have doctrinal standards. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of the faithful. But we don't use those doctrinal standards to exclude people."

It seems that the devil himself would qualify for membership in these churches—and, in fact, serve also as their very head. If it is true that these churches do not "use those doctrinal standards to exclude people," if even the "conservatives" insist that "we try to be as inclusive as possible," why, then, anyone can be member: atheist, agnostic, mystic, even Hindu and Muslim. And the devil!

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many."

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many."

But none, it seems will listen—and certainly not to One whom these same false prophets declare to be no more than mere man lying still in some grave in Judea.

Apostasy has taken long and shocking steps in the past few years.

■ Now: Interfaith Couples

How rapidly the church scene changes became evident again in a feature article in *Newsweek* magazine of December 15, 1997. The article, titled "A Matter of Faith," had a sub-heading, "The all-American holiday in this age of intermarriage: Mom's in church,

Dad's in temple. What do they teach the kids?"

The article points out that increasingly there are couples of differing religions joined in marriage. This is not just Protestant who marries a Roman Catholic, but "Christians" marrying Jews or Hindus or Muslims. For these there is the weighty question: what must the children of such mixed marriages be taught? The answer of many is: teach them both religions—that of father and of mother. The idea is expressed this way:

"There are many paths to God," Ricci's Catholic mother complacently observed last month after participating in her granddaughter Jocelyn's bat mitzvah. But for most of the last 2,000 years, most people lived in villages where those paths almost never intersected, and if they did, the outcome might as easily have been a holy war as a wedding. Their religious traditions did not prepare them for a society in which the handsome boy next door might be any of three different kinds of Catholic, let alone a Shiite.

We have always been a nation of seekers, and now not one bound by the religious fault lines of the past. The proportion of Jews who married Gentiles, around one in 10 for the first half of the century, according to the American Jewish Committee, doubled by 1960, doubled again by the early 1970s, and in this decade has leveled off at just over 50 percent. To put it another way, by some estimates one out of three American Jews lives in an interfaith household and faces some version of Ricci's dilemma.... The comparable figure for Catholics, according to a 1990 survey cited by psychologist Joel Crohn, an authority on mixed marriages, is 21 percent; for Mormons, 30 percent, and for Muslims, 40 percent....

And as these families raise their children, they are creating, in effect, a new form of religious identification in America, analogous to the "mixed race" category that some people want to add to census forms....

By the time they're in college, a Hindu-Catholic child will hardly be a novelty in this country. Perhaps one of them might even marry Rabia Asghar, the 3-year-old daughter of Cynthia and Tariq Asghar of Chicago, who is being raised in both her mother's Methodism and the Islam of her Pakistani-born father. Or Karennia Meredith, 2, who is learning about God from the perspective of her Mormon mother, Christine, and her Catholic father, Tony, with a

little "free-form" prayer adopted from both faiths thrown in each morning....

You sense what kind of generation is arising. On the one hand, the public schools are not supposed to teach religion at all. On the other hand, the homes (where religious instruction is presumably given) are teaching a hodge-podge of different religions. The present generation claims that there are

many ways to God. The next generation will possess the "best" of all religions—which must assuredly ultimately be the religion of the antichrist. The moral law of God is tossed aside. The religions of the heathen are incorporated into "Christianity." There is no more room for Christ and His atonement. And soon, there will be no room for the church, the body of Christ. □

In His Fear

Rev. Arie denHartog

The Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31

We recently concluded a lengthy study of the book of Proverbs in our Young Adults' Society with two sessions discussing the portrait of the virtuous woman found in Proverbs 31. We were impressed again with the great wisdom of the teaching of the Word of God in this passage. The godly women of our churches, both young and old, can do well by studying this Word of God. Especially valuable is such a study to combat the sometimes insidious influence of the ungodly feminist philosophy of our day even in the church. There could hardly be a philosophy more contrary to the beautiful portrait of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 than that of modern-day feminism. God-fearing women ought to realize this, not only that they might combat this worldly teaching but also in order that they might know what is true beauty and virtue before God.

We believe the correct interpretation of Proverbs 31 is that the reference is literally to a God-fearing woman, an example to all in the kingdom of God. Some commentators interpret this passage allegorically. Some make her an allegory of "wisdom." Others make her to be an allegory of the church. We follow the rule of Bible interpretation that the Scriptures must be taken literally unless the Scriptures themselves indicate otherwise. We see no such indication in this passage. Furthermore, the great detail that is given in describing the virtuous woman fits best with a literal interpretation of her as the ideal woman.

Space constraints do not give opportunity for a complete discussion of all the details given in this chapter. In our Young Adults Society we found more than enough material in this chapter to spend two meetings discussing this section of Proverbs. In this article we can only point out some of the broad outlines of the chapter and at the same time contrast them with the philosophy of the world.

Let us take note first of all that the inspired author of Proverbs

speaks of "finding" a virtuous woman. The reference is to the searching of the young man for a suitable marriage partner for life. Few endeavors will have greater impact on his future life than this one. The virtuous woman is extremely rare. That is the point of the question, "Who can find a virtuous woman?" Few are to be found. The vast majority of women in the world are the opposite of the virtuous woman. They are wicked, proud, vain, self-seeking, rebellious against their husbands, worldly in their concerns, terribly poor mothers, and ill qualified to raise a family in the fear of the Lord. Young men searching for a good life partner ought to read Proverbs 31. They must search diligently and with great care to look for a truly virtuous woman. They must search in the right place for a wife, namely, among the God-fearing and in the church of God. Surely they will never find in the world one that has the virtues mentioned in Proverbs 31. They must realize that "favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain" when they search for a mate.

Most young men of our day

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do not look for the virtue described here in the Word of God. They are concerned only for outward, physical beauty and worldly popularity and glamour. This is tragic because they will soon find out how little these things matter for a godly and blessed marriage. God has given us in His Word a guide concerning whom we should marry. We are wise when we pay attention to it in the choice of the person with whom we will spend the rest of our life. The price of the virtuous woman is far above rubies. To find such a woman is to find a great treasure that will be a great blessing for one in marriage and also for the cause of the church and kingdom of God.

Two things stand out immediately when one reads this chapter regarding the virtuous woman. First, she lives for her husband. Secondly, one of her greatest virtues is self-denial in order that she might care for her family.

Both of these things are considered outrageous by most feminists of our day. What could possibly be more male chauvinist than to say that the virtue and worth of a woman in marriage should be judged according to her faithfulness to her husband? Does she not have the right to independent glory and honor for what she is in herself? And what could possibly be more demeaning to woman than to confine her to a life of drudgery and humility in having to care for children in the home? Is this not a task that the least educated, with very few gifts, can perform? Cannot child care be done by those who are not intelligent enough to get any other occupation, or by part-timers who have not yet advanced themselves in their careers? An educated and gifted woman surely ought not to have to waste her outstanding gifts in the demeaning role of taking care of a husband's needs and those of children? Perhaps in days gone by when educational opportunities were limited for women nothing

better could be expected of them. In our modern-day society the woman has gifts that qualify her for far more than being confined to the home. She is highly educated, and it is a tragic waste for her to stay home.

That is the way the world thinks. Who would deny it? Often with great anger, contempt, and proud self-assertiveness the teaching of God's Word is rejected.

Consider carefully how the virtuous woman is described by God in His Word. "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that she shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all her life." It is obvious that this woman devotes herself to her husband. Her husband can trust in her. How vital is trust in godly marriage! The virtue of this woman is doing her husband good and not evil all the days of her life. She is highly praised for this.

