

The Standard Bearer

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

In This Issue:

Meditation — <i>Rev. James D. Slopsema</i> Thankful Praises	314
Editorial — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i> Shall We Please God or (Certain Kinds of) People? or the Regulative Principle of Worship	316
Letters	318
Church and State — <i>Mr. James Laning</i> Vermont Supreme Court Extends Marital Benefits to Homosexual Couples: Invites Same-Sex Marriages	318
A Word Fitly Spoken — <i>Rev. Dale H. Kuiper</i> Fear	321
That They May Teach Them to Their Children — <i>Prof. Russell J. Dykstra</i> Christian Education and Service	322
Taking Heed to the Doctrine — <i>Rev. James Laning</i> The Truth Over Against the False Teaching of the Charismatics	324
Search the Scriptures — <i>Rev. Martin VanderWal</i> Light into the Darkness	326
All Around Us — <i>Rev. Gise J. VanBaren</i>	328
Ministering to the Saints — <i>Rev. Douglas J. Kuiper</i> The Nature of the Diaconate (1) An Office of Authority	330
Day of Shadows — <i>Homer C. Hoeksema</i> Enoch, Who Walked with God (2)	333
News From Our Churches — <i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger</i>	335

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Thankful Praises

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High:

To show forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.

Psalm 92:1, 2

Music is one of the many wonderful creations of God. Music is delightful. How our lives are enriched by music. Music is also powerful. It can lift our mood; it can inspire; it can excite; it can calm. It can do many things.

When we put words to our music there is song. Songs are delightful, whether we sing them ourselves or hear them sung by others. Songs are also powerful, more powerful than music alone without words. The words of a song carry a distinct message that music alone can not. Songs can be a powerful

tool in the hands of God to edify and lift us up spiritually. Songs can also be a powerful tool in the hands of the devil to wear down our faith and to fill our soul with evil thoughts, desires, and feelings.

What are the songs that fill your heart? Are they the songs of God that edify? Or the songs of the world that destroy?

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O most High.

It is also a good thing to meditate on this for a while.

The lovingkindness and faithfulness of the Lord.

God's lovingkindness is His mercy for His people. As the term itself suggests, God's lovingkindness is God's love for His people. How the Lord loves His own! He loves them with an eter-

nal, electing love. And the Lord is no fair-weather friend. He also loves His people when they are in distress and downtrodden. In love His heart goes out to them so that He rescues them from their woes with many acts of kindness. Such is God's lovingkindness.

Closely connected to this is God's faithfulness. This is God's faithfulness to His covenant. God has graciously established a covenant with His elect people, a covenant of love and friendship, a covenant that is mirrored in the covenant of marriage among us. In that covenant God promises many wonderful things to His people. He promises to live with them in intimate friendship, to care for them, to defend them, to provide for all their needs now and forever. God is faithful to this covenant, faithful to His covenant people, faithful to

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His covenant promises. That faithfulness shows itself in many acts of lovingkindness for His people in distress.

The Lord showed His lovingkindness and faithfulness to His people Israel. The Lord brought them out of the bondage of Egypt and into Canaan. In Canaan the Lord richly blessed Israel. He made Canaan to be for them a land flowing with milk and honey, so that Israel enjoyed the fatness of the land. This prosperity served as outward tokens of God's love and favor upon His people. Also at the tabernacle and later in the temple the Lord showered Israel with the blessings of salvation, blessings that brought Israel into the joy of intimate fellowship and friendship with their God. The Lord also preserved and defended Israel from the attacks of her enemies, who with superior strength sought to take from Israel the land of promise and to destroy God's covenant with Israel.

All of this was the lovingkindness and faithfulness of the Lord.

The psalmist celebrates this lovingkindness and faithfulness of God in the rest of the Psalm. For he goes on to speak of the terrible destruction of Israel's enemies at the hand of the Lord (v. 4-9), and rejoices in the great blessing of the Lord to Israel (vv. 10-15).

It was for this lovingkindness and faithfulness that Israel gave thanks. This Psalm was sung on the Sabbath day by the congregation of Israel at the temple after their return from the Babylonian captivity. Through the singing of this Psalm, Israel gave thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness and faithfulness.

As the people of God we today also enjoy the same lovingkindness and faithfulness.

In Christ Jesus we belong to the same covenant enjoyed by Israel in the Old Testament. For the covenant of God is with Abraham and his seed (Gen. 17:7). And all those who have the faith of Abraham and

by faith belong to Christ are Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:7, 29).

The form that the covenant takes today is quite different from the form it took in the Old Testament era. Gone is the earthly Canaan with its physical boundaries. Gone is the earthly temple. But the essence of the covenant remains. In Jesus Christ, God lives with us in intimate friendship and fellowship. In that covenant God promises to care for us, bless us, and provide for all our needs now and forever.

To that covenant God is also faithful. In Jesus Christ He richly blesses us according to His promises, showing us again and again His lovingkindness. In His lovingkindness God forgives all our sins for Christ's sake, dwells with us in sweet communion, provides for all our material as well as spiritual needs, defends us from the powers of darkness that seek to destroy us....

And for this we must give thanks.

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.

How shall we give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness and faithfulness?

The answer is found in the phrase itself. To "give thanks" in the original Hebrew is one word, which expresses the basic idea of pointing out something to another. We give thanks to God for His lovingkindness and faithfulness by pointing them out. How richly God's lovingkindness and faithfulness have blessed us! We thank the Lord by pointing these wondrous blessings out first to God, who gave them to us. But we point them out also to our neighbors: our children, our fellow saints, our fellow students, our co-workers, the unbeliever who opposes us for Christ's sake.

There are many ways by which we can effectively point out the lovingkindness and faithfulness of God in thankfulness. We can do

this in prayer. We can do this as we instruct our children. We can do this as we commune with one another in the fellowship of the saints. We can do this as we witness to the ungodly.

The emphasis of this Psalm is that we are in gratitude to point out God's lovingkindness and faithfulness in song. For after proclaiming the goodness of giving thanks to the Lord, the psalmist speaks of singing praises to the name of the most High. Then the psalmist continues to speak of showing forth (bringing to light, telling of) God's lovingkindness and faithfulness upon an instrument of ten strings and upon the psaltery. Clearly the psalmist would have us express our gratitude to God by bringing to light in song all that the Lord has done for us in His lovingkindness and faithfulness and then to praise Him for it. He would have us do this in the morning and every night. Songs of thanksgiving and praise should fill our homes and lives.

This is a good time to evaluate the songs that do fill our homes and our cars. What kind of songs are we listening to or singing?

There are a multitude of songs that differ drastically from the songs that express gratitude to the Lord. The world, for example, produces many songs that bring to light and praise, not the lovingkindness and faithfulness of God to His church, but the abominable sins of the world. And there are many songs produced in the church that point out and praise, not what God has done in His faithfulness, but what we will do. They are man-centered rather than God-centered songs. In keeping with this, many of the songs produced in the church grossly misrepresent God.

The songs that should fill our homes, our cars, our souls should be songs of gratitude that accurately bring to light the lovingkindness and faithfulness of the Lord and that praise Him for them.

For that reason we should be singing the Psalms. No, the Psalms are not the only songs of the church that show forth the lovingkindness and faithfulness of God. God has led the church to produce many spiritual songs that praise God for His faithfulness and do so from the perspective of the fuller revelation of the New Testament Scriptures. These songs are also ours to sing. Nevertheless, the Psalms were given to the church by the inspiration of God as means to give thanks to the Lord and to show forth His lovingkindness and faithfulness. These Psalms must not be neglected by us. They are to be precious to us so that we sing them in the morning and every night.

How often do we sing songs of gratitude and praise to the Lord?

We are so busy with our daily work, busy often with recreation and entertainment, that we have no time to sing songs of gratitude and praise to our Lord. The blessings of God are innumerable. We must be a people who show forth God's lovingkindness in the morning and His faithfulness every night.

It is good to give thanks unto the Lord.

A thing may be good because it is right.

A thing can also be good because it is pleasant.

Here the idea is that it is good to give thanks unto the Lord in song because it is beneficial. Showing forth the lovingkindness and faithfulness of God contains the idea of joyful celebration. It suggests that when we bring to light

the lovingkindness and faithfulness of God in song, we are led to celebrate God's wonderful blessings. We are filled with joy and rejoicing in God's salvation.

What a powerful tool singing is. The songs of the world are a powerful means in the hand of the powers of darkness to tear us down spiritually as they fill our souls with the lusts of this world. But songs of gratitude and praise to the Lord are a tremendous means in the hand of the Holy Spirit to lift us up in celebration of God's lovingkindness and faithfulness.

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto His name, to show forth His lovingkindness in the morning, and His faithfulness every night.

What will you sing? □

Editorial

Shall We Please God or (Certain Kinds of) People? or the Regulative Principle of Worship

One of the most powerful winds blowing through the Reformed and Presbyterian churches today is the hurricane of "liturgical renewal," or "progressive worship." The service of public worship as the Reformed have conducted it for hundreds of years is summarily scrapped as "traditional" ("traditional" being uttered with scorn or with sorrow, as though describing a service that was either foolish or useless). The traditional service is replaced with a service of bands and singing troops; banners; films, skits, and

drama; dialogues; dancing; and shallow, man-centered, Arminian, but lively "gospel songs."

Or the two kinds of services are placed back-to-back on a Sunday morning. The traditional service is at 9 A.M., the progressive service is at 11. Every member can indulge his preference.

The assumption of those who spend their waking hours planning the demolition of the traditional Reformed worship and concocting new and more appealing activities of worship is that the church is free to shape the worship of God as she thinks best. And what is best is

whatever pleases the worshipping people.

This assumption is shared by most of the "conservative" members of the churches where progressive worship is introduced. They dislike the innovations intensely. They complain. They attend only the 9 A.M., traditional service. But they tolerate the new worship.

How we worship is a matter of preference.

Our preference.

