



The Standard Bearer

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

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**Vol. 75, No. 11
March 1, 1999**

No Condemnation in Christ Jesus

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Romans 8:1

No condemnation!

The apostle Paul has shown us earlier in this epistle that since the fall of Adam in Paradise the whole human race is under condemnation.

That is true of those who are not under the gospel preaching. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of all who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. For when they know God as He manifests Himself in all the works of His hands, they do not glorify Him as God but turn to vain idols, and God gives them over to their sin until the measure of their iniquity is full.

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

But that is also true of those who are under the preaching of the gospel, who have received God's covenant, His law, and His promises. By nature they also are dead in trespasses and sins. For "there is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10-12).

Therefore we also stand condemned before our own consciences. We confess with the apostle: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:22, 23).

We continue to become ever more deeply aware of the fact that

"in [us], that is, in [our] flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). We are guilty of sinning even when we are fully aware that it is wrong. But there are also many character sins, which others plainly see but to which we are blind. Besides all that, there are many secret sins that we commit, which cause us to pray with the psalmist: "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Ps. 19:12).

All our sins are open and exposed before the eyes of the sovereign Judge who rules over heaven and earth. How offensive our lives must be in the sight of the holy God. Our entire life is written in His book: every desire, every thought, every word, every deed, even in our relationships to one another. Nothing is overlooked, nothing is excluded. There is nothing in our lives that is not tainted with

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

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SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

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16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

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sin, for even our best works are as filthy rags in the sight of the true and living God. He judges us not only in this life, but also in the final judgment. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10).

Each of us may well cry out: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

We hang our heads in shame, condemned by our own consciences. Our whole life, with all our desires, thoughts, words, and deeds, testifies against us. We are worthy only to be cast out in wrath to everlasting condemnation in hell fire.

Yet, amazing as it may seem, even now, as in the great day of judgment, the righteous Judge of heaven and earth writes in bold letters across the pages of the book recording our deeds: No condemnation! Not in any sense of the word. No accusation of anyone or of my own conscience can condemn me. The verdict is: You are not guilty! You are righteous! You are worthy of eternal life with Me in My glory!



How is that possible!?

The answer lies in the "Therefore now!"

The apostle himself had cried out: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And he had added: "I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

After clearly pointing out our misery, the apostle declares to us that blessed gospel truth: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

In Christ Jesus. That is the heart of the blessed gospel of salvation. Salvation is by grace alone in Christ Jesus.

God has eternally appointed

the Son to be the Christ, and as the Christ to be the Head and Mediator of His people. God has given to Christ this people as members of His body, as stones of the temple of which He is the foundation. They are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God in Christ Jesus." He is the Good Shepherd and they are the sheep of His pasture, His very special, peculiar possession.

Even as we are eternally in Christ, so we were in Him when He took on our nature in the likeness of sinful flesh. We were in Him during all His earthly sojourn and ministry, even until He died.

God laid upon His mighty shoulders the great burden of the guilt of all our sins. Every single sin of all the elect of all ages was laid upon Him. He, the Son of God's love, closest to the heart of God, took upon Himself that burden of guilt. And He surrendered Himself to God to do the Father's will as the Redeemer of His people.

No wonder that He is called "the Man of Sorrows" and "the Suffering Servant of Jehovah." All His life, even from the time of His birth, He bore that burden, which grew heavier every step of the way. The climax came in the garden of Gethsemane, where He experienced a foretaste of the agony that awaited Him and where He surrendered Himself in absolute obedience to the Father. In that self-surrender He was unjustly condemned, mocked, spit upon, and beaten. The whole world joined in rejecting Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, and thereby casting out God.

But the deepest agony was the total isolation in the utter darkness of hell, when He cried out: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" We now know the answer, for we carry it in our hearts. We were in Christ! One with Him, we were redeemed from the bondage of sin and death and brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, worthy of eternal life.

For we were in Christ Jesus when He arose, when He ascended to heaven, and we are now in Him in glory. From heaven He sends us His Spirit to arouse in us a deep awareness of our sin and misery, to create in us true sorrow and repentance. Only in the way of repentance and forsaking our sin can we experience that blessed assurance: Thy sins, though ever so many, are forgiven thee! By grace thou art justified, righteous in Christ Jesus. For God sees no sin in Jacob and no transgression in Israel!

But more. The wonder of grace only increases. As the apostle adds in verse 2: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." It is by the Spirit of Christ and through that living bond of faith in my heart that I am made one with Him, a member of His body, a branch in His vine. Through faith I realize the guilt of my sins, for those sins rise up against me condemning me. I experience that I am a slave of sin, in the bondage of my own depravity. It is through that same faith that I receive the assurance that I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. In Him my sins are forgiven, never to be reckoned against me. Not now, not in the day of judgment, not ever! I can confess from the heart: "I am righteous in Christ Jesus now and forever!"

In that great day of days, when the whole world, I included, will stand in judgment, all my life will appear before my consciousness, nothing excluded. I will hang my head in shame, for every moment of my existence will testify against me. But Christ, my Justifier, sits on the judgment seat, and He will declare me righteous in *Him*!

I will be counted worthy of eternal life only in Christ Jesus!

On the one hand, I say: "O wretched man that I am!" On the other: "No devil, no world, no friend or foe can condemn me! God declares me righteous. I thank

God in Jesus Christ, my Lord!"

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The earmarks.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

The same Spirit who justifies us before our own consciousness is the Spirit who sanctifies us in Christ. God, who has begun a good work in us, will also surely finish it. He preserves us by sanctifying us until we are prepared to enter into His rest.

But that does not mean that this is without a struggle on our part. The old man of sin still wars in our members. We are still prone by

nature to hate God and our neighbor. We ourselves, apart from Christ, are incapable of doing any good and are inclined to all evil.

Therefore Satan can and does still attack us, the world can and does tempt and threaten us, our sinful nature is drawn to sin. For example, a drunkard may be delivered from his indulgence, yet all his life he must resist the temptation of falling back into his former sin. We have our character sins, our sinful inclinations against which we must fight as long as we live. Except for the grace of God we not only may but also surely will become ensnared in sin.

When we do sin we lose the assurance of our justification. David cries out in bitter anguish

in Psalm 51: "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit."

Yet sin no longer has dominion, grace abounds! We can now walk according to the dictates of the Spirit, who speaks to us through the Word. It is that Word of God, not some internal voice, that guides us as the lamp before our feet and the light upon our pathway.

And we confess with the sweet Singer of old: "By Thy good Spirit led from trouble and distress, my erring feet shall tread the path of uprightness" (Psalter #389).

Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift! □

Editorial

A Defense of the Gospel of Grace Against ECT (2)

In the editorial of February 1, 1999, I described ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together) as a uniting of evangelicals and Roman Catholics for fellowship and cooperation in the gospel. The purpose of this influential movement is threefold: to fight the "culture war"; to evangelize the lost; and to realize the oneness of the church. Demonstrating from Scripture that justification is central to the gospel of the glory and grace of God, the editorial charged that ECT compromises, and thus loses, the biblical doctrine of justification as confessed by the Reformation.

A more serious charge could not be imagined.

This raises the question, "What is the biblical teaching on justification as faithfully confessed by the Reformation and by the true church today?"

Righteous before God

Justification is the act of God in Jesus Christ by which a sinner becomes righteous before God the righteous judge. This act is necessary for salvation inasmuch as the sinner is guilty before God and inasmuch as God, before whom the sinner stands, is righteous.

The sinner is guilty. He stands before the divine judge as a transgressor of the law, as one whose

very nature is contrary to the law, and, therefore, as one who deserves condemnation and the punishment of eternal death. Yes, and if the sinner is not justified by God the judge, he *will be* condemned, sentenced, and executed. "All the world," says the apostle in Romans 3:19, is "guilty before God."

God the judge is righteous. As righteous, He will by no means clear the guilty, but will—and must—punish the guilty sinner with the extreme penalty of eternal hell in body and soul, *if the sinner is not justified by Him*.

The sinner's need is his guilt, and justification, accordingly, is God's change of the sinner's legal position, or standing. Justification

is not a work of God that makes the sinner a good person, but it is a verdict from the bench that declares the sinner to be innocent. There is a work of God that makes the sinner a good person, who begins to love God and his neighbor. This work always accompanies justification. But it is not justification. It is not any part of the act of justification.

That this is justification—simply and strictly an act that changes the sinner's legal standing—is proved from three, plain teachings of the Bible. First, justification is God's salvation of a man or woman precisely with regard to the sinner's guilt. The justification which the apostle sets forth in Romans 3:20ff. corresponds to the guilt which he has charged against the whole world in verse 19. As guilt is one's legal standing before the judge and justice, so justification is exactly the change of that legal standing.

Second, the opposite of justification in Scripture is condemnation: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom. 8:33, 34) As condemnation is not that someone *makes me bad*, but *pronounces me guilty*, so God's justification is not that He makes me good, but that He pronounces me innocent. The apostle does not say, "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that *corrupts me*?"

The third conclusive proof that justification is the change of the sinner's legal standing is Scripture's teaching that God justifies by *imputing* righteousness to the sinner. In the act of justification, God imputes, or reckons, the righteousness of another to the account of the guilty sinner. This imputation, or reckoning, of righteousness is the justification of the sinner.

This is the language of the Bible in Romans 4. Abraham's faith was "counted unto him for righteousness" (v. 3). David in Psalm 32 spoke of the blessedness of the man

unto whom God "imputes righteousness without works" (v. 6). Faith was "reckoned ... for righteousness" (v. 9). "Counted," "imputes," and "reckoned" are all the same word in the Greek original of the chapter. This word expresses that God justifies by crediting the sinner, who is himself unrighteous, with the righteousness of another. There is a legal transfer of righteousness to the sinner's account.

The whole truth of justification stands in this, that righteousness is not *infused*, or *imparted*, to an immoral man, so that he becomes good, but *imputed* to the account of a guilty man, so that he becomes innocent.