Furthermore, the role of this woman is not one forced upon her by some evil man or repressive philosophy of the time. We are told in verse 13 that "she worketh *willingly* with her hands." The virtuous woman loves her role, she finds her glory and honor in it. Her husband loves her and she loves her husband. What peace of mind there is for the God-fearing husband who can go to work every day in the confidence that things are well at home because the home is under the care and wise management of his godly wife.

Peruse Proverbs 31 and consider how complete is the devotion of the virtuous woman to her home and family. "She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens" (v. 15). "She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet" (v. 21). "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness" (v. 27).

What are some of the great virtues displayed by all of this? Self-

denial is one of the greatest. This is the opposite of the pride and self-seeking that is so shamelessly promoted and even boasted of by worldly feminism. There is hardly an occupation in life that requires more self-denial than the occupation of mother in the home. But as much as this virtue is despised by the world, much more is this virtue exalted by the Word of God. Self-denial is a wonderful and glorious spiritual virtue. No painted face of any movie star or shapely body of a worldly sex symbol can compare with the virtue and beauty of self-denial. According to the words of our Lord Jesus, self-denial is absolutely necessary for the Christian life. We cannot follow Him except we deny ourselves. God is pleased with it. The self-denying mother is precious in God's sight. Her self-denial will have a tremendous impact on her home and family. There is no more powerful example than this virtue for the nurture of God-fearing children. God-fearing children will praise and bless the mother who is self-denying.

Obvious from the description of the virtuous woman in this passage is that she works very hard. It is almost unbelievable how hard she works. She rises up early and stays up late. She goes to great lengths to provide for her family. This is a virtue in God's sight. There is moral and spiritual virtue in this hard work because it involves devotion to her husband and family and is not for self promotion, not for glory among men, but for the good of husband and family. Notice the great length to which this woman goes in order to provide for her family. "She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchant ships: bringing her food from afar" (vv. 13 and 14).

The virtuous woman is very gifted and intelligent. She is artistic. She is able to make beautiful things. She is able to do many

things. She has developed the talents God has given her in a very great measure. She does not sit around moping that she has been relegated to a sphere in which she is unable to "realize her potential." She uses her gifts and talents to the fullest extent in a fulfilling role which is at the same time for the good of her husband and in devotion to her children. This is noble in God's sight. There is no worldly career woman that can light a candle to this virtuous woman as far as virtue and significance is concerned. This must be seen of course especially in the light of the great value and significance of raising a covenant family and children that know and fear the Lord. What career in the world can possibly compare with this in God's sight? What has greater significance for the future welfare of the church of God and the cause of the kingdom of Christ?

When all the glory of the kingdoms of this world and all the works performed in them are destroyed, the works of the virtuous woman shall stand forever in the glorious kingdom of Christ. They will be shown to have been performed by the grace of Christ Jesus in the heart of this woman and they will redound unto His praise.

Pay attention to the profuse manner in which the virtuous woman is praised and exalted in Proverbs 31. "She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms" (v. 17). "Strength and honor are her clothing" (v. 25). "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all" (v. 29). The world would call the mother in the home weak and pathetic. The strong, according to the world are those who liberate themselves from the home. To be something, woman must by all means get out of the house. No woman will ever make anything of herself in the demeaning role of motherhood.

Godly women of the church, pay attention to how absolutely op-

posite the Word of God is to the vain philosophy of the world! Strength and honor belong to the virtuous woman. Her honor is ultimately the place which the Lord has and will give her in His kingdom. Her strength is from the Lord. It is real spiritual strength whereby she does great things.

Notice another great virtue of this woman. "She stretcheth out her hand to the poor, yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy." In the busyness of her life in the home and with the family it is almost beyond belief that this woman still has time to care for the poor and the needy. Yet she does. Again this shows how utterly selfless this woman is. As much as she loves and devotes herself to her family she realizes that this must not so totally preoccupy her that she has no care for those who are outside of her family. The virtuous woman excels in her care for the poor. God has commanded us to care for the poor. Godly women are especially gifted in their womanly nature to have tender compassion and care for the poor.

Most career women of the world are far too busy with selfish pursuits to have time and energy for these things. Their very character of self-centeredness precludes this. Self exaltation and self glory is considered to be the great virtue of the world in which we live, but in God's sight these are despicable and abominable vices. Compassion, sincere, genuine, selfless compassion for the poor and needy are great virtues before God. It amazes me how often the homes where there are several children and the homes that are so very busy are also the greatest centers of hospitality and love for outsiders.

The husband of this woman was a prominent man in society. He was known in the gate of the city. In Old Testament times the gate of the city was the place of commerce and business and the place where the courts of law were found. Perhaps the husband of the

virtuous woman was a lawyer or a politician. This is not to say that the commoner must not also have a virtuous woman as his wife. But this part of the illustration of Proverbs 31 silences all who might imagine that for the poor and uneducated it may suffice to have a wife like the woman in Proverbs 31, but that the prominent men in the world of our day must have wives who are equally prominent. Their wives must have their own careers, equal in worldly glory with their husbands. We said at the beginning that the worth and significance of the virtuous woman is described in terms of her faithfulness to her husband. But it is also true that the husband is "known in the gate of the city" because of the virtue and devotion of his wife. There is indeed truth in the common proverb "behind every great man there is a woman."

The children of this virtuous woman rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also praises her. Not all children and husbands of virtuous woman do this. This is not to the credit of these ungrateful and derelict children and husbands. Sad to say, even in the sphere of the church there are wicked and ungrateful husbands and children. This is a shameful thing. Yet in the covenant home we see this on every hand. Husbands and children who have wives and mothers who show the virtues described in Proverbs 31 ought to praise and bless them profusely. The blessing of her children and the praise of her husband are a great reward for the virtuous woman. Because she has understanding and wisdom she rejoices greatly in these things. Husbands and children have a great calling and obligation regularly to bless and praise their virtuous wife and mother. There are few things in life that God gives which are a greater blessing than a virtuous wife and mother. The spiritual and psychological well-being of children are the fruits of the labors of the virtuous mother in the home.

The principle from which the virtuous woman lives her life is the fear of God. That is the reason why, as we said at the beginning, there are no women with these praiseworthy virtues in the ungodly world in which we live. Those who do not fear God cannot be truly virtuous. They never will be. As much as the virtuous woman is motivated in all her life and business by her faithfulness to

her husband and devotedness to her children, there is a higher principle out of which she does all things. This principle is the fear of the Lord. God Himself works His fear and love in the heart of the virtuous woman. She is therefore His glorious workmanship created in Christ Jesus. This is the greatest reason for her virtue and praiseworthiness. And therefore also, more important even than the

blessing and praise of husband and children, she is blessed of the Lord and she will receive a great reward from Him.

Let us look around us in our churches and in our covenant homes. The Lord has given us such virtuous women. How worthy they are of praise, and what reason for thanking God we have that He has given such great women to His church. □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ron Cammenga

Funeral Services

"Funeral sermons or funeral services shall not be introduced."
Church Order, Article 65

Conducting funerals—one of the more difficult aspects of the ministry.

The deceased may be an aged saint who has lived a full life. Or a young father or mother taken suddenly from the family. Or a teenager or child who dies before ever coming to maturity.