This assumption is shattered on the rock of the regulative principle of worship. By the regulative principle of worship is meant that God

Himself regulates, or rules, the public worship of Himself by His church. God regulates worship by clearly prescribing in His Word what this worship must consist of. God Himself tells us *how* to worship Him. This "how" refers to the inner, spiritual disposition of the worshipers: "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). It also refers to the elements of the service of worship: the preaching of the gospel; the two sacraments, rightly administered; prayers and congregational singing; and the offerings, especially for the poor.

God does not leave the "how" of worship to the wisdom and whim of the worshiping people.

It is not even the case that God permits the church to worship Him in any way that she sees fit, as long as nothing in the worship obviously conflicts with His Word. Often Reformed people will defend some aspect of worship by saying, "It is not forbidden by Scripture." But it is the Lutheran and Anglican position on worship, that whatever is not forbidden is permitted. The distinctively Reformed position is radically different: Whatever is not prescribed is forbidden.

This principle of public worship is in accord with the nature and purpose of worship. Public worship is the fellowship of God with His people in the covenant of grace: God meets with His people in the Word and Spirit of Jesus Christ. In this meeting, God prescribes the manner of the meeting, not we. He is the sovereign, stipulating the "how" of worship, just as He stipulates who is to be worshiped.

Public worship has as its purpose the praise of God, not the religious satisfaction of those who worship. And God determines how He is to be praised.

As regards the benefit of worship for God's people, this benefit is edification. It is not spiritual entertainment, emotional excitement, aesthetic titillation, and the like. And God prescribes, as He alone

knows, the content of worship that will build up the saints.

God, who knows us and who knows the rulers of the church, would never leave such an important activity as worship to our discretion. Foolish, sinful people will soon invent a worship more to their own liking—worship that is not centered in, based on, and permeated with the Word; worship that is not so theocentric; worship consisting of ceremony and ritual; worship that is more conformable to contemporary culture; worship that caters more to ourselves.

Rulers of the church who have the authority to legislate worship, rather than to minister and administer God's regulations, will do exactly what rulers began to do very early in the history of the church. This resulted in the impressive, but empty and abominable service of Rome. And, in fact, the movement of "progressive worship" and "liturgical renewal" is leading Reformed and Presbyterian churches back to Rome.

Progressive worship is revolution against the regulative principle of worship, that is, revolution against the authority of God in the sphere of worship. I do not refer to this or that outrageously offensive aspect of progressive worship, whether a dramatic portrayal of the crucifixion or a liturgical dance. But progressive worship *as such* rebels against divine regulation of the service by Holy Scripture. Instead, it shapes the service according to what seems fitting, moving, and effective to the worship leader or to the people themselves.

What drives the new worship? "I like it!" "We feel that this or that religious activity would be a nice addition to the service!" "We were moved by it!" "This will draw the people, especially the young people!" The decisive question is, "What pleases the people?" We may put it this way: Man's own will governs the worship. The Bible calls this worship "will worship" (Col. 2:23).

We should not underestimate the power of the movement of progressive worship. It is in large part the reason why Willow Creek Community Church in the Chicago area, Calvary Church in Grand Rapids, and hosts of similar churches throughout North America are booming. They cater to the likes of the people. This is their strategy.

The true church may expect, perhaps is already experiencing, pressure to "learn" from the new worship, always "within limits," of course. This will come from the carnal members on her rolls and from the carnal natures of the living members.

Against the incoming tide stands the regulative principle: *God's wishes decide the worship.* Our wishes have as little to do with the "how" of worship as they do with whom we worship. How the church worships is not a matter of our preference. It is a matter of God's command.

It is discouraging then that reputedly conservative men in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches deny and even attack the regulative principle. Rev. Steve Schlissel is busy doing this. He has written a series of articles entitled, "All I Really Need to Know about Worship ... I don't Learn from the Regulative Principle" (*Messiah's Mandate*, 1999).

Although he pays lip service to the regulative principle, the Presbyterian theologian John Frame, professor at Westminster West Seminary, in fact, empties it of any governing power over his worship services in southern California and the worship services of anyone who heeds his instruction on worship. "It is virtually impossible to prove that anything is divinely required specifically for official services" (*Worship in Spirit and Truth*, P&R, 1996, p. 44).

Frame, supposedly a conservative at a reputedly conservative seminary, enthusiastically promotes the contemporary, progres-

sive worship that is destroying the traditional Reformed worship regulated by God's Word. Frame approves teaching in the services of public worship by people who are not elders; children's church; drama as a legitimate form of preaching; teaching by means of dialogue; infant communion; worship services that are entirely given over to music, that is, services without any Bible reading or preaching; and liturgical dance.

This is to repudiate the regulative principle by gutting it and to substitute for it as the rule for worship the fancies of Presbyterians in southern California and the tastes

of worship leader John Frame. Showing which way the wind is blowing, the book comes highly recommended by four leading Presbyterian theologians at two leading, purportedly conservative Reformed seminaries.

No one who fears God will say that the whole matter is unimportant. The right worship of Himself by His chosen people is God's ultimate purpose in creating and redeeming them. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise" (Isaiah 43:21).

Such is the importance of the

right worship of God by the church that God has devoted the entire first table of the law to it. The first commandment prescribes *whom* we must worship. The third prescribes *wherein* we must worship Him. The fourth prescribes *when* we must worship Him.

And the second?

The second prescribes *how* we are to worship God.

God thinks that the important question about the manner of the worship of His people is, "What pleases Him?"

So do we. □

— DJE

(to be continued)

Letters

■ The Real Scandal

I just read your editorial, "The Hillsdale Scandal" (*Standard Bearer*, March 15, 2000), and wanted to express my appreciation for a timely and perceptive contribution. I

didn't have a lot of data about all that occurred, *World* magazine being one of my main sources. I do, however, concur with your pointing to the "real scandal" and pray

that it will be effective in pointing us to God's holy requirements. Thanks.

(Dr.) Carl W. Bogue
Akron, Ohio

Church and State

Mr. James Lanfing

Vermont Supreme Court Extends Marital Benefits to Homosexual Couples: Invites Same-Sex Marriages

May the State of Vermont exclude same-sex couples from the benefits and protections that its laws provide to opposite-sex married couples? That is the fundamental question we address, a question that the Court well knows arouses deeply-felt religious, moral, and political beliefs.... We hold that the State is constitutionally required to extend to same-sex couples the common benefits and protections that flow from marriage under Vermont law. Whether this ultimately takes the form of inclusion within the marriage laws or a parallel "domestic partnership" system or some equivalent statutory alternative, rests with the legislature. Whatever system is chosen, however, must conform with the constitutional imperative to afford all Vermonters the common benefit, protection, and security of the law.

Baker, et al., v. State of Vermont,
Supreme Court of Vermont (January 31, 2000)

The Battle for Recognition of Same-Sex Marriages

The politically powerful and well-funded "gay rights" movement scored a stunning victory recently when the Vermont supreme court ruled in favor of three same-sex couples who sued the State of Vermont for refusing to issue them marriage licenses. Vermont's high court held that the "Common Benefit" clause of the state's constitution guaranteed same-sex couples the same legal benefits under the law as those enjoyed by opposite-sex married couples. The court then gave the state legislature "a reasonable time" either to issue same-sex marriage licenses or to create a parallel "domestic partnership" system legitimizing homosexual relationships.

Although this decision is limited to the state of Vermont and cannot be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, the 58-page opinion will undoubtedly have considerable influence on other states who have yet to face this issue. Vermont is the first state in the continental United States to extend marital rights to same-sex couples, although the Hawaii Supreme Court made a similar ruling in 1993, holding that its state's failure to recognize gay marriages amounted to gender discrimination.

The Vermont ruling is particularly shocking because, following the notorious 1993 Hawaii case, some 30 (mostly southern and western) states passed preemptive legislation banning homosexual marriages. Moreover, the U.S. Congress, fearing that "gay couples would fly to Hawaii to get married" and that the 49 other states would then be forced to recognize those marriages, passed the federal

Defense of Marriage Act, which denies federal recognition of homosexual marriages and allows states to pass laws ignoring same-sex unions licensed elsewhere.

The Vermont supreme court apparently ignored this rash of recent legislation passed to preserve traditional marriages and, oblivious to the numerous briefs filed in the case by pro-family organizations, nonetheless forced its judicial will on the Vermont legislature by directing it either to issue same-sex marriage licenses or to enact a parallel "domestic partnership" scheme for homosexual couples.

Judicial Activism

Conservative constitutional scholars are now viewing this notorious and unprecedented ruling with dismay and revulsion as another alarming instance of arrogant judicial activism. Rather than exercising proper judicial restraint required by our system of government by only *interpreting* laws passed by the legislature, these liberal activist judges are instead *legislating* from the bench and, in this case, deliberately jettisoned centuries of western legal tradition favoring marriage, procreation, child-rearing, and the family.

The court insisted it was not yet sanctioning same-sex marriage. But as one legal scholar has remarked: "Insofar as the Vermont opinion gives all the legal benefits of marriage to same-sex couples, it might as well issue the license too."

The Benefits of Marriage at Stake

For several centuries, the western legal tradition has recognized profound and substantive benefits and protections incident to marriage. They include, for example, the right to receive a portion of the estate of a deceased spouse who dies without a will; preference in being appointed an executor of a spouse's estate; the right to bring a lawsuit for wrongful death of a spouse and loss of consortium; the right to worker's compensation

survivor benefits; spousal benefits under health, life, disability, and accident insurance; presumption of joint ownership; the right of spousal support, maintenance, and property division in the event of separation and divorce; and many other rights and privileges. State and federal laws have afforded these rights and privileges to spouses because of the state's historic public interest in protecting and promoting marriage, procreation, child-rearing, the family, and the community as a whole. The same-sex couples argued, however, that because they are "similarly situated," their exclusion from such marital benefits and rights was unconstitutional.

The State's Interest in Marriage and Children Forfeited

The attorney general for Vermont had argued that the state licensed only heterosexual marriages because of its historic interest in legitimizing children and providing for their security: to discard such an interest would "advance the notion that mothers and fathers are mere surplusage to the functions of procreation and child rearing."