In the December 8, 1997 issue of *Christianity Today*, evangelicals involved in ECT published a defense of their original document, "Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." This defense was titled, "ECT: The Gift of Salvation." By this defense these evangelicals attempted to answer criticism of their original document. The criticism was that the original document failed to confess justification by faith *alone*. Although the defense wanted to leave the impression that evangelicals and Roman Catholics in ECT do agree that justification is by faith alone, it frankly acknowledged that there is no agreement on "the language of justification as it relates to *imputed righteousness*" (emphasis added). But if there is no agreement on imputation, there is no agreement on justification. For justification *is* the imputing of righteousness.

Justification as imputation consists of two distinct elements. God does not impute to the elect sinner his own unrighteousness. This is the forgiveness of sins. The judge renders the verdict, "Not guilty!" The creditor cancels the debt.

The other element is God's crediting the account of the sinner, positively, with a perfect righteousness that fully satisfies the justice

of God. The judge declares, "Innocent!"

Although there is nothing like this in earthly justice, there is a similar act of judgment on God's part in declaring all humans guilty. Romans 5:12ff. teaches that God has imputed the disobedience of Adam to every human unto condemnation.

By Faith Alone

How does God impute righteousness, and *how* does the guilty sinner thus receive righteousness? *How* can the sinner—how can I—be righteous before God? The answer of the gospel and of the Reformation is, "by faith! by faith alone!"

Faith, which is the knowledge of God as a gracious Savior and the trust in His promise that He will justify everyone who repents and believes, is the means, or instrument, by which the sinner receives righteousness from God.

The sinner is justified by faith *alone*. This is the plain meaning of the Habakkuk passage (2:4) picked up by Paul in Romans 1:17: "the just shall live by his faith." To add, "and by his own works," is obviously to destroy the prophet's great doctrine.

This is the apostle's conclusion in Romans 3:28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." Inasmuch as "the deeds of the law" refer to man's own activity of obeying and keeping the law of God and inasmuch as this is the only conceivable additional way of being justified, the apostle teaches that we are justified by faith *alone*. Luther was right, theologically, exegetically, and linguistically, to translate the text with the word "alone."

Scripture excludes works and working from justification, that is, all the sinner's own efforts to satisfy the justice of God, both by attempting to pay for his sins and by attempting to merit righteousness. The apostle makes this unmistak-

ably plain in Romans 4:5: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

Justification is *by* faith; it is not *because of* faith. Faith is not a new work of the sinner that merits righteousness. Faith is not a condition that the sinner fulfills in order to obtain righteousness. The Bible never says that we are justified *because of* faith, or *on account of* faith. It rather says that we are justified *by* or *out of* faith. All the Reformation creeds are unanimous in repudiating the subtle notion that faith is a deed of man upon which justification depends.

In his recent examination of orthodox Reformed theology as presented in the creeds of the Reformation, Jan Rohls observes that the contrast between "righteousness of faith" and "righteousness of works" is meaningful "only if faith itself is not in turn understood as a work." In the Reformation creeds, "faith is not another cause on account of which" the sinner is justified. "On the contrary, faith is solely the instrument for grasping Christ's merit" (*Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, Westminster John Knox, pp. 127, 128).

The Heidelberg Catechism is representative of all the confessions, and especially pointed, in its repudiation of the notion that the justification-formula, "by faith alone," means that faith is a meriting ground or an obtaining cause on the part of the sinner himself. "Why do you say that you are righteous by faith only? *Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith ...*" (Question 61).

To teach this would be the same as teaching justification by works.

However, much of contemporary, so-called evangelicalism teaches this very thing. Faith is a condition that the sinner must fulfill in order to obtain for himself

the righteousness that God in grace offers equally to all, a work of the sinner upon which depend forgiveness and eternal life. Thus, much of evangelicalism is in fundamental agreement with Rome in the central matter of justification. Both teach that man himself does something to earn, or obtain, righteousness. For Rome this something is working; for evangelicals, it is believing.

This goes far toward explaining ECT.

What destroys this subtle error, namely, making faith the basis or cause of righteousness, is Scripture's teaching that the sinner is unable of himself to believe. God must give faith, which then is not the sinner's contribution, but the instrument by which God justifies. "By grace ye are saved through faith, and that (faith) not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

As the act of God *through faith*, which by His gift is actually ours, justification is His verdict *in our consciousness*; His crediting our account *in our soul*; His forgiveness *in our experience*; His imputing us righteous *so that we are assured of it here and now*. Like the publican we go up to the house of God, stricken with our guilt, bringing nothing of self save our sins, crying out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." And like the publican we go down to our house justified—righteous by divine verdict in the courtroom of our own consciousness (Luke 18:9ff.).

The Obedience of Christ Alone

That which completes the biblical gospel of justification by faith alone is the basis of God's justifying act. This basis is the obedience of Jesus Christ, and the obedience of Jesus Christ alone. This explains how God can be just in declaring the ungodly sinner righteous and, on the ground of this righteousness, not only not damning him, but even blessing him

with eternal life and magnificent glory.

The justified sinner needs to know this basis of his justification. Otherwise, he can never enjoy peace. There is a basis for justification! This basis is the obedience of Christ!

Christ's lifelong obedience and especially His atoning death, in the stead of all those whom the Father gave Him as His church in the decree of election, is the righteousness of God worked out for guilty sinners.

Christ's obedience, therefore, is reckoned to my account when I believe on Him. Just as my disobedience was imputed to His account on the cross (not *infused into* Him, but *imputed to* Him), so His obedience is imputed to my account through faith.

Justification, accordingly, magnifies Jesus Christ and His cross. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

Honoring God's righteousness in Christ alone, faith knows and trusts in Jesus Christ alone for righteousness. Faith embraces Jesus Christ and His finished, perfect work alone. Faith pleads Christ alone at the seat of judgment.

Faith renounces all else for righteousness! Self! The good works which we do, in fact, perform by the Holy Spirit! The church! Our own denomination! The saints! Our believing parents! Mary! Even sound doctrine, including our confession of justification by faith alone!

"Faith," said Luther, "clasps Christ as a ring clasps its jewel."

This is God's own Word of justification.

This is the biblical heart of the gospel of grace.

This was the truth into which the Spirit of Christ led the church of the Reformation.

And this is compromised by ECT.

—DJE
(to be cont.)

Could Christ Sin?

In the article "Apollinaris and the Doctrine of Christ (1)" (*Standard Bearer*, Jan. 1, 1999), Prof. Hanko states that it is an error to believe that "the temptations of Christ were real only because Christ could have fallen into sin."

My question is this: If Christ in His manhood, in His humanity, while He was walking around on earth could not have sinned when Satan tempted Him, how was His perfect obedience to God the Father worth anything, except that He was some kind of robot? I believe that Christ was sinless (He did not sin) and that He was born without a sin-nature like us, but I thought He was the second Adam and, being perfect as Adam was before the fall, He too could have fallen. The fact that He did not sin and fall, when He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 2:18; 4:15), makes His obedience glorious. But if He only obeyed as some sort of human robot, is not this disgraceful to His honor?

Does not the Heidelberg Catechism suggest that Christ had to be like Adam in Lord's Day 5, Question 15 and in Lord's Day 6, Question 16?

I need an explanation that makes clear to me what obedience is in someone who cannot possibly disobey. I do not want to hold a false doctrine, but I am troubled by a view of Christ's obedience as a robot-like walk.

Al Salmon
Moorestown, NJ

Response:

The brother, I fear, presents a false dilemma when he suggests that the only two possible alternatives in our explanation of the Lord's temptations are: a robot-like

obedience for our Lord, or a possibility that the Lord could sin. Is there not a third?

The two possibilities presented by Mr. Salmon are both manifestly impossible. A robot-like obedience is no obedience at all, for it is not willing obedience; and willing obedience lies at the very heart of the efficacious sacrifice of Christ — as Mr. Salmon himself suggests.

The possibility of Christ sinning is equally unacceptable, for sin is always committed by the "person," and Christ is the person of the Son of God, the second person of the holy Trinity. To affirm that Christ could sin (even if He never did) is to affirm that God can sin. We may not, of course, say that.

As I suggested in my article, some have attempted to avoid the dilemma by saying, as Mr. Salmon does, that the possibility of Christ sinning rests "in His manhood, in His humanity, while He was walking around on earth." But, for three reasons, this will not do: 1) It suggests that Christ could do something as a man which He could not do as God. That is the intolerable separation of the two natures forbidden by Chalcedon. All Christ's works He performed as the one divine-human Mediator. 2) It opens the door to Nestorianism because it gives to Christ's humanity a human person, with the result that Christ is two persons: a human person who could sin in His human nature; and the divine person of the eternal Son of God in His divine nature. 3) It rests the reality of obedience on the possibility of sin. Why should obedience imply the possibility of sin? Why does obedience become "robot-like" where no possibility of sin exists? The answer to these questions is not clear. The fact is that in glory we shall be perfectly obedient to do the entire will of God,

yet we shall not only never sin, but we shall be unable ever to sin again. Augustine called this obedience the highest freedom, the *non posse peccare* (not to be able to sin).

We must affirm readily and fully that, while most emphatically Christ could not sin, yet His temptations were very real and He was indeed tempted in all points as we are tempted. He had to learn obedience. And He had to learn obedience by the things that He suffered, which things include temptation. Mr. Salmon's references to Hebrews 2:18 and 4:15 are altogether to the point. But is there not here a mistaken notion? Does the reality of temptation rest upon the possibility of sin? Why should that be the case? It was possible for the Lord to be truly tempted as we are tempted and yet to be unable to sin because without actually sinning and without even possessing the ability to sin, one can still know and sense the attractiveness of the sin presented in the temptation. To illustrate: Although I have countless temptations against which I need to battle, rock music is not, for me, a temptation. It is ugly, repulsive, without any attractive features. It doesn't tempt me. There is no temptation involved. But other temptations to sin are appealing. When one knows and sees the attractiveness of a sinful deed, has he already sinned? I do not believe so. Else temptation itself would inevitably imply sin. One can certainly know the appeal of a wicked deed and not succumb to the temptation and perform the deed. To understand why a deed is attractive is not, in itself, sin. It becomes sin when one commits the deed.