Usually the deceased is a member of the church. At times this is not the case. Often the family has the comfort of everlasting life and glory because the deceased has died in the Lord. At other times they cannot have this comfort because the dead one had lived wickedly and worldly.

No matter what the circumstances, funerals are never easy. But conducting funerals is a necessary part of the ministry. And funerals provide a unique ministry

opportunity, both for comfort and warning.

Funeral Services Forbidden

It might strike us strange that Article 65 of our Church Order forbids funeral sermons and services. Are there, then, to be no funerals for God's people? Is our practice today of having funerals, even funeral services in our church buildings, in conflict with Article 65?

The answer is: No. What is forbidden by Article 65 is making funerals official worship services of the church. A "service" with a "sermon" in that sense is forbidden.

The history of this article in our Church Order goes back to the earliest Dutch Reformed synods. Already the synod of Dordrecht, 1574, expressed its disapproval of official funeral services.

In the interest of the greater edification of the church, it is decided that funeral sermons shall be discontinued or, where there is no

such practice, they shall not be introduced so as to avoid the danger of superstition that arises from this practice. We think that the tolling of bells at funerals should certainly be discontinued.

The synod of Dordrecht, 1578, reiterated this decision, adding "...and that in the same the praise of the deceased not be proclaimed." Reflecting the concerns of past synods, the original Article 65 of the *Church Order of Dordrecht*, 1618-1619, stated:

Where funeral sermons are not held, they shall not be introduced; and where they already have been accepted, diligence shall be exercised to do away with them by the most appropriate means.

Opposition to Rome's Practices

The decisions of the early synods are the reaction of the Reformed to the superstitions practiced in the Roman Catholic Church.

Back in the days of the Refor-

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mation, and still today, Roman Catholic funerals are official worship services. There is a prescribed liturgy. The body of the deceased is anointed with "holy water." Prayers are offered for the dead and for those in purgatory. Eulogies are spoken in praise of the departed. Bells are tolled to announce the departure of the dead and to drive away evil spirits. And the Mass is conducted.

The Reformers rejected these abuses and were determined to rid the churches of Romish superstitions. For this reason there was to be no official worship service.

That remains the position of the Protestant Reformed Churches today. The consistory does not supervise the funeral service. The congregation is not summoned for worship, as is the case on the Lord's Day, or the special days that will be mentioned in Articles 66 and 67. There is no prescribed liturgy. No "Form for Conducting Funerals," as there are forms for the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The main reason behind the forbidding of official funeral services is that funerals are not ecclesiastical but family affairs. Not the church but the family has the responsibility to bury their dead. They must arrange the funeral. They have charge of the service. They must see to it that the principles of God's Word are carried out in the laying to final rest of the deceased family member.

It would be well that this reason for the forbidding of official funeral services were included in Article 65. In 1940 the Christian Reformed Church revised the article to read:

Funerals are not ecclesiastical, but family affairs, and should be conducted accordingly.

Other Reformed denominations have followed the lead of the CRC in this revision, including the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Church of North America.

Reformed Funerals

Our funerals should give clear testimony to the hope and comfort that we have as Reformed Christians. This is the concern of Article 65.

Does this mean that tears are not to be shed, as if the Reformed Christian is unaffected by death? Not at all! Our Savior wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). We grieve too when God takes a loved one from us in death. But our funerals must show that our sorrow is not at all the sorrow of the world which has no hope (I Thess. 4:13).

Even in the Old Testament the Lord was concerned that in their funeral practices the children of Israel distinguish themselves from the heathen surrounding them. "Ye are the children of the Lord your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (Deut. 14:1, 2). Also today our funeral practices must show that we are a peculiar people, holy unto the Lord.

Our funerals ought to be simple affairs. The focus ought to be the Word of God. Let the minister briefly expound a passage of Scripture, directing his remarks to the living, not to the dead. This is not to say that the deceased is never to be mentioned in the minister's remarks. But it is to say that the Word is to be brought to the living.

Ministers must refrain from eulogizing. In our liberal-minded day, in keeping with the prevailing notion that God loves and wants to save all men, the worst wretches are preached into heaven at their funerals. But this wickedness has its beginning when the focus is placed on the deceased—his life and good works.

This is a real danger for Reformed ministers, especially when

the departed saint lived an exemplary life and served the church honorably. But family and friends must be directed to God, not to man; to the work of God in Christ Jesus, not to the accomplishments of a human being. In this is our comfort and hope!

Ministers ought to take the opportunity of a funeral to issue the warning of God's Word to the living. The living ought to be reminded that the end of every man is death, and after death the judgment.

This warning is all the more in place because at the funeral the minister often addresses a mixed audience. Often family, friends, and business acquaintances who have left the church or are living wickedly are present to "pay their last respects." Perhaps there is present a son who had openly rebelled against his parent now deceased; or a grandchild who had had no use personally for grandpa or grandma's piety. Or the business associate who has not attended a Sunday church service for years. The seriousness of death and the certainty of judgment must be brought home to them, that so they may be brought to repentance or left without excuse.

Burial vs. Cremation

From time to time the question is raised about the legitimacy of cremation rather than burial. Is this an option for the Christian? Is this to be regarded merely as a matter of personal preference? After all, have not many of the saints been burned to death by their persecutors? And in the miracle of the final resurrection is not Christ going to raise all the dead, no matter how they died or how their bodies were disposed of?

All arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, the Scriptures very definitely favor burial over against cremation. This is not to say that it is absolutely forbidden for the child of God to be cremated. It is my understanding that there

are countries in the world today where no choice is given, but, for various reasons, usually shortage of land for cemeteries, the dead are routinely cremated. And there may be other reasons, especially health reasons, that dictate cremation. Nevertheless, when the Christian has the choice of being buried or cremated, he ought to have his body buried.

Here are a number of reasons.

1. Our bodies are temples of

the Holy Spirit and therefore, even in death, ought to be treated with the utmost respect.

2. The examples of the saints in Scripture indicate that burial was the norm. Although he owned no other portion of the land of Canaan, Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah for a burying place. Lazarus was buried. Our Lord Jesus Christ was buried.

3. It can be demonstrated that cremation has its origins in paganism.

4. The Scriptures indicate that not being buried, but instead having one's body burned, was a special judgment of God. Cf. Leviticus 20:14; 21:9; II Kings 23:20; Amos 2:1.

5. The Scriptures commend burial by comparing the burial of the believer to the planting of a seed, a planting which gives testimony to the Christian hope of the final resurrection. Cf. I Corinthians 15:35ff. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

Love and the Footwashing (John 13:1-17)

Such evil welling. From hell, of course. The end of Jesus must be by forces gushing from there.

Almost we do not see it. It is the last Thursday of Jesus' life on earth. He is now busy, privately, ministering to His disciples. He will institute the Lord's Supper in place of the Passover. He will instruct His disciples in many things about the kingdom. He will offer a beautiful high priestly prayer. He and the disciples will go to the garden and there Jesus will pray more....

Such good and godly things! All is well!

But hell.... Look at hell's evil welling: "And the supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot,

Simon's son, to betray him..." (John 13:2).

Judas will go out. He will call the wolves. And the devil in him will be calling the devils. Wolves of hell. Hellions from hell. Gates of hell. To devour the Son of Man. To undisciple and scatter disciples.

But look! Now is love. "When Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1).