But the court summarily dismissed the state's alleged interest in "promoting child-rearing in a setting that provides both male and female role models." Although admitting that this was the state's "most substantive" argument for promoting traditional marriage, the court noted a "fundamental flaw" in the state's defense of heterosexual marriage:

In 1996, the Vermont legislature enacted, and the Governor signed, a law removing all legal barriers to the adoption of children by same-sex couples. At the same time, the legislature provided legal protection in the form of court-ordered child support and parent-child contact in the event that same-sex parents dissolved their "domestic relationship." In the light of these express policy choices, the State's arguments that

Mr. Lanting, a member of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church, is a practicing attorney.

Vermont public policy favors opposite-sex over same-sex parents are patently without substance.

The tragic implications of this argument by the court cannot be overemphasized. Simply stated, the thrust of the court's argument is this: Because the Vermont legislature had previously sanctioned adoption of children by homosexual couples, passed laws prohibiting discrimination based on "sexual orientation," and approved artificial conception by lesbian mothers, the government has thereby forfeited its historic interest in protecting and promoting heterosexual marriage, procreation, child-rearing, and the traditional family.

The court noted that since an increasing number of opposite-sex couples marry with no intent of ever having children, the traditional relationship between marriage and procreation is no longer valid. Moreover, the court declared, "with or without the marriage sanction, the reality is that increasing numbers of homosexual couples are employing increasingly efficient assisted-reproductive techniques to conceive and raise children."

The court's bizarre "logic" can be summarized as follows: (1) Many same-sex couples as well as opposite-sex couples often marry "for reasons unrelated to procreation"; (2) Many same-sex couples as well as opposite-sex couples often use "artificial reproductive techniques" to give birth to children; (3) Many same-sex couples as well as opposite-sex couples adopt and raise children; (4) current laws prohibit discrimination based on sexual "orientation":

Therefore, to the extent that the state's purpose in licensing civil marriage was, and is, to legitimize children and provide for their security, the law plainly excludes many same-sex couples who are no different from opposite-sex couples with respect to these ob-

jectives. In short, the marital exclusion treats persons who are similarly situated for purposes of the law, differently. Thus, viewed in the light of history, logic, and experience, we conclude that none of the interests asserted by the state provides a reasonable and just basis for the continued exclusion of same-sex couples from the benefits incident to a civil marriage license under Vermont law.

The Demise of Marriage and Society

It must be said, of course, that surely the Vermont court did *not* come to this decision "in the light of history, logic, and experience" as it claimed. On the contrary, legal "history" has always promoted and protected marriage as an exclusive relationship between a man and a woman; same-sex relationships were despised and criminalized as sodomy and deviate sexual conduct. Moreover, "logic" tells us that to argue that same-sex couples should be given marriage license and benefits because they are allegedly "similarly situated" is nonsense, since it begs the very question at issue. Finally, "experience" has already told us that further erosion of the protections for marriage, child-rearing, and the family will only hasten the demise of western society as we know it.

Countermeasures

The question remains as to whether anything can be done to prevent liberal activist judges in other states from re-defining marriage and discarding centuries of legal tradition. After the 1993 Hawaii supreme court decision affording marital benefits to same-sex couples, some 30 states passed preemptive legislation specifically excluding same-sex couples from the definition of marriage.

Other states are now rushing to amend their state constitutions by voter initiatives and referenda placed on state ballots this election year. Alaska and Hawaii have al-

ready passed such measures and California voters a few weeks ago faced "Proposition 22" which declared simply: "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California." Similar measures are planned in Colorado, Nevada, and other states.

But will state constitutional amendments defining marriage be an effective countermeasure against the homosexual agenda being adopted by activist judges? Apparently it was somewhat effective recently when the Hawaii supreme court refused to recognize homosexual marriages. Although the same court in 1993 had extended marital benefits to homosexual couples, in its recent ruling it held that the 1998 amendment to the state constitution (passed by a 2-1 voter margin) banning homosexual marriages resolved the issue. The decision was a loss for three homosexual couples who unsuccessfully demanded Hawaiian marriage licenses several years ago.

But the Hawaii court strangely enough left untouched its 1993 decision requiring extension of marital benefits. The confused and bizarre result is that now in Hawaii and Vermont the state must extend "marital" rights and privileges to couples who are outside the state's definition of marriage. The Vermont legislature is now considering several bills which would create a license scheme for homosexual relationships, not unlike the marriage status.

Reformed Christians can only be appalled at these recent legal developments which profoundly weaken the very foundation of western civilization. Indeed, if our society and legal system can no longer define and protect marriage, child-rearing, and the family, then the immediate future of our culture is bleak. Soon Christian employers, landlords, insurance salespersons, and others will be forced to recognize homosexual "marriages" or face unpleasant legal consequences. □

Fear

The word fear, as a noun, verb, or adjective, is found in Scripture over five hundred times; only ten books of the sacred canon do not mention fear. This is not surprising, since fear is basic to true religion, and its absence is true of all unbelief. Scripture distinguishes between the fear of the unbeliever and the fear of the child of God; and because we are by nature inclined to be fearful, it often calls us *not* to fear.

The only proper object of fear is Jehovah God. No one is like unto Him, who is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders" (Ex. 15:11). God *is* to be feared and *ought* to be feared (Ps. 76:7, 11). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7); it is the whole duty of man (Eccles. 11:13). Not only does the individual Christian fear the Lord, but this is also true of the congregation in its worship, for God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints (Ps. 89:7). This fear for God is also the basis for the communion of saints, for "they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name" (Mal. 3:16).

But the wicked cannot, and will not, fear God. "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18). False prophets and preachers "feed themselves without fear" (Jude 12), running greedily after the error of Balaam for reward. Judah was a foolish people in that they did not fear the Lord nor tremble at His presence (Jer. 5:22). Unbelievers do have a certain fear for man (John 9:22; Acts 5:26), and they spend their lifetime in bondage, fearing death (Heb. 2:15). Those that sin willfully after having received the knowledge of the truth have "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" (Heb. 10:27), for plagues shall come upon those that do not fear "this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD" (Deut. 28:58). Who shall be able to stand when the great day of His wrath is come? (Rev. 6:17). The believer shall, as he is covered by the blood of the Lamb!

The fear of God that we have been given is clean

or holy (Ps. 19:9). This holy fear causes us to tremble before God (Phil. 2:12); it is reverence for God (Heb. 12:28); it results in meekness before Him (I Pet. 3:15); and it is mixed with love. Strikingly, the apostle John writes that "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (I John 4:18). The child of God fears his God, but does not fear any evil (Ps. 23:4), war, or calamity (Ps. 27:1), or what man can do unto him (Heb. 13:6). Indeed, he does not fear them that are able to kill the body, but rather Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28). How is this to be explained? Only in that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. We experience that love, return it to God, and show it to our neighbor. Convinced that God is our Father, we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God. All is well. God's perfect love casts out fear and torment.

But it is perfect love alone that is able to do that, and because our faith and our love are not perfect, the Scriptures repeatedly exhort us *not* to fear. By nature we are fearful; by nature we do not fear God; by nature we fear those things which the unbeliever fears. Hence Abraham is told not to fear the Canaanites, for God is his shield and exceeding great reward (Gen. 15:1). Joshua was not to fear nor be dismayed regarding the unknown future after Moses had died (Josh. 8:1). Zion is not to fear the revilings and reproaches of men (Is. 51:7). The women (and the church) are not to fear, for Christ is risen from the dead as He said (Matt. 28:6). Through His death and resurrection, Christ has destroyed him that had the power of death (the devil) and delivered us from the fear of death (Heb. 2:14, 15). The Spirit of adoption that is in us is not a spirit of bondage that causes us to fear (Rom. 8:15). We are called to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear, knowing that we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (I Pet. 1:17, 18). In heavenly vision, John hears a voice saying, "Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great" (Rev. 19:5). Then all will be perfect: faith, hope, and love. And godly fear.

Until then, "Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). □

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Christian Education and Service

The Word of God plainly teaches that believers are called to a life of serving one another. Jesus told His disciples not to seek to be masters over one another, but rather to serve the others. Serving others follows a principle of God's kingdom, namely that "whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:12). Applying this principle Jesus admonished His disciples, "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (v. 11).

Jesus demonstrated that truth in a most dramatic and striking way. The night before He was crucified, He moved from one disciple to another around the table and, on His knees, washed their dust-covered feet. After He finished He informed His astonished disciples that it was done for their instruction. "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15).

However, as striking as that incident is, it pales in comparison with the ultimate act of sacrificial service, namely that of Jesus laying down His life for the benefit of

His people. He taught His disciples, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28; the word for *minister* in this verse is *serve*).

Christian schools are called to instruct the children of believers in the fear of the Lord. The aim of the school is to equip these young believers to serve God in this world. The goal is the "perfect man," the spiritually mature believer, one "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:17).

It is to be expected, therefore, that the Christian school will both teach the students how to serve others and equip them for a life of service.

In fact, a significant new development in the Christian school is that a particular kind of Christian service is not only encouraged but, in more and more instances, required. It is encouraged through organizations which set up concrete opportunities for giving service. It is fostered by assemblies in Christian high schools and colleges which promote "service" in a variety of ways, including the public recognition of those students who participated in "service projects." In some institutions, students are bombarded with announcements and notices of service opportunities.

"Service" is even required for graduation in some schools. Consider the following paragraph from a particular high school student handbook.

...[E]ach student at _____ Christian High School will be required to provide sixteen (16) hours of applied service each academic year. These service hours will be a requirement for graduation. In order for a student to be in good standing in his/her academic class, the student must complete the 16 hours between June 1 and May 31 of each year.

That is not an isolated example. It is becoming commonplace to require students to perform service hours. In some institutions service is a separate graduation requirement; in others, it is demanded by individual courses such as government or religion (Bible).

When it is seen in this light, the concept of "service" takes on a rather different character. Is this what Jesus meant when He told His disciples to be "servants"? What are these "service hours" and "service projects" that are being touted by so many Christian high schools and colleges?

