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The Blessed Mourners

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Matthew 5:4

A few months ago we looked at the first of the beatitudes in Christ's sermon on the mount. The first characteristic of the citizens of the kingdom was that they were poor in spirit. Such a citizen recognizes that in man there is no good whatsoever. This he acknowledges to be true also of himself, since he understands that he can do nothing before God to merit heavenly glory. He knows that he is nothing but a dead sinner.

Quite naturally and logically we see the proper placement of the second beatitude, which speaks of those who mourn. A Christian is a mourner because he recognizes what he is of himself: poor in spirit. At first this does not appear to make sense. How is it that one can be a blessed or happy mourner? Yet this is one of the characteristics of the Christian. Whoever is not a

mourner cannot be called a citizen of the kingdom.

Christ here is not talking about just anyone who happens to be mourning for one or another reason. There is plenty of mourning all about us. One simply has to go to the hospital to see much grief and sorrow. Think also of the untold thousands who suffer the ravages of war, pestilence, and disease. There are the many troubles that are common to every family. Ultimately there is death. Man cries and tries to remove the hurt, but his sorrows continue. Of these mourners Jesus is not speaking.

Jesus is talking about the mourning Christian. The mourning Christian recognizes the terribleness of his sin, for God has revealed Himself in His Word and law. The law presents the unchangeable requirements of the just God. This law demands that he love God with his whole being, but all he sees in himself is violation of the law. A rebel he is by nature, who constantly seeks to throw off the yoke of the law. Nothing less does he deserve than the eternal wrath of God in hell.

And the mourning Christian knows where it all started, with the

willful disobedience of our first father, Adam. The child of God knows that he is included in Adam's sin, in his condemnation and death. So, he mourns. Moreover, the Christian mourns the development of sin with its awful consequences on earth. Since the time Cain killed Abel until the present day, sin has developed so that nation rises against nation, man shedding man's blood. This development can be seen in all spheres of life. One simply has to look at the gross immorality which abounds in entertainment, in the government, and in the home. Man sets his heart on that which is material, with no thought for the things of the kingdom of heaven. It really does not matter in which direction one looks, godlessness and impiety are evident everywhere. There is no concern for the laws of God, and the child of God mourns because of this terrible evidence of violation of what God requires.

Last, and even more particularly, the child of God mourns because of his *own* sin. Not only are others violating God's law but he himself violates that same law in thought, word, and deed. In anguish he cries out with the apostle

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Paul, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19). All this causes mourning in God's child because he offends the sovereign God and deserves the wrath of God upon him.

Man in general does not mourn in that way and for those reasons. Man in general does not see the root difficulty: his sin against God. He knows that he is in a bad state and proposes all kinds of solutions. But he does not mourn, for he does not connect the evidence of God's wrath upon him with his own transgression of God's law.

However, the child of God sees all of this and mourns. He recognizes now the difficulty. As a regenerated child of God he has been brought by the grace of God to the point where he mourns his own sin. Consequently he cries out for forgiveness of his sins. He confesses before God his many sins and implores his Father for mercy and forgiveness. Blessed are such mourners.

The contrast between the godly and the ungodly can be seen in II Corinthians 7:10, where we read, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." This is because the sorrow of the wicked is not sorrow for sin, but for the consequences of sin. His goal is to remove the consequence of his transgressions. In his attempt to establish peace and to prevent war he does not do so by removing the cause, sin, but by establishing forces which will keep the peace. In his concern about venereal diseases and AIDS he does not stop the sin which brings on these diseases, but seeks cures for the diseases so that he can continue in his sinful life in the breaking of the seventh commandment. Thus man desires to retain his sin, but seeks to find the means of preventing the God-ordained consequences of his sin. Mourn he does, because he has to suffer in the way of trans-

gression of God's laws. Meanwhile, he refuses to learn from the Word of God what is the heart of his problem, and thus, because he refuses to repent and seek after God, his sorrow worketh death.

Godly sorrow worketh repentance — sorrow which reveals itself in continual grief over the root problem, sin. This mourning reveals itself in the earnest prayers of the saints. Acknowledging his sin he prays to the Father in heaven for the promised mercy, confessing that there is deliverance only through the cross. In addition, he hates sin and fights against it, for he cannot be a proper mourner for sin while willingly holding onto his sins.

This we should apply to ourselves. To be consistent, not only must we be strict regarding our confession, but we must apply the same principle to every aspect of our walk. The truth of the matter is that we are not always consistent. We can be enthralled by the radio, TV, movies, and the computer. Often we find entertainment in dramatizations in which God's name is taken in vain and there is adultery, murder, and theft. In worldly songs which glorify evil ideas of this world concerning love, rebellion, etc., we find enjoyment. However, one who mourns the sinfulness of sin, and of his own sin, cannot then turn around and enjoy the sins of this world.

No, the citizen of the kingdom of heaven, in mourning, seeks by grace to walk in the narrow way of life. His desire is to flee from the sins of the world and of his own flesh and to seek God's Word and the proper proclamation of it. Regularly he will come to God in prayer. Daily he faces the struggle within himself between the old and the new man. All of this is evidence of sorrow of a godly kind for which there is comfort.

The world seeks comfort in everything that is below, but there is no comfort to be found. The child of God turns to the Scriptures and

reads, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners" (Is. 57:18), and, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Is. 40:1, 2). God makes this possible through the cross of His Son Jesus Christ. On the cross Christ bears and removes the guilt of my sin, thus removing the very cause of my mourning. As a result the child of God in his mourning can rejoice that Christ has satisfied the just demands of God for him. He mourns because of his sins, but he understands that the guilt of these is already removed.


Again the Word of God speaks, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Is. 40:11). Countless saints have been comforted by the words of Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." And yet one more, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17). In his mourning, the child of God understands that God provides richly for him for Jesus' sake. The sorrows, griefs, and afflictions are light, and even work for us the exceeding weight of glory. There simply is no greater comfort than to know that God is for His people and that nothing can be against them.

Comfort in the fullest and final sense is when Christ comes again on the clouds of glory to take us to heaven. There He wipes away all our tears. No night is there, only joy and light. All mourning shall cease, and we are comforted to know that this is the

lot of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

When all is said and done, you and I as children of God do not have to be envious of wicked men.

In all their corruptions they remain under the condemnation of God. They have no comfort whatsoever, in fact, cannot. But we as children of God have comfort. Nobody can ever take it away. Therefore, do

not be ashamed of your mourning, for you have at the same time a comfort that is real, the forgiveness of sins and final glorification for Jesus' sake. 

Editorial

The Third Point of Common Grace Reconsidered and Reformulated

The November 2000 issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal* (CTJ), journal of the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), reconsiders the third point of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924. It does so in an article entitled, "Common Grace, Theonomy, and Civic Good: The Temptations of Calvinist Politics (Reflections on the Third Point of the CRC Kalamazoo Synod, 1924)." The author is Dr. John Bolt, professor of theology at Calvin Theological Seminary.

The article is the last of three articles in the CTJ reviewing the history and doctrine of the controversy over common grace in the CRC in the early 1920s. Among their other purposes, the articles are a friendly acknowledgment of the 75th anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), which the PRC celebrated last year. The first two articles appeared in the April 2000 issue of the CTJ. One treated the history of the common grace controversy culminating in the adoption of the three points of common grace by the CRC synod of 1924, the expulsion of Herman Hoeksema for his opposition to the doctrine of common

grace, and the eventual formation of the PRC. The title of the historical article is "Common Grace and the Christian Reformed Synod of Kalamazoo (1924): A Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Retrospective." The author is John Bolt.

The other article in the April 2000 CTJ reexamines that aspect of the first point of common grace that affirms a grace of God for all in the preaching of the gospel, sincerely desiring the salvation of every human to whom the gospel comes—the "well-meant offer of the gospel." The title is "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-Called Well-Meant Offer of Salvation." The author is Christian Reformed theologian, Dr. Raymond A. Blacketer.

The *Standard Bearer* commented on these two articles in several editorials titled "Reformed in ... the Fundamental Truths" (June 1, Sept. 1, and Sept. 15, 2000). In view of the ecumenical overture in the two articles by Bolt and Blacketer, a three-part editorial on the historic conference in 1939 on behalf of the reunion of the CRC and the PRC appeared in the October 1, 2000 *SB*. The *SB* also published Hoeksema's speech at the "Pantlind Confer-

ence" in three installments (Oct. 1, Nov. 1, and Nov. 15, 2000).

In this editorial, I will briefly summarize the latest article on the controversy between the CRC and the PRC over common grace, John Bolt's reconsideration of the third point of common grace in the November 2000 CTJ. In subsequent editorials, I intend to comment on the third point in light of Professor Bolt's reconsideration. This will include reflection on Bolt's reformulation of the third point and on his intriguing explanation of the reformulation in terms of the role of the Holy Spirit in divine providence.

The interested reader is encouraged to obtain the November 2000 CTJ, so that he or she can read the important article in its entirety. One should write Mrs. Thelma Koens, 3233 Burton St., SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4387, or call (616) 957-6044. This issue of the CTJ also contains a number of worthwhile articles on the life and work of John Calvin, including a hitherto untranslated piece by Calvin against the "Nicodemites."

A Surprising Slant on the Third Point

Bolt's treatment of the third point of common grace is surpris-

ing. The third point teaches that the unregenerated person is able to perform good works in the sphere of everyday earthly life in society. This is due to an operation of the Holy Spirit within him which, without renewing his heart, so influences his soul that good thoughts and desires produce good works. Hoeksema condemned the teaching as a denial of the biblical and confessional doctrine of total depravity. Louis Berkhof and other Christian Reformed theologians contended that the third point is a necessary defense of total depravity.

Bolt does not ignore this purely doctrinal, and certainly central, aspect of the third point. But neither does he limit himself to it. In fact, as the words "theonomy" and "Calvinist Politics" in his title indicate, his main interest is elsewhere. Bolt states as much. Early on, he writes:

Concretely, then, if the reasoning reflected above is correct, one would expect that the Protestant Reformed Churches, and their theological tradition from Herman Hoeksema on, would have profound sympathies for the theonomist position. That is the issue we shall consider in the remainder of this article (p. 209).