Hell is hell, I tell you. And evil is welling. But *who is king?* Is He not Love? Is He not Love *now?*

Yes! Love! Love rules hell. Love thwarts hell. Love instructs. Love comforts. Love prays. Love will save. Love is loving!

Jesus' love! Father-love! If such love is *now*, what shall we fear? Will not Love-now always be Love?

Behold now: Love washing feet. Sin-cleansing, soul-cleansing love. Love welling ... in you? Footwasher too?

For Study, Meditation, & Discussion

1. Circumstances, Customs, and a Clarification.

John 13 is the only record of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples on that last Thursday. What do the parallel accounts in Mat-

thew 26:17-29, Mark 14:12-25, and Luke 22:8ff. tell us of the circumstances leading up to and following the feet washing? Glean from a Bible dictionary or other source to answer questions such as the following: What were some of the

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customs associated with the eating of the Passover? What do we know of the custom of the washing of feet in Palestine?

Evidently, when Jesus and the disciples had come to celebrate the Passover meal together, the room was all ready for feet to be washed: there was a pitcher of water, a basin or bowl to pour the water and wash the feet, plus a towel to dry off the feet after they had been washed by hand. All was ready, except, that is, for one thing: there was no one to wash the feet! There were no servants. And none of the disciples had volunteered.

As to the time when Jesus Himself rose up to wash the disciples' feet a clarification is in order. John 13:2-4a (KJV) speaks of it being the *end* of the supper when Jesus rose to wash the feet. But this is clearly not the proper translation. Three things prove this: 1) The Greek reads simply: "the supper having come to pass," that is: it being supper time; 2) Verse 26 shows that the supper was still in process *after* Jesus washed the disciples' feet. 3) Footwashing would normally take place before a meal. Therefore, we ought understand Jesus to have washed His disciples' feet immediately before or sometime during the supper.

2. The Spiritual Reality of Christ's Washing (vv. 4-11).

What does Jesus say in His conversation with Peter to indicate that there is a spiritual reality signified by the washing of the feet (vv. 8, 10)?

Cite texts in Scripture which refer to salvation as a washing (e.g., Psalm 51:7; Titus 3:5). What is washed (away) in salvation? How are we washed?

The cleansing work of Jesus is twofold. There is His work of *justification*, or the blotting out of our guilt, and the imputing to us of His own righteousness. There is also His sanctifying work *in* us by His Spirit, cleansing us from the corruption of sin. How might Jesus

be referring to this twofold work of cleansing in verse 10 when He says: "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit"? (Hint: Jesus says here that we are clean "every whit," that is, totally. But still our feet must be washed. Might the first clause refer to our legal *status* as those justified in the sight of God, and the latter clause refer to the necessity of daily cleansing and sanctification? Cite other texts to support or refute this claim.)

How is the truth of the necessity of Christ cleansing us brought out in the protest of Simon Peter (vv. 6-9)? How does Peter in his protesting represent all men as they are apart from grace?

Jesus at this time washes all the disciples' feet, including those of Judas. Judas, however, was never cleansed, spiritually, by Jesus. This is brought out in verses 10, 11, and 18. How does this compare to the baptism of all the children of believers in the church?

3. The Example for Us (vv. 12-17).

After Jesus sits down again He tells the disciples that what He has just done in washing their feet is an example for them, that they should follow Him and wash one another's feet. He argues (vv. 13, 14) that since He whom the disciples call (literally) the Master and the Lord has condescended to wash feet, they ought also to wash the feet of each other. And further, lest the disciples think this beneath their dignity as apostles (v.16), they must remember that Jesus is far greater than they, and that if He did not think it beneath His dignity to wash feet, neither should they.

What about this calling of disciples of Jesus to wash feet? Some have thought, and still do, that we are all *literally* to wash each other's feet. Is this true? Just how are we to wash each other's feet? Is Jesus saying by this simply that we should serve each other? Or is

there something more, something in our serving, which corresponds to "washing" each other spiritually? In other words: Is Jesus saying of us that we are and ought to be His "cleansing agents," used of Him, somehow, in the washing of the people of God? If so, how can we help each other get rid of the dirt? How is our washing one another different from Jesus' washing of us?

Fundamental to this foot-washing is a humble, serving spirit. How do the disciples show at this time that this was exactly contrary to their nature (Luke 22:24)? Jesus is our example also in the right attitude we should have. He was humbled low. The Son of God, the Lord and the Master of the universe, the heir of all things, and all things now given into His hand (v. 3), continues to serve.... How do we develop and show this serving (vs. self-serving!) spirit in our hearts and lives?

4. Love unto the End (v. 1b).

This washing of dirty feet is a lesson in Christ's loving us unto the end (v. 1). Jesus' love is the reason why He cleanses us with His blood and by His Spirit, and why at this time He teaches of this spiritual cleansing by washing the disciples' feet. His love, flowing freely to us, and unconditionally to us, will never end. He does not love His disciples only to the end of His life on earth, and then stop loving them. No, He loves them unto the end of this age, and then beyond, in the eternity of the new heavens and earth.

In your circumstances of life, right now, do you know that Jesus' love has not stopped? What of your future: can you say that Jesus will love you to the end?

5. Perspective.

Jesus, the foot-washer, is the Christ, the Son of God. List several characteristics of this Christ, and His love, which the foot-washing brings out. How espe-

cially does this passage reveal Jesus as the humble Servant of Jehovah? List other instances in Scripture of Jesus serving Jehovah and His people.

Do you believe this Christ, this Savior? Do I?

Believing is knowing, with heart, mind, and soul, this wonderful, feet-washing, soul-cleansing Jesus. Believing is *following*, with humble, thankful heart, the example Jesus has set for us, and washing others' feet. Judas Iscariot knew all *about* this Jesus. But he

did not truly know Jesus Himself, or follow Him. And what of us: how do we show true faith?

In this knowing of faith, and in this serving, is, Jesus says, happiness (v. 17). Judas, in his unbelief and diabolical treachery, was a very unhappy man. Later he would go out and hang himself. But for disciples, in the way of faith and following Jesus, there is happiness.

Are you happy? Even happy in the midst of sorrow? If you are not, the only explanation is that

you are not trusting this Jesus, or not serving Him. For "unhappy circumstances," trials, afflictions, losses of whatever sort cannot undo the happiness of salvation.

Just think: there is Jesus. Evil welling. Such evil welling. It will be a cross and death and hell for Jesus. And yet He is trusting His heavenly Father. He is serving. Love unto the end. Happy. Though it be a cross. Though it be *such* a cross. Happy ... for our happiness!

Evil welling? All is well! □

Ministering to the Saints

Prof. Robert Decker

The Extreme Remedy

Having discussed previously the various steps or admonitions to be followed by the elders in the application of Christian discipline upon an impenitent sinner as these are outlined in Articles 76 and 77 of *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, we turn now to a discussion of the last step of Christian discipline. This last step is excommunication.

This last step is required according to Article 76 which reads,

Such as obstinately reject the admonition of the consistory, and likewise those who have committed a public or otherwise gross sin, shall be suspended from the Lord's Supper. And if he, having been suspended, after repeated admonitions, shows no signs of repentance, the consistory shall at

last proceed to the extreme remedy, namely excommunication, agreeably to the form adopted for that purpose according to the Word of God. But no one shall be excommunicated except with the advice of the Classis.

Excommunication is mentioned as well in Article 77 when it describes the third admonition to be applied by the elders to the unrepentant in which, "... the congregation shall be informed that (unless he repent) he will be excluded from the fellowship of the church, so that his excommunication, in case he remains obstinate, may take place with the tacit approbation of the church."