What constitutes "service" is often rather vaguely defined. It may involve helping an elderly or handicapped person with house or yard work. Service may include such a wide variety of activities as assisting in Sunday School, participating in the Big Brother/Sister program, helping out in a Special Olympics event, or volunteering in a hospital or nursing home. Working in an inner-city kitchen for the poor or visiting prisons also constitutes service.

Service projects are organized endeavors, often involving light

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construction, almost always in a place far from home. Homes are built or restored in the slums of Chicago or in economically depressed regions in Mississippi or Kentucky, for example. Christian community centers are remodeled and cleaned up. Service work can involve painting, roofing, hauling away construction debris, tearing down unwanted concrete walls, and yard work. Often times the students have opportunities to interact with the people in these poorer areas and, through that contact, to witness to the residents of their (the students') faith.

Such service projects are the ultimate kind of service, tailor made for Christian high schools and colleges. These projects tap the enthusiasm, idealism, and boundless energy of youth. Service projects attract young folks eager to make a difference in the world. The projects give tremendous satisfaction in that regard. At the conclusion of the week or two of work, the old dilapidated building has been transformed! The people who benefit are most grateful. The students have a sense of accomplishment, much heightened by the fact that it was done in the name of Jesus. The people who saw them work, those who benefited, were told, "This is our way of showing the love of Christ." That is heady stuff for Christian youth.

Students have every incentive to join in. Youths who work on such a project (either on spring break or in the summer) fulfill any service hours requirement that the school may have. They have a very good time with like-minded students – enjoying a unity and camaraderie not often felt in day-to-day living. In addition, they have opportunity to experience a different culture and interact with different people, as well as see a new part of the country, or even the world. Finally, participants receive

approval from parents, teachers, and church members for their work. Not a few students even receive public recognition in church bulletins and school assemblies.

Schools that encourage or require service hours like these projects as well. Service projects are supervised either by a church or a school organization. They are not hard to monitor – it is plain that the projects involve sufficient hours to cover service requirements. Besides, committees who monitor each student's service hours are assured that this fits the school's standards for "service."

Since a few people with old-fashioned notions of Christian education might wonder about the propriety of schools encouraging or even requiring service hours, promoters have ready answers. The rationale is that the Christian school seeks to instruct the whole person. Learning Christian values and standards requires not only thinking, but doing. The Christian school has the structure to encourage as well as monitor the activity.

Also in support of service hours the point is made that showing love to God and the neighbor is the necessary exercise of the Christian's faith. If the Christian does not do service, he falls under the Bible's condemnation of those who only hear the word, but do not do it. Indeed, not the *forgetful hearer*, but the "doer of the work, ... shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:22-26).

Not only that, but it is asserted that Christians are called to "wholistic service" (i.e., whole or complete). Such service requires meeting not only the spiritual needs but also the physical needs of those who are served.

Service hours, it is maintained, has additional biblical support. James 2:14-26 teaches that faith must produce works, otherwise it is no faith. The judgment set forth in Matthew 25:34-40 dem-

onstrates that Jesus expects His people to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the prisoners.

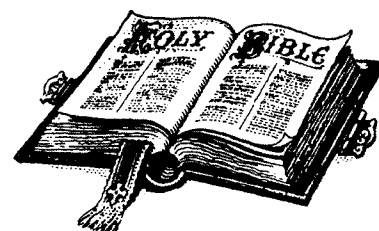
In addition, service hours are confessional, it is asserted. The three parts of the Heidelberg Catechism are summarized by the words *Sin*, *Salvation*, and *Service*. The knowledge of sin, faith, and the gift of salvation must lead to service.

Goals for the service projects include: "To share Christ's love"; "To challenge participants to adopt a more service-oriented lifestyle"; and "To assist and encourage the growth of the ministry centers."

Finally, it is averred that doing service is "kingdom work." The Christian is a citizen of the kingdom of Christ. The whole world belongs to Christ. It is the proper work of the Christian to regain this creation for Christ. Although this regaining of the creation is not limited to service projects, it certainly includes such communal action. Indeed, some are so bold as to assert that Christ will not return until the whole of the creation is regained for Christ.

Armed with such support, many a Christian high school and college have pushed students into service.

The Reformed Christian, however, must not be taken in by these arguments. This conception of service is simply wrong. In brief, let it be noted that, on the one hand, service hours and projects are a perversion of the life of Christian service required by God. And on the other hand, they lie outside of the proper work of the Christian school. This will be examined next time, the Lord willing. □



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Being Baptized in the Spirit (2)

The Truth Over Against the False Teaching of the Charismatics

We ended our last article by asking why Christ told His disciples, who had already received not only the sacrament of baptism but also the spiritual baptism to which it pointed, that they could not go forth preaching the gospel to the nations until they had received the baptism in the Spirit, and were thus endowed with power from on high. Evidently there was a sense in which they had already been baptized, and a sense in which they had to wait until they were baptized. How is this to be explained?

The explanation for this is to be found in the fact that the church at this time was going through the transition of Pentecost. At Pentecost, Christ *poured out* His Spirit upon His church, so that God's people experienced the blessings of salvation to a much greater degree than they had before. This change took place after Christ was exalted to the right hand of the Father and received from the Father the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). Christ then proceeded to pour out this Spirit upon His body, the church. When God's people were thus filled with the Spirit, they received the additional grace they needed to proclaim the gospel of sovereign grace to the different nations of the world.

Although there was a sense in which the disciples had already been baptized prior to Pentecost, it was at Pentecost that they experienced this baptism to a much greater degree. This baptism caused them to experience more the sanctifying power of the Spirit that cleansed them more from sin and gave them a deeper knowledge into the truths of Scripture. This was precisely what they needed in order to perform the work Christ had given them to do.

The Devilish Signs and Wonders of the Charismatics

What draws many to the Charismatic movement is the "power" they claim to possess. The first baptism, they say, merely brings one into Christ. But the second baptism gives one power to perform amazing things. This was referred to in the previous article. This power is said to manifest itself, first of all, in their being able to speak with tongues, a gift which they say always accompanies the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Some of these people also claim to have the power to perform miracles. This is no surprise, for the external signs of speaking in tongues and performing of miracles go together. They are referred to together in Mark 16:17, 18.

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Scripture makes clear that the signs and wonders performed by Christ and the apostles ended when the Scriptures had been completed. These miracles are referred to as "signs of an apostle" in II Corinthians 12:12. Signs of an apostle were obviously performed only during the days of the apostles.

When we consider the purpose of these signs, we can understand why these signs ended once the Scriptures were completed. These signs accompanied new divine revelation and served to confirm that word, taking away any doubt that the word which was spoken was really the word of God.

We see this already in the days of Moses. When God gave Moses a message to deliver to the people, Moses expressed doubt that the people would believe that God had really spoken to him. Then God gave Moses some miracles that he would be able to perform before his brethren, signs which would confirm that the word he had spoken was really the word of God.

The signs performed in the days of the new dispensation had the same purpose, namely, to confirm the word of God. We read of this in Mark 16:19, 20.

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So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and **confirming the word** with signs following. Amen.

New revelation was being brought, and signs were being performed to confirm this new revelation. But now that this period of new revelation has come to a close, these confirming signs have also ceased.

The one who is working among the Charismatics is none other than the devil, who has been given power to perform lying signs and wonders, to deceive those who have pleasure in unrighteousness. We read in the Scriptures that in the last days there will indeed be some performing signs and wonders. But these signs and wonders will be signs and wonders of the lie, performed by those under the dominion of the devil. II Thessalonians 2:9-12 speaks of this when setting forth the work of the coming Antichrist.

Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Similarly, Revelation 13:13 says that the antichristian church will do "great wonders" in front of the ungodly world.

The devil is bringing another gospel today, and he is trying to confirm that lie by these "signs and wonders of the lie." This, however, is taking place under the sovereign

control of God, who governs even the forces of evil. God is making use of these lying signs and wonders. They belong to the strong delusion He is sending against all those who do not love the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness.

The Power of the Devil: An Impersonal Force

The power working among the Charismatics is impersonal and devilish. It does not bring the people into a personal, intimate communion with God. It is a devilish force that directs and controls people, so that they are more and more in bondage to sin.

This stands in direct contrast with the work of the Holy Spirit. When the disciples of Christ were filled with the Holy Spirit, they were brought much closer to God, so that Peter, for example, could now clearly explain how the Old Testament Scriptures spoke of the suffering and exaltation of Christ. The power of the Charismatics, however, is not a power that causes them to grow in their knowledge of God, so that they willingly serve Him. Rather, the power of which they speak leads them to teach all sorts of false doctrines, causes them to babble incoherently, and sometimes makes them fall over backwards. This is clearly not the power that brings one into a deeper understanding of the Word of God. It is a power that appeals to the sinful flesh, and gives one the feeling of being taken over by a power from outside of him.

Thus this power of which the Charismatics speak can rightly be called a *force*. It is something they give themselves over to, so that it controls them and keeps them in bondage. They babble without knowing what they are saying, unless someone is there to "interpret" the message. Some of them say that the language they speak is a real foreign language that is unknown to them, while others say it is a heavenly language unknown

to anyone on this earth. But, either way, they are involved in an activity in which there is no growth in the conscious knowledge and covenant fellowship with God. All emphasis is placed on the experience of having a power come over them and take control of them.

The Holy Spirit: The Power from on High

The power of which Christ spoke is the Holy Spirit Himself. In Article VIII of the Belgic Confession, the Holy Spirit is called the eternal power and might of God. This power is actually a person; He is the third person of the holy Trinity. It is this person who is the power that brings us into the personal, intimate friendship that is called the covenant of God.

This power from on high always works with the Word, guiding us into the truth of that Word. He guides us into Christ by guiding us into the truth, for Christ is the truth. Therefore, the churches where this Spirit is found are churches where there is great emphasis placed upon growing in the knowledge of the truth. And because this Spirit has been guiding the church into the truth from generation to generation, Spirit-filled churches also have sound, biblical creeds that the Spirit has guided them to write.