Although Christ was tempted all His life long, Hebrews 4:15 refers especially to the temptation of Christ by Satan in the wilderness.

When Satan came to Christ in the desert and presented to Christ a "short-cut" to His kingdom, which was the way of popular appeal and the adulation of the multitudes rather than the way of the cross, Christ saw the horror of the cross in all its frightening severity — a horror which later in the garden pressed out of Him His agonizing prayer. He saw the attractiveness of Satan's proposals. Satan, as it were, said: "There is no need for you to go to your throne through that dreadful way of suffering and death on the cross. Change these stones into bread and make the wilderness a Paradise. All the people will crown you king (as they wanted to do when later Christ fed 5,000 men). Show your supernatural powers and point the people to the fact, at the same time, that you fulfill prophecy; jump from a temple tower and the angels will save you. The crowds will bring you in triumph to Jerusalem and crown you king." Could not Christ understand and sense the attractiveness of the devil's proposal?

Was He immune to shrinking from the dreadful task of bearing the wrath of His heavenly Father? Was He callous to the suffering that would be inflicted on Him? Could He not see clearly that from the viewpoint of the ease of the road to His kingdom Satan's proposals were appealing? He was like us in all things.

But He also saw that the proposals of Satan required submission to Satan. He saw that the way which Satan suggested was the way of disobedience. He would never again be able to sing Psalm 40: "I come to do thy will, O God. In the volume of the book it is written of me." It is not difficult to see that Christ could truly experience the tug of temptation. But to know the tug of temptation is not to succumb to it; and, therefore, it does not imply sin.

It is well to remember that the same is true of us. To be able to understand, in the circumstances of our life, the appealing attractiveness of the sin of fornication is not necessarily to sin. Such becomes a

sin when we *commit* fornication — in deed or even in our thoughts.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5, "knew no sin." That knowing no sin does not mean only that Christ did no sin (else Paul would have said that). It means that sin was totally foreign to Him in such a complete way that sin was an impossibility. Yet He became sin — for us! Imagine such a great wonder as that! He who knew no sin *became* sin for us. And, because He could be tempted in all points as we are tempted — though without sin — He can be and is a sympathetic High Priest. Thank God for Christ!

Nevertheless, Mr. Salmon's questions are hard questions which we cannot fully understand. Their difficulty rests in the mystery of God become flesh — the wonder of the incarnation, the wonder of our salvation.

The discussion here is an interesting one, and if Mr. Salmon desires to comment further, he is encouraged to do so.

— Prof. Hanko □

Ministering to the Saints

Prof. Robert Decker

Visiting the Sick (3)

We continue our discussion of the elders' calling to visit the sick by considering how the elders ought to conduct the sick call in specific instances. When the elder must call on a parishioner who is about to submit to major surgery, he ought to visit the person before the surgery takes place. The elder can

make this call either the night before the day of the surgery or he can visit the person an hour or so before the surgery is scheduled to take place. There is something to be said for both of these times. Both are times of stress and anxiety for the parishioner. He needs the Word of God. The advantage of making the call the night before the surgery is that the elder has more time to spend with the parishioner. He should wait until the visiting hours are over so that there is a minimum of distractions. A particularly appropriate passage to

read is Psalm 4, especially verse 8 which reads, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." One disadvantage of making this call an hour or so before the surgery is that often the patient is under sedation. This makes the call very difficult and, often, even impossible. One more comment is in order. It usually is not necessary that the elder remain with the family during the surgery itself. But he should be readily accessible in the event the family needs him.

As a general rule, hospital pa-

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tients ought to be called upon once per week. If the patient is critically ill, he should be visited more frequently, daily if necessary. If death appears imminent, the elder should remain with the patient and family.

It is extremely important that the elder remember that he occupies the office of Christ, the Good Shepherd of the sheep. The elder must maintain the dignity of the office. He must as well display the love and concern of Christ for the sick. And he must lead the sick to meet their merciful High Priest, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, by means of the Word of God and prayer. In this way the sick will "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16).

When the parishioner is terminally ill, he or she must be prepared to meet the Lord through death. The needs vary among God's people. Some are strong in faith and possess by God's grace hope as an anchor for their souls. They are submissive to the Lord's way with them. They are ready, even eager, to go and be with the Lord. These ought to be encouraged.

Others among God's people are afraid to die. These are reticent to talk about death. The elder must encourage these people to express their fears. He must bring to them the assurances of the Word of God. The elder must call attention to the great victory the Lord Jesus obtained over sin, death, and the grave by His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. The fearful ought also to be reminded that God's grace is abundantly sufficient for all of their needs. God, they must be told, will give them "dying grace" when they need it.

Still others attempt to "act" as if death is not going to happen. They are in a state of denial. These must be carefully led by the elder to face the reality of death. As the elder does this by means of the

Word of God, he must also be aware of the fact that denial often turns into bitter anger against the Lord. These think that God is being terribly unfair and hard on them. They think God ought to let them live awhile longer for the sake of their families and loved ones. These must be patiently, gently, compassionately, yet firmly admonished to submit to the Lord's way with them. The elders must bring to these this word of God, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is. 55:8-9).

We often do not understand God's ways, but they are good for us. Always! Not even death can separate us from God's love in Christ (Rom. 8:28-39). God's chastening may be grievous, "nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11). These passages are just a few of the many which can and ought to be brought to the attention of those who are angry with the Lord. By the means of His Word brought by the elders, the Lord can and does turn the bitterly angry into the submissive children of God who trust that God's ways are good for them.

Though it is much less common than it used to be, there are those who are not told that their death is imminent. More often than not, this happens when young children are afflicted with terminal illness. Parents of these children sometimes find it extremely difficult to tell them that they are about to die. The elder should do all that he can to convince the family to inform their loved one of his impending death. This is necessary in order that the person may be prepared to die. Why deprive him of the anticipation of the wonderful glory of the fellowship with God in Jesus into which he is about to be taken?

Often, and this is true of children too, they know. Undersigned ministered to a youngster dying of cancer whose parents could not bring themselves to tell the little one that he was about to die. The last time I visited him I read Psalm 23, and when I got to verse 4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me," the boy recited it with me. Two days later he peacefully fell asleep in Jesus.

The elders are to be cautioned, too, not to ignore the needs of the loved ones of the dying. One can become so concerned with the dying parishioner that he forgets that his loved ones need to be prepared as well for the reality of the dying of their loved one. The needs of those about to be left behind by their dying husbands, wives, children, parents, relatives, or friends are often as great or greater than those of the dying person. The elders must bring to them also God's Word of comfort and assurance, of instruction and encouragement. They too must be submissive to God's way with themselves and their loved one who is about to die.

All of this brings us to the elders' calling to minister to the dying and those bereaved. No matter the circumstances, to one degree or another death is always a struggle for the Christian. This is because it is "the last enemy that shall be destroyed" (I Cor. 15:26). The elders must make use of the many passages of Holy Scripture that speak of the victory in Christ which God's people have over death. Psalms 73, 77, 90, and 116 are just four of the many Psalms which can be used to comfort the dying. Part of Job's response to Bildad is the wonderful confession, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26). Who can count the multitude of

dying Christians who have been comforted by these words of Jesus: "In my Father's house are many mansions: If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3)? Or, think of the wonderful comfort contained in this Scripture: "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are tempo-

ral; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Cor. 4:16-5:1). And, to quote no more, there is the command to John to write, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

Whatever the elders do, they must bring the Word of God to the dying. Often those about to die slip into a coma. This can last for only an hour or so or it may last for days, even weeks, and months. These must be brought the Word too! God has promised

never to leave or forsake His saints. God is present with us and fellowships with us by means of His Word. For this reason the elders must never give up trying to reach comatose parishioners. When visiting such, the elders ought to read a verse or two. They ought to explain the Word briefly. And the elders must pray with them. Sometimes the comatose parishioner will respond with a squeeze of the hand. More often than not, there's no response. Response or no, we believe God can and does speak to His saints even when we apparently cannot.

The same passages used to comfort the dying can be used to comfort the bereaved. This, D.V., will be the subject of our next article. □

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Mary Beth Lubbers

The Reformed Family: Standing Before His Cold

He giveth snow like wool...."

Psalm 147:16

I love snow. I love its texture, its freshness, its coldness, and its symbolism. I love the pristine whiteness of new-fallen snow, its dazzling brightness chiseling little dagger points into my eyes, the kind of snow that we experienced last month in the Midwest. And while others button up their coat collars ever more securely and shield their faces with the warmest of woolen mufflers, I love the

gentle touch, or biting sting, of snowflakes on my face and skin. I like the tiny ice prisms blanketing my hair — a kind of snowflake snood. I enjoy a barefoot walk in the snow, however brief and brisk, just as some people enjoy the serendipitous discovery of the Swedish sauna. I love the snow's potential as well as its unpredictability. Will we witness the soft, feathery shake of a down pillow? Or, will we survive a wild, howling, old-fashioned prairie blizzard? I love the irony of lacy snowflakes — in accumulation — shutting down an entire city for days on end. "Who can stand before his cold?" (Ps. 147:17)

To many people, however, snow is nothing but disagreeable precipitation, and cold at that; winter, a season to be endured until

spring returns to our climes. Perhaps they are some of the unfortunates who must shovel snow. Having been blessed with four able-bodied sons and an ambitious husband, I have never had to contend with snow removal. I can imagine that wrestling great mounds of snow from one side of the driveway to the other could change one's perspective a little. Whether, then, you personally like or dislike snow, and for whatever reasons, it is the very essence of the intricacies of God's design in creation.