Note well that the excommunication of an unrepentant sinner must take place, "... agreeably to the form adopted for that purpose according to the Word of God." This means that the Form of Excommunication has the status of a minor confession in our churches. Minor, not in the sense that it carries less authority than the major confessions, the Three Forms of

Unity, but minor in the sense that it speaks only of one aspect of the truth of Scripture, namely, excommunication. The Form of Excommunication bears the same authority as do our Reformed confessions. It may not be changed except by way of a weighty objection (*gravamen*) being brought against it to the synod. Such an objection would have to demonstrate from Scripture that the form is in error.

In the light of the fact that very little discipline is being applied by the church in our day, and in light of the fact that excommunication is almost unheard of in the church in our day, it is significant that both the Church Order and the Form of Excommunication speak of excommunication as a remedy. Article 76 of the Church Order calls it the "extreme remedy" and the form calls it the "last remedy." This means that our Reformed fathers regarded excommunication as a means to save the impenitent sinner. The church, after repeated and patient admonitions, proceeded to the "extreme, last remedy" with the

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fervent hope and prayer that God would use that means to save the impenitent sinner. Our churches must never lose sight of this important point. To neglect discipline and even excommunication is to be disobedient to the commandment of the Word of God and, further, it is to deprive the impenitent sinner of the means by which he might be saved! One of the three important purposes of Christian discipline and excommunication is the salvation of the sinner.

The second purpose of excommunication is to preserve the purity of the church. The form puts it this way, "... that we may not by this rotten and as yet incurable member, put the whole body of the Church in danger...."* When one walks in sin and refuses to confess that sin and leave it, he must, after being admonished patiently and in the love of Christ, be put out of the church. If the church fails to excommunicate impenitent members, she puts herself in danger. The church will sooner or later, but inevitably, become infected by the impenitent member. The proper exercise of Christian discipline is one important means of keeping the church pure and faithful both in doctrine and in the lives of her members. This is precisely why Christian discipline is one of the three marks by which, "... the true church may certainly be known ..." (Belgic Confession, Article 29).

Closely related to the above is the fact that when the church refuses to discipline the impenitent the name of God is blasphemed. All sins are really blasphemy. Every sin, whether it be a denial of the truth, i.e., false doctrine or an evil practice, is a refusal to honor and praise the name of God. And that's to blaspheme the holy name of God. The Heidelberg Catechism, in at least two places, beautifully sums this biblical truth. In answer to the question, "What is required in the third commandment?" the Catechism, says, "That we, not only by cursing or perjury, but also by

rash swearing, must not profane or abuse the name of God ... and, briefly, that we use the holy name of God no otherwise than with fear and reverence, so that he may be rightly confessed and worshiped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works" (L.D. 36). The Catechism, teaches that when we ask that God's name be hallowed we are asking, "grant us, first, rightly to know thee, and to sanctify, glorify and praise thee, in all thy works, in which thy power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy and truth, are clearly displayed; and further also, that we may so order and direct our whole lives, our thoughts, words and actions, that thy name may never be blasphemed, but rather honored and praised on our account" (L.D. 47).

Both the Church Order in articles 71 - 80 and the Form of Excommunication make clear that there is only one ground for excommunication, *viz.*, impenitence. One is excommunicated because he stubbornly refuses to repent and thus fails to "come to any remorse for his sins" and to "show the least token of true repentance." Because the sinner refuses to repent of his "heinous offence" he "daily aggravates his sin." So it is that after having admonished the sinner patiently and in the love of Christ and with the advice of the classis, the elders are compelled to apply the extreme remedy. On the other hand, should the sinner repent of his sin in godly sorrow, the elders and congregation gladly forgive the sinner and restore him or her to the fellowship of the church. The church does this because she is convinced that God has forgiven the sinner.

The utter seriousness of the "extreme remedy" is emphasized by the language used in the form and by the sharp warning given by the form to the congregation. Because of the sinner's refusal to repent the form states,

Therefore we, the ministers and

rulers of the Church of God, being here assembled in the name and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, declare before you all, that for the aforesaid reasons, we have excommunicated, and by these do excommunicate N. from the Church of God, and from fellowship with Christ, and the holy sacraments, and from all the spiritual blessings and benefits, which God promiseth to and bestows upon his Church, so long as he obstinately and impenitently persists in his sins, and is therefore to be accounted by you as a heathen man and a publican, according to the command of Christ (Matt. 18), who saith, that whatsoever his ministers bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven.

After exhorting the congregation to keep no company with the sinner, but to admonish him, the form gives God's people sharp warning,

In the meantime let everyone take warning by this and such like examples; to fear the Lord, and diligently take heed unto himself, if he thinketh he standeth, lest he fall; but having true fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, together with all faithful Christians, remain steadfast to the end, and so obtain eternal salvation ... lest our God humble us again and that we be obliged to bewail some one of you; but that you may with one accord, living in all godliness, be our crown and joy in the Lord.

In the form's powerful prayer God's people,

... bewail our sins before thy high majesty, and acknowledge that we have deserved the grief and sorrow caused unto us by the cutting off of this our late fellow-member; yea, we all deserve, shouldst Thou enter into judgment with us, by

* All subsequent quotations are from the Form of Excommunication found in the Psalter used by the Protestant Reformed Churches unless otherwise indicated.

reason of our great transgressions, to be cut off and banished from their presence. —But O Lord, Thou art merciful unto us for Christ's sake; forgive us our trespasses, for we heartily repent of them, and daily work in our hearts a greater measure of sorrow for them; that

we may, fearing thy judgments which thou executest against the stiff-necked, endeavor to please thee....

Serious indeed is excommunication. Let the elders and ministers take it thus, and whenever nec-

essary apply the extreme remedy in the hope that God will use it to bring the sinner to repentance, and with the prayer that by this means God's church may be kept pure and His holy name not blasphemed but honored and praised. □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

Christ, our Prophet

Christ "is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption."

Such is the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 12.

As we continue our study of the names of the Mediator, and particularly the name *Christ*, we must consider the threefold office Christ occupies as our Mediator—Prophet, Priest, and King.

Christ, the Messiah, was anointed by God a *prophet*.

That is what Peter testified in Acts 3. He pointed his audience all the way back to the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15ff. There Moses said, "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken. And the LORD said unto me,...I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it

shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."

Those words of Moses, those words of the one whom the Jews considered a prophet to whom no one could compare, Peter expounded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit with direct application to Jesus Christ. He applied those words to convince the incredulous Jews that Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the One in whose name the lame man had been healed, is the only and true Messiah, the great Prophet of the church, whose doctrine it is highly dangerous to hold in contempt.

His Prophetic Office

A prophet is one who speaks in the name of and on behalf of God.

There are several aspects to a prophet's calling. The chief factor in the office of a prophet is that the prophet must know God. All else follows from that knowledge of the One whom he serves. (As a parenthetical statement of application, that same holds true for you and me. If we are to serve God in the office of believer as prophet, as all Christians are called to do, then we must know Him with the personal and experiential knowledge of faith.)

From that knowledge comes the calling to confess the name of God and to declare the will of God. That in its essence is the calling of a prophet.

We also were created prophets. That is evident already from the very first chapter of the Bible. Adam was created with the knowledge of God, in fellowship with God, to converse with God and to glorify God by his speech.