When the disciples were filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter stood up and preached a sermon that indicated that he now had a much deeper understanding of how the Scriptures all speak of Christ and His work. Similarly today, the more we pray for the filling of the Spirit, the more we receive that Spirit, who causes us to grow in our love of the truth and to be able to preach that truth with boldness.

This is what the church needs in order to preach God's Word to the nations. In every nation the church has to battle against many lies. The church needs the power of the Spirit to sanctify her and to

cause her to grow in faith, so that she is prepared to battle these errors with Scripture.

By God's grace we continue to

receive this Spirit, this baptism. It is in this way that we are prepared to proclaim the gospel of grace to

the nations, so that every nation may embrace this truth, and proclaim it in their own language, to the glory of God. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Martin VanderWal

Light into the Darkness

Matthew 4:12-25

The above-mentioned text presents an introduction to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God incarnate. God has ordained Him for the work, by means of John's baptism. Tempted by the devil, tried by God, He has demonstrated Himself equal to His weighty calling. Now His works must be recorded.

The Darkness of Affliction

The place of this work of Jesus Christ, according to Matthew's gospel account, is the region known as Galilee. Galilee was located to the north of Judea, with the region of Samaria intervening between the two.

One who was born and raised in the region of Judea would hold Galilee in a certain contempt. While Galilee was indeed Jewish, it was the backwaters of Jewry. That region was far from the center of the Jewish world. In Judea was the glorious city of Jerusalem, adorned with Herod's temple, Jerusalem as the center of influence

and culture. The elite of society would never think of living in Galilee. Galilee was in Jesus' day the same as Isaiah identified it: of the Gentiles.

Such contempt was due in no small measure to the history of that northern region. It was the place of the apostate Northern Kingdom of Israel. Judea could claim that it had remained faithful under the house of David, and the region surely bore that stamp. Galilee, however, as Zebulon and Naphtali, had rebelled against the house of David, and placed itself under the apostate reign of Jeroboam. It was therefore, in Isaiah's day, a land of darkness. It had also been a land of great affliction. When Jehovah visited affliction upon His people, that affliction came through the land settled by Zebulon and Naphtali. When Asa king of Judah sent to Benhadad for help because of the oppression of Baasha king of Israel, Benhadad brought the forces of Syria to trouble the cities of Naphtali, in Galilee (II Chron. 16:4). The war between Hazael, a later king of Syria, and Jehoahaz took place in the same region (II Kings 13:3, 7, in the light of 14:25-27). The captivity of the Northern Kingdom, under Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria, also began in Galilee (II Kings 15:29). The forces of

Nebuchadnezzar, brought finally against Judah and Jerusalem, passed through Galilee on their way to Jerusalem (Jer. 1:14, 15).

In light of all this history, we can well understand why Judea would hold Galilee in such low esteem.

It was according to God's good pleasure that such a region should be the center of our Lord's earthly ministry. It was the fulfillment, again, of the Old Testament Scriptures. As Isaiah prophesied, so it was bound to come to pass. It was his word of comfort to those in that region, that light would arise in the darkness there. But, even more, it was a word of grace. Not in the so-called light of Judea or Jerusalem would the Lord have His earthly ministry, but in the darkness of the region of Galilee. The Lord will not call the righteous, but sinners into His kingdom.

The Disciples Called

This point gains ever further ground when we remember the identity of those whom Jesus called as His disciples: Peter, Andrew, James, and John. They were the residents of this backwater region which sat in darkness. These four were typical of Galilee. They were not the intelligentsia of society. They were not of name or reputa-

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tion. They wielded no power or influence in the halls of Herod's temple or palace. They had no wealth, which, when properly applied, might accomplish great things. They were not students pursuing a "higher education." After all, the exercise of the mind caught no fish, rowed no boats, mended no nets. Such pursuits would be, at most, a pleasant diversion, and, at least, an idle exercise leading away from the day's work. We would identify them as the least likely candidates for disciples.

There is further contrast. There were others whom earthly wisdom would choose as superior. There was much in the way of learning in Judea, especially in the schools at Jerusalem. There boys were trained in their youth to be rabbis. They were filled, not just with earthly wisdom and learning, but also with the knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. They were taught the interpretation and the application of those Scriptures. The sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Herodians, and farther away, the Essenes, all had their schools. There were plenty of men who had graduated from these schools. At the present, they functioned as teachers of the people. Among these we must number Gamaliel and his protégé Saul of Tarsus.

Earthly wisdom might choose those in political power. In Jerusalem the chief priests and the Sanhedrin had men of stature and power. They had influence with Herod and Pilate. They had a certain power over the people. With them, Jesus might find a way to win the whole nation of the Jews to His kingdom. If the learners would not become leaders, perhaps the leaders might become learners.

None of these did Jesus call as His disciples. They were not qualified. They were vessels already filled, saying nothing about the content. The fishermen of Galilee were qualified, not because of what

they were, but because of what they were not. Here, too, is rich grace. Christ will make His own disciples. He will fill them with the treasures of His kingdom. His call demonstrates that preeminently. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Not: "I will make you fishers of men, if you follow me." That call—not a condition—these four must follow. For that call follows the work of election in these four. As Jesus later told them, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." As with His choice, so His calling is efficacious. Of Simon and Andrew we read, "And they straightway left their nets, and followed him." Of James and John we read, "And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him." They neither deliberated nor discussed. The call was compelling. As He had called them, so would He equip them.

The Shining Light

With these four now called and following, Jesus proceeded to the work of His earthly ministry. The light must shine throughout Galilee, and even beyond, dispelling the darkness. In this darkest region the light first shines.

Matthew 4:23 gives the proper order of that shining, to the gathering of a great multitude. What we find noteworthy about that light is that it consists first of all in preaching, to which the miracles are subordinate. The work of Christ described by Matthew in verses 23-25 is the continuation of the words of verse 17. The work of John the Baptist is continued in Jesus' teaching and preaching in the synagogues. The gospel of the kingdom is exactly that it is at hand. There can be no doubt of this. The public work of the forerunner is effectively finished, and the King Himself now takes up the labor. That the preaching of the gospel is itself light must be stated over against the healing acts of Christ. Those wondrous healings

serve a subordinate purpose. It is important to understand that subordinate purpose in a definite order.

First, but least, those miracles serve the gospel of the kingdom by giving a picture of the work of the King. He indeed does bring healing, even miraculous healing, in various instances. The mention of all these different things signify that the power of this King is over all. There is nothing too difficult for Him. In this regard, however, they demonstrate the true healing that this King brings, even salvation from the death of sin. Citizens are not brought into the kingdom by any wonder of healing of any physical or psychological or emotional kind. They are not even brought into the kingdom by the casting out of a demon. It is the gospel of the kingdom that brings in its citizens. Where the wonder-working power of God accompanies the preaching, children of the devil's kingdom are translated into the kingdom of the dear Son of God. There is the real wonder and the true healing.

Second, these miracles had the purpose of gathering a multitude about Jesus. Among the people, Jesus first healed. Then, after the fame of Him had gone out, those dwelling in Syria brought their sick and tormented to Him. Here is an amazing thing. If things were dark in Galilee of the Gentiles, things were certainly dark in Syria. Those living in the realm of the afflictors now bring their afflicted to the land of the afflicted, to have their afflictions removed by this King. No matter how great the affliction, the King healed them all. It is easy to understand why great multitudes would gather about Jesus.

Finally, these wonders sealed the King's word as true. They signify, they draw, but to seal is their most important function. So many wonders prove that the King carries the authority of God. Therefore, when He preaches and when He teaches, it must carry all the

force and weight of God's own Word. In order to understand this, we need only consider the bulk of

the context. There are three chapters ahead that are all teaching and preaching the gospel of the king-

dom. There we must see the true light that destroys the deepest darkness.

Questions for Meditation and Further Study:

1. What things are omitted from this gospel account? How does this omission help us understand the particular emphasis of this account, especially in the light of the inspiration of Scripture? How do these inspired omissions draw attention to the continuity between John and Jesus?

2. In how many ways is Isaiah 9:1, 2 fulfilled by the events recorded in Matthew 5:12-25.

3. What other reasons can you see for Jesus' call of the four from their particular occupation? How would this underscore the observation made by the Sanhedrin recorded in Acts 4:13? How must this observation continue on to the present?

4. Why are so many different afflictions mentioned in verse 24? What is the range and diversity of these as mentioned? What purpose

might this range and diversity have in addressing the power of the King?

5. Great multitudes followed Christ, according to Matthew 5:25. Is the "success" of Jesus' earthly ministry to be defined in terms of these multitudes? Its authority? Must the present church of Christ measure its success by the multitudes that follow? Take into account the subsequent history, especially the death of this King on the cross. □

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Gun Locks, Etc.

One hesitates to add to the volumes of articles treating the sad killings that have taken place within the past year in the schools. Most recently, it was the killing of one six-year-old by another. It seems beyond comprehension that a six-year-old could actually come to school with a loaded gun and kill a classmate. Endless questions are asked: Did he know what he was doing? Is he morally responsible for his action? Can he be prosecuted for his terrible deed?

But what is more incomprehensible is the attempt to find all kinds of solutions to the "problem" of guns. One hears of "gun controls," "gun locks," "licensing of guns," and more. One receives the distinct impression that many will deal with the "problem" by proposing ways to avoid the conse-

quences rather than dealing with the real difficulty.

Newsweek, March 13, 2000, featured this sad event as part of its cover story. In an article, "Did Kayla have to die?" the magazine began by explaining the reaction of the father of the little boy who committed murder.