Did you know, for instance*:

- * That each snowflake (polycrystal) is composed of tens, perhaps hundreds, of individual snow crystals?
- * That each snowflake is a symmetric, hexagonal, branched, fern-like crystal? And that if you

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are a curious, careful observer of snow you can occasionally spot a 12-pointed star made up of two hexagonal stellar crystals pressed together?

- * That a transfer of water molecules from droplets to vapor to ice crystals is key to the process of snow formation?
- * That the same snow cloud can produce many different types of crystals — stellar, needle, column— at the same time?
- * That the vast majority of snowflakes fall at speeds of 1-6 feet per second, but that large snowflakes act like parachutes and often slow down, while kernel-like snow pellets known as graupel fall much faster?
- * That a thick layer of fresh snow on your roof can save you money on your heating bill?
- * That fresh snow is a good insulator because of the high percentage of trapped air among the lattice structure of the accumulated snow crystals? Since the air can barely move, heat transfer is greatly reduced.
- * That if 12 inches of snow, containing one inch of water, and weighing 5.2 pounds per square foot, is followed by another storm bringing 25 inches of snow and 2 inches of water with a total snow load of 15.6 pounds per square foot, and that if the area of your roof is 1,800 square feet (which is typical of many houses), that there would be 28,080 pounds of snow resting on the roof — the weight of three full-grown elephants?
- * That sunshine alone is very ineffective in hastening snowmelt? Warm, humid winds work for maximum melt! David, the shepherd boy, observed this scientific fact thousands of years ago as he sat on the Judean hillside tending his father's flocks. In Psalm 147 he notes: "He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow."
- * That fresh snow can reflect

more than 90% of the sunlight that strikes the surface? This is why many people wear sunglasses in the winter.

- * That snow is *white* because visible sunlight is white and the complex structure of snow crystals reflects sunlight instead of absorbing sunlight? (Most natural materials absorb sunlight, which gives them their color.)
- * That when the ground has a thick layer of fresh, fluffy snow, sound waves are readily absorbed at the surface of the snow? This explains why waking up and without even looking outside, one senses it has snowed just from the muffled sounds one hears.
- * That a cubic foot of snow (12 inches on a side) may contain 1,728,000 individual snowflakes, and that no two are ever, or ever have been, alike?

But enough of the science of snow. When the Scriptures speak of snow, it is always through imagery, by metaphor, and by comparison.

In Job 38, the great chapter on God's power, sovereignty, and providence in creation, the Lord asks the rhetorical question: "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? Or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail?" "Out of whose womb came the ice? And the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it?"

With Job we give the expected response that God hath ordered all of nature. He hath gendered it, and until He returns we can only explore, discover, and subdue His creation in an imperfect and insignificant way.

For centuries man has delved into the science of snow. With amazement he explores the complexity of design, the delightful diversity, of each individual snowflake. Who can even begin to comprehend its intricate makeup, much less to command its arrival on the earth? That is what Jehovah does

in Job 37. "For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth...." And then, "By the breath of God frost is given...." A mere exhaling of God's breath, and our world is paralyzed in winter's icy grips for months.

The psalmist knows of snow, too. David had had ample opportunity to study its purity and its complete whiteness. In Psalm 51, when David acknowledges the depth of his depravity, he compares snow to his complete cleansing in Jesus Christ: "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Isaiah echoes this property of snow in chapter 1: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow...." How untold many believers have found comfort in this great transformation — from blood red to snow white!

Again, in Psalm 147, in an irrepressible splurge of joy, David expresses what is versified so grandly in Psalter number 402:

He sends His swift commandment,
And snow and ice enfold
The world, and none are able
To stand before His cold.
Again He gives commandment;
The winds of summer blow,
The snow and ice are melted,
Again the waters flow.

If we as Reformed believers know this truth about snow, and teach this truth to our children, we will have learned the most significant phenomena about snow. God speaks the snow. He breathes the frost and rime. The filthiness of our sins has been forever washed away, and now we appear whiter than new-fallen snow. No climatologist will learn more, though he studies the structure and properties of the snowflake ever so carefully. □

* All scientific facts were lifted from *The Snow Booklet* by Nolan J. Doesken and Arthur Judson, Colorado Climate Center, Fort Collins, CO 80523.

Expecting the Lord's Return

Some time ago we wrote an article for this department reflecting on what our Reformed confessions say regarding the return of the Lord. It was our intention at that time to write a second article on the above named subject as a follow-up. We believe that the perspective of the Reformed confessions (especially the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession) on the return of the Lord is hardly ever heard in the church world today.

The Reformed confessions focus on the truth that Jesus will return for judgment. This is of course also what we confess in the Apostles' Creed. The Reformed confessions maintain that Jesus will come to judge this ungodly world. This world will continue to increase more and more in ungodliness as the end grows nearer. This world will not, as is so often imagined, grow better and better and finally evolve into some kind of earthly utopia. In fact, one of the great signs of the end of the age is abounding wickedness, lawlessness, and immorality in this world. The Reformed Christian denies that the world will become a better place. He knows that according to Scripture, it will only get worse and worse.

How much are we as Christians sensitive to the reality of the growing wickedness of this world?

Are we slowly, and perhaps not so slowly, without realizing it, allowing our thinking and life-style to be compromised by the ungodly world in which we live? How much are we toning down our condemnation of the world rather than understanding the ever more urgent need of this condemnation?

The last days will also be days of great apostasy in what calls itself the church. It will not be a time of mass revival and worldwide conversions, as some claim. It will be a time when the true church will be but a small remnant in the world. The last days will be days of great deception, when the lie will be paraded in the church as though it were the truth of God's Word. On the other hand, the truth will be evil spoken of. Those who promote the lie will present themselves as though they are champions of the Lord and are promoting the cause of His kingdom. They will boast of their love and benevolence towards all men, their great human sympathy and broad-mindedness towards their fellow man. This broad-mindedness will be considered to be the height of virtue. The faithful saints of God who strive to live sincerely by the law of God and for His righteousness in the earth, and who condemn the wicked life-style of the world and separate themselves from it, will be considered bigots who are judgmental and unloving.

The faithful church of Jesus Christ desires to fulfill her Lord's great commission to preach the gospel unto the end of

the earth. She rejoices at the conversion and salvation of God's elect. For according to our confessions the gathering of the full number of God's elect is the great purpose of history. The saints of God give thanks to God when they witness the power of the gospel of Christ to gather His church from the heathen nations of the world. The church also gives thanks when the Lord preserves His people in the line of generations according to the promise of His covenant. She therefore maintains faithful catechism instruction of covenant children. When there is renewal and reformation by the Spirit and truth of God in the church, the church praises the name of her God. On the other hand, the members of the church do not despair when the true church seems ever so small over against the millions of this world, because they see this as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Though the saints of God grieve over the apostasy of so much of the church, they rejoice that God reserves unto Himself 7000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

We are confident that the Lord will not forsake the church He has chosen to be His own. The full company of God's elect must and will be gathered. The Lord has so loved this church that He gave His own beloved Son for her final salvation. The saints of God believe that God will always preserve His true church in the world.

The gates of hell will not prevail against her. Though the true church is small in the eyes of the

... the gathering of the full number of God's elect is the great purpose of history.

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world, though she is despised by apostate Christendom, she is precious in God's sight and He will make her glorious. The church of Jesus Christ shall finally be presented before God in heaven as the glorious bride of Christ.

How blessed it is by grace, then, to be a member of that church and to be a faithful member who loves the Word which the Lord has given to His church. How important it is to submit to the discipline and admonition and spiritual care of that church. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches us to say with joy in our hearts that we are and ever shall be a living member of the glorious church of Christ Jesus.

The members of the church are called in the last day to stand fast in the truth. They must maintain the truth of God's Word without compromise, the truth in all of its power, beauty, and holiness. The members of the church are called to labor for the cause of the kingdom of Christ in the world.

The Lord will come in judgment on the wicked nations of the world which will until the end remain ungodly. The ungodly are the enemies of the living God and of His church. There are in the world many who are the enemies of God. They are always far greater in number than the saints of God in the earth. The enemies of God reveal themselves in their wicked, worldly philosophy of life and in their brazenly evil conduct before the Lord. They shall not be able to stand before the sovereign judge of heaven and earth when He comes again. They will be judged for all their ungodly deeds which they have done in disregard and defiance against God. (See Jude 15.)

Many of the most serious enemies of God and of His people are those in apostate churches. This was true in the time of the Reformation and this is increasingly true in our modern day. Most of the persecution of the faithful saints comes not from the heathen world but rather from nominal and apos-

tate Christendom. It is clear from Scripture that the Antichrist will arise from a union between the powers of the ungodly world and the apostate church. This apostate church is portrayed in the book of Revelation as the great whore. The false church in the last day will have imposing organizations in the world. Today we would call them megachurches. The false church boasts of great numbers. She claims the authority of great antiquity. She makes high claims for herself. She boasts of doing great things for God and for the kingdom of Christ. She glories in her great earthly strength, the large numbers of her membership, her glorious institutions, and the great influence she has in the world. At the same time, she uses her great power to persecute the faithful church and her members. She looks with contempt on the faithful people of God. The apostate church mocks the faithful church, which dares to expose and condemn her false doctrines and worldly glorying.

The truly Reformed church today keeps watch on the church of Rome, as she has the marks of being the Antichrist. This all the Reformers believed. While we do not see the final manifestation in this church of Rome, we do continue to see signs of her acting like the final Antichrist. This is not time for reconciliation with her at the expense of the truth of the gospel, as some Protestants today are advocating.