But sin messed up the entire relationship in which Adam stood as prophet of God. His knowledge of God became darkness.

The prophet became a liar. That is what we are today, by nature. We are all liars. Not in the sense that we corrupt the truth concerning various relationships between creatures. We don't say, e.g., that two times two equals seven. We know many truths about the elements of the creation, and from those truths develop many inventions and conveniences for society. But spiritually we are liars.

Man knows that God is God, and that he must glorify Him as God. But he denies even that truth in his own mind. We do too. When we walk in sin, we lie to ourselves by saying, God doesn't mind, or God doesn't see, or God will forgive without demanding anything from us. We deny our

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own depravity and darkness.

We see the wrath of God directed against us in all creation. We see the punishment of death He has exacted from sinners. He kills us. That is what we know of God. We don't know God as Savior—not as we stand by nature. And therefore we don't want to talk about God and we cannot speak His praises and glory.

That is how we stand in Adam—fallen prophets.

That is why we must have Christ. You must have Christ.

He came. He came as the Prophet sent from heaven, God's Christ. He knew the will of His heavenly Father. He knew it from eternity. But not only did He know; He spoke. Christ said in Psalm 40, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart."

And what did Christ do as our Prophet? He stood in the place of His people to glorify the Father. While we were yet enemies, lying in our sin and shame and death, Christ stood in our place, for us, for all His elect, as Prophet. He did that as Prophet during all His thirty-three years sojourning through this world in our flesh.

He instructed us in the knowledge of God the Father. That was His purpose.

That was His purpose in the Old Testament as He spoke through the mouths of His prophet-servants. The whole Old Testament is the teaching of Christ as our Prophet.

But when Christ came as the Word become flesh (John 1:14,18), then especially He instructed His people in the knowledge of the Father. "If you know me," He said, "you know my Father." In all His works He revealed the Father. That is what He testified when the Jews took up stones to kill him, according to John 10:32. As the Prophet sent from God, "Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do

ye stone me?" His whole life from Bethlehem to His ascension into heaven is the revelation of the Father, the God of our salvation.

As Prophet He is and proclaims the gospel. In Christ Jesus alone is the original light and knowledge of the glory of God. He brought His doctrine from the very bosom of the Father. And He continues to teach you as the chief Prophet.

Do you hear His voice? So speaks the apostle in II Corinthians 4:6: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Whoever would serve as God's prophets must first be taught by Christ.

The Significance

When we understand and confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, then we also see what is the significance of Christ's prophetic office for us.

Until Christ spoke as our Prophet, you and I sat in the shadow of death. He was anointed to preach. In fulfillment of that prophetic announcement of Him in Isaiah 61, Jesus Christ was anointed to preach good tidings to the meek, and sent to bind up the broken-hearted.

You and I need this chief Prophet! You may have all confidence in your own knowledge. You may have a rather high place among men. But the simple fact is, "no man knoweth the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him" (Matt. 11:27).

Scripture says He spoke as one having authority. There was heat as well as light in His doctrine! And there is still, by the power of His Spirit, though His doctrine now comes through the mouths of weak, contemptible men, who are called to serve as His ministers. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and

every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:4,5). "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

He speaks. The mighty Prophet speaks from the splendor of His holiness, calling you and me to repent of our sins. There is a holy seriousness and majesty in all His doctrine, commanding our reverence. In our lives that are permeated with sin He leaves nothing uncovered. He makes the hearts of sinners to tremble. With His powerful voice, this mighty Prophet brings us down; He speaks the truth concerning our sin. But, wonder of grace, He does so in order to reveal to us the glory of His heavenly Father as the God of our salvation!

As Prophet, Christ works His salvation in us!

And the fruit of Christ's work as our Prophet is that we also become prophets of the living God, confessing His name. We who are in Christ Jesus by a true and living faith are now prophets, as well as priests and kings. We are reflections of the glorified and exalted Christ who lives within us by His Holy Spirit. He who is the Christ has come and has realized His threefold office. He has realized it for us, and now realizes it in us by His Word and Spirit.

By the preaching of His Word the light of God's glory shines upon us in the face of Jesus Christ. Some times more than others does it make deep impressions upon us; but when the Spirit works by that Word, we cannot escape the piercing brilliance of that light. The sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:27).

Christ prophesies in such a way that He not only gives us un-

derstanding of the truth of the Bible, but He lays it upon our hearts, compelling us to speak and to sing the praises of our God. So it must be. Jesus says in Matthew 10:32,33: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But who-

soever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

Shall we not speak the praise of Him who gives unto us the words of eternal life?

Yes, I know, there is still much sin in us. There are many devils to fight. But Christ has spoken the

powerful Word of salvation. Let us confess Him, shall we? Let us confess the name of our God, with our speech and by our actions. Then we shall have peace. Then, and then only, shall we receive the testimony in our hearts that we are indeed prophets in Christ Jesus who saved us. □

Chapter 7

The Revelation of the Wonder of Grace in Paradise (cont.)

Jehovah Maintaining His Covenant

The Lord God turns from the woman to the serpent. But now He no longer questions. He addresses the serpent in the well-known words of Genesis 3:14, 15: "And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

It must have been a deathly suspense in Paradise just prior to these words of the Lord. There was the consciousness of sin, but there was an attempt to hide and to shift the responsibility for that sin. We read nothing about a whole-hearted manifestation of true re-

pentance. We must remember that as yet Adam and Eve knew nothing of a gospel, of Christ, of a sacrifice for sin, and of forgiving grace. Undoubtedly this is also the reason why the Lord does not dispute their false reasons which they give in replying to His questions. He simply addresses Himself to the serpent and to the devil first. Before He deals with Adam and Eve, the beginning of the gospel must be announced. This is announced very strikingly in this word of the Lord that is addressed, mind you, to the tempter, but in the hearing of Adam and Eve.

Modernistic criticism does not know what to do with these verses. If all this is a legend, a myth, then what is the meaning of this passage? The critic has great difficulty in producing any kind of half-plausible solution to this problem. It has been suggested, for example, that the author of these words writes this story originally, perhaps, as a protest against existing snake-worship. But let us note that higher criticism's denial of the word of God at this point means that all is lost. The reality of sin, the reality of the gospel—it is all

gone. Nothing remains. To us, on the other hand, all is reality. Paradise, the trees, the commandment, the snake as the instrument of the devil—all these are real. Then there is no difficulty whatsoever with the words of this passage. The serpent, and that, too, as the visible instrument of Satan, is here addressed. Moreover, he is addressed in the hearing of Adam and Eve. He is addressed in language which makes it clear that Jehovah maintains His covenant. This is the very heart of the gospel of salvation.

As we try to understand this word of cursing that is addressed, first of all, to the serpent, let us have clearly before our mind what had happened.

God had established His covenant originally in Paradise. This covenant is God's relation of friendship and living fellowship with man. In that covenant of friendship man was to reflect God's life, to serve Him and praise Him and extol the glory of God's Name in the midst of and through the means of all the works of God's hands around him. Thus, and thus only, would he enjoy life in the true

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sense of the word. Moreover, man must be of God's party, both positively and distinctively, that is, antithetically. Over against the devil Adam must show that he was of God's party by saying "No" to the devil.

Man, however, had violated God's covenant. Satan, the devil, had come through the instrumentality of the serpent. He had opposed and slandered God and put his lie over against God's truth. Man had turned to the devil and hearkened to him and had turned against God. As far as man was concerned, this violation of God's covenant was the breaking of that covenant relation. Apparently God's covenant was lost.