The father knew it even before he was told. When a fellow inmate informed Dedric Darnell Owens that there had been a shooting at his son's school, "a cold, sickening feeling came over me," Owens later told the local county sheriff, Bob Pickell. "I knew it was my son that did the shooting," said Owens, who was in jail for violating probation after serving a two-year sentence on cocaine and burglary charges. Sheriff Pickell asked Owens, how he could be so certain? "Because of his past violent acts," answered Owens, according to Pickell. The first grader had already been suspended from school three times for fighting, once for jabbing another kid with a pencil. In be-

tween jail terms, Owens had asked his son why he fought other kids. "Because I hate them," the boy answered. Owens said his son spent his time "watching violent movies and TV."

The article continues by describing the sad home life of the boy who took and used the loaded gun he found in the home in which he stayed. *Newsweek* continues by pointing out in an article, "Learning Right from Wrong," the answers that others have provided.

To the legal system, the answer is clear: children have the requisite moral sense—the ability to tell right from wrong—by age 7 to 15, depending on which state they live in, and so can be held responsible for their actions. The Roman Catholic Church pegs it at the early end of that range: children reach the "age of reason" by the tender age of 7, a milestone marked by their first confession of sin and holy communion. Developmental psychologists and other researchers who study the ques-

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tion are not so sure. How old a child must be to both know in his mind and feel in his heart that lying, stealing, cheating, hurting—let alone murdering—are morally wrong is a matter of scientific debate.

But the question of when is not nearly so fraught as the question of how. Although they pretty much agree that living in a crack house—with people who respond to challenges with violence, and bereft of parental love, supervision and models of moral behavior—can leave a child's conscience still-born, scientists are struggling toward a definitive answer to the question of how children develop a sense of right and wrong. "If there is any consensus, it is that conscience is a combination of head, heart and hand," says Marvin Berkowitz, professor of character development at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. "It is knowing the good, loving the good and doing the good. And that requires both cognitive and emotional components."

The emotional piece falls into place first. "All children are born with a running start on the path to moral development," says the psychologist William Damon of Stanford University....

...The other emotional ingredients of conscience are that quaint pair, guilt and shame. Although some child advocates insist that no child should ever be shamed, scientists who study moral development disagree. "Guilt and shame are part of conscience," says Berkowitz. In young children, the sense of right and wrong is born of the feeling that you have disappointed someone who loves you, usually your parents. If there is no one whose love you need, whose disapproval breaks your heart, you are missing a crucial source of the emotions that add up to knowing right from wrong and acting on it....

Amazing how accurate is some of the reasoning of these psychologists. Yet in all of this, they refuse to acknowledge the clear teachings of Scripture on this score. It is one thing to point out that "guilt and

shame" are a "part of conscience"; it is another to emphasize, as did David in Psalm 51, "I was conceived and born in *sin*." The fact of total depravity is ignored. It is one thing to speak of one who has "no one whose love you need, whose disapproval breaks your heart..." it is very different to emphasize the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is not gun locks or gun license that will cure the problem. One might present good arguments that those have some useful functions. But all such suggestions ignore the real problem. There was a time when no one would have thought of "gun locks." Guns were hanging on the walls of homes. Children did not take them to shoot other children. But times have changed.

We live in a society in which violence is glorified on the screen and on TV. The news broadcasts go into all of the most gruesome details about the latest murders and atrocities. Under the guise of "freedom of speech," the most awful cursing, the most vivid dramatizations of murders, rape, as well as sexual innuendoes of every sort are presented.

Though a young girl can be put into prison for many years for killing her child just born, the noted and respected physician can kill the babe hours before birth and retain his freedom. For one woman who engages this physician, it is a matter of "choice." For the other woman it is a matter of "murder."

We live in a society where the God-ordained institution of marriage is undermined and is being destroyed. Divorce and remarriage have become commonplace. There is not much of "home life" anymore. Homosexuality is openly approved—and attempts are made to have unions of homosexuals to be considered "marriage." Those who are opposed are accused of "hate crimes."

Gambling has become commonplace. It is extortion especially

of the poor. If it is done by the "mafia," it is illegal; if it is done by the government, it is encouraged and extolled.

Then we wonder why there is so much of child and woman abuse. We wonder why there are so many sexual crimes. We wonder why children can murder children.

Will gun locks solve the problem? This could conceivably prevent some gun accidents. It is, perhaps, a reasonable innovation. But it does not solve the underlying problem. Systematically society has been eradicating the name of God. There is no room for Him in the public schools. His Word may not be read (except, perhaps, as "good" literature). Systematically society has been accepting all kinds of idolatrous "religions," while accusing true Christianity of bigotry and intolerance. Under the guise of "choice" and "freedom of expression" and "alternate life styles" society has shredded the laws of our God. The depravity of man has been flowering and bearing an abundance of fruit. Man simply fools himself with thinking that these "Band-Aids" will solve the cancers in society.

Nothing less than true repentance before God is required. Only the perfect work of the Savior Jesus Christ can deliver from sin and death. Therefore Scripture requires, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (with the assurance) and thou shalt be saved and thy house."

■ Tax Exemption—Subsidizing Churches?

An article in the *Grand Rapids Press*, February 12, 2000, contains disturbing information. The IRS, it is said, is getting "tough on churches" and their tax exemptions.

"Bill Clinton is promoting policies that are in rebellion to God's laws," said the advertisement by the Church at Pierce Creek.

When the Internal Revenue Ser-

vice challenged the church's tax-exempt status because of the church ad, it started a nine-year battle between the agency and the New York church.

The church's ad, printed in the Washington Times and USA Today, ran two presidential elections ago. It attacked then Gov. Clinton's moral character and said his abortion and homosexuality policies conflicted with theology. It also said, "Christian Beware. Do not put economy ahead of the Ten Commandments." The ad concluded by requesting tax exempt contributions.

The IRS sent a letter stating "a reasonable belief exists that you may not be tax-exempt" and asked the church for information "to better understand your activities."

The church, however, took the position this wasn't prohibited taxpayer-subsidized political activity; that it was a religious message "warning members of the Body of Christ." After the church failed to respond to IRS requests for information, the agency revoked the exempt status.

Then Pierce Creek went to court and gave three reasons why it should prevail:

* The IRS violated its right to free speech. The court countered that a tax exemption is a method

of subsidizing churches, and the First amendment doesn't require, and might oppose, a government policy for subsidizing factions within political debates.

* The IRS violated the law providing that government shall not burden a person's exercise of religion. The court countered with the argument that the lost exemption may deter some people from contributing, but this doesn't impose a burden on its members' exercise of religion if they wanted to proceed with subsidy.

* The IRS, the church claimed, was selectively prosecuting Pierce Creek. Other churches allow political candidates to speak from the pulpit, and nothing happens to them. The court countered that this case was different. The other churches were not using political advertisements as a means of soliciting tax-deductible donations.

The court ultimately upheld the IRS' standard for exempt status revocation.

The moral: The IRS giveth, but for those who fail to follow its commandments, it taketh away.

I only wish I could have come up with the last statement as my comment on this action—but the writer of the article did so first.

What one finds particularly

disturbing is the statement made by the court that "a tax exemption is a method of subsidizing churches, and the First Amendment doesn't require, and might oppose, a government policy for subsidizing factions within political debates."

Now one might well and properly claim that society in general receives far, far more from the churches than it "loses" because of a tax exemption status. However, the sad fact is that the court regards this exemption as a matter of "subsidy." And what is true for churches would be equally true for Christian schools. If the argument is correct, then there could be raised the question whether the First Amendment allows for such government "support" since there is supposed to be separation between church and state. If the government regards "exemption" to be "subsidy," what would it say then about such things as "school vouchers"? Clearly the courts can find ways to silence the church and schools—or force them to suffer the consequences. Likely we will be hearing more of such court actions in the future. □

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

The Nature of the Diaconate (1) An Office of Authority

Having sketched the history and basis of the diaconate, we must now explain in more detail what this office is. Doing this will continue to impress

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on us that the office is necessary for the church and has a solid basis in Scripture.

The nature of this office is well summarized by this definition of the term "diaconate": the diaconate is that office in the church of Jesus Christ which is particularly devoted to works of mercy and the care of the church's poor. But this

raises questions: What characterizes an office? What is true of the diaconate by virtue of its being an office? And what makes the office of deacon distinct from that of the other offices in the church? The nature of the diaconate must be explained in more detail.

The diaconate is an office.

An office is a position given by God to men in the sphere of His covenant, in which He authorizes them to serve Him in that sphere. God gave Jesus Christ an office. The name "Christ" indicates that God ordained and anointed Christ to the office of Mediator of the covenant, assigning Him the prophetic, priestly, and kingly work of saving us from sin and bringing us into God's fellowship. God has also given each believer an office. We all have authority from God to function as prophets, priests, and kings in His service (cf. Lord's Day 12). Pastors, elders, and deacons hold special offices, being called, ordained, qualified, and thus authorized to serve God by representing Jesus Christ to the church. Each does this in a particular way — the pastor by teaching the truth and praying; the elders by ruling the church; the deacons by caring for those in need.

In general, then, one who holds a special office in the church is given authority by God and Christ to represent Christ as Mediator to God's church. This authority is manifest by serving the saints and administering spiritual blessings to them. Furthermore, that the office-bearer is given authority means that he must answer to God for how he uses it.

Because the diaconate is an office, we must see how all that has just been said is true of the diaconate.

We begin by underscoring that the deacons have authority.

God has given them this authority, having called them to this work and equipped them to do it. He gives authority through the church, which selects men to serve in this office. This does not mean that the church is at liberty to put into the office of deacon any man she desires; rather, God instructs the church, in I Timothy 3:8ff., what kind of men to choose. But possessing the necessary qualifications does not in itself mean that

one has been given authority by God. Through the call of the church, God puts into the diaconate those particular men whom He wishes to hold that position.

As a visible proof to the church that these particular men are given authority to hold their office, the church installs these men into office at an official, public worship service, and prays for them (and the elders) that God might

replenish them more and more with such gifts as are necessary for them in their ministration; with the gifts of wisdom, courage, discretion, and benevolence, to the end that every one may, in his respective office, acquit himself as is becoming; ... the deacons in carefully receiving, and liberally and prudently distributing of the alms to the poor, and in comforting them with thy holy Word. Give grace both to the elders and deacons, that they may persevere in their faithful labor, and never become weary by reason of any trouble, pain, or persecution of the world. (Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons, as used in the Protestant Reformed Churches).