The true church of Jesus Christ has hope as she confronts her enemies. As long as she has her eyes fixed on the Lord's return, she is not terrified by her adversaries. She does not become discouraged by the smallness of her numbers and her seeming insignificance in the world. She is not discouraged by the ridicule she experiences from apostate Christendom. She does not take vengeance on her en-

emies. She does not take justice in her own hand and become violent and disobedient to her Lord. She endures persecution and ridicule with patience and leaves vengeance and justice to the Lord.

The comfort of true believers and members of the faithful church of Jesus Christ is the hope of the return of the Lord. They look for the great joy of the final salvation of their souls and the revelation of the glory of their Lord. They look for the reward the Lord will give His faithful saints at His appearing. They look for the appearance of His church in glory before the throne of God.

According to the Belgic Confession, the judgment of Christ shall be justly terrible and dreadful to the wicked ungodly but most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and the elect, because then shall their full deliverance be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruit of their labor and trouble. The saints look for the day when they will see the vengeance of the Lord revealed on the wicked, who have most cruelly persecuted and oppressed and tormented them in this world. The so called imprecatory Psalms sing of the glory of God's righteous judgments on the wicked and the deliverance of the saints through vengeance on their enemies.

The calling of the saints is to stand in the midst of the faithful church of Jesus Christ to maintain the truth and honor and glory of the name of the Lord. The faithful saints look for Him to vindicate His cause when He comes.

Scripture and our Reformed confessions teach that the hope of the return of the Lord is the mighty incentive for holy living. The saints are called to a life of holiness. Holiness of life demands separation from the ungodly world. It requires that the Christian live absolutely antithetically to this ungodly world. The great command of

*... the
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Scripture is, "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate." Our day is a day of compromise of the truth of God's Word and joining with the world. Sometimes even those who profess to be conservative reveal a thinking and life-style that involves woeful accommodations to the world.

I was reminded of this recently at a conference I attended. The speakers at this conference were popular conservative leaders professing the Reformed faith. They had some good things to say, but one thing especially disturbed me. They were constantly making reference to contemporary movie stars and modern Hollywood productions to illustrate points in their presentations. It reminded me how very familiar almost everyone is with the culture of Hollywood and Broadway. How much this culture dominates the thinking of most Americans, so that even when speaking about the truth of God's Word, illustrations must constantly be made from this culture in attempts to be relevant to our times. How did this come about, even in the more conservative church world, except through hours and hours of television viewing and frequent attendance at the movie houses? I wondered, too, whether reference to the life-style and speech of this culture should be the occasion of light-hearted jest and laughter when it is so terribly wicked before God. How very few are sensitive enough to realize the terrible evil of this culture. How many today realize the absoluteness and radicalness of the antithesis between the truth and holiness of God's Word and the philosophy of the culture we live in?

Sometimes even conservatives can bring the church farther down the road to worldliness. They do this by, on the one hand, condemn-

ing the blatant evil of modern-day society, while, on the other hand, condoning and speaking with amusement about that which is, according to them, less evil. This is one of the issues of the common grace controversy that has been maintained by our Protestant Reformed Churches. The question is whether the antithesis between the world and the church is absolute or whether we can after all find much that is still good in the world. Should we laugh and joke about things that are abominable to the Lord and imagine that they are only mildly evil?

The expectation of the Lord's return is the hope of the revelation of the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. The Heidelberg Catechism states that the comfort of the believer is that "the very same person who offered Himself for my sake to the tribunal of God and has removed all curse from me will come as judge from heaven." For this reason the coming of the judgment is most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and the elect. Modern-day Arminianism and pop psychology have corrupted the Christian's expectation of the Lord's return.

The members of the church are taught to have great esteem of themselves. The Bible rather calls Christians to abhor and humble themselves before God and to glory and hope only in the righteousness that is theirs because of the cross of Christ. Arminianism encourages pride concerning man's own acceptance of Jesus and concerning the great things he has done for the Lord. The true Christian looks for nothing but the glory of Christ and the praise of His perfect works of salvation.

The only hope of the true saints of God is the righteousness of the cross. They look for the righteousness of the Lord's judgment on the

wicked. They look for the righteousness of Christ to cover them in the judgment and to justify them before God. The day of the Lord will be the glorious revelation of His righteousness. With the apostle Paul we long to be found in Him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Jesus Christ. (See Philippians 1:3.)

Yet the faithful saints are also encouraged to look for the reward of the Lord. For when the Lord comes again, He will reward His saints for their faithfulness. He will give a great reward to those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake. For this reason they are exhorted already now to rejoice with exceeding great joy. But this reward will not be of merit but of grace. This is another beautiful and classic statement of the Heidelberg Catechism about the proper expectation of the Lord's return in judgment.

The glory of the final salvation of the saints, the blessedness of heaven, is far greater than any glory of this world. The faithful saints who often suffer great loss in this present world, and from whom the wicked sometimes take away every ease and comfort in this world, have this hope. They will live forever in perfect glory and blessedness in the presence of their God and Savior. So great is the glory of this, that eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God has prepared for those who love Him. The proper expectation of the Lord's return for the faithful saints requires that they not set their hearts on the riches and glory of this world. By faith we must fix our eyes on the unseen world of glory in the new heavens and new earth. For this glorious salvation we must be ready to forsake all, and to sacrifice our very life. □

How many today realize the absoluteness and radicalness of the antithesis between the truth and holiness of God's Word and the philosophy of the culture we live in?

The Prediluvian Period (4)

Chapter 2

The Curse Upon Cain

Introduction

Once more it must be emphasized that a clear understanding of the character of Cain's sin is essential.

What took place when Cain killed his brother Abel? Was it a mere murder — homicide, or even fratricide? That would bring the narrative wholly in the sphere of the merely natural. It would rule out the specific scriptural element. The Word of God does not deal with mere murders. It treats of the history of God's kingdom and covenant and thus of the battle between the righteous and the wicked. This is the battle that centers in Christ, that is consummated at the parousia, in the day of the Lord, and in which God takes the side of the people of His covenant over against the world. Unless we keep this in mind, there are many elements in the narrative of the events following Cain's murder of his brother which are left unexplained. Why does the earth cry to the Lord? Why does the punishment of Cain assume this peculiar form? Why may not Cain be killed, and how are we to think of the mark upon him?

Hence, we must keep in mind that the wicked had killed the righteous; the seed of the serpent had attacked and sought to destroy the

seed of the woman. This is plain from the narrative in Genesis: Cain killed Abel as the righteous offerer, the friend of God. This is evident from I John 3:12: he killed Abel because his works were righteous, while his own works were evil.

Now the result of this murder was certainly that Abel's soul had glory and victory in heaven. Nevertheless he seemed defeated as far as the earth was concerned. This might not be. God maintains His cause, defends His people, and gives them complete victory. Thus, not the wicked but the righteous shall inherit the earth and all things. This had to become plain in the history of Cain and Abel, even as it did later in the history of Noah and his eight. For this reason Cain receives a peculiar punishment. He may not be slain for his murder of Abel, but he must be cursed from the earth as one who is dispossessed as far as earthly things are concerned.

We must, however, see this punishment of Cain not only from the viewpoint of this one event, this one manifestation of conflict, but also in its historical perspective, in connection with and as an integral part of the subsequent history. It is obvious that at this point in history we stand at the beginning of the conflict, not at the end. It is obvious that the punishment of Cain does not represent the *final* outcome of the conflict, either as far as the whole of history is concerned or as far as this particular

epoch is concerned. With regard to the former, the consummation is in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ; with regard to the latter, the consummation is at the time of Noah and the Flood. History, therefore, must go on. Abel must be replaced by Seth presently, so that the seed of the woman is continued. But also the seed of the serpent must continue. Cain must be punished in such a way, therefore, that this is accomplished. Not only so, but the punishment of Cain must be of such a kind that the purposes of God with respect to subsequent history are served, not only in that the conflict is continued but also in that there is *development* toward the goal of the typical consummation accomplished in the Flood. Through this very dealing of the Lord with Cain, the course of the history of the world before the Flood is so channeled that the line of Cain is preserved and allowed to become great in the world, great also in wickedness and in power to persecute the seed of the woman. Even the curse upon Cain must serve this purpose.

The Trial of Cain

The Lord puts Cain on trial, as it were.

This trial begins with a penetrating question which Jehovah puts to Cain: "Where is Abel thy brother?"

The Scriptures are silent as to the details of the scene, except that

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it seems rather obvious from the narrative that the scene was not that of the murder. It seems rather that Cain had slain his brother and had gone about his business, and the Lord stops him in the way. Perhaps this question came to Cain from the Lord as he was busy offering again. We know not. But it is characteristic of the wicked in history that they sin and rebel against God, kill the righteous, crucify the Christ and reject Him, and trample underfoot the blood of atonement — all in a religious manner! They continue their offerings, build their temples and churches, labor for charity and missions, and strive, as they claim, for the kingdom of God. The abominable wickedness of it all is that they do all these things as if they could possibly draw the Lord into communion with their evil life and walk. While we do not know what Cain was doing at the moment, it would be very characteristic of him as a wicked man to have been offering sacrifice at the very time when the Lord spoke to him. For remember that Cain, murderer though he was, was not like the heathen; he was a religious man, living in the historical sphere of the covenant, where God was served.

As to the form of the Lord's question, it is apparently an innocent and very general question. It does not accuse Cain at all directly. It suggested no guilt and no crime. As such, it leaves the matter strictly to Cain. Yet the question was a searching one, and one calculated to leave Cain still more without excuse. For it served the purpose of exposing the inward attitude of Cain's mind and heart toward his own sin. The Lord, of course, was in need of no information about Abel or about Cain's murder of his brother. He knew

exactly what had taken place, and He surely had no need of inquiring from Cain as to the whereabouts of Abel. Nor, we must remember, did the Lord have any need of finding out the attitude of Cain: that He knew also. But Cain must be *exposed* in the judgment of God; the thoughts of his heart must be *revealed*. To this end the question is designed. Will Cain now answer the Lord truthfully? Will he confess to having murdered the righteous?