But God maintains His covenant. We must remember that this covenant is *God's*. There are not two parties who conclude and establish that covenant by mutual action and agreement. There are indeed two parts, or two sides, in that covenant: God's part and our part. But there is but one party in the covenant, namely, God's. God establishes His covenant. God also maintains His own covenant. God is His own party as the covenant God, and man can only be *of* the party of the living God. Hence, He, and He alone, maintains that covenant. Man violates it, and, on his part, breaks it, breaks it irrevocably, so that if it were up to him that covenant would never be restored and would never function again. But God maintains His own covenant. That is why, in the events immediately after the fall, He quickly passes by Adam and Eve, and He proceeds to deal with the serpent and with the devil, in order to maintain His own covenant over against the devil.

This, we must remember, is the chief content of these words. Certainly, these words contain a promise ultimately of the Messiah. But they do not speak of the Christ directly and clearly and individually. However, they do express very clearly: I will maintain *My* cov-

enant. Because God maintains His covenant, the sinner dies. Because He maintains His own covenant, the tempter is cursed. Because God maintains His covenant of friendship over against the devil and the power of darkness, enmity is announced, and fierce battle, and because He maintains His covenant, God's victory, the triumph of the cause of His covenant, is promised and predicted.

Notice, in this connection, that Jehovah God addresses the serpent. He addresses him not in the sense that He spoke His word of blessing to the animals in Genesis 1:22. But the Lord addresses him as an individual, rational being: "Because thou hast done this...." It is plain from this address that the *subject* in the serpent is the devil. The devil is still in the serpent. He could not have left him after he succeeded in his temptation, for the Lord God would not let him depart until He had cursed him.

Note, further, that the Lord curses the serpent as animal. His form and his mode of living are changed. He is made to creep in the dust and to swallow dust with his food. He is cursed above all cattle and above every beast of the field. This does not mean to say that the other animals were cursed in the serpent. They are subjected to vanity because of the fall of their king. But the serpent is brought down from his former high position and is more humiliated and despised than any other animal. Moreover, he will not be represented with the other animals, in the new creation. When the creatures shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, the serpent will not share in the glorious liberty of the children of God. God's curse remains on him (Is. 65:25).

But why is the serpent cursed? The answer is: because God maintains His covenant. The very visible instrument of the devil's opposition and wicked attempt to destroy God's covenant must bear testimony of this fact. But even here,

we must remember that not only the serpent is involved. The subject in the serpent is the devil. The degradation of the serpent, his tool, is for the devil the constant symbol of his own curse. As the serpent is most deeply degraded, so the devil is degraded, cursed forever. The Lord maintains His covenant. And the enemy of that covenant is accursed!

It is in this same light that we must understand the enmity which the Lord here announces: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed."

We must pay attention, first of all, to the idea of this enmity as such. It implies, in the first place, that friendship had been established through the temptation and fall between the devil and mankind. An unholy alliance, a spiritual fellowship of wickedness, an affinity had been established between the devil and the woman. The reference here, let us note, is directly to the manner in which the temptation and fall took place. The bond had been established first between the devil and the woman, and through the woman with the man, and through Adam, remember, with all mankind. This spiritual fellowship was a fellowship of enmity against God. God's covenant, as far as mankind was concerned, had been broken and laid in ruins by the woman's fall and through the instigation of the devil.

But the Lord will put enmity between them. In the place of that friendship there will be mutual hatred. There will be enmity *between* them, that is, on both sides and on the part of both. God will do that, of course, by changing the heart of the woman and her seed. For we must remember that the positive side of this enmity against Satan is covenant friendship. Even as the friendship of the world is enmity against God (James 4:4), so the enmity against the devil and his seed is friendship of the living God. God, therefore, will maintain His

covenant in their hearts. He will root out the devil's darkness and make the woman and her seed children of light again. When the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, this love will reveal itself as enmity against the serpent and against the devil and all that is of him. The antithesis of the light over against the darkness will come into being. On the other hand, the very establishment of God's covenant with the woman and her seed will cause them to be the objects of the devil's hatred. This is the enmity of which the Lord here speaks.

We can see, as Adam and Eve at that time could not see, the realization of all this in the light of Scripture. Centrally, this enmity is realized in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in Christ, whether in the old dispensation by way of promise or in the new dispensation by way of fulfillment, that the woman and her seed are justified and are victorious. It is by the power of Christ that they are regenerated and that the devil's darkness is rooted out of their hearts. It is Christ who makes them the party of the living God. It is Christ who makes them enemies of the devil.

In the second place, we must take note of the parties in this enmity that is announced. The enmity is between mankind and the serpent, first of all. No doubt, the serpent as animal is meant here, too. This is plain from the very language of this announcement. It speaks of the bruising of the heel of man and of the crushing of the head of the serpent. The reference is literally to the injury inflicted by the serpent on man and to the death-blow inflicted by man upon the serpent, and thus to the hatred between man and the serpent.

Secondly, and essentially, this enmity is between the woman and the serpent as *tempter*, that is, therefore, between the woman and the devil. And it is between their respective seeds. That seed of the

woman and that seed of the serpent are from a natural point of view both the woman's seed. But from now on that natural seed of the woman will be divided into two camps, into two seeds, from a spiritual point of view. From that spiritual point of view, there will be the spiritual children of the covenant, the holy seed, in the line of the generations of the elect, on the one hand. That seed is, in the highest sense, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary, David, Judah, Israel, Abraham, Shem, Noah, Seth, Adam—born of a virgin, without the will of man. On the other hand, there will, from a spiritual point of view, be the seed of the serpent, the children of their father the devil, the reprobate-wicked of this world—a seed which culminates in the Antichrist and which has its king in the devil.

Now notice, in the third place, the Subject who here announced this enmity and its creation. *Jehovah God* says: "I will put enmity...." Take careful note of this. That means that it is all of God. The covenant is God's! He maintains it; He establishes it; and He realizes it. Even through the deep way of the fall and sin, He leads that covenant on to the higher glory in Christ.

Thus it is, in the light of Scripture. For it is God who sends our Lord Jesus Christ to gain the victory, to crush the head of the serpent, and to rear up the glorious covenant of grace, the eternal tabernacle of God with man. But it is also God who through the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ actually establishes that covenant and realizes its fellowship of friendship in the hearts of whomsoever He wills. Herein lies the beautiful certainty and assurance of the gospel of the promise. There is nothing of man in it. The establishment and realization of that covenant are not man's work at all. It is all of God. Man, that is, elect man, the seed of the woman, is of God's party through His grace.

Moreover, it is all by divine appointment, by sovereign election. For there was no seed of the woman, and there was no enmity. There was only the seed of the serpent and enmity against God—that is, as far as man was concerned. But God had determined upon this enmity from eternity, and He had determined to put it into the hearts of His own people, those whom He had chosen in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world. This is the gospel of the promise, announced in Paradise. This is the revelation of the wonder of grace.

But there is more. For that promise is also the promise of sure victory.

Indeed, that victory shall be attained through the way of suffering. For the serpent and his brood shall bruise the heel of the woman and her seed. Here is the prophecy which implies all the history of the old dispensation.