Toward the end of the article, he states his "basic concern": "Our basic concern [in the article] was the question of whether there was an inherent connection between the denial of common grace and a theonomic point of view, particularly in the matter of civil righteousness" (p. 231).

The surprising slant on the third point has to do with the question whether a rejection of the third point commits Hoeksema and the PRC to a theonomic and theocratic position regarding civil government. If the state in the form of an existing government is not a creature of common grace, must not the PRC repudiate the state? And are not the PRC thereby committed to

the position that the only lawful civil government is one that is avowedly Christian, a government enforcing the civil laws of Old Testament Israel and controlled by Christians?

Bolt investigates whether the denial of common grace by the PRC puts them into bed with the theonomic Christian Reconstructionists. At the same time, he explores the possibility that Gary North's insistence that the state be founded on biblical, particularly Old Testament, law implies the denial of common grace.

In this connection, Bolt recalls the history of Hoeksema's refusal to have the United States flag in the worship services of the church he pastored in Holland, MI in 1918.

Bolt concludes that, despite the alleged "kinship" between the Protestant Reformed rejection of common grace and the theonomic insistence that the state be founded on Old Testament civil law, the theology of the PRC and the theology of theonomic Christian Reconstruction are fundamentally opposed.

We have finally arrived at the point where we can give a definitive answer [to the question, whether there is an inherent connection between the denial of common grace and a theonomic point of view, particularly in the matter of civil righteousness]: "No, there is no necessary and logical connection between theocracy/theonomy and the denial of the third point of common grace" (p. 231).

The reason in the end for the opposition, says Bolt, is eschatology. Theonomy is postmillennial. "The Protestant Reformed theological tradition from Hoeksema on has stood resolutely opposed to all postmillennial dreams and ambitions" (p. 227). Bolt calls attention to the "strong commonalities on this point [eschatology] between the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Christian Reformed Church." This occasions

his suggestion that there might be "fruitful reconsideration of Kalamazoo's third point" by the two denominations (p. 227).

Politics, theonomy, and eschatology—all of these big, lively, and controversial issues are raised in connection with the third point of common grace.

Cleared of the Charge of Anabaptism

Surprising as this approach to the third point may be, it is by no means invalid, or even far-fetched. For Bolt's basic concern is this question: Is denial of common grace good works inherently Anabaptism? As Bolt points out, he is working with the old charge against Hoeksema and the PRC: Anabaptists! Does rejection of the common grace doctrine of the second and third points, and of the thrust of the first point, that is, the common grace doctrine of Abraham Kuyper, amount to an Anabaptistic world-flight? More particularly, does the rejection of Kuyperian common grace, which the CRC made binding doctrine in her fellowship by adopting the three points, necessarily imply the condemnation of civil government as evil, even demonic?

The PRC would put the issue this way: Is it necessary to affirm common grace in order to avoid the Anabaptistic condemnation of creation and its ordinances as evil and in order to avoid Anabaptistic world-flight?

Professor Bolt clears Hoeksema and the PRC of the charge of Anabaptism. Their rejection of common grace is not, and does not imply, a sour disposition toward the creation and a Christian life of world-flight.

The accusation of world-flight does not apply to them as deniers of the doctrine of common grace, claim Hoeksema and Danhof. "When one considers 'world' as nature, then it is clear that we do not separate nature and grace but

desire rather to live everywhere out of grace." "Worldly" vocations are the Christian's clear responsibility as citizens of the kingdom of God: "In business and trade, in science and art, in state and society, the citizens of the kingdom may never default on their duties in order to withdraw into the narrow confines of the church as such. Then we would have to leave the world itself while it is our calling to remain in its midst." *Hoeksema's and Danhof's response to Van Baalen [']s charge of Anabaptism* must be taken at face value: They emphatically repudiate the Anabaptist understanding of nature and grace and its practical consequence, world-flight.... They insist that the Reformed worldview values natural life fully as the proper terrain for Christian vocation (emphasis added, p. 219; Bolt is quoting Hoeksema and Danhof from their Dutch booklet, "Not Anabaptist, but Reformed").

Bolt's judgment that the denial of common grace by the PRC is not Anabaptism is as significant as Blacketer's judgment in the April 2000 CTJ that these Churches' denial of the "well-meant offer of the gospel" is not hyper-Calvinism.

A Reformulation of the Third Point

Even though the theological issue, whether the third point denies or upholds the Reformed doctrine of total depravity, is not Bolt's main concern, he does address this purely theological issue. And his conclusion concerning the doctrine of the third point is as remarkable, indeed astounding, as was his own account of the history of the adoption of the three points and the ouster of Hoeksema by the CRC and as was Blacketer's finding concerning the "well-meant offer" in the first point of common grace.

Bolt proposes a reformulation of the third point. In this reformulation, the seeming good works of the ungodly are attributed, not to grace but to providence. The reason is that Bolt, like Hoeksema,

wants to honor the threefold definition of good that is given by the Heidelberg Catechism in Question 91: Good works are only those that are done out of true faith, only those done according to the law of God, and only those that aim at the glory of God.

Let me here suggest a possible framework and reformulation of Kalamazoo's third point that might not fully satisfy either of the two sides but could be a position that both could live with. The first step would be to remove the term *grace* from any discussion of the ongoing vestiges of the image of God in fallen man and the gifts and virtues associated with the image. Restricting the notion of grace to the soteriological realm honors Hoeksema's concerns and would suggest that the expression "good works" also be restricted to the Heidelberg Catechism's understanding of "only those that proceed from a true faith." The material content of this issue could then be placed in the doctrine of providence where it is free from all confusion with soteriology (p. 232).

Then follows Dr. Bolt's reformulation of the third point. In order that the reader may clearly grasp and fully appreciate the reformulation, I will first give the third point as it was adopted by, and is still binding in, the CRC. Bolt's reformulation will follow, in italics.

Relative to the third point, which is concerned with the question of civil righteousness as performed by the unregenerate, synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confessions the unregenerate, though incapable of doing any saving good, can do civil good. This is evident from the quotations from Scripture and from the Canons of Dordrecht, III, IV, 4 and from the Netherland Confession, Art. 36, which teach that God without renewing the heart so influences man that he is able to perform civil good; while it also appears from the citations

from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology, that our Reformed Fathers from ancient times were of the same opinion (Hoeksema's translation of the original Dutch, in *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, 1947, p. 377).

Concerning the performance of so-called civic righteousness by the unregenerate, the Synod declares that the unregenerate are incapable of any saving good (Canons of Dort, III/IV, 3). We do acknowledge that God in his providence does maintain all people as his image bearers who continue to keep "glimmerings of natural light, whereby they retain some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discover some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining orderly external deportment." (Canons of Dort, III/IV, 4). These deeds of outward conformity to God's ordinances do not make unbelievers inwardly virtuous or good before God; they render unbelievers inexcusable (Romans 1:20; Canons of Dort, III/IV, 4). At the same time God's providential governing and sustaining creation and humanity within the bounds of external order is his universal gift to all people. Though under judgment, life in this world is not hell. Christ is King! (CTJ, Nov. 2000, p. 233).

Comment on the article and its reformulation of the third point will follow in subsequent issues of the SB, God willing.

It should be noted here, first, that Professor Bolt's fair, even sympathetic, treatment of Hoeksema, his zeal for the Reformed faith, and his labor is appreciated. Bolt declares that "the Reformed theological tradition has much to learn from Hoeksema's indefatigable theological passion for the sovereignty of God's grace in Jesus Christ" (p. 234). As regards Hoeksema's opposition to the third point, Bolt listens to Hoeksema's objections and concerns. Few have ever done this. Most have contented themselves with smearing him as an Anabaptist. Also, the

Christian Reformed theologian obviously takes delight in Hoeksema's steadfast refusal to wrap the church and himself in the American flag in the politically volatile days of World War I.


Second, and more importantly, it can be beneficial that the doctrinal issues of common grace are raised and reexamined. This is not only true for the CRC and the PRC. All Reformed and Presbyterian churches can profit from a discus-

sion of these issues in the light of Scripture and the creeds. Dr. Bolt's invitation to discuss the third point and his analysis of it is not limited to men of the CRC and the PRC.

Third, there is an ecumenical spirit and intent in the article. Bolt laments that there was no "open and honest dialogue" in 1924. He says that "it's not too late to make some attempt today." He suggests that the CRC and the PRC ponder "whether the strong commonali-

ties" as regards eschatology "could not lead to fruitful reconsideration of Kalamazoo's third point." He adds: "There are other areas also where further discussion might lead to an awareness of commonalities or at least shared difficulties."

How does his church respond to this plea for discussion of the issues that divide?

How do the PRC respond?  — DJE

Feature Articles

SHALL WE DANCE, ROCK, AND PLAY?

Or: How Shall We Judge Contemporary Worship? (#3)

Rev. Barry Gritters

Because the Protestant Reformed Churches want earnestly to be obedient to Jesus Christ in their public worship, they look both ways more than once before they cross into a new neighborhood of worship practices. They feel very safe (that is, humbly obedient to Jesus Christ) in their old neighborhood. The explanation is not a stuffy traditionalism. They desire to be obedient to Scripture.

These churches agree with Carlos Eiríe in his contention that "the rebellion of man in regard to worship displeases God tremendously, not only because of the act of disobedience, but because of the form of worship it creates. It is insult added to injury." Perhaps Eiríe could have said: "Injury

added to insult." For, first, it insults God by worshiping without regard to His commands; then it injures God by creating a form of worship that disfigures and deforms both Him and His church.

We believe that, because worship is the primary calling of God's people, both now and eternally (see Revelation 14:6,7; 22:9), it is not possible to exercise too much carefulness in determining our manner of worship.

The Heidelberg Catechism explains God's requirement in the second commandment of God's law as: "that we in no wise represent God by images, *nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.*" (emphasis mine: BG)

A Reformed Critique

These modern worshipers have no biblical warrant for what they do. Their worship committees are not

governed by the "regulative principle of worship," that is, the principle according to which the worship form and content must be regulated strictly by the Word of God. These worship trailblazers do not go to Scripture with their questions. They go to culture, to the neighborhood, to the community. They are not governed by the Word of God.