In this connection, we must bear in mind that it is not the *mere sin* of Cain as such which invokes the curse pronounced upon him. This is never the case. David, for example, also murdered his brother (Uriah), but there was forgiveness for David, while there is no forgiveness for Cain. Even at the cross there was forgiveness, according to Jesus' prayer, for them who crucified Him, and that cross was surely the murder of the Righteous by the wicked. But there was no forgiveness for Cain. It was not the mere sin, but the sin compounded by impenitence that invoked the curse upon Cain. Suppose, for a moment, that Cain had repented and confessed his sin before the face of God. He surely would have been forgiven. Any sinner who repents finds forgiveness with God — not *because* of his repentance, indeed, but in the *way* of it. But there was no repentance in the heart and mind of Cain. He was hardened. Cain not only *did* wickedly. He *defended* his sin rather than repent of it.

This had to become manifest, in order that Cain might be left wholly without excuse and in order that God might be justified in His judgment. To that end Cain is put on trial; and to that end this

initial question is put to him.

Cain's answer to this question breathes defiance: "I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?"

In the first place, by his answer he denies the very fact of his sin. This is plain evidence that there was no inkling of sorrow and repentance in Cain, not even remorse. The true, contrite heart never covers up. It acknowledges sin. It is filled with godly sorrow over sin and desires to have sin taken out of the way. But then, surely, full acknowledgment, first of all, of the fact of sin is necessary. But Cain attempts to deny and to cover up, and that, too, by means of a lie. The proper answer would have been, of course: "I murdered him." But he denies all knowledge.

In the second place, Cain impudently and brazenly disavows all responsibility. For he adds to his denial the defiant rhetorical question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" By this question he stated emphatically that he was not his brother's keeper. But this was not true. It was certainly his responsibility to be his brother's keeper just because he occupied the position of his brother's *brother*. But this disavowal of all responsibility was a clear manifestation of the hatred which filled him. Love loves to keep the brother. But Cain hated his brother, and in this defiant question he even now defends the principle of hatred over against God. He is even impudent and brazen about it. He acts as though the Lord's very question is absolutely no concern of his, as though the very whereabouts of Abel was no responsibility of his — all the while knowing not only that he was responsible, but that he had violated that responsibility by his murder.

Thus Cain is exposed as being inwardly as wicked as was his outward deed. He is a defender and representative of darkness. Far from being a *penitent* sinner, he is a denier and defender of his sin.

*It is
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of atonement—
all in
a religious
manner!*

He is as wicked as his deed. He is exactly the opposite of one that is truly penitent, one who is ashamed and humble, one who hates and condemns his own sin.

Cain Convicted

Again the Lord addresses a question to Cain, "What hast thou done?" To this question the statement is added, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."

The question is not a question for information, not a question to which an answer was expected from Cain. But it is a question which points the finger of accusation, divine accusation and indictment, at Cain. It is a question designed to impress on him the terrible nature of his sin, and at the same time to furnish the ground for the sentence which would be passed upon Cain. Cain, the wicked, whose offering was an abomination to Jehovah, had killed the righteous! The seed of the serpent had slain the seed of the woman! The darkness had risen up and quenched the light!

That the question is indeed one of accusation is plain from the fact that the Lord calls the earth to witness to the truth of the accusation: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." The earth had received Abel's blood when Cain slew him in the field; and now from the earth that blood cries to the Lord for just vengeance. Moreover, there is a connection here with the nature of the sentence which is passed upon Cain, as is plain from verse 11: "And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand." The sentence is in harmony with the circumstances of the sin: the earth had received Abel's blood, the blood of the righteous; and from that earth Cain, the wicked, would be cursed.

*When
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It is evident that we have to do here with a figure of speech. In the literal sense of the word, lifeless blood does not cry, nor does the earth, or the ground, bear witness. There is the figure of personification here. Yet this figure of speech has profound significance; it must not be passed over as being merely an emphatic or poetic form of expression. The meaning

is that the earth is included in God's covenant with His people, according to the ordinance of God. Even as the creation was brought under the curse through man's sin, so the whole creation is also included in God's covenant of friendship with His people in Christ Jesus and shall be redeemed and glorified with the church in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. That earth is there for the sake of the righteous. It must serve for the blessing of the righteous and the curse of the wicked. When the wicked persecute and slay the righteous, then the whole creation cries for vengeance. This is but one aspect of the groaning of the creation of which we read in Romans 8:19-22: "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

If, in the light of the Scriptures, we would give content to this cry, this voice of blood, from the earth "which opened her mouth to receive" Abel's blood, that content is the same as the cry of the souls under the altar, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Thus it must

be understood that the ground cried unto the Lord with an accusing voice concerning Abel's blood and concerning Cain's blood-guiltiness. The earth, as included in God's covenant with His people, is the Lord's ordained witness. It bears testimony, substantiating the accusation and judgment of the Lord that are implied in His question. The Lord says to Cain, as it were: "The earth is my ordained witness. That earth has opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood; and from the ground the voice of his blood cries to me. Thou hast slain the righteous. Thou art guilty!"

The Sentence

Sentence is therefore pronounced upon Cain. He is "cursed from the earth which hath opened her mouth to receive" his brother's blood. Notice, in the first place, that Cain is cursed not *by*, but *from* the ground. Secondly, notice that this is explained in the words of verse 12: "When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth."

This is a specific curse pronounced upon Cain, quite in harmony with the nature of his sin. The ground itself was also cursed after the Fall; yet for Christ's sake and for the sake of the elect in Him, it was also kept and in principle blessed. But now Cain is cursed *from* the ground. The earth itself is made to assume an attitude of cursing toward Cain. When Cain tills the ground, it will not yield its strength to him. This does not mean that Cain will dwell in the desert. But it implies that wherever Cain shall turn, he will be cursed from the earth. His presence, as it were, will cause the earth to recoil in horror, so that it will scarcely feed him, and so that only with great difficulty will he be able to derive from the soil the means of his support.

In that same sense he will be a

fugitive and a vagabond. The very earth will cast him out and forsake him, so that he will have no rest. Especially, it seems, in the light of Cain's retort and in the light of the fact that he goes forth from the land of Eden, this included two elements:

1. That he no longer had any place in the land of Eden, where Jehovah revealed His face and spoke to His people;

2. That he would be driven always by the impulse of fear that everyone finding him would want to slay him. As unrelentingly chased by this dread, he would have no settled resting place in the earth. A vain, fugitive, accursed life shall Cain lead in the earth. The very earth will spew him out, wherever he turns.

Bear in mind, too, that behind all this is the Word of God's curse, the almighty Word of God's wrath upon Cain, and that, too, in specific judgment of his sin of murdering the righteous. The covenant God takes the part of His people and takes vengeance upon their enemies.

The Execution of the Sentence

Cain's attitude over against this sentence is not at all one of repentance. He retorts, "My punishment is greater than I can bear," or, according to another rendering, "Mine iniquity is greater than can be forgiven." Even the latter rendering, though questionable in itself, cannot be explained as a complaint of repentance, or even of remorse — not in the light of what follows. He looks at the heavy punishment imposed on him, rather than looking with sorrow at his sin. This is always characteristic of the impenitent.

But even with respect to that punishment, his attitude is one of rebellion and defiance. He retorts

that his punishment is greater than he can bear. He is driven out from the presence of the Lord in Eden. He is become an accused outcast. But his punishment, such is his defiance, shall never be executed, for everyone that finds him will kill him. The sense of Cain's retort, therefore, is that his punishment will fail of execution because it will soon be ended by death at the hand of someone who will kill him. (The objection of higher criticism that this is an impossible piece of history is foolish. The critics like to point out that the author forgets that there were no other people at this time. It should not be overlooked, however: 1) that 130 years of history could well have yielded 3 or 4 generations at this time, and a few thousand people. 2) That this word of Cain also looks to the future.)

But the Lord will work out His purpose with Cain. Cain himself must be a sign, a sign of the truth that the righteous shall inherit the earth, while the wicked shall be disinherited. He must serve as a sign and concrete illustration of the everlasting punishment of the wicked, who shall go on forever existing, yet absolutely disinherited. Thus in Cain is realized a theme which occurs often in the Psalms, e.g., Psalms 59, 69, 109.

*Cain
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Hence, the Lord appoints a mark, a sign, upon Cain. There is no profit in joining the speculations which have been made as to the nature of that sign — whether Cain was a leper, or had a horn, or was afflicted with trembling, etc. The simple fact is that the Bible does not tell us about this, and we do not have to know. The point is that it was a mark which served to prevent Cain's being killed by warning and threatening everyone of a sevenfold vengeance upon the man who might

lay hands on this God-appointed vagabond. Nor must we mistake the purpose and motive of this sign. There was no expression of grace and longsuffering in it. This is impossible: grace and the curse do not go hand in hand. In fact, this sign had the very opposite motive: it insured the execution of God's sentence upon Cain.

Thus, in the first place, Cain must serve as a living testimony of the fact that the Lord takes His people's part in the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Here is a revelation that God and all things are for His people, and against the wicked; that God's people can suffer and be hurt for a little while, but that their enemies must soon perish, while the righteous have the victory.

In the second place, the Lord's justice upon Cain is so executed upon Cain that:

1. He is kept alive and becomes the progenitor of an ungodly generation.

2. He and his generation are given a separate place, away from the presence of the Lord in Eden, where they can develop in ungodliness and where the sin of Cain can ripen and bear its full fruit.