Again, first of all, the language is applicable to the serpent. He crawls behind man and bites his heel. This is typically serpent-like. But it is also devil-like. We must understand, then, that the chief reference of the text is to the suffering inflicted upon the church by the devil and his seed throughout history. There is a battle, a spiritual battle, between the woman and the devil and between their seeds. In that battle the heel of the seed of the woman is repeatedly bruised. This bruising of the heel signifies the infliction of intense pain and of an injury which impedes the advance of him who is so injured. The church will suffer. The advance of the church through the world will be opposed and made extremely difficult by the opposition of the devil and his seed. Having her heel wounded, the church will leave a bloody trail behind her all through the course of history.

Nor is it difficult to trace that trail. In the old dispensation, you behold the bruising of the heel of that seed in the persecution and suffering of the church before the

Flood; you see it in the history of Israel in Egypt; you mark that bloody trail clearly in Babylon's attempt to destroy God's people; and you can see it again shortly before the coming of Christ in the persecution of the holy seed in the time of that old dispensational type of the Antichrist, Antiochus Epiphanes. These are but a few examples. Always, throughout the ages, there was a struggle, a bloody struggle, in which the devil and his seed always aimed to destroy the holy seed, the seed of the woman. But always, though often it seemed as though the devil would succeed and would do far more than bruise the heel, the victory belonged to the seed of the woman, and the holy seed was preserved—by the power of the promise.

Centrally, of course, you behold both the struggle and the victory in Christ Jesus our Lord. At

the hand of the world, the carnal seed, the devil and his allies, Christ must suffer and be in terrible agony. But also the church after Him must suffer all through her history. How true it is that also in the new dispensation the history of the church has been written, figuratively, in the blood of the saints! It is a history of continual struggle and suffering. Moreover, the severest suffering and persecution is yet coming. There are bloody days coming for the church, when she shall be persecuted to the death by the power of Antichrist.

But God's is the victory!

That victory is realized in nature also: the serpent's head is crushed though he may succeed to bite the heel of man.

But especially is the reference, again, to the church in Christ Jesus. Centrally that victory is in Christ. He, through the blood of atonement and in the resurrection from

the dead and His ascension to the right hand of God, where He wields all power in heaven and on earth, has the victory. He crushed the head of the devil and all the power of darkness. But in Christ the entire church is victorious, too. They cannot possibly be overcome. For God is their God, in Christ Jesus, and they are of His party in the midst of the world. In the old dispensation that victory is by way of promise, and always because the great Seed is in the loins of the seed of the woman. In the new dispensation that victory is centrally and principally realized. In the day of Christ it shall attain to its everlasting and full realization and perfection.

In this light we must understand the protevangel. In that protevangel, the sure promise of God, we must see the design of all the coming history. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregational Highlights

With thankfulness to God, our Grace PRC in Standale, MI reports that they have agreed to purchase the property of the disbanded Grand Valley Covenant Reformed Church at the corner of Lake Michigan Drive and 8th Avenue near Standale, MI.

This is the same location where Grace has been worshiping since their organization back in 1995, so they are very familiar with what they have purchased. The only difference now is that all the bills come to them and not to the former congregation.

As a result of this purchase, Grace also began holding their services at 9:30 A.M. and 7:00 P.M. on January 18.

This purchase included a fully

equipped building with a piano, organ, KJV Bibles, pulpit furniture, and all the necessary items for a worship service. It also included many other items such as a fully equipped kitchen, folding tables, and chairs. As if that were not enough, the purchase also included the parsonage—a four-bedroom home (two really huge rooms). They also purchased 2.5 acres to the north of the property for possible future expansion.

I have no way of confirming this, but it is quite possible that our congregation in Loveland, CO holds the distinction of being the only PR church with its web site printed on their sign out in front of their building. Loveland also continues to report that they have a very positive response to their web site.

For those of you who don't have the time to drive to Loveland, I include their web site address here: <http://www.iserv.net/~prc>.

While we are mentioning web sites, we can also include here that the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ can now be found at the following address: <http://www.covprc.org>.

The congregation of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA hosted a farewell gathering for Nathan and Paula Brummel on January 4. Nathan had just completed his six-month internship at Hope at the close of 1997. Plans called for the Brummels to go first to Loveland, CO for two Sundays and then continue on to Grand Rapids, MI where Nathan will complete his last semester of seminary training, D.V.

The months of December and January saw many of the choirs of our various congregations present their annual Christmas concerts. It all started back in early December, with the choir from our Hudsonville, MI PRC, followed soon after by programs presented by the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI;

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

the Loveland, CO PRC; and the Edgerton, MN PRC. It all concluded on January 18 with a combined concert presented by choirs from the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI and the Grandville, MI PRC.

Evangelism Activities

In late September of last year, Rev. J. Slopsema, pastor of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, began a series of sermons on "The Christian Family." First's Evangelism Committee advertised this series extensively in area papers, and their congregation was urged to invite friends and neighbors.

In evangelism news from the Randolph, WI PRC we include the following excerpt from a letter they received from Pompano Beach, FL. "We are a local church-run mission organization and are preparing curriculum for use overseas. We are very impressed with much of the PR literature and would very much appreciate receiving two copies of "Church Membership in an Evil Age." These are for the purpose of previewing for future ordering of larger quantities. Secondly, we are presently collecting literature for six different libraries for churches and schools overseas (Russia, Zimbabwe, Surinam, Italy, and two in Albania). It is very possible that some of these will get translated into the language of the country at some point."

The Evangelism Committee of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI reports that their pastor, Rev. R. Cammenga, spoke for a Reformed Doctrine class at Calvin Christian High School on "The Origin, Beliefs, and Practices of the PRC." The presentation was well

received and many good questions were asked.

We also find that this committee has filled over a hundred requests for copies of the pamphlet, "Promises, Promises, Promises—A Reformed Look at Promise Keepers," in response to an ad in *World* magazine.

The consistory through the Evangelism Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC encouraged their congregation to consider inviting a friend or neighbor to their New Year's Eve and New Year's Day worship services. Rev.

Gritters preached from Philipians 1:21 and Romans 14:8, on the Christian's View of Death and the Christian's View of Life. God gives Christians the grace to die—without despair or the desire to commit suicide. He also gives grace to live before death—to the Lord.

Food For Thought

"It is an advantage, not a discouragement, to be weak in ourselves. When a bucket is empty it can be the better filled out of the ocean." □

—Manton

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Edgerton PRC express their Christian sympathy to the family of

MRS. DOROTHY BRANDS.

It is our prayer that her family may find comfort in the assurance that their dear sister, mother, and grandmother is now experiencing the joy of God's presence and the living water for which she longed all her life.

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1, 2).

Rev. Allen Brummel, president
John Hilton, clerk

TEACHER NEEDED!

Hope Christian School (Redlands, CA) needs a teacher or teacher/administrator for the 1998-1999 school year. Grade assignments are flexible (3rd-4th, or 5th-6th, or 7th-9th). Interested persons may call Ed Karsemeyer at the school (909-793-4584) or at home (909-794-3656), Doug Pastoor (909-792-9392), or Bill Feenstra (909-793-3597).

SB INDEX

Reminder: Deadline for ordering the subject/title/textual index to the 73 bound volumes of the SB is February 28. (See January 1 issue for details. One small change: index will come in one hard-cover volume, matching SB volumes.)

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies for the 1998-1999 academic year in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches should make application at the March 19, 1998 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 19 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to:
Theological School Committee
4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huisken, Secretary

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The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.