Because of this, they ask the wrong questions. The question is not: How does the neighborhood behave? The proper, God-honoring questions are: "What does God in His Word require us to do when we gather for His praise? How must we behave in His presence?" Thus, they end with a multitude of difficulties and errors.

Let me list some of them. *First, they are inevitably man-centered, not God-centered.* Because they ask, "What is the neighborhood like?" they craft their services after man's

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desires. They are committed to the idea that we go to the place of worship to get something from God, rather than that we bring something to God. But the question is not: "What makes us feel good?" but, "What is this great and glorious God worthy of?"

So it's the age-old idolatry: They worship the creature more than the Creator.

Because they are man-centered, these worship services are "performance-oriented." Whether it's the high-powered Robert Schuller's invitation to Tommy LaSorda to tell the people of the Crystal Cathedral how the "Great Dodger in the sky helped him to win games and lose weight..." or simply the local talent in the praise band or the adolescents in the drama, it is performance-oriented.

So the people all clap. Applause is a part of their worship.

They are walking, if not running, back to the same unbiblical practices that the Reformers condemned so vehemently in the RCC when worship was done for the people.

Therefore (**second**) whether high-liturgy or seeker-oriented, these new worship services *take away from the congregational and covenantal aspect of worship*. They are individualistic. The people don't praise together, but watch others praise. A Reformed worship service is marked by the deliberate desire to have all the people participate in everything they possibly can (see my pamphlet: "Public Worship and the Reformed Faith").

Third, *they don't distinguish between mission work and worship*. Mission work is one thing, public worship on the Lord's Day is quite another. In mission work, I'm willing to preach on the steps, out of a boat, or stand on a soapbox at the Hudsonville Community Fair (if I were permitted).

Mission work and trying to preach to unbelievers is one thing. Public worship is quite another. Those who advocate contemporary

worship, appealing to the example of Jesus on the seaside, and Philip in a chariot, are making a simple but fundamental mistake: They confuse public worship of the gathered people of God with evangelism.

The result? The unchurched who have come to a church of this style now have formed a judgment of what worship is. And these "seekers" who have "found it" are not led to a biblical, reverent way of approaching God, but continue to dictate the worship of the assembled people of God. They're still worshipping like the neighborhood. Instead of transforming the world by the renewing of their minds, the church is allowing itself to be "conformed to the world."

Fourth, *these services inevitably take away from a sense of the awesome majesty of God*.

For them, God is cool, probably a kindly, gray-haired old man who winks at everyone and judges no one. He's easy-going, probably a lot like us. There's no reverence, no sense of awe, not even in the liturgical services with all the pomp and ceremony, because the attention is on the players. The watchwords are *casual, breezy, easy-going*.

Though God in Christ is our Friend, to whom we may come close and with boldness, He's still God! He is and always will be the awesome figure of Revelation 1: "His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.... Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell down at his feet as dead." That's the awesome glory of the God whom we worship.

The worship God delights in is the kind the four beasts and twenty-four elders of Revelation 4

give to God: "And they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.... And... the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast down their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created."

Then, because a wrong conception of God is conveyed, everything is crooked. Whatever the delivered message says, the whole service conveys the wrong message, an unbiblical one. These unchurched visitors learn. Oh, they learn. What do these unchurched learn? They learn about the "new faith." To borrow from Cornelius Plantinga, this is how the visitor to these new worship services responds: "Now I understand what the Christian faith is all about! It's not about *repentance or sorrow for sin or humbling one's self before God* to receive God's favor. It has nothing to do with *doctrine and instruction in the being and nature of God*. It's not about an *alien righteousness imputed to me by a gift from God*. It's not about *discipline and self-sacrifice and mortifying an old man and dying to myself*. It's not about the *impossibility of pleasing God by myself* and the irresistible and sweet grace of God. No, what I had read about the church is all wrong. God is user-friendly. He's a go-fer whose job it is to make me happy. The church is for maximizing the possibilities of my personal growth and self-realization. The Christian faith is mainly about celebration and fun and personal growth and five ways to boost my self-esteem."

Fifth, *they detract from the preached Word*.

It matters not which kind of service it is, or what the motives are, the end result is that there is usually not time for the preaching. If there is time, the minister is sit-

ting on the pulpit in a casual manner, submitting to the people some of the thoughts he's come up with through the past week.

One pastor offers other pastors a sampling of questions he received, plus his answers. Not one is answered with an appeal to Scripture. All of them (including an important question about predestination) are answered with his own personal conviction, rather than: "Thus saith the Lord." In that

connection, what preaching there is, is not the authoritative proclamation of the gospel: "Thus saith the Lord." Instead, it's a bar-stool, a hand-held microphone, and a man in blue-jeans and sweatshirt casually talking about issues.

The preaching in its *saving*, comforting, power is absent. Preaching as the voice of Jesus Christ Himself is gone.

Just as serious, the preaching in its *judging*, *condemning* power

has disappeared. We may forget that in our analysis of contemporary worship. In very nature and purpose—to be user-friendly, attractive, appealing, non-confrontational, inoffensive—contemporary worship's preaching cannot be antithetical. Sharp warnings, calls to repentance, threats of eternal judgment for impenitent sinners, shutting the gates of the kingdom for some, must necessarily be absent.



John Calvin's Assessment of Antipaedobaptism

Some Reflections on Calvin's *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter 16

Jonathan D. Moore

Introduction

In Book IV and Chapter 16 of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin reveals in no uncertain terms his attitude towards those who rejected infant baptism. This aspect of Calvin's Calvinism sits very uneasily with the doctrine and practice of many Reformed churches today, and it behooves all who love the Reformed faith, to stop and consider our heritage. It may well be that in doing so we will be reproved, corrected, and instructed in righteousness.

Calvin's Assessment

Calvin first makes plain that his reason for defending infant baptism at such length in his *Institutes* is not a penchant for controversy or a warped sense of priorities, but that such a defence con-

stitutes a vital promotion of "purity of doctrine as well as the peace of the church."¹ It is not our purpose here to examine Calvin's arguments but to observe his attitude towards those who rejected infant baptism. Calvin sees his baptistic opponents as 'ignorant,' 'stubborn,' 'frantic,' 'fickle,' and 'obtusely arrogant.' He describes them as "mad beasts," who are "repeatedly deceived" and "agitated by a frenzy." He considers them as being 'punished by the Lord' and 'justly avenged by God for pride and obstinacy,' and he held some of them at least to be clearly "reprobate." According to Calvin the baptistic position of his day consisted of "mad ravings," "niggling arguments," "stupidity," "irrationality," "smoke," "trifles," "absurdities," "deceits," 'shameless lies,' "dreamed up" ideas, 'deluded notions,' "specious reasons," and "sheer inversions of Scripture." Calvin accuses his baptistic opponents of 'grievously disturbing'

and 'rashly stirring up Christ's church,' "grievously slandering Christ," 'weaving webs of deceit having hardened themselves against the truth,' and 'ceaselessly assailing this holy institution of God.' He rebukes their 'barbarous boldness in dissipating and corrupting Scripture,' and accuses them of 'gravely sinning,' 'unjustly and wickedly shutting God's power within narrow limits,' 'assaulting the fortress of our faith with great violence and many siege engines,' 'dragging in the crassest absurdities in defense of their errors,' and 'spitefully obscuring God's goodness.' To Calvin, the

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1 All quotations from Calvin, unless otherwise stated, are taken from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ed. John Thomas McNeill, Trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, Vol. 20, 21, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, [1559], reprint ed., 1960), 2 vols., II: 1324-59 (IV.16.1-32).

arguments of antipaedobaptism were “ridiculous and devoid of all semblance of reason,” and in some of its apparently necessary ramifications Calvin held antipaedobaptism to be “nothing but execrable blasphemy.”

Whether Calvin was or was not a Reformer renowned for his irenic catholicity and large-heartedness, he clearly abhorred from the heart antipaedobaptism and could not refrain from pouring severe and vehement abuse on all its promulgators. It is hard to imagine how a Christian minister’s condemnatory language could have been any stronger. Nor can it be argued that this was just a fit of carnal anger which he later regretted. This chapter of the *Institutes* first appeared in its fullness in 1539. Calvin let this chapter stand for twenty years of his ministry and was happy to republish it in his maturity in 1559 with only one additional section (#31).² This language and assessment was therefore not a temporary slip, but Calvin’s considered and edited opinion for at least 20 years of his ministry.

It might, however, be argued that IV.16 is just “an appendix” in the *Institutes* and therefore not central to Calvin’s position. Apart from the fact that Calvin’s refutation of antipaedobaptism is nearly twice as long as his positive treatment of the whole sacrament of baptism,³ this argument fails to take into account Calvin’s stated reason for adding this appendix. For Calvin the very idea of rejecting infant baptism was horrific and almost beyond imagination. It certainly would never feature in orthodox Christian thinking, and as such would not ordinarily merit serious consideration in a positive statement of faith. Yet when it *was* ‘grievously disturbing the church,’ it *had* to be fiercely resisted. It is for this reason that he felt compelled to address the charges of the Anabaptists with regard to infant baptism. Their claims were ‘griev-

ously disturbing the church’ precisely because they rejected the Reformed definition of the church, and struck at the heart of Reformed soteriology. Yet to have placed his treatment of antipaedobaptism throughout the main text would have elevated the Anabaptists to a place they did not deserve. Thus Calvin wrote, “I cannot refrain from adding an appendix here to restrain their mad ravings.”

Calvin also gives the reason why he held antipaedobaptism in such contempt. He saw it as the direct and active work of the devil himself — a “great subtlety” of “Satan.” Consequently, Calvin was able solemnly to predict that where a baptistic mindset gains the ascendancy, there would be found:

- a. a dwindling in Christian “assurance and spiritual joy”;
- b. a noticeable ‘diminishing of the glory of the divine goodness’ in our estimation;
- c. an increasing lack of faith in the divine “promise” (i.e., covenant);
- d. an increasing and “impious ungratefulness toward God’s mercy”;
- e. “a certain negligence about instructing our children in piety”;
- f. God’s “vengeance.”

Understandably, therefore, Calvin ends his chapter with the following plea: “let us offer our infants to him, for he gives them a place among those of his family and household, that is, the members of the church.”