In the third place, the very form of the curse pronounced upon Cain becomes, under the providence of God, the occasion for Cain and his generations becoming civilization-builders. It must not be considered mere coincidence that when Cain goes out from the presence of the Lord, he goes about building a city. This should be viewed as a consequence of his wrestling against the curse pronounced upon him. But even this must serve ultimately the divine purpose of the defeat of the seed of the serpent. For as the line of Cain becomes great in its worldly achievements, so it also progresses in wickedness, finally filling the measure of iniquity and becoming ripe for the destruction of the Flood. □

Nestorius and an Unholy Squabble About Christ (1)

Introduction

Controversies are frequently present in the church of Christ because the church is called to fight the good fight of faith, also in defense of the truth of Scripture. But controversies are not pleasant, and sometimes they are very ugly.

It is not surprising that controversies are ugly, for they are fought by men who are sinners, even within the church of Christ. The redeeming element is usually that some who are engaged in it are defenders of the faith and are fighting that the truth of God may be preserved. One can overlook a great deal of individual wrong in controversy if it is clear that the truth is at stake and that men are fighting valiantly for it.

But once in a while it happens that the spectator to a controversy mutters to himself as he observes the battle: A plague on both your houses; and he turns away in disgust. Such a controversy took place in the fifth century in the Mediterranean world between a heretic by the name of Nestorius and a man who, although his views were vindicated at the time, was not himself as orthodox as one would have liked him to be. The latter's name was Cyril.

The controversy was over the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what makes it all so sad. It involved the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ, the truth of Him whom the Scriptures call Immanuel, God with us. And it was so violent, so unchristian in every sense, so brutal, so ugly, that it is difficult even to talk of it. When I was teaching Church History, I found this chapter to be one of the more distasteful.

And yet, the Lord used the controversy to bring the church nearer to the truth concerning the union of the divine and human natures of our Savior. The result of the controversy was the Chalcedonian Creed. (It might be a good idea if you would look it up and read it now. It can be found in the back of the *Psalter* used in the PRC.)

The Problem in the Church

You will recall that, in our last article, I mentioned the fact that the church was having a most difficult time in defining precisely who Christ is. In 325, at the great council of Nicea, the church had emphatically confessed the doctrine of the Trinity, and that doctrine especially as it was connected to the absolute divinity of Christ. Christ Jesus our Savior is, in the memorable words of that creed, "very God of very God."

But, although the church readily acknowledged that Christ was also a man "like us in all things, except our sin," no one was prepared to say precisely in what way Christ was also a man. And, granted now that He was indeed a man, what was the relation be-

tween His divinity and His humanity? These were vexing questions.

Apollinaris had given an answer by which he attempted to answer both questions. He had concluded, under the influence of Graeco-Roman philosophy, that the divine Logos had taken the place of the human soul in the man Jesus Christ. But the church told him, flat out, that he was wrong and that he would be branded a heretic if he insisted on his position. He was wrong, so said the great Athanasius, because Christ had to have a human soul in order to save us in both body and soul. Apollinaris would not admit his wrong; he was branded a heretic.

But the questions remained.

The story of Nestorius is the story of two other attempts to answer the question — and the story of the final answer which the church gave.

The Early Life of Nestorius

Nestorius' life was like a brilliant comet which flashes briefly across the sky and very quickly disappears from view.

He was born in Germanicia in the early part of the 400s. Germanicia is in Syria on the northeast coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Its most important city is Antioch, the city from which Paul the apostle set sail on his missionary journeys. And so it was to Antioch that Nestorius went for his education. While attending school and in his early post-graduate years, he lived in a cloister hard by the walls of the city. In the

cloister he learned about and learned to love the ascetic life.

Nestorius was a man of considerable ability. He not only found it relatively easy to master his subjects, but after his schooling he showed a vast theological learning and a sound and practical judgment which set him apart from many others. These gifts soon came to the attention of the leaders in the church, and he was ordained a presbyter in the church at Antioch. In that church he practiced a rigid austerity, in keeping with his love of the ascetic life, and he became a fervent and powerful preacher, whose oratory attracted hundreds. He became accustomed to preaching to a church crowded with people.

Such a man soon drew wider attention to himself, and it was not long before the emperor took notice of him. The patriarchate of Constantinople fell vacant. The emperor was responsible for filling the post.

To appreciate fully what happened next, one must understand the importance of Constantinople. It was a city on the Bosphorus (you can find it on a map under the name of Istanbul) which occupied a strategic position because it was the western side of the door that separated Asia on the eastern side and Europe on the western side. Constantinople had received its name from Constantine the Great who, when he became ruler of the Roman Empire, moved the capitol of the empire from Rome to this city on the Bosphorus. Because it was so closely associated with the center of political power, the church in Constantinople grew rapidly in importance as well, especially when the emperors were devoted to the task of supporting the church and, when possible, ruling it. Constantinople, as a result, became the most important church in the eastern part of the Mediterranean world and was rivaled only by Rome itself.

The patriarch of Constan-

tinople was the most important man in the Eastern church, the equal in the East to the pope, who was bishop of Rome. In fact, the two tended to squabble a great deal over who was really ruler of whom. Both wanted the top spot. The controversy continued till 1043 when the church split between east and west. The patriarch of Constantinople was in a position to influence all ecclesiastical affairs; he was able to influence the emperor himself and give him counsel and advice on how best to rule in church and state; he was, under the emperor, the most powerful man in Asia.

It is some measure of the high reputation of Nestorius that the emperor passed over the leading clerics in Constantinople and chose Nestorius to be the new patriarch. The year was 428. Nestorius could not have been much more than 25 years old.

Troubles

Once again a little background information is important to understand events.

As I said at the beginning of this article, the church was embroiled in controversy over the relation between the human and divine natures of our Lord Jesus Christ. But one complicating element in the controversy was the use of a rather strange term: *theotokos*. That term was applied to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and means, literally, "God-bearer," or, less literally, "mother of God." Mary was *theotokos*, the mother of God.

This term, whatever one may think of it as an accurate description of Mary, had originated among the monks, especially in Egypt, who were already deeply involved in the worship of Mary. They thought the term important to preserve the divinity of Christ, and they made common use of it to express their devotion to Christ and to Mary. So common had the expression become, especially in

Egypt, that it had entered the devotional life of the members of the church, and it had become a part of the liturgical rituals of the clergy.

But there were many who did not like the term, refused to use it, and sometimes fought vehemently against its use in the churches. They complained that it was not biblical, that it did not accurately express Mary's relation to Christ, and that it was, in fact, a dangerous term which could easily leave the impression not only that God Himself was born from the virgin, but also that God Himself suffered and died on the cross. One can sense the force of these objections.

The differences over the use of *theotokos* were also present in Constantinople at the time Nestorius moved from Antioch to take over this prestigious post.

Something happened to Nestorius when he received this appointment from the emperor. I think what happened was something latent in Nestorius' character which did not have opportunity to come to expression until he had the reins of power in his hands. But from the very day he assumed his duties he became a proud and arrogant man who was a religious fanatic of the worst sort. He seemed to think that God had appointed him to be patriarch of Constantinople for no other reason than that he might be God's sole avenging angel against every solitary heresy that appeared on the horizon.

From day one Nestorius moved with intolerant zeal and bigotry against every little sect that had a corner in the teeming mass of people who inhabited the imperial city. On day five after his inauguration he ordered burned down a small Arian church in a poor quarter of the city. I suppose a zeal against heresy can be approved, but the methods which Nestorius used were harsh and cruel even by the standards of his day. Condemnation was not enough. The heretics had to be run out of the city

or destroyed. Their property had to be confiscated and their voice silenced. Nestorius began to deliver impassioned speeches against heresy, which roused the people to fury until riots became everyday occurrences in the city and blood began to be spilled.

What makes his frenzy and inordinate zeal all the more distasteful is the fact that when the West-

ern church condemned Coelestius and Julian of Eclunum for the heresy of Pelagianism, and when these two men fled to Constantinople, Nestorius was the one who was tolerant of their view and supported them in their heresy of the free-will of man. He was even willing to appeal to the pope on their behalf in an effort to get their condemna-

tion undone. "Consistency, thou art a jewel."

One other "heresy" he could not abide. He hated the term *theotokos*. The use of that term was, to Nestorius, the greatest of all heresies.

The stage was set for great trouble.

We must save the rest of the story till next time. □

Come, Lord Jesus

Rev. Cornelius Hanko

Wars and Rumors of War

Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

Matthew 24:6

Ever since the fall of our first parents in Paradise, the world has been at war. The disobedience of Adam and Eve and their alliance with Satan by eating of the forbidden tree already created between the two of them a strained relationship which could only be healed by grace.

God had put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, as became evident already when Cain killed his brother Abel. In rebellion against God, Cain's descendants persecuted the church. As a result, about fifteen hundred years later the first world was ripe for judgment and was destroyed by the deluge. Only Noah and his family were saved by the waters of the flood.

Not long after the flood, Nimrod the mighty hunter tried to unite the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth into a world empire at Babel. God prevented him by confusing their language, and as a result they were scattered over the face of the earth. The breach of Babel will not be healed until almost the end of the ages. Already today we see efforts toward unification in a striving for a universal language, a common market, same currency, etc., which will ultimately lead to the kingdom of Antichrist.

Ever since Nimrod, nations have risen against nations, wars and rumors of war have continued unceasingly. One kingdom was swallowed up by a stronger one. Thus Syria was taken over by Assyria, Assyria was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, and the Babylonian kingdom was established.

It is interesting to note that Nebuchadnezzar made an image to be worshiped by all the princes of his kingdom. The dimensions of that image equaled the number 66: sixty cubits high and six cubits

wide. We can plainly see here a forerunner of the Antichrist, whose number is 666.

Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was, in turn, taken over by the Macedonian kingdom, and the Macedonian kingdom was conquered by the Roman empire. These last four are the beasts that are mentioned in Daniel and in Revelation.

One more must appear, but in the meantime the devil is bound for a period of a thousand years, that is, for a time determined by God in which he cannot deceive the nations so that they unite as a world power.

But that does not mean that the world is at peace. Wars and rumors of war continue throughout this present dispensation. There always was and there always will be a struggle for supremacy, for ruling the world, even until the end of the ages.