The prayer is the church's acknowledgment that God has called these men to their office. In a similar manner, as visible proof of the authority vested in the first deacons in the New Testament church, the apostles prayed and laid their hands on the seven men chosen for the diaconate (Acts 6:5-6). The significance of the laying on of hands is the same as the significance of our prayer: it shows that the church has set aside these men to the office, and that the church views them as having been given authority from God to function in that office.

At the same time, the men being installed into the diaconate acknowledge that God has authorized them to hold office. The first of three questions put to them at their installation is "whether you do not feel in your hearts, that you are lawfully called of God's church,

and consequently of God Himself, to these your respective holy offices?" To which their answer must be "Yes."

That the deacons have been given authority of God Himself to do their work must give them zeal for the work and diligence in carrying out the duties of their office.

Deacons must remember that to do this work they are called; lawful calling is implied in the idea of authority. A deacon who is busy with his secular work and with the responsibilities of fatherhood can find that time is at a premium; but the work of the diaconate must not suffer! The work of the diaconate can be hard work, particularly when dealing with a person or family which does not practice good principles of stewardship, and which seems not to heed the Word of God which the deacons bring. In times such as these, let the deacons be encouraged by remembering it is their calling to do this work, for God has given them authority to do it.

Implied in their having authority is that they have the ability to do the work, for God has given to the men whom He has called to the diaconate the gift of His Spirit in special measure to do that work. The deacons must remember this as they bring the Word of God. They have authority to bring that Word and to apply it to the particular situation in which they find a family. They have authority to rebuke and admonish, as well as to encourage and comfort. Bringing the Word, they must not question their effectiveness, but remember that they have done their duty, and that they are but instruments of the Holy Spirit to work spiritual blessings in the hearts of God's people. At times the people will not well receive the Word of God which the deacons bring, because the Spirit uses God's Word also to harden. Sometimes the people of God simply do not want to hear God's Word. Then the deacons

must still bring it with authority, remembering that to make the people obey it is not within their power.

Many will be the times when deacons, after diligently and authoritatively carrying out their work, will see fruit on their labor. The people will hear it, receive it well, appreciate the time which the deacons took to bring it, and be strengthened by that Word. This is another evidence of the fact that God has given authority to the deacons and uses them for the good of His people.

While the deacons must be conscious of their authority to do the work, they must also guard against three dangers.

The first danger to be guarded against is that of overstepping their authority. When we treat the work of the diaconate in detail, we will better understand how this might happen. Briefly for now, deacons have authority to gather, preserve, and distribute the alms; to visit and care for all those in need; to bring the Word of God and apply it to the needs of the family; even to insist on visiting those who might need benevolence but do not want the deacons' help; and to teach principles of stewardship to those whose need is due to their own poor stewardship. But the deacons overstep their authority when they make financial or business decisions for the family, for they have then usurped the authority of the head of the home.

The second danger is that the deacon is so impressed with his authority that he neglects to dig into the work, to prepare carefully for his visits, to pray and to study the Word of God so that he can apply it to the needs of the people. This is a danger, of course, not only for deacons, but also for ministers and elders. All who are called to special offices in the church must remember that they have authority to *work*, and so must busy themselves in their work.

The third danger is that the

deacon comes to a member of the church who is in need of spiritual help with a rod, instead of in love and in the spirit of meekness. This also is a danger for pastors and elders. All of us, and deacons also, must remember to deal pastorally with the people, even with those living sinfully. To deal with them we have authority, and we must certainly exercise that authority. But authority must be exercised in love. When one comes with the attitude, "I have authority; and boy, am I going to show it. Do this or else!" one is not viewing his authority rightly. Understanding our authority should make us diligent and zealous, but in a quiet, serving way — never backing down from the truth, never failing to point out the sins of the people, and yet doing so in such a way that they will see we truly care for them.

Elders and pastors must also uphold and respect the deacons' authority. They uphold it by visiting any who despise the deacons' authority, who belittle the mercies of Christ by not receiving those mercies in their need, or who belittle the work of the deacons gathering the alms. The deacons also have authority to visit and rebuke such, but if their authority is not heeded, the elders must enforce it by rebuking these people.

They respect it by not too quickly interfering with the work of the deacons. In this connection, the whole question arises regarding the relationship of the deacons to the consistory — a question that cannot now be answered. Suffice it to say that the elders do have spiritual oversight of the deacons. Article 23 of our Church Order gives elders authority "to take heed that ... the deacons faithfully discharge their office." Article 25 requires of deacons that they render an account of their work to the consistory. Article 40 says that the ministers shall be present at deacons' meetings "if necessary." Also

indicating that the elders have legitimate oversight of the deacons, these questions are asked of the minister and elders in the absence of the deacons at the annual church visitation: "Are the collections counted *in the presence of the minister or one or more of the elders*?" And "Do they (deacons, DJK) administer the finances wisely, *in consultation with the minister and the consistory*?" (Emphasis mine, DJK. This latter question could very well refer to the administration of the general finances of the church, but does not thereby exclude reference to the work of benevolence).

However, that the elders have spiritual oversight of the deacons does not mean that they *are* deacons. It does not mean that the deacons are the elders' servants in doing this work, and that they must do things exactly as the elders say. Elders must remember this, particularly when an elder visits the deacons' meetings. The elder is there as an elder, not as a deacon. He ought not speak too quickly. Though he may certainly give his personal advice when asked for it, he ought not be too forceful in speaking his opinion on any issue that the deacons face, not only because he is not a deacon, but also because he must remember that the elders *as a body*, and not as individuals, have the oversight of the diaconate. He can express his concerns to the diaconate, but they are not binding on the deacons unless the consistory as a whole endorses those concerns.

One finds in the Old Testament a notable instance in which a king (elder) usurped the authority of the priests (deacons) and was judged severely. King Uzziah was smitten with leprosy for burning incense on the altar of incense (II Chron. 26:16-21).

Finally, also the congregation must understand and submit to the authority of the deacons. The congregation, at the time of installation of officebearers, is exhorted to

receive "these men (elders as well as deacons, DJK) as the servants of God; ... Provide the deacons with good means to assist the indigent. Be charitable, ye rich, give liberally, and contribute willingly. And ye who are in need, look unto God in your need and thank Him, who by His Holy Spirit makes His church willing and able to supply your needs." Again, the prayer of that form indicates that the congregation needs grace to submit to the deacons' authority: "Grant also especially thy divine grace to this people over whom they are placed ... give unto the rich liberal hearts towards the poor, and to the poor grateful hearts towards those who help and serve them."

The rich submit to the deacons' authority by giving for the relief

of the poor, and the poor by seeking relief from the deacons when needed. The congregation submits to the deacons' authority by willingly receiving those deacons who wish to visit with the family. Whether or not the family considers itself in need of benevolence, the head of the family ought never refuse at least to meet with the deacons. The head of a home shows submission to the deacons' authority by receiving the benevolence which they bring, even if he thinks his family does not need it, or even if in pride he does not really want it. We also show such submission by receiving in love and giving due consideration to their advice regarding our stewardship and handling of finances.

A great danger in the hearts of

God's people is to refuse, in pride, to submit to the authority of the deacons. Often this is manifest in refusing to go to the deacons in our need, thinking that the deacons are the very last resort, and we will do everything possible first to avoid going to the deacons, including having the head of the family work longer hours at the expense of family time, or having the mother in a family in which children are still at home go to work outside the home, with the result that the family suffers. This is refusal to submit to the authority of the deacons.

In the way of honoring their authority, we honor Christ, and God, whom the deacons represent and serve! And we show our gratitude to God for giving the church this office. □

Day of Shadows

Homer Hoeksema

The Prediluvian Period (8)

Chapter V

Enoch, Who Walked with God (2)

Enoch's Faith

The book of Hebrews emphasizes in this connection that Enoch walked by faith. And the application of Hebrews 11:6, that without faith it is impossible to please God, is made in connection with the fact that Enoch pleased God.

It is in itself impossible to please God without faith. For without faith we are enemies of God. Without faith we will not seek God, cannot and will not strive to be pleasing to Him. All that is not of faith is sin.

But this is especially true of Enoch as he lived in the midst of an ungodly and openly rebellious world. As long as pleasing God requires little or no overt self-denial and loss from an earthly point of view, one may put on a show of being desirous to please God. In such a situation it is possible to be long outwardly to God's people while one's heart is far from God. This is possible as long as the lines are not tightly drawn. But when pleasing God means a battle and suffering, it is different.

This is especially on the foreground in Enoch's case and in Hebrews 11. The world stands diametrically opposed to those who please God. They commit ungodly deeds and speak hard things

against God. For this reason, they also stand against God's people. To be pleasing to God means to stand over against the world. The result of this, in a world such as that in which Enoch walked with God, is suffering, hatred, reproach, persecution, loss of all things.

This was the case with Enoch very plainly. The world developed in wickedness; in that world Enoch was a lone witness.

This is a facet of the history of the prediluvian world which must not be overlooked. There were undoubtedly fierce persecutions at that time — persecutions which increased as time went on. Perhaps it may be thought that this is speculation. Yet a more careful study of the biblical account brings out

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rather clearly that this must have been the case. It could not have been different. Consider the following in this connection:

1. We have the first instance of such persecution at the dawn of this period, when Cain kills his brother Abel because Abel was righteous. This, as we have pointed out previously, was the first manifestation of the battle between the two seeds. It was not mere fratricide, but the persecution of the righteous by the wicked.

2. If we gather the data of the Word of God about the time of Enoch, there can be little doubt that also his day was a time of persecution. We have pointed out that it is reasonable to assume that Enoch was a contemporary of Lamech the Terrible, who sang of his violence in boastful poetry before his wives. What was the nature of that violence of Lamech? Judging by the fact that Lamech stood in the line of Cain and that the sins of the fathers are visited in their generations, and judging by the fact that Lamech himself makes mention of Cain in his proud and boastful song of violence, one can only come to the conclusion that Lamech's violence was of the same kind as Cain's. It was not merely violence in general against his fellow human beings, but violence *against God's people*, even as Cain's violence was of that kind.