Some Questions by Way of Contemporary Application

All professing Calvinists should ask themselves some questions at this point:

1. Have we given due consideration to the fact that a theologian of the stature and insight of Calvin deemed antipaedobaptism to be a fearful work of Satan, calculated ultimately to destroy the Christian church?
2. If we are quick to say that Calvin was just a child of his times,

are we not perhaps too quick to forget that we are the children of our own times — times of fearful and unprecedented relativism, pluralism, individualism, antinomianism, tolerationism, unbelief, and the complete collapse of Western Christendom, all horrific tokens of God’s wrath against us as a civilization — and times in which there is not a man of the stature of Calvin to be seen from one side of the globe to the other?

3. Are we willing to grapple with what is clearly a passionately held foundational tenet in Calvin’s ‘Calvinism,’ or do we prefer to admire from afar a mythical Calvin who never existed?

4. Calvin in his day thought that “we ought to be greatly afraid of that threat, that God will wreak vengeance upon any man who disdains to mark his child with the symbol of the covenant; for by such contempt the proffered grace is refused, and, as it were, foresworn.” Ought not we to do the same?⁴

2 *Ibid.*, II:1324. This extra section was specifically targeted at the anti-Trinitarian Anabaptist, Michael Servetus. However, the vast majority of the quotations above are from the other, older sections of this chapter, and it cannot be said that Calvin is affected here by a general loathing of all doctrines connected with Servetus. Calvin is addressing *all* Anabaptists here *exclusively* on the issue of infant baptism and covenant continuity, and not in connection with their other aberrations.

3 Cf. *Ibid.*, II:1303-23 (IV.15).

4 There is no conflict here with IV.15.22, where Calvin writes that, “if, when the sign is omitted, this is neither from sloth nor contempt nor negligence, we are safe from all danger.” This comment is in the context of his forbidding women to baptize *under any circumstances whatsoever*, and consequently having to argue that baptism is not so necessary, that, in an extreme situation, baptism by a woman is preferable to no baptism at all. Calvin’s comments here are totally removed from any thought of antipaedobaptists, whom Calvin would never have cleared from the charge of sloth, contempt, or negligence in this respect.


5. Do we *really* believe that 'the promise is to us and to our children'? Or is it just a 'proof text' that we trot out whenever someone challenges us about our tradition? Will not the extent to which we believe and love this promise be proportionately reflected in the extent to which we resist and hate that doctrine which would deny that promise?

6. For the Reformed, how can infant baptism be 'a secondary is-

sue' when it lies at the heart of Reformed soteriology and ecclesiology?

7. Do we find in our own local manifestation of the church of Christ a dwindling in Christian "assurance and spiritual joy"? Do we find a noticeable 'diminishing of the glory of the divine goodness' in our estimation? Do we discern an increasing lack of faith in the divine "promise" and covenant? An increasing and "impious un-

gratefulness toward God's mercy"? Are we guilty of "a certain negligence about instructing our children in piety"? Do we see any signs of God's "vengeance"? If we detect any of these things, are we right not to attribute this, at least in part, to our attitude towards antipaedobaptism, or indeed to our succumbing to a baptistic mindset and orientation?

Let every man examine himself. 

Why Are the Protestant Reformed Churches Distinctive?

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

The Protestant Reformed Churches in America are distinct from other Christian churches, even other Reformed churches. This is well known to many scholars and leaders, not to mention lay people, in the church community at large.

This distinctiveness is comprehensive in scope. We are distinctive in doctrine — holding to the truths of the sovereign grace of God (often referred to as the five points of Calvinism), believing that the grace of God is particular and not common, that the covenant of God with man is unilaterally and sovereignly (rather than bilaterally and conditionally) established. We are distinctive in worship — not singing hymns but Psalms, emphasizing the importance and centrality of the preaching of the gospel in worship, not permitting choirs and special numbers to replace the active involvement of the whole congregation in worship. We are

distinctive in areas of practice — not permitting divorce except for reason of adultery, and then not permitting the remarriage of divorced persons while their spouse is still alive; not permitting our members to labor in secular vocations on the Lord's Day except in occupations of necessity and mercy; not allowing our members to be members of labor unions or secret organizations; speaking out against fornication, immoderate use of alcohol, and other sins against the law of God; and impressing on our members the need to live differently than the world of ungodly unbelievers.

This distinctiveness brings upon us the respect of many outside the PRC, and of other saints and churches who believe that which we believe. By asking us for help in the form of missionaries, subscribing to our periodicals, listening to our radio programs, reading our literature, and supporting our causes, they show appreciation for our distinctiveness, and they encourage us to continue to be distinctive.

At the same time, this distinctiveness comes with a price. One

of the costs is that of the scorn and reproach of others. There are those who cannot speak a kind and civil word to or about us, who level false accusations against us, who think that we have an inflated view of ourselves, considering ourselves to be "holier than thou," believing that we have a corner on the truth, thinking that we will be the only ones in heaven, and the like. Others accuse us of twisting and violating the Word of God, and failing to be Christ-like in our intolerance of certain teachings and actions. Another price is that of the loss of members, financial resources, and property. The split which decimated us in the 1950s, resulting in the loss of two-thirds of our membership, was part of the price we paid for being distinctive. Even today, many will not join the PRC because of our view of divorce and remarriage, or because of some other teaching of ours; and today some still resign their membership in the PRC because they are not willing to be so distinctive. Another aspect of the cost of distinctiveness is the family disunity that arises when one commits himself to upholding these distinctives,

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while a relative attacks him or her with equal or greater determination. Such disunity many of our families do experience.

Well might we ask the question, in light of the high cost, why are we distinctive?



Not because we are traditionalists. Of course, with regard to many of our distinctives, we labor to show that the faithful church of Jesus Christ in the past has also been distinctive in these areas. And we are concerned to “hold the traditions” and “walk in the old paths.” In this way we manifest the true apostolicity of the church. But this is different from sentimental traditionalism, an attempt to keep things the way they have been and do them the old way.

Neither because of any practical reason. Some consider our distinctiveness (even our existence as churches) to be justified because we still fill a niche in the market of religious church-goers. This was once suggested to me by a pastor of another Reformed denomination. The niche we supposedly fill is that of catering to the desires of those who still like to hear the doctrines of total depravity, and sovereign grace; who still like to sing the Psalms instead of man-made hymns, and want to be very conservative and traditional in their worship. Pity those people for their ignorance, for not being enlightened with the “new” understanding of Scripture, and not going along with the modern liberalism which infiltrates other Reformed denominations today; but at least the PRC exists to satisfy their religious needs. Such would be a practical reason — but it is no reason at all, as far as we are concerned!

Nor because we like to think of ourselves as the only ones who possess the truth, as is charged. We frankly acknowledge that we are not the only ones to whom the truth has been given. The church

of Jesus Christ in the New Testament has had the truth ever since the time of the apostles; all Christian denominations today have historically known the truth; but many have rejected that truth. That we have not done so is not due to our power, but to the grace of God.

Why, then, are we distinctive?

Essentially for one reason, and for that reason alone: faithfulness to God demands it! In obedience and gratitude to Him, we will be distinctive.

We can explain this reason from three different viewpoints.



The first viewpoint is that of the role Scripture plays in our life. We believe Scripture to be the inspired, inerrant, complete Word of God, profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness (II Tim. 3:16). It is sufficient unto salvation (II Tim. 3:14). It is our only authority for faith and life, because the Word of God is truth (John 17:17) and is life (John 6:63). It can be all this because it contains no word of mere man. In fact, Scripture warns man against adding to or taking from the word which God has given (Rev. 22:18ff.).

What Scripture teaches as truth we must believe. What Scripture calls the lie we must denounce. What Scripture commands us to do we must do. What Scripture forbids us to do we must refrain from doing.

Our distinctiveness is not due so much to our *knowing* Scripture better than others, as it is to the grace of God enabling us to *believe* and *obey* Scripture more faithfully and consistently than others. The reason for debate and difference of opinion with regard to many doctrines and practices which are debated today (the origin of the world, women in office, e.g.) is not really the interpretation of Scripture, as many would have us believe; Scripture is clear, and has only one interpretation. Rather, it

is a matter of bowing, or failing to bow, to Scripture’s authority.

In the areas in which we are distinctive, then, we labor to show that our view is scriptural. We are not willing to hold to or to reject a position on the basis of popular opinion, or with a desire to win over a certain group or segment of society; we desire to bow to the Word of God in all that we teach.

This makes us distinctive. Today many follow the advice of Bible scholars that we must use a new hermeneutic, a new way of understanding and explaining the Bible. Consequently, many cardinal doctrines of Scripture are redefined and explained differently than the true church has always understood and taught them. This is apostasy, falling away from the truth. We deplore this apostasy and fight against it by maintaining the clear meaning of Scripture as the church has always understood it. This we do in faithfulness to God and His Word.



The second viewpoint is that of the covenant.

It is true that the doctrine of the covenant is one doctrine in which our distinctiveness is manifest; but my point for now is that a true understanding of the doctrine of the covenant explains why we are distinctive.

The covenant is the bond of friendship and fellowship which God establishes with His people in Jesus Christ, whereby He is our God and we are His people (cf. Gen. 17:7, Jer. 31:31ff.). Not by nature do we enjoy this covenant friendship, for we are sinners, but by grace, on the basis of the work of Christ on the cross, whereby He atoned for our sins and merited for us the right to this covenant fellowship. By His Spirit’s work in our hearts, we actually possess the new, covenant life of the resurrected Christ, and can manifest this covenant friendship in all that we do — particularly in the way of

prayer, studying His Word, and obedience to Him. This covenant fellowship which we enjoy with God is the very essence of salvation.

But it is possible that the enjoyment of this covenant fellowship can be interrupted. By our disobedience; by our refusal to teach as truth that which God reveals; by our seeking to do anything our way instead of God's — by all these the enjoyment of covenant fellowship is interrupted. The child of God who lives close to God knows this from experience, just as the child knows that in the way of disobedience to his parents, though the parents will still love him, the enjoyment of fellowship will be interrupted for a time.

That God has established such a covenant with us is a motivation to us to be distinctive. Because He has brought us into friendship with Him in Christ, we want to show ourselves to be His friend. We want to love, serve, and worship Him in obedience to His command to do so, and in the way He has commanded. We want to believe to be truth that which He says is truth. And only when we do these things can we enjoy friendship with Him. One who twists the words of his friend, or does not trust his friend to tell the truth, cannot really enjoy the friendship they share.



The third viewpoint is that of

the antithesis.

This is really the negative implication of the second, that of the covenant. While the covenant is the bond of friendship between God and His people in Christ, the antithesis is the separation between God and the world of ungodly unbelievers, and therefore between His people and those unbelievers. When God established His covenant with Adam and Eve after the fall, He also placed this antithesis between Eve's seed and that of the serpent. The antithesis is the relationship, not of friendship and unity, but of enmity and disunity between two people or parties. Scripture speaks of this disunity in other places, too — cf. II Corinthians 6:14ff., e.g.

It is impossible for this disunity which God has created not to be manifest in the lives of God's friends. To live as God's friend means to live as enemy of God's enemy. In using the term enemy, I do not mean that we ought to harbor a personal hatred for the ungodly as a neighbor; this would be contrary to the second table of the law. We must seek the neighbor's earthly good, and even spiritual good by seeking his salvation. But when he makes clear by his speech and actions that he hates the truth of God's Word, we must have no friendship with him.


Churches must also manifest this antithesis in the way of fighting for the truth which others deny, and for the law which others vio-

late. To do this is a matter of faithfulness to God! How different from the common idea that we are all one, and must live as one, work to be one, strive for unity, and denounce all separation of churches! In fact, we are not all one in Christ, and must not pretend to be.

So the doctrine of the antithesis explains why we are distinctive, and especially why this distinctiveness takes the unpopular form of pointing out the error in the thinking and practice of other churches. It is a matter of clearly identifying right and wrong, truth and lie, so that we might ally ourselves with the right, and keep ourselves from the wrong. And in this way we show covenant fellowship with God consistently, by keeping ourselves from those who deny His Word.



Whether one appeals to the Word of God, or to the doctrine of the covenant, or to the existence of the antithesis, it all comes back to this: we are distinctive in order to show our faithfulness to God.

Because our distinctiveness is a matter of faithfulness to God, we are willing to pay the price. May we always be willing! Our resolve is to continue being distinctive. By God's grace we will carry out this resolve, in the confidence that He is pleased with us, and that in the way of perseverance in defending the truth and godliness we shall receive the reward of grace. 

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Martin VanderWal

Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

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The teaching of Christ in these verses represents a development in the Sermon on the Mount. The prior verses identify the citizens of the kingdom from the viewpoint of their bless-

edness. Their blessedness was described in various ways, according to the characteristics that identified them.

Now that we know these citizens and their blessedness, the

Lord Jesus Christ compares them to two things: salt and light. He states, "Ye are the salt of the earth," and, "Ye are the light of the world." Yet, this is more than a comparison. There is a certain calling that proceeds out of this comparison. The calling that proceeds from the comparison to salt is that believers retain their savor. The calling that proceeds from the comparison to light is to let that light shine. However, we must not divide between the calling and the comparison. The comparison is the gospel, the ground and foundation for the calling.

These two comparisons belong exactly together. They cannot be properly understood in isolation. The relationship is that of purpose. The first stands in the service of the latter. The believers must remain salt, in order that their light may shine before men. If we rest upon this fundamental truth, we will be preserved from an incorrect understanding of the first comparison especially.



In that first comparison, Christ compares the church to salt. "Ye are the salt of the earth."

It is here that we must face the prevalent interpretation of this passage and refute it. This interpretation is closely linked to the error of common grace. Common grace is the teaching that God in grace restrains the world in its corruption, making it better than it might otherwise be. With that error in the background, one reads into Matthew 5:13 the idea that the church's duty is to permeate the earth. In this way, the wicked of the world become better. In other words, believers are to exert a power and influence in the world that restrains the world's sin. They are to be the preservative that retards the moral spoilage and decay of the world.

Such a view is that given in the footnote of the "New Geneva Study Bible" to this passage: "The pri-

mary value of salt was not a flavoring but as a preservative. Disciples are to hinder the world's corruption. The salt deposits along the Dead Sea contain not just sodium chloride but a variety of other minerals as well. This salt can become good for nothing when the rain washes out its saltiness over the years."

Such an interpretation does not fit. What ought to give us great pause when confronted with such an interpretation is the very place it occupies in this sermon of Christ. We must think it more than a little strange that in the very beginning of this sermon, and so soon after the distinct word about persecution, Christ would teach a form of common grace!

This pause must become outright rejection through a number of considerations. There is one word which must cause us immediately to reject the idea of preservation, the word "savor." Christ did not say, "If the salt hath lost its power to preserve, it is thenceforth good for nothing." He said, "If the salt hath lost its savor..." Second, such an interpretation militates against the immediately preceding context. It is the nature of the world in its wickedness to persecute the church. This persecution represents one of the fullest manifestations of total depravity. It is simply impossible, therefore, that Christ should next speak of the church as preventing the expression of that same natural depravity. Third, the nature of the world's depravity makes it impossible for the church to have such a function. Sprinkling salt on rotten meat does not keep the meat from its rottenness. Neither will salt make that rotten meat less rotten than it is. Salt does not restore rotten meat to fresh! In fact, salt on rotten meat will most definitely lose its savor.

The word of our Lord is much more simple: Be salt and stay salt! Retain your savor as that salt! We must say that the first principle is

the self-preservation of that salt.

There is a positive purpose to this salt. We find that positive purpose in the word "earth." That word is distinct from the word "world." We find this distinction through a comparison of the Lord's teaching on salt with His teaching on light. When Christ states, "Ye are the light of the world," He is defining the fact that their light as Christians shines into the darkness of sinful men. We have a different word than "world" when He speaks about salt. The word earth means not simply the substance of the earth, namely dirt. Rather it means the course of one's life upon the earth, as he moves about in certain circles, and engages in certain activities. Earthly, mundane activities are on the foreground here. The Lord teaches us that what the believer does in the world is acceptable and pleasing to God. He may be engaged in the very same work as the unbeliever. He may sit in the lecture room or library next to unbelievers. He may work in the same shop or factory as the unbeliever, engaged in exactly the same activity. Believers shop at the same grocery store, and bring children to the same park. But the activity of the believer is tasty to God because it is salted.

Thus, the Christian, though living in the world, is not of the world. And, as he lives and moves in the world, his work in that world is acceptable and pleasing to God. God delights in it. We find here an antidote against the world-flight of the Anabaptist and ascetic. We receive a tremendous incentive to undertake the most mundane, earthly chores.

These words of Christ contain also a grave warning against contamination. "If the salt hath lost its savor." Above we saw that these words point to the fact that Christ's application of this comparison has regard to taste. It does not refer to salt as a preservative. There is more, however. If salt is sprinkled upon rotten meat in or-

der to preserve it, that salt will lose its savor. It will be contaminated by the pungent flavor of that rotten meat. If the Christian, under the banner of common grace, enters into the world in order to restrain its moral corruption, he will lose his savor. The thing that happens is exactly what Christ says must not happen!

The consequences are dire indeed. Christ asks the rhetorical question, "Wherewith shall it be salted?" If the salt loses its savor, the earth is not going to be salted. The Christian, now polluted with the world's moral defilement, cannot work that which is pleasing to God. He may engage in the holiest of activities, but God does not accept them, for there is no savor to them. Then follows a word of utter uselessness: "It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men." That salt is as good as dirt. It belongs in the street with the dirt that men walk upon.



We see how this paves the way for the disciple of Christ to shine his light. Through the maintenance of the antithesis, the Christian can consider himself as light, and to carry out the calling to let his light shine before men.

With this word about light, Christ divides up the comparison into two parts. The first part concerns a city on a hill. It is the very nature of a city on a hill, that it cannot be hid. We must have the picture of a city on a hill. That city is prominent by day. It stands out among the pastureland, fields, and foliage on that hill. That city is even more prominent at night. Into the darkness of the night, light pours out through the windows of the multitude of dwellings. How that light must warm the heart of the weary and cold traveler as he makes his way through the night to that city. As long as he travels in the darkness, he is beset by dangers real and imagined. The light

of the city beckons him onward to its safety.

The only possible application that we can find belongs to the church as an organic unity, and that as manifest in the lives of the individual believers and their seed. As they live together, striving in unity for the truth of the gospel and to manifest its power in their lives, they are the city which cannot be hid.

Such a communion and fellowship is difficult to grasp in our day of rampant individualism. That individualism so easily infiltrates the church. The Christian may very easily see his calling to shine his light as an individual, and we may take nothing away from that privilege and responsibility. There is, however, a danger attendant upon this calling. The danger is to neglect the truth of the body of believers and their seed. Where that danger is neglected, so will the conscious apprehension of the source of that light, Christ Himself be neglected. Where one neglects or ignores the body of Christ, the Head is soon to follow. To know oneself as a window in a city is a blessing indeed.

The second part of this comparison follows upon the first. Christ takes us in our thinking from the whole city, to one house in that city, and then to one room in that city. At night that room becomes dark. Therefore, a man will light a candle. Then we are treated to the spectacle of a very foolish man. He lights a candle, and then places over that candle a bushel. We are prone to ask of such a foolish man why he lit the candle in the first place.

Yet, such a thing often takes place in the kingdom as manifested upon the earth. Christ, after all, is not instructing His disciples about the use of candles. He has said, "Ye are the light of the world." One who bears the name Christian is the light of the world. Yet, so often they who bear this name refuse to let their light shine. One

may fear what others might say or do, dreading the blessedness of persecution. Another may deny that he is light, preferring the title Christian, but denying the gracious doctrine of sanctification. Whatever the reason, it all falls under the judgment of foolishness. As foolish as hiding a lit candle under a bushel.

The purpose of this light is to bring that light unto others. Such is the direct application that Christ here makes. In the comparison, He states, "It giveth light unto all that are in the house." In the reality, He states, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

The purpose of letting this light of good works shine is the glorification of the Father in heaven. This is the thing that must capture our attention. Such is true of our good works as such, whether men see them or not. One of the essential attributes of good works is that they are performed to the glory of God. However, the emphasis of Christ falls on the appearance of those good works to other men, with the purpose that they "glorify your Father which is in heaven."

This purpose, as identified by Christ, is of two points. Fundamental is that men consciously and willingly glorify God when they see these good works. The Christian's (and Christ's) chief purpose in this matter is to lead other men to glorify God. Those men see these good works. They see them as light. In contrast, they see the utter darkness in themselves, repent of that darkness, and pray for Christ to make them light. They then hear the word of Christ, "Ye are the light of the world." They, too, aim for the glory of God in a life of good works. The city is built and increased. Scripture teaches this elsewhere, e.g., I Peter 3:1. This teaching of Scripture is reflected well in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32.

The second point of this pur-

pose has to do with those who remain in the darkness, and strive against the light. These refuse to testify to the goodness of this light. They seek to snuff out that light. They will put a bushel over the candlestick. For them, it is both foolish and vain. For the Lord Jesus Christ declares His own to be light, and gives them the light as it shines. And He will vindicate it at His glorious return. The light will be justified, and the darkness condemned. Through that activity of judgment, even the wicked will be forced to glorify God. They will acknowledge that He is glorious, even as He condemns them as darkness.

God will be glorified. How blessed to be an instrument of that glory, by being salt and light! We begin with the declaration. "Ye are the salt of the earth." "Ye are the light of the world." This is the work of grace. As the believer conducts himself according to his nature as salt and light, he under-

stands that this conduct is also the gift of God's grace. He is thankful. And when others see that light and give glory to God, he will not

boast in his works, but in God who has given them. God receives the glory, as fountain and end.

Questions for meditation and further study:


1. Find the Scriptures that mention salt. How do they contribute to a proper understanding of Matthew 5:13? What is the relationship between God's covenant of grace and salt?

2. In what specific areas are you tempted to be less than the salt of the earth? How are Christ's declaration and warning incentives to remain salt and maintain a salty conduct.

3. In what earthly ways are you specifically called to be salt unto God? What sorts of things

are you called to make pleasant to Him?

4. Do you represent a lighted city on a hill to travelers seeking that city? How would such travelers already manifest the effects of God's grace? Are all men made happy by the presence of such a city?

5. In what areas are you tempted to hide your light? How does Christ's word about its foolishness bring you out of that temptation? 

The Prediluvian Period (8)

Chapter VI

The Prediluvian Amalgamation

Introductory Remarks

The entire sixth chapter of Genesis speaks of the events which culminated in the Flood, by which the first world was destroyed. In the first part of the chapter it records the causes and the circumstances and the judicial ground upon which the

Lord condemned and executed judgment upon the first world. That cause was a *general wickedness*. When the Flood was sent, there was not only wickedness, depravity in the world. The latter is always present; and it is always total. Yet final judgment does not come. If there were ten righteous in Sodom, the city would not be destroyed. But there was a general wickedness: when the Flood came, there were only eight persons left who constituted the

church. In other words, the measure of iniquity of the prediluvian world was full. History could not go on. The sinfulness of sin in that world had come to its full manifestation. If the world had gone on any longer, it would have meant the destruction of the church.

In the very first part of Genesis 6 we are also told how this general wickedness came about. In general, we are informed that it arose when men began to multiply in the earth and daughters were

born unto them. No exact point in time is specified. But one gets the impression from a careful study of Genesis 5 and 6, as well as in the light of the rest of the Scriptures, that there was especially in the last few centuries of the prediluvian period a rapid and rapidly accelerating development of wickedness in the world and a hastening of that first world toward its end. The whole period was marked by brevity and rapid development; but the progress toward that end of the first world was not a mere steady development. On the contrary, there was an acceleration in the rate of development as time went on. This acceleration went hand in hand with the natural development and increase of the race. As the world's population began to accelerate in growth, and as that increased population developed naturally, developed in civilization and so-called cultural achievements, so the world hastened more rapidly toward the consummation.

One of the factors which itself hastened that development in sin was the amalgamation of the church and the world at that time. This factor of amalgamation itself became possible only when mankind became more numerous. When there was a greater choice of daughters, and when there was a world, represented in the line of Cain-Lamech, which was also able to present itself in all its sinful attractiveness, then the circumstances also became ripe for this amalgamation to take place — an amalgamation which, in turn, contributed to the further acceleration of the world's development in wickedness. While we cannot pinpoint the exact time of this amalgamation, we may be certain that this unholy union of church and world would come about especially after the world had reached the great heights of development achieved by Lamech and his notorious family. This would also be the time when the world's population began to grow very rapidly.

The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men

There have been various views proposed concerning the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" who are mentioned in Genesis 6:1, 2. One view explains that we must understand the "sons of God" as referring to the aristocracy of that time, men of higher rank and social standing, while the "daughters of men" are the plebes of that day, people of a lower social class. The text then would mean that there was an intermingling of people of various social levels. It is obvious, however, that this view is not warranted by the terms used in the text.

A second view explains that this passage refers to a union between divine beings, or angels, and human females, the daughters of men, and that the fruit of this union was the "giants" (nephilim) mentioned in verse 4. The meaning then would be that in the period before the Flood angels descended from heaven to have intercourse with human beings and that the result of this intercourse was the wicked generations of mighty giants mentioned in the context. Modern critics like to interpret the passage in this fashion, not because they believe that such a thing ever happened (as some older interpreters did), but in order to prove that the Scriptures are a strange conglomeration of myths. Now, in the first place, such intercourse between angels and human beings is neither truth nor reality. It is true that the phrase "sons of God" may refer to angels. But if the fact that angels are spirits would not be sufficient to rule out the thought of angels in this connection, we may be reminded that the Lord teaches that the angels neither marry nor are given in marriage. Besides, the giants mentioned in verse 4 were not a special race of strange, inhuman beings, but mere men, though they were mighty men of renown. Nor does the text in verse 4 teach that these giants were exclusively

the offspring of the sons of God and the daughters of men; in fact, it gives us to understand that these giants were in the earth even before the intermarriage of which this passage speaks.

The Scriptures call men "sons of God" in a spiritual, ethical sense. In this sense, Israel is God's son, His firstborn. And in numerous passages, both in the Old Testament and in the New, God's people are referred to as His sons (Deut. 32:5; Ps. 73:15; Hosea 1:10; and often in the New Testament). Neither is it strange to think that even in that early period the generations of the sons of Seth were known as the children of God. As early as the days of Enos, they had begun to call upon the name of the Lord, something which suggests that in his days the Sethites publicly and unitedly confessed the name of the Lord their God in the midst of the world and worshiped Jehovah. Thus understood, Genesis 6 refers to the intermarriage of the Sethites and the Cainites and to all the intermingling of the two races which is naturally presupposed by and follows from such intermarriages.

This is also at least suggested by the words of the Lord Jesus when He compares the days before the Flood with the days that shall precede His coming: "For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:38, 39). These words suggest that in the days before the Flood there was intermarriage without regard to their relation to Jehovah. "They took them wives of all that they chose."

By the "sons of God," then, are meant the Sethites. They were the race of the God-fearing. Only, we must not include all Sethites. The Sethites in the outward sense are meant. There is no falling away

from grace. But also at that time the rule prevailed that not all were God's people who were of God's people. It was those who were outwardly of Seth's generations, but who were not true Sethites, who intermarried. By the same token, the "daughters of men" does not refer to young women in general (as the phrase in itself may mean), but the daughters of the Cainites (in contrast with the sons of God, the Sethites). Hence, there was an intermingling of the church and the world on a general scale.

Their Intermarriage

It is significant that this intermingling, amalgamation, took place through *marriage*. We read that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them *wives* of all that they chose.

To understand the seriousness of this, we must, in the first place, consider the question: what is marriage?

Marriage, according to the Scriptures, is an intimate union and communion of life and of love between one man and one woman, based upon a communion of nature. It is a communion of life. This means that the two lives involved in a marriage supplement each other. They belong together. They become one. The twain shall be one flesh. Together they constitute one whole. This union of life in marriage, properly conceived, is a union physically, psychically, and spiritually. On the basis of this communion of life, there is a communion of love in marriage, so that the married persons, sharing one life, go out in love toward one another, delight in one another and in one another's fellowship, desire each other, seek each other, give themselves for one another. Further, we must remember that marriage is a union *for* life, as well as a union *of* life. The marriage bond is indissoluble, except by death. Hence, marriage, properly conceived, involves unity of aims,

unity of purposes, unity of walk, unity of speech, unity of action. Man and wife must go through life as if they are not two, but one: one in principle, one in faith, one in love, one in hope, one in aims, one in struggles, one in prayers — the man in his position as man, and the woman as woman. Thus marriage, according to the Scriptures, is a picture of the union between Christ and His church, God and His people.

This marriage is based upon a union and communion of nature. The marriage partners must be compatible. Even the world, with all its perversion and corruption of the institution of marriage, recognizes this. But this is true, in the first place, naturally and psychically. The marriage partners must be compatible physically and psychically: alike as to character and tendencies, alike intellectually, socially, emotionally, etc. But, above all, marriage requires spiritual unity and compatibility. Married persons must be spiritually one.

There is no true love in marriage, but only the perversion and subversion of love, unless there is the spiritual unity which is characterized by the love of Christ and by the fear of the Lord. This is the all-important thing in marriage. From this point of view, the world, outside of Christ, cannot even speak of love; it has no right to do so. Call it infatuation, or "falling in love," or sexual attraction. It is not love, but

lust. It is not truly marriage, but the perversion of marriage. In principle, there can only be adultery and fornication in the marriage relationship in the world, even when men and women of the world may succeed in a measure in ordering their lives outwardly according to the demands of the institution of marriage and not live in open adultery and fornication.

Without the love of Christ, there is no true love in marriage.

This means, therefore, that the amalgamation referred to took place at the focal point of all human relationships. It involved the most intimate and the most crucial relationship in all of social life. In the second place, this amalgamation took place in that aspect, that sphere, of human life which is basic to all the other spheres of life, and from which, therefore, all other spheres of life would inevitably become involved and affected.

Now what took place in the prediluvian world?

In the first place, the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair. It is not impossible that this took place, as we have intimated before, about the time of wicked Lamech and his family. At least, it must have accelerated at that time. Conditions were ripe for it then. It seems as though in the time of Lamech, who composed boastful poetry for his two wives, Adah and Zillah, that the woman

as woman began to be on the foreground. Nor, of course, must we have the idea that this was a purely isolated aspect of the life of that world, as though somehow in a world which was very primitive and underdeveloped this sensuality began to make itself felt. This is simply not according to reality. There must be a whole set of circumstances which accompany both this sensuality and this amalgamation. One of the factors

in the rapid degeneration of that first world, and also in this amalgamation, was the fast development of life itself and the tremendous power and energy both of body and mind which were displayed and developed by the human race before the Flood in the generations of Cain. This gave rise to the development of a civilization and a culture in the service of

Instead of keeping an eye on the city that hath foundations, as is proper for those who are called "sons of God," they were attracted to Cain's life of the world and for the world.

sin and iniquity. The genius of Jabal produced a world attractive for its wealth. The genius of Jubal produced a world attractive for its beauty and art and music. And the genius of Tubal-Cain produced a world attractive for its industry and power and might and all that these can produce for mankind. All of this was in the service of sin and corruption.

It was in such a world that the daughters of men made the most of their sensual beauty and made themselves carnally attractive to the sons of God. It was in such a world that the sons of God began to look upon the daughters of men. They were deceived by the greatness and the glitter of the world. They were attracted by Cain's city, by Jabal's riches, by Jubal's music, by the industrial power of Tubal-Cain. Instead of keeping an eye on the city that hath foundations, as is proper for those who are called "sons of God," they were attracted to Cain's life of the world and for the world. The beauty, the outward, sensual beauty, the beauty of the eyes and the features and the form, the carnal beauty of the lusty sex appeal of the daughters of men — these made a deep impression upon the sons of the church in that day. They were smitten by the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh. They saw the daughters of men that they were "fair." They had perverted vision. They had sensual eyes. They looked at the daughters of men with adultery in their hearts, to lust after them. They had eyes which were without the love of God in them. They had no eye whatsoever for the spiritual compatibility which was necessary for a proper marriage.

And so, they took them wives of all that they chose. They married merely on the basis of carnal attractiveness. All other considerations were discarded. Though they were historically "sons of God," historically children of the generations of God's people, the

love and fear of the Lord did not count as over against their love for these carnal daughters of men. It is not impossible that when we are told that "they took them wives of all that they chose," this also implies polygamy. We do not know. But this would be quite natural and quite in harmony with the example of a man like Lamech. This intoxication with sensual beauty is very short lived, and it very readily seeks gratification with other women. However that may be, it certainly implies that they desired and married these daughters of men, these women of the world, merely on the basis of physical beauty, on the basis of carnal considerations.

It is to be noted, too, in this connection that the initiative in this amalgamation was taken by the Sethites. It was the sons of God who took them wives of all that they chose. This implies especially, whatever else it may imply, that the movement was not one of the children of the world, the daughters of men, toward the church and the generations of God's people; but it was the very opposite, a movement of the generations of the sons of God, the Sethites, toward the world, a movement away from the generations of God's people.

The Results of This Amalgamation

The result of such amalgamation is, in the first place, that where God's people ally themselves with the world, the world does not become church, but the church is swallowed up by the world.

There is a reason for this. The deepest reason is that *God only* converts and changes us into His children, and He does so according to His own good pleasure. Moreover, He does so, as a general rule, in the line of the generations of His people. We have no reason to be-

lieve that if it pleases us to form alliances with the world, God is going to accommodate Himself to those alliances and change the world. The generations of God's people may not tempt God in this respect.

But there is a spiritual reason also. When the believer puts on a yoke with an unbeliever, that yoke is always an unequal yoke. When such alliances are formed, the church forms them on the world's terms. That happened here. Were not these marriages consummated solely on the basis of sensual beauty? The only reason stated by the Scriptures why the sons of God took

them wives of all that they chose from among the daughters of men was that they saw that they were fair! There was no other reason. They certainly did not see that these daughters of men were godly. They certainly could not see in the case of such wives that "he that findeth a wife findeth a good thing." They allied themselves with the daughters of men on the terms of the daughters of men, the terms of the world. Thus it is always. The world will not join the church. The world will never form an alliance on the church's terms. Because this is the case, of course, it becomes fundamentally impossible for the sons of God, once having formed such alliances on the world's terms, to witness. How can you witness when you stand on the same basis as the world? What right and what spiritual power did these sons of God have to speak of God and of His service after they had entered into these marriages solely on the basis of sensuous beauty and out of the motive of the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye? None!

In the second place, the result of this amalgamation was the general wickedness described later in Genesis 6. In only a few generations the world had so developed

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in wickedness that it was ripe for final judgment. It may be that when such alliances are formed, there is perhaps in the first generation yet some battle and some misery — at least on the part of any who are really the sons of God. But in generations God does not bestow His covenant blessings where such amalgamations take place. In generations, also in that world, there was a rapid decline, until wickedness and godlessness prevailed. In fact, through the process of hardening, there is no more rapid development of wickedness than when the false church joins with the wicked world. Wickedness and godlessness accelerate under such circumstances.

In the third place, such amalgamation is a significant factor in the occurrence of persecutions such as we have alluded to earlier. For

there is no force which more bitterly hates and persecutes the true and faithful church and the true people of God than the apostate sons of God joined in unholy alliance with the power of the world. It is from such alliances that the power of the Antichrist arises in the new dispensation, I John 2:18, 19. In principle, this was the same in the prediluvian world.

The result was the world as the Lord Jesus described it, a world which was typical of the world as it shall be before the Lord returns. They ate, they drank, they married and gave in marriage; and knew not until the flood came and destroyed them all.

Seen in this light, we can understand, too, that this amalgamation was a significant factor in bringing about the situation which prevailed at the time of the Flood, namely, that there were but eight

souls who constituted the church at that time and who were saved by water. The rest of the people of God had either died by that time, or they had been persecuted to death. But by far the larger part of mankind had revealed themselves as ungodly.

Nor must we overlook the fact that this amalgamation and its results were strictly under the sovereign control of the Lord God, the God of His people. It must serve His purpose, in order to bring the conflict of the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent into sharp focus, in order to bring the history of that period to its consummation, and in order that He may reveal the wonder of His grace in saving His church and giving them the victory, and that, too, through the judgment of the world.



Come, Lord Jesus

Rev. Cornelius Hanko

Signs of the Times (12)

The Sign of the Son of Man

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Matthew 24:30

At the end of the ages, when God's church is ready for glory and God's counsel in regard to the wicked is fully carried out, Christ will appear

in all His majesty and glory. Every eye will see Him as King of kings and Lord of lords forever and ever!

Jesus had spoken of the signs of the end of the world as birth pangs, the pain that a pregnant woman naturally experiences in giving birth to a child. Childbirth is severely painful, but so natural that it is expected; and when the mother sees her own healthy baby, all her pain is forgotten. The whole creation is now and has been since the fall of Adam in birth pangs, which increase as the end of the ages approaches, laboring to bring forth the new creation. "For we know that the whole creation

groaneth and travaileth together until now" and "will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:21, 22).

The final sign that God's goal is attained is the sign of the Son of man. This sign appears in the heavens, where every eye will see it. It is the announcement of the return of the Lord of glory upon the clouds of heaven as the righteous Judge of all the inhabitants of the earth who have ever lived.

Scripture speaks of the sign of the *Son of man*. This name emphasizes the true humanity of the Son of God. As the second person of the divine Trinity He was fully

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God, yet He took on the likeness and weakness of sinful flesh. He became like unto the brethren with a complete human nature, like us except for sin.

Jesus was born as a son of Adam, from the loins of Abraham, in the line of the tribe of Judah, of David's royal seed, from the womb of the virgin Mary. All that was written of Him was His divine program which He willfully carried out throughout His entire ministry, even unto the accursed death of the cross. He lived, suffered, and died in anticipation of the glory that followed.

The cross of Jesus Christ stands in the center of history. It casts its long shadow down through the old dispensation all the way back to the Fall in Paradise. The believers who lived in the days of the shadows lived and died in the hope of the redemption through the atoning death of the Son of man. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13).

In the fullness of time the Son of man came as the Man of sorrows, the suffering Servant of God. He carried our grief and our sorrows and bore them away forever. He crushed the head of Satan and attained the victory for Himself and for His people by His death and resurrection. As Victor over sin and death He ascended to heaven before the eyes of His disciples. We read in Acts 1:12 that two angels appeared to inform the eleven: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as ye have seen him go into heaven."

It had already been said in prophecy: "The LORD (Jehovah) said unto my Lord (*Adonai*, the Mighty One), Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." The entire history

of the new dispensation must be regarded in that light. By the exalted Son of man God is gathering His church and bringing into judgment all those who reject Him and His Christ.

Thus we read in the book of Revelation: "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." All the saints and all the angel host, yea, all of heaven responds: "Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:12).



At the culmination of history the sign of the Son of man will announce His second coming. Soon after, He Himself will appear in His full power and His glory, which He now possesses as Lord of lords, the full revelation of almighty God, who is the sovereign Ruler in heaven and on earth. Moses caught a glimpse of that glory when he was sheltered in the cleft of the rock as Jehovah passed by. His face still shone with that glory when he returned to the camp. The disciples had a glimpse of that glory when on the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus appeared with Moses and Elijah as transformed in the dazzling brightness of the glory that awaited Him upon His accomplished work of the cross.

In this present dispensation the exalted Christ is the good Shepherd who sends forth His gospel to the ends of the earth to gather His sheep that are given to Him of the Father and whom He redeemed with His own blood. They hear His voice and they come to Him. He leads them in green pastures and prepares them for the time when

He will take them unto Himself as one fold and with one Shepherd. This present age is the history of the gathering, preserving, and defending of God's church through Christ by His Word and Spirit. Only when the last elect is gathered in and prepared for glory will our Lord return.

The Lord of glory rules His church in love, but He rules the world with a rod of iron. His Word that is proclaimed to the ends of the earth is not only a savor of life unto life, but also a savor of death unto death. God's holiness and justice demand that His Word brings condemnation to those who despise and reject it. For the Lord has compassion upon whom He will have compassion, and whom He wills He hardens (see Is. 6:9-13; Luke 13:13-16). The chaff and the wheat must grow up together, for the chaff serves the wheat. The carnal element must serve as the scaffolding for building the house of God. The persecution of the world must

serve to purify the church during this present time as by fire, that the gold may be refined by being separated from the dross.

This purifying process becomes increasingly evident as the end of the ages approaches. The line of demarcation between the apostatizing church and the world on the

one hand, and the true church of Jesus Christ on the other, becomes ever more distinct. Zion is redeemed by judgment.

The worst thing that can happen to the wicked is that God gives them over to their sin. This is taking place before our very eyes. The basic truth of Scripture in regard to the sovereignty of God is denied by most of Christianity. A God is taught and worshiped who loves all men, yet is impotent to save all men or to avert the evil that is present in the world. Their ambi-

The line of demarcation between the apostatizing church and the world on the one hand, and the true church of Jesus Christ on the other, becomes ever more distinct.

tion is to make this a better world by their own efforts. All religious groups are tolerated except those who persistently maintain the infallibility of the Scriptures and the sovereignty of God.

God has also given the world over to her vain philosophy. Today the theory of evolution is almost universally accepted. Yet it is an outright denial of the Word of God, the infallibility of the first chapters of Genesis, and therefore of the entire Scriptures. If we cannot believe the first chapters as the inerrant Word of God, how can we be sure of the rest? Still worse, it is a denial of God and His Christ by placing them outside of creation. History becomes a matter of development and advancement, a striving toward perfection in a world that man hopes will carry on for millenniums still to come.

Modern technology has opened the door to a whole new world of blatant corruption, as is evident from the TV and the computer. Those in the know tell us that the computer is still in its infancy. So greater evils are still to come. Animals have been cloned, and who knows how soon the attempt will be made to clone human beings? Hitler at one time tried to create a super-race, and again that ambition is undoubtedly in the minds of those who deliberately experiment with genes and other mysteries of the human anatomy. One shudders to think of what may be ventured in the future, especially because man assumes that anything he imagines he can also do. He would be as God, now more than ever as the sin of paradise reaches its full development.

We are living in a time of affluence such as the world has never known. There are more millionaires and billionaires in the world today than ever before. Huge corporations are being formed. Those who have the means build costly homes, have cars, boats, snowmobiles, and other luxuries. Because of our many conveniences every

one is busier than ever. People are so preoccupied that they have no time for quiet family life in the home, no time for searching the Scriptures, no time for spiritual matters as the world rushes toward its eternal destination.

More could be mentioned, such as the striving for unification in the church and in the world, government control reaching ever deeper into our lives, disregard for justice in the courts of law, ever increasing blatant lawlessness, shameful immorality, despising of the institution of holy marriage, and much more. But let this suffice. It all leads to the coming of the man of sin, the Antichrist. The cup of iniquity will soon be full.

It is our comfort that God is gathering and preserving His church. He is even purifying her as by fire to prepare her for the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The time is drawing near that we as believers will be robbed of our possessions and led as lambs to the slaughter. But Christ speaks His assuring word: "Behold, I come quickly." And the church responds: "Yea, come, Lord Jesus, for death is gain."



Throughout the entire period of the second coming of Christ, the church is entering into glory with tear-stained eyes. The persecution of the church intensifies as we approach the end. But the Holy Spirit also uses this persecution as a purifying and strengthening process to preserve the saints. God's kingdom is approaching. God's will is being done. God's name is being glorified upon the earth. "His judgments are a mighty deep and as the mountains high." We hear ever more loudly the footsteps of our Lord, who is hastening to return.


With uplifted heads we await

ever more eagerly His coming and the final sign of His coming. When that sign appears, the whole world will see our Christ in the dazzling glory of His heavenly majesty as the mighty Conqueror, the Lord of lords and King of kings. They will see Him as the One whom they rejected and crucified.

The sign of the Son of man will be accompanied with signs of terrible judgment. The sun will be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken (Matt. 24:29; Rev. 16).

This appearance will create great terror in the hearts of the ungodly. "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the

Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:15-17). Who can stand when He appeareth!

Yet we will rejoice with inexpressible joy! We will be at home with our Lord, enjoying the perfect life God has prepared for us. Our salvation will be fully realized, far overshadowing our light affliction of this present time. With our whole being we will join the myriads of angels and the multitude that no man can number with the blessed refrain: "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever!" Amen! 

*The time
is drawing near
that we
as believers
will be robbed
of our possessions
and led as lambs
to the slaughter.*

Young People's Activities

In early December the Young People's Society of the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN took a break from their study of the book of Romans to spend six meetings reviewing a video series by Dr. R.C. Sproul entitled, "Fear and Trembling — The Trauma of God's Holiness." This series, geared toward youth, contained six messages: 1) Encountering God, 2) Holy, Holy, Holy, 3) Inner Sanctum, 4) What Manner of Man is This? 5) Cosmic Treason, 6) Fear and Trembling.

The Young People's Society of the Edgerton, MN PRC invited the congregations of our churches in Northwest Iowa, as well as their own members to the Annual Christmas Singspiration on December 17. This singspiration rotates each year among the three churches in that area, this year being Edgerton's turn. Following an hour of singing praise to God, opportunity was given for a time of fellowship and refreshment in their church basement.

Sister-Church Activities

Rev. Lau Chin Kwee, pastor of our sister church in Singapore, the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, was scheduled to come in January 2001 to the USA for another semester of advanced studies at our Theological School in Grand Rapids, MI.

Efforts are also still continuing to find a new church home for the congregation of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. Even as they continue to meet in their temporary home at a place called the "Bible House," they continue their search for property which they could consider

purchasing. Many months have passed and many properties have come along, but as of yet, nothing has been right for them, with each property lacking in some important area. However, members of CERCS continue to pray about this earnest desire and are not discouraged. They also continue to raise funds for the project. But they know that they need more than just funds, they also need our prayers and encouragement.

On Christmas Day, December 25, the congregation of the FERCS sponsored a Gospel Meeting which was designed as a means of bringing their non-Christian relatives and friends under the preaching of the gospel. The topic of the message was "Come and Worship," based on Matthew 2:8.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL now has their own web site, where information such as their heritage, faith, worship location, and more can now be found. Their address is www.peace@prc.org.

School Activities

The annual School Christmas program of the South Holland PR School was held on December 19. The school children developed the theme, "Jesus Christ: Our Prophet, Priest, and King." In addition to the student body, children who will begin kindergarten in 2001 and 2002 were also asked to join in the program by singing "Away in a Manger" and Psalter #400.

Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA collected money this past holiday season from their students to give as a gift to support the mission work in Ghana, West Africa.

The Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN invited their sup-

porters to their annual Christmas program on December 19.

Congregation Activities

The Choral Society of the South Holland, IL PRC presented their Christmas program the evening of December 17 after their evening worship service.

The Choir of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI also celebrated the birth of our King, Jesus Christ, in song by presenting a concert for their congregation on December 10.

Not all programs celebrating the birth of our Savior were exclusively choir programs. The congregation of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB Canada combined their Children's Christmas and Choir programs for the same evening, December 20.


Minister Activities

Our vacant Lynden, WA PRC has formed a trio of the Revs. R. Cammenga, D. Kleyn, and R. VanOverloop. They were scheduled to call on January 10.

The other vacant congregation, the Randolph, WI PRC, voted early this year to extend a call to Rev. B. Gritters of the Hudsonville, MI PRC. With Rev. Gritters on that trio were the Revs. A. denHartog and R. Hanko.

The Hope PRC in Walker, MI announced a new trio from which they would call a minister to replace Rev. J. Kortering in Singapore. That trio consisted of Revs. W. Bruinsma, C. Haak, and J. Slopsema. After meeting in early January, they extended a call to Rev. Bruinsma.

Food For Thought

"The very act of faith by which we receive Christ is an act of utter renunciation of self and all its works as a ground of salvation." 

—Mark Hopkins

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Young Adults' Society of Hope PRC, Redlands, CA expresses Christian sympathy to its members who are the grandchildren of

MRS. FANNY MIERSMA.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. A. denHartog, President
Steven Potjer, Vice-all

NOTICE

The faculty of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary is thankful to God to be able to announce to the Churches that they have licensed Seminarian David Overway to speak a word of edification in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Our prayer is that the Chief Shepherd of the Church will bless the brother as he continues to prepare for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments and make him a blessing to the churches. Pulpit supply committees are reminded that all requests for pulpit supply from the seminary must be addressed to the rector.

NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Dan Huizinga (Phone: 616-453-3191). This contact should be made prior to the next scheduled meeting held 7:30 P.M., at Southwest PRC, February 12, 2001, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Dan Huizinga, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Loveland PRC express their Christian sympathy to Warren and Elaine Bonzelaar and family in the death of her father,

MR. LEONARD PEERBOLTE.

May they find comfort in the words of the God of all comfort, who says in Psalm 73:23, 24: "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

Rev. G. Eriks, Pres.
Larry Nelson, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Young Adults' Society of Hope PRC, Redlands, CA express their Christian sympathy to the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren of

MR. JOHN JABAAY.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6).

Rev. A. denHartog, President
Steven Potjer, Vice-all

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Randolph PRC express their Christian sympathy to Don, Jim, Frank, Henry, Ted, and Morry DeVries and their families in the death of their brother,

GERALD DEVRIES.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6).

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Pat DeVries, and to Dave and Carol DeVries and children in the passing away of their husband, father, and grandfather,

GERALD DE VRIES.

May the family find comfort in the words of Scripture, "For I know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Corinthians 8:9).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.
Ed Hekstra, Clerk

NOTICE!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Doon, IA on Wednesday, March 7, 2001, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, February 5, 2001. An officebearers' conference is being planned for Tuesday, March 6, on "The Minister As the Man of God." All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Doon, Mr. Jim Hoogendoorn, 702 2nd St., Doon, IA 51235. Phone: (712) 726-3573.

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, Stated Clerk

TEACHER NEEDED

Hope PR Christian School is seeking application for a lower elementary teacher for the 2001-2002 school year. Direct inquiries to Mike Lotterman (616) 453-4106, or to the administrator at the school (616) 453-9717, or send a resume to the school:

1545 Wilson S.W.
Grand Rapids, MI 49544