It has been said that World War I was a war to end all wars. A League of Nations was formed. A peace palace was built. But it was not long before we were engaged in World War II. The United Na-

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tions has built a large, costly building where all the world's problems were to be solved. But even that has not brought an end to warfare.

Our own nation gained its independence through a revolution against England. Later we engaged in a civil war. We became involved in wars with other nations. In the meantime, there were always numerous wars and struggles going on all over the world. There was a "cold war," as well as constant threats of new wars.

We cannot fail to notice that in each war new and more powerful weapons of warfare are employed. The world has gone from the club to the bow and arrow, then to the sword and the battering ram. In more recent years guns and airplanes have come into use in war, trench warfare has become bombings, and bombs have been developed into nuclear and biological weapons whereby untold destruction can be wrought both upon property and to human lives. It appears as if the time will come when the nations will be so thoroughly prepared to wipe each other out that the world may be in a deadlock, not able nor daring to make the final blow that would end in total disaster. Does this mean that also in that sense the world will come to a stalemate, that the battle of Armageddon has no finish, except by the coming of the Son of man? We can only surmise.

We can hardly imagine the hatred that is built up, the constant agony involved, both for those who are on the battlefield and for those who are in the area, even for those who are threatened with bombings day and night. Not to mention the rape of women and plunder of homes during the war. And there are the bitter consequences. This includes not only loss of valuable property, destroyed cities, but also the dead, the wounded, the maimed, and the paraplegics, as well as their families who must suffer along with them. Even the victor suffers heavy losses of lives and

property, losses that can never be made up.

This ultimately leads to the final battle of Armageddon. It has been said that history may end where it began, near the former garden of Eden. This final battle results in the coming of our Lord with the clouds of heaven.



All these things must come to pass.

Revelation 6 speaks of the Lamb opening the seals, that is, carrying out the counsel of God as exalted Lord in heaven. Then we read that the white horse with its rider is sent forth to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. Then the red horse is sent out to take peace from the earth.

There is a close relationship between the spread of the gospel and the opposition it receives in the appearance of false Christs and the continuous warfare throughout this dispensation. The false Christs and the wars increase; the one in the church, the other in the world, until the cup of iniquity is full. These both are the ragings of the wicked against God and His Anointed. They are determined to wipe out God's cause and God's name from the face of the earth. Man must triumph over God.

Therefore Jesus warns us: Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom shall rise against kingdom before the end is reached. That end is not yet, not until all God's counsel is carried out to the full.

There is, on the one hand, the power of Satan and his forces. He does all that he possibly can to bring unrest among the nations and to wipe out God's cause from upon the face of the earth. Besides that, man by nature is prone to hate God and his neighbor. He is incapable of any good and inclined to all evil.

That reveals itself among the nations in covetousness, greed, pride, and jealousy. We think, for example, of the emperors who were greedy for power and wanted to be worshiped as if they were gods.

On the other hand, God is carrying out His counsel also through wicked men.

It is interesting to note that the disciples used one word when they referred to the end of the world, while Jesus used another word. The word that the disciples used refers to the conclusion of history, the cessation of time, while Jesus employs a word that means the goal, when God's counsel is fully realized and His eternal purpose is attained.

In spite of, even through, the efforts of the powers of darkness to prevent God's cause from prospering in the world, God gathers His church. He preserves and defends her over against all the onslaughts of the wicked.



Be on your guard. Let not your heart be troubled.

Psalms 2 declares: "Why do the nations rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

You know what follows: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision."

Why? Because God has set His king upon the holy hill of Zion! All power is given to the exalted Christ in heaven and on earth. Nothing happens apart from God's will. All the evil powers of darkness must serve toward the coming of the Lord.

*In spite of,
even through,
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It is in that confidence that we pray, Thy kingdom come! Yes, that includes wars and rumors of war, even mass destruction, bitter suffering for God's people. It also includes the rise of the Antichrist, who in a sense is already among us. But in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us and loves us still!

No, the end is not yet. That is, wars will not bring the kingdom of heaven. But Christ is carrying out God's counsel until God's purpose, His goal, is attained. God's judgments are a mighty deep, and as the mountains high. But Jesus assures us: Behold, I come quickly, even speedily. Not one word shall fail of all that God has promised.

Thus He encourages us: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." □

A Bedtime Prayer for Young Children

Dear Father in heaven, Creator of all,
I thank Thee for hearing, when Thy children call.
Keep watching above me, all through the dark night,
That in the bright morning, I wake to Thy light.
Bless father and mother, and those that I love.
Send Thy Holy Spirit, to work from above.
Forgive all the sins that this day I have done.
I ask in Thy Son's name, the victory He's won.

Amen.

Deborah A. Benson

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

We received the following from the Evangelism Committee of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI and decided it was worth passing along for your consideration. "Did you get behind in your *Standard Bearer* reading during late December/early January and miss the offer to write for the cassette recording of a fireside chat given by Rev. Cornelius Hanko? Before a good-sized crowd at the fall meeting of the Eastern Men's and Ladies' League, September 22, 1998, Rev. Hanko spoke from his long experience with family devotions, particularly after one's children have left the home, when a couple or widower/widow finds himself or herself alone, with more time to enjoy devotions each day. The subject of how to fill lonely hours was also covered, and ideas

were given on satisfying and useful ways a Christian can enrich each day. Rev. Hanko also spoke on family devotional practices in other denominations that believers in the PRC might consider as beneficial. To receive this edifying tape send a \$3.00 check made out to Southwest PRC, 4875 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418."

Although no date has yet been set, it appears that our Bethel PRC in Itasca IL will be moving soon into their new church home. This impending move means more work for their Evangelism Committee. Currently they are discussing plans for evangelism in the neighborhood of their new church home. They are also planning on updating the brochure introducing their church and our denomination to outsiders, as well as making changes in their current yellow page advertisement.

Mission Activities

The consistory of the Loveland, CO PRC, in consultation with Missionary T. Miersma and the Mission Committee, has decided to

end the work in San Luis Valley, CO as of April of this year. Rev. Miersma and his family will be moving to Spokane, WA to begin labors there with the Sovereign Grace Reformed Church.

Loveland's consistory used this announcement as an opportunity also to urge their congregation to write the families and individuals of the S.L.V. mission to encourage them to move to the vicinity of one of our churches. Or maybe possibly to move to the Loveland, CO area, where they would find a new church home, along with a warm welcome from our church there.

On January 25, the congregation of the Hull, IA PRC extended a call to Rev. R. Moore, their pastor, to serve our churches as a missionary to Ghana. Rev. Moore has accepted this call.

Congregational Activities

The council of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI has approved the publication of a monthly newsletter in their congregation. This newsletter will be

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

called "The Messenger" and will include primarily the missionary newsletters, newsletters from the schools and denominational committees, and other items of general interest.

The extreme cold of the last weeks has slowed down the work being done on the new sanctuary of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. However, all the windows have been installed and temporary doors have been put in. Carpenters continue to work in the narthex area and the masons have been able to do some work on the interior walls.

Work also continues on the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL. The latest word from them indicates that staining and varnishing is now being done. The floor has been installed in both bathrooms and the kitchen and some wall-papering was also completed.

The congregation of the Lynden, WA PRC was recently encouraged to come together for a night of singing psalms from the *Psalter* at the Health Care Center in Lynden.

The council of the Byron Center, MI PRC recently decided to use this year's catechism collections to purchase a *Psalter*-number Board for the front of their sanctuary.

The council of the South Holland, IL PRC has approved the organization of a daughter congregation in the Dyer, IN area. Twenty-four families and three individuals signed a petition of the council expressing interest in beginning a new congregation. This request will be presented to the March meeting of Classis West.

South Holland encouraged this organization partly because they feel that the Northwest Indiana area is one that will continue to

grow and more families may move there in the future. Also, this area will be a new area of witness for our churches.

Minister Activities

Rev. A. Spriensma, pastor of the Grandville, MI PRC, underwent two surgeries during the month of January for a recurring colon condition. Tests showed no malignancy, and after several weeks of recuperation, Rev. Spriensma began to take up his labors in a limited way by teaching a catechism class the first week in February and preaching one service on February 7.

Food for Thought

"The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions, and the nearer we get to Him the more intensely missionary we must become."

—Henry Martyn □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC would like to express their sympathy to Jane Petersen and her family in the death of her husband,

ROLAND PETERSEN.

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.
Ed Hekstra, Clerk

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address synod 1999, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Mr. Don Doezema
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Marcia DeMeester in the death of her father,

SID NEWHOF.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:16, 17).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.
Tim Pipe, Retired Clerk

EXTENDED DEADLINE!

The 75th anniversary committee still needs pictures relating to the PRC denomination for the anniversary booklet. Pictures pertaining to churches, schools, ministers, young people's conventions, etc. will be much appreciated! By March 31.

Please send the pictures to:

Mr. Ken Elzinga
4465 100th St.

Byron Center, MI 49315

Remember to include your name and address on the back of each picture so they can be returned to you promptly.

TEACHERS NEEDED

Hope Christian School of Redlands, CA is in need of a teacher for the intermediate grades (3 & 4) for the 1999-2000 school year. The grade assignment, however, is flexible, with the possibility instead for an elementary position (grades 1 & 2). Interested persons are encouraged to send an application to Hope Christian School, attn: Ed Karsemeyer, 1309 E. Brockton Ave., Redlands, CA 92374. You may also phone school (909-793-4584), Bill Feenstra (909-793-3597), or Mike Gritters (909-793-4439).

Hull Protestant Reformed School will need a 6th/7th grade teacher for the 1999-2000 school year. Inquiries or applications should be made to Mr. Pete Brummel, principal, 218 Second St., Hull, IA 51239, (712) 439-2490 or (712) 439-1308, or to Mr. Brian Kroese, 301 Second St., Hull, IA 51239, (712) 439-1699.