3. This is suggested strongly by Hebrews 11:5. First of all, the expression "he was translated that he should not see death" suggests that violent death threatened Enoch — especially since his translation took place at the unusually early (for that period) age of 365 years old. The words "he was not found" suggest that they were looking for Enoch, that they sought his life, but that God snatched Enoch out of their reach.

4. This is in harmony with the analogy of all the history of God's people in the midst of the world. If from the days of Enos the Sethites began to call upon the

name of the Lord, what else could be expected in the light of all subsequent history than that they would be persecuted for the sake of God's name? This is a matter of general experience for God's children, a rule of the gospel. Did not our Lord say, "They have hated me; they shall also hate you"? Moreover, is the probability of such persecution not in harmony with the analogy between this prediluvian period and the period immediately before our Lord's return? And is it not to be expected that in respect to persecution also this prediluvian period would be typical of the time before Christ's second advent?

In this connection, we may point out that such persecution would also be a significant factor in explaining that there were only eight souls saved in the Flood. This persecution would naturally have a double effect. On the one hand, it would cause many of the true children of God to perish before the Flood, would have the effect of decimating their numbers. On the other hand, many others, driven by fear and the threat of persecution partly, and partly also attracted by the allurements of the ungodly world, would reveal themselves as unfaithful and would forsake the generations of the sons of God and amalgamate with the wicked generations of Cain. Thus it always is in the history of God's cause. Thus it will be in the days before the coming of the Son of Man. Thus it must have been in that period also.

But, to return to Enoch, for him to occupy such a position was impossible without faith. For, as Hebrews puts it, he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. The meaning is not that one must merely believe that God exists. All men are in the deepest depth of their heart convinced that God *is*. This is inescapable. But to know that God is as our God, the God of our salvation, to know by faith that God is

on our side, and that, therefore, the vast majority, as it were, is on our side — only in that strength of faith is it possible in the midst of a wicked world to please God.

To believe — in spite of all appearances to the contrary — that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him is necessary. To have the confidence that those who seek Him in His covenant communion, who seek Him in all their ways, who diligently inquire what may be His will regarding their life, who seek His glory, His kingdom, His cause — to have the confidence that such will surely be rewarded by God is necessary.

This is possible only *by faith*, faith which is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. For it does seem, when God's people are oppressed and persecuted and destroyed, and when the wicked prosper and are in power and flourish, as though the very opposite is true, as though they, not the righteous, are victorious. But faith is the evidence of things unseen. And by faith Enoch knew that God was on his side, and he was assured that God is a rewarder of them that seek Him.

But this also means that Enoch is the product of God's sovereign grace, that what he was was due to the fact that God realized His own promise in him. For to walk with God and to be pleasing in God's sight one must be like God in his deepest nature, like God in righteousness and holiness. But this is a matter of grace. By nature we are in darkness, lost in guilt and corruption. It is only by the grace of Christ that we become spiritually like God. Thus it was with Enoch. He was a man of faith. This means that he clung not to himself and his own strength and his own works, but to the unfailing promise of God. This faith was not of himself; it was the gift of God.

Thus the history of Enoch — a sample, remember, of what was

true in principle of all the line of Seth — is a clear revelation of the fact that the promise of the two seeds and of the enmity between them was realized by God Himself in those prediluvian times.

Enoch's Translation

The same is true of the translation of Enoch. It is the revelation of the power of God's promise: Enoch had the victory by faith!

In Genesis 5:24 we read, "And he was not; for God took him." Literally, the text reads: "and not he...." This peculiar expression concerning Enoch in the midst of the series of saints of whom we read each time, "and he died," distinguishes Enoch. In Hebrews we read that he was translated, that he should not see death, and that he was not found.

This can only mean that Enoch

did not see temporal death. In this respect he was privileged above the rest of the saints at that time. Without death, he was bodily and spiritually so changed that it was possible for him to live with God in heaven, even as he had walked with God on the earth. As such Enoch became a type of the saints who will be living at the time of Christ's coming and who shall also be immediately changed.

The reason for this reward lies in the fact that Enoch was a great witness. As such, he was hated and persecuted by the wicked. His translation is a concrete proof that God is the rewarder of them who diligently seek Him, and that not the wicked, but His people, the seed of the woman, have the victory.

By faith he was translated. It was not because of his faith: for faith is never meritorious. Neither

was it because of the works of his faith: for also those works are a gift of God to us, that we should not boast. But it was *in the way of faith* that Enoch was translated. In that way he pleased God; and the end of that way is the sure reward.

But the translation of Enoch was not only his personal reward; it is also a testimony of a clear sign. It was a sign to the wicked world of that day that Enoch's prophecy was true, and that the Lord was indeed coming for judgment upon an ungodly world. It was a sign that they who walk with the devil shall walk to the devil, that they hasten to everlasting destruction. On the other hand, it was a sign — and what a source of comfort that must have been to the church in those times of tribulation — that the Lord surely rewards the godly with everlasting glory. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Denomination Activities

The Psalm Choir, made up of members of many of our west Michigan PR churches, was once again able to give two quality and very enjoyable concerts this late winter. On Sunday evening February 27 they presented their selection of favorite psalms in the auditorium of our First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, and then they followed that up one week later with a concert at our Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. We could also add, by way of a reminder, that if you have not had an opportunity to hear this fine choir, perhaps because you live outside the state of Michigan, you will get your chance this June, since they are scheduled to be part of our 75th anniversary celebration.

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

This year's annual combined Men's Bible Society meeting was held March 21 in the basement of the Edgerton, MN PRC. Men from the Doon and Hull, IA PR churches joined Edgerton's men in a study of the history of Israel at the time of Eli and Samuel as found in I Samuel 4:14 ff. Hull's Men's Society, by rotation, was also responsible to provide a topic for after-recess discussion.

This year's annual Young Adults' Spring Retreat was once again sponsored by the young adults of the Loveland, CO PRC. Loveland's Young Adults also hosted a singspiration the Sunday before the retreat. This provided an opportunity for the entire congregation to welcome the visiting young adults from across the country. This year, as in the past, the week was spent in the Rocky Mountains at Covenant Heights Convention Center in the shadow of Longs Peak.

This year's retreat took an in-depth look at the whole subject of

prayer. Rev. Garry Eriks, Loveland's pastor, spoke the first evening on "The Nature of Prayer," and the following evening Rev. Nathan Brummel, pastor of the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN, spoke on "The Power of Prayer."

Mission Activities

Rev. J. Mahtani, our churches' missionary to Pittsburgh, PA, was scheduled to visit with interested believers in Fayetteville, NC, March 24-26. Since this visit coincided with his children's spring vacation from school, the whole family accompanied him. Saturday's plans called for a fellowship meal and activities, followed by a Bible Study on the sovereignty of God. Rev. Mahtani also planned to bring God's Word to the group the next day by preaching for them. We are happy to report that the Fellowship in Fayetteville is making arrangements with the RFPA to stock some of their publications in a local Christian bookstore.

Rev. Mahtani was also recently

invited to give a chapel speech at the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary in Pittsburgh.

In a recent bulletin from Ghana we find that Rev. R. Moore was able to speak at a Hostel for college students in early March. Rev. Moore spoke from Ephesians one and two, with an emphasis on God's sovereignty in salvation. We also note with sadness that the three-year-old daughter of a couple who were attending the worship services on a regular basis died suddenly after becoming ill with malaria. Rev. Moore was thankful that this little one was able to worship with them the Sunday before. A good reminder to us all of the brevity of life and of the weakness of our own bodies.

Congregational Activities

At a special congregational meeting back in late February,

the congregation of the Loveland, CO PRC approved a proposal to purchase the pews of the South Holland, IL PRC. They will probably arrive sometime in May. We can assume that South Holland will in turn be getting some new ones ... or they could be standing soon after that.

The Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, CN recently added some new furniture to their auditorium as well. They purchased a bookcase requested by their Evangelism Committee for the establishing of a church library. They also obtained a large pamphlet rack for the display of pamphlets and books, a bulletin board, a small table for the front of the auditorium on which to place the offering bags, and a table in their narthex for bulletins and newsletters.

Minister Activities

On March 15, Mrs. Roberta Harbach, widow of the late Rev. Robert Harbach, who served as pastor in our churches for 24 years, passed away at the age of 82 years. We thank the Lord for the life and witness of this saint and the labors that she and her husband were able to carry out for the kingdom. Rev. 14:13.

The council of our vacant Hull, IA PRC formed a trio of the Revs. J. Laning, M. VanderWal, and R. VanOverloop. On March 20 they met and voted to extend a call to Rev. VanOverloop.

Food For Thought

"Death to the Christian is the funeral of all his sorrows and evils, and the resurrection of all his joys."

— Aughey ☐

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

May 1, 2000 marks the 65th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

JOHN and HENRIETTA LUBBERS.

We, their children and grandchildren, thank God for the many years He has given them to be together, and for the precious instruction they have given and example they have been to us.

"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psalm 16:6).

- * Ed and Lorraine Miedema
- * Don and Correne VanOverloop
- * Gary and Carol Lubbers
- * John and Joan Bouma
19 grandchildren
62 great-grandchildren

Hudsonville, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Men's Society of the Byron Center PRC express their Christian sympathy to our fellow member Mr. Mike Elzinga in the death of his father-in-law,

MARVIN KOERNER.

May he take comfort in the words of Revelation 14:13: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, 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."

Duane Gunnink, President
Marvin Gritters, Secretary.

NOTICE

The program committee for the 75th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches is in need of Young People's Convention photos from 1959 to the present. We also need 50th Anniversary celebration photos. Please send pictures to

Steve Ophoff
1480 Rothbury N.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49505.

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 10, 2000 at the Hope Protestant Reformed Church.

Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk