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What the Lord Requires of Us

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Micah 6:8



What does the Lord require of you?

This question was posed by Micah to the people of God in the Old Testament. It is a necessary question to face also today.

Perhaps you would say that the Lord requires us to go to church on the Lord's day, to support and send our children to the Christian school, to know and defend the truth of Scripture....

This is essentially what the people of God said in Micah's day. They came to the house of God with their offerings, they observed the solemn feasts, and concluded that they had done what the Lord required of them.

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

However, the Lord had a complaint against them and charged that they had not at all done what He required. Yes, it is possible to go to church, to support the Christian school, to defend the truth, and much more — and still not do what the Lord requires.

Listen carefully to Micah's instruction about the Lord's requirements for us.

What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?



Micah was a prophet of God to Judah. Although he addressed Judah, his words also applied to the nation of Israel.

Micah preached during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and the godly Hezekiah. He was a younger contemporary of Isaiah.

From his prophecy itself we learn of the many evils that prevailed in Judah. The people worshiped idols. Due to this idolatry their worship of the Lord at His temple was nothing more than hollow formalism. In addition, the

poor and downtrodden were being exploited by the rich.

So the Lord in chapter 6 takes up a controversy with Judah. The language suggests a legal proceeding in a court of law. The Lord is arguing His case against His people. He challenges Judah to testify against Him. What has He done to them so that they were weary of Him? Has He been unreasonable in His demands? Has He gone back on His word?

The Lord points out that in faithfulness to His word He had delivered them out of the bondage of Egypt and preserved them from their enemies in the wilderness.

Judah responds with an acknowledgment of sin and the question, What will the Lord have her do? Does the Lord want her to come with burnt offerings in abundance? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Or perhaps does the Lord at this time require a greater sacrifice yet, the sacrifice of her children?

And the Lord's response through Micah?

"He hath shewed thee, O man,

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. David J. Engelsma
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: engelsma@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Don Doezeema
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603
PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033
(e-mail: doezeema@prca.org)

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: seancourtney@cpcc.freeserve.co.uk)

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what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"



These requirements that God lays upon Judah are the requirements of His covenant.

The covenant is certainly on the foreground. God is identified here as the LORD. In the KJV "LORD" is used whenever the original has the name "Jehovah." This is God's covenant name. In addition, Micah speaks of the LORD, or Jehovah, as Judah's God. "What doth the LORD require of thee, but...to walk humbly with thy God?" In the covenant, the Lord becomes the God of His people (Gen. 17:7).

God's covenant is a living relationship that God establishes and maintains with His chosen people. In the covenant, God lives with His people in blessed friendship and companionship. He blesses them with many wonderful gifts and provides for all their needs both for time and eternity.

In the Old Testament the twelve tribes of Israel were the covenant people of God. For that reason God delivered them from the bondage of Egypt and brought them to Canaan, where He could live with them and bless them. In the New Testament the covenant of God is no longer limited to one nation. The elect of God are now found among the nations. God establishes and maintains His covenant with them through Jesus Christ.

And now we are informed of what God requires of His people in His covenant. In the covenant there are two parts: there is God's part and there is our part. Only when both God and His people are faithful to their respective parts of the covenant can the covenant of grace continue. The same is true, for example, in the covenant of marriage, which God ordained as an earthly picture of His covenant with His church. There is the

man's part and the woman's part. For the covenant of marriage to work, both must do their part. So is it in the covenant of grace that God has with us. But in God's covenant we cannot keep our part of the covenant on our own. We can do our part only after God has done His part. And God's part in the covenant is to save us in Jesus Christ, deliver us from the bondage of sin, renew us by the Spirit, make us new creatures. Only when God has done His part can we do our part. Our part is the fruit of God's part.



And what is our part in the covenant? Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.

These requirements of the covenant were not new to Micah's day. The Lord had already shown Israel what He required of them in His covenant. As Micah indicates, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good." The Lord had shown Israel the requirements of the covenant in the law of the ten commandments given at Mt. Sinai. The justice, mercy, and humble walk mentioned by Micah are the heart and essence of that law. They are the summary of that law.

To do justly and love mercy are the summary of the second table of the law, which spells out the duties we owe our neighbor.

"Justly" is used here in the sense of fair and equitable treatment of others, especially when it comes to the rights of the poor and disadvantaged.

This fair treatment was scarcely found in Micah's day. From Micah's prophecy we learn that the rich oppressed the poor. The fatherless and widows were being trodden underfoot. Judges gave favorable verdicts to those who bribed them. The priests, whose living was provided for in the sacrifices, would teach the people only for a price.

God requires that we do justly, dealing honestly with our neighbor, protecting his rights, especially the downtrodden who cannot protect himself. We do this by keeping the second table of the law. This is what God requires of us in His covenant.

And He requires that we love mercy.

Mercy is compassion for those in need, a compassion that leads us to help the needy. The needy we encounter includes the poor, the widow, the orphan, the sick, the elderly, the distressed....

One shows mercy to the needy by keeping the second table of the law, especially in its positive requirement. Among other things, the second table of the law requires that children care for aged parents, that husband or wife cares for an incapacitated spouse, that we protect the life and even the reputation of our neighbor, that we care for the poor....

And Micah speaks of loving mercy. It is not enough just to *do* mercy; we must *love* mercy. Helping those in need must not be just a duty but our delight to do. The same thing applies to doing justly.

This is what God requires of us in His covenant.

Are we meeting these requirements? How easy it is to attend church, support the Christian school, defend the truth, but at the same time ignore the plight of the needy and even trample underfoot the rights of others.

God requires that we do justly and love mercy! That is our part in the covenant we have with Him.

And we are to walk humbly with our God.

To walk with God means to live in close communion with Him. Think of two who walk together arm in arm, their heads bowed in conversation, enjoying each other's company. In like manner, to walk with God means to live close to

*It is not
enough just
to do mercy;
we must love
mercy.*

Him, to be in constant communication with Him. We do this by hearing and studying His word and responding to Him in heartfelt prayer and song.

Micah speaks of walking *humbly* with our God. That is the only way you can walk with Him. You cannot walk proudly with God. For God resists the proud; He gives grace only to the humble. No, if you will walk through life in close communion with the Lord, you must walk humbly. That means that you recognize your position of servant to God, whose calling it is to do His will. It means that you recognize yourself as an unworthy sinner, so that you seek the covering of your sins in the blood of Jesus Christ. It means that in gratitude to God for His forgiveness and salvation, you seek to serve

God according to His will in the power of the cross.

Only when we walk humbly with God will we do justly and love mercy. For God is a God of justice and mercy. And those who humbly walk with Him come to taste of His justice and mercy. This alone moves one to be just and merciful to his neighbor.

And this is what God requires of His people in His covenant. This is our part in God's glorious covenant.



He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good.

That which is good is morally good, reflecting the very goodness of God.

For that reason, what is good

is also pleasing to God.

And when God's people are pleasing to Him, they taste His blessing.

Judah was not tasting the blessing of the Lord. They were not doing justice, not loving mercy, not walking humbly with their God. Because of pride, their relationship to the Lord was only outward and formal. They loved neither justice nor mercy. So they were also under the discipline of the Lord. Eventually they lost their place as God's special covenant people.

Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.

You can do this only in Jesus Christ.

How good and pleasing this is to the Lord!

What blessings are in store for those who so live! 

Editorial

Glittering Vices

In the November 2000 issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal* (CTJ), journal of the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), Professor John Bolt raises anew the issue of the CRC's third point of common grace. He does this in an article titled, "Common Grace, Theonomy, and Civic Good: The Temptations of Calvinist Politics (Reflections on the Third Point of the CRC Kalamazoo Synod, 1924)." At the end of his reconsideration of the third point, Bolt proposes a reformulation of the third point that he thinks might be acceptable to both the CRC and the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).

The third point teaches that the unregenerated can do works in ev-

eryday life in society that are good. The cause is a working of grace within them by the Holy Spirit, as is the teaching of the second point of common grace. Ultimately, the explanation is a favorable attitude of God toward all unregenerated people, reprobate as well as elect, as the first point affirms. There is good in the souls and deeds of the unregenerated because of the grace of God to them and in them.

Although the purely theological issue is not the Christian Reformed theologian's main concern in the article, Dr. Bolt does examine the theological issue. Correctly, he notes that the theological issue is the doctrine of total depravity and that this was the main issue, if not the only issue, for Herman

Hoeksema and Louis Berkhof during the controversy in the 1920s.

The PRC object to the third point as a departure from the biblical and confessional doctrine of total depravity. The doctrine of total depravity holds that the unregenerated sinner—the "natural man"—is spiritually corrupt. His nature, what he is—body and soul—is corrupt. The corruption is complete. Body and soul are wholly sinful. There is no good in him. The power of sin reigns in him so that there is no possibility of any good appearing in him—not a good thought, not a good desire, not a good affection, and, therefore, not a good word or deed.

This is the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in Question

8; of the Belgic Confession in Articles 14 and 15; and of the Canons of Dordt, III, IV. This is the teaching of Scripture in Psalm 51:5, Romans 3:9-20, Ephesians 2:1-3, and other places.

This is the meaning of "total." This is the meaning of "total" in the English language. "Total" does not mean partial. Everyone is clear as to the meaning of "total" in economic matters. If I tell my creditor that the check is total payment of my debt, whereas in fact it is only 95% of the amount that I owe, he will let me know in a hurry what "total" means.

The cause of the total depravity by nature of every member of the human race, Jesus Christ only excepted, is the transgression of Adam, covenantal head of the race. His disobedience rendered him and all of us guilty and, therefore, worthy of the judgment of the spiritual death of total depravity. Descending from our fallen father and mother as from a foul source, we inherit their depraved nature through natural conception and birth.

The third point of common grace denies total depravity. The third point teaches that, with the possible exception of an Adolf Hitler, unregenerated men and women are able to perform good works. The reason is given in the second point of common grace: a work of the grace of God within them restraining sin in them. By virtue of this operation of the Spirit within them, the unregenerated can think some good thoughts, desire some good desires, and entertain some good motives. Out of these good thoughts, desire, and motives come some good deeds.

The good in the souls and works of these unregenerated people is a goodness in the judgment of God. Although not a good produced by saving grace in their hearts (they are and remain unregenerated) and although a good only in everyday, earthly life, it is good in the eyes of God. For

it is the fruit of His own grace in these people.

In their third point, the CRC did not purpose to deny total depravity. Rather, they purposed to *defend* total depravity. In the discussion about the third point, no one should suppose that the PRC overlook, or ignore, this. Louis Berkhof insisted that the third point is a defense of total depravity in his explanation of the three points in 1925, "The Three Points in All Parts Reformed."

The defense goes like this.

It is obvious to everyone that, with the possible exception of an Adolf Hitler, unconverted people do many good deeds in everyday life. Mozart writes glorious music. Winston Churchill courageously stands alone for liberty in the face of the Nazi juggernaut. A Muslim mother sacrifices her own life for the child she loves. A worldly truck driver stops to help the Christian whose car has broken down on the expressway.

If we do not recognize God's work of common grace in these unbelievers, so runs the CRC's defense of total depravity, we will have to conclude that the doctrine of total depravity is false. Our own eyes see and our own minds perceive that ungodly people do good deeds. But if we confess common grace, we attribute the good that is obvious in the lives of the ungodly to the grace of God.

In his "The Three Points in All Parts Reformed," Berkhof wrote this (I translate):

If we deny the working of God's common grace, we must necessarily come to the conclusion that [unregenerated] man performs that external good of himself. Then we very definitely run the risk that we deny the total depravity of man.

Total depravity is the gospel's judgment of us all, not as a "might-have-been" but as a reality....

The PRC are well aware of the claim by the CRC to be defending total depravity by their doctrine of common grace.

The fact remains that the third point is a denial of the doctrine of total depravity. The third point denies that unregenerated people are totally depraved. They *would be* totally depraved, if it were not for common grace. But because of common grace, they *are* not totally depraved. In the CRC and in every other denomination that embraces this doctrine of common grace, total depravity is a mere abstraction. No matter that the doctrine is part of the church's official documents and no matter how loudly the church declares that it maintains total depravity, total depravity in that church merely describes what the race would have become, had not God intervened with His common grace. Real flesh-and-blood people, the genial unbeliever next door and the decent pagan on the mission field, are not in fact totally depraved. No one is totally depraved, except perhaps Adolf Hitler. All flesh-and-blood people are somewhat good and do some good by the grace of God. They are *partially* depraved.

This, charge the PRC, contradicts the biblical doctrine of total depravity. The biblical doctrine does not intend to be an abstraction. It does not intend to describe what would have been. It is the searing judgment upon living, flesh-and-blood people. It is the gospel's indictment of real people—my genial, unbelieving neighbor, the decent pagan on the mission field,

and myself as I am by nature, apart from the regenerating grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is the gospel's judgment upon every person to whom the gospel comes.

Total depravity is the gospel's judgment of us all, not as a "might-

have-been" but as a reality in Romans 3:9ff.: "They are all under sin ... there is none righteous ... there is none that doeth good, no, not one ... there is no fear of God before their eyes ... that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

This is the gospel's—and Calvinism's—offense. The world knows that the gospel—and Calvinism—pronounce this humbling judgment. This is why the world hates the gospel—and genuine Calvinism (to be redundant).

To insert the third point of common grace, with its roots in the first and second points, right after Romans 3:20, as a kind of mitigating footnote to the devastating judgment passed upon the fallen race of mankind in chapters 1:1-3:20, is incongruous. Try it. Mentally, make a large space in the Bible between verses 20 and 21 of Romans 3. In that space visualize the three points of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924:

Nevertheless, fallen, unregenerated men and women, Gentiles and Jews, are able to do many works in everyday life that are good in the sight of God. Indeed, by their good works some of them put regenerated believers to shame. This is because there is a grace of God working in them, a power of the Holy Spirit Himself in their souls restraining sin in them and making them somewhat good. And the source of it is a favorable attitude that God on His part has toward them—a real love, a real grace—altogether apart from the cross of Jesus Christ (which, of course, modifies significantly the truth of predestination that will come up in chapters 8-11).

To attach this modifying and mitigating footnote to the gospel's judgment on fallen men and women in Romans 1-3 and elsewhere is fatally to soften and compromise the judgment of the gospel. Since the gospel sounds this

judgment in order thus, by the saving grace of the Spirit of Christ, to humble the elect sinner, so that he abhors, renounces, and abandons himself, that is, repents, and casts himself in faith on the grace of God in Jesus Christ alone, common grace opposes and undermines the gospel.

To leave anything good in unregenerated man is to cater to the sinner's self-flattery and self-reliance. It is to open the door to the notion of the sinner's cooperation with the grace of God in the gospel in salvation—the heresy of free will.

The avowed enemies of the Reformed faith see, and gleefully point out, that the doctrine of a common grace that produces good in the unregenerated is concession on the part of Reformed churches that do not dare maintain in reality the doctrine of total depravity that they profess.

Common grace is a concession that jeopardizes the Reformed repudiation of free will. Not long ago, Clark Pinnock edited a book that is an all-out, vicious assault on the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace, which Pinnock calls Calvinism. Explaining why he has abandoned Calvinism and why now he damns it as monstrous false doctrine, he wrote:

The depth of human sinfulness was another matter that soon demanded my attention. Calvinists, like Augustine himself, if the reader will excuse the anachronism, wanting to leave no room at all to permit any recognition of human freedom in the salvation event, so defined human depravity as total that it would be impossible to imagine any sinner calling upon God to save him. Thus they prevented anyone from thinking about salvation in the Arminian way.

Then Pinnock added these words:

Leaving aside the fact that Augustinians themselves often and suspiciously qualify their notion of "total" depravity very considerably and invent the notion of common grace to tone it down, I knew I had to consider how to understand the free will of the sinner in relation to God (*The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, Zondervan, 1989, p. 21).


The third point of common grace has another evil effect, although this has been ignored in the debate. It wreaks havoc with the

Christian's assurance of salvation. The Spirit of Christ assures the believer of his salvation, perseverance, and election in connection with evidences of grace in his own experience and life. Canons, V/10 mentions that the "desire ... to perform good works" is

such an evidence. The importance of this "solid comfort" must not be minimized. If we are robbed of this, to live in perpetual doubt and uncertainty, we are "of all men the most miserable."

According to the third point of common grace, the desire of soul to perform good works is no evidence of salvation. For also the unsaved and perishing have such a desire, and they have it by the grace of God.

If the glittering deeds of the ungodly are not the good product of common grace, what are they? What about the seeming good in the lives of the unregenerate?

(to be continued) 

— DJE

Post (editorial) script:

Because this and following editorials comment on the third point of common grace, in light of the recent discussion in the *CTJ*, we publish Herman Hoeksema's critique of the third point in his history of the PRC. What follows is that critique. — Ed.

The third point of common grace ... wreaks havoc with the Christian's assurance of salvation.

The Third Point and Its Implications *

1. Will you literally quote again the third point of doctrine adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924?

Yes, it reads as follows:

"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 Dordrecht, III/IV, 4, and from the Netherlands Confession, Article 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."

2. Which are the passages from the confessions to which synod refers in support of this declaration?

They are:

Canons III/IV, 4: "There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintain-

ing an orderly external deportment."

Belgic Confession, Article 36: "Wherefore we detest ... all those who ... confound that decency and good order, which God hath established among men."

3. What is the relation between the second and the third point?

The relation between the doctrines declared by the second and the third point is like that of cause and effect. Both declarations speak of an operation for good upon the natural man which is not regenerative. The second point teaches that by this operation of the Holy Spirit the natural man is somewhat improved, so that he is not so depraved as without this operation he would be; the third point refers to the fruit of this operation of God upon the natural man, consisting in his power to do civil good.

4. What, then, is briefly the teaching of the third point?

That, by virtue of a positive influence of God upon him for good, the unregenerate is able to do good works in the sphere of things natural and civil

5. Does not the third point state that the natural man is unable to do any saving good?

It does, indeed.

6. What, then, did synod of 1924 mean by the distinction between saving or spiritual and civil or natural good?

It may justly be doubted if the synod had any clear distinction in mind. However, judging from its declarations and from later interpretations of these three points of doctrine by some leaders of the Christian Reformed Church, synod understood this distinction as follows:

a. Both spiritual and natural good are good in a moral sense before God. Neither of them may be called sin.

b. Spiritual good has its source in the regenerating influence of the Spirit of Christ; natural good in the unregenerated nature of the sinner as restrained and preserved from total corruption by the influence of the Spirit of God.

c. Saving good is eternal and consists in conversion, sanctification, and perseverance unto the end; civil good is temporal and has reference to and value for the things and sphere of this present life only.

7. Is it not true, that synod also had in mind the distinction between outward and inward good?

No, this cannot be maintained. Synod certainly intended to say and did clearly express that civil righteousness, or the natural good of the unregenerate man, is good inwardly, that is, proceeds from his mind and will. This is evident from the fact that the synod spoke of an operation of the Holy Spirit and of an influence of God upon the sinner, and such operations are always inward. And this is plain, too, from the interpretation Christian Reformed leaders have offered of this third point. Professor L.

* This is chapter 8 of the second section in the long out-of-print book *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, pp. 377-387. The doctrinal section has been reprinted in *Ready to Give an Answer*, RFPA, Grandville, 1997.

Berkhof, for instance, wrote on this point as follows: "His works may be called good, in a subjective sense, in as far as they are the fruit of inclinations and affections touching the mutual relations of men, which are themselves relatively good, are still operating in man; and in an objective sense, if they in regard to the matter as such are works prescribed by the law, and in the sphere of social life correspond to a purpose that is well-pleasing to God" (*The Three Points*, pp. 50, 51).

8. From what else is it evident that synod actually intended to declare that the natural man is capable of performing what is positively good?

From its condemnation of the views of the Reverends H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema, which had been published before the synod in 1924 and in opposition to which the second and third points were formulated. They had written on this matter as follows:

"And what, then, is civil righteousness? According to our view, the natural man discerns the relationships, laws, rules of life and fellowship, etc., as they are ordained by God. He sees their propriety and utility. And he adapts himself to them for his own sake. If in this attempt he succeeds the result is an act that shows an outward and formal resemblance to the laws of God. Then we have civil righteousness, a regard for virtue and external deportment. And if in this attempt he fails, as is frequently the case, civil righteousness disappears, and the result is exactly the opposite. His fundamental error, however, is that he does not seek after God, nor aim at Him and His glory, even in this regard for virtue and external deportment. On the contrary he seeks himself, both individually and in fellowship with other sinners and with the whole world, and it is his purpose to maintain himself even in his sin

over against God. And this is sin. And in reality his work also has evil effects upon himself and his fellow creatures. For, his actions with relation to men and his fellow creatures are performed according to the same rule and with similar results. And thus it happens that sin develops constantly and corruption increases, while still there remains a formal adaptation to the laws ordained of God for the present life. Yet, the natural man never attains to any ethical good. That is our view" (*Along Straight Paths*, pp. 72, 73).

9. What, then, are the implications of the third point?

The first implication is a separation of the spiritual and moral or the spiritual and natural, a separation of the first and second tables of the law of God.

10. Why do you say that such a separation is implied in the third point?

Because the third point plainly declares that the natural man is incapable of doing saving or spiritual good, while he is nevertheless able to perform what is good in the spheres of this present life. According to synod and the leaders in the Christian Reformed Church, the same act may be spiritually corrupt and worthy of eternal damnation, and morally good and pleasing to the Lord. An act may not be rooted in and proceed from faith, yet it may be good.

11. What is another implication in this third point?

The second implication of the third point is that there is conflict between the doctrine of total depravity and the actual working out and application of this truth.

12. How could you make this clear?

It is the official confession of the Christian Reformed Church that the natural man is incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. Moreover, it is their confession that only those are good works that proceed from a true faith, are done according to the law of God and to His glory, and not those that are based upon our imagination or on the institutions of men. Yet, although in the abstract and as a matter of their confession the Christian Reformed Church admits this, in practical life it professes it to be wholly different. In this life, with respect to the things and spheres of this world, there is nowhere a totally depraved man, according to them. All are able to do good. All can live a morally good life. They condemn it in the strongest terms as absolutism, when one maintains the confessions and applies it to real men in the real world. Total depravity has become a mere abstraction in the Christian Reformed Church.

13. What is a third implication in the third point?

The third implication is that a man can do good works, which are, nevertheless, not to be accounted as his own, and for which he can expect no reward. This is emphasized repeatedly by the exponents of the theory of common grace, and by defenders of the Three Points. The good works of the natural man are really not his, no more than it is to be attributed to a boat that the steersman forces it in a direction opposite from that in which the wind would naturally blow it. "If man were left to himself," writes Professor Berkhof, "he would not be able to perform even this civil good.... For this reason this natural good does not entitle man to any claim of reward" (*The Three Points*, p. 52).

14. What is the fourth implication in the third point?

That properly the good work of the natural man is the good work of the Holy Spirit without its being the work of the natural man at all. The Spirit of God so influences the corrupt nature of the unregenerated man, that in his case the evil tree brings forth good fruit. He does not penetrate to the heart of the natural man. The heart remains corrupt. In that heart is nothing but unrighteousness and enmity against God. Yet, God so influences the nature of the sinner, his thoughts and his will, his affections and desires, that with a heart full of hatred against God he performs that which is pleasing in the sight of God. The Spirit forces, compels the operations of that wicked nature to go in the right direction, even as the helmsman forces a vessel to sail against the wind. It may be impossible to conceive of so monstrous a thing, but it is emphatically the teaching of the third point.

15. What is the practical application and result of the doctrine upheld in the third point?

The result is that in practical life the official teaching of the church that man is totally depraved and is incapable of doing any good, while inclined to all evil, is forgotten. The world that is professed to be in darkness is magically flooded with light by the wonder of common grace. Nowhere do you find the corrupt man as described in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day III, and in the Canons of Dordrecht, III/IV, 1-4. Practically, the difference between the righteous and the unrighteous is wiped out. It is even alleged that the latter put the former to shame! The theoretically depraved are actually wonderfully good! There is a good deal of harmony between righteousness and unrighteousness. Much concord is established between Christ and Belial!

16. Which are your general and principal objections against the teaching of the third point?

First of all, it may be objected against this declaration that it lowers the standard of moral, ethical good, and thus necessarily obliterates the distinction between good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness. The definition of good works, which the Heidelberg Catechism gives, that they are those that proceed from a true faith, are done according to the law of God and to His glory, certainly does not hold for the "good" of which the third point speaks. There is another good, that is neither good nor evil, or rather, that is both. The exponents of the Three Points speak of the relativity of good and evil. Professor Berkhof speaks of a good that is relatively sinful and of sin that is relatively good. He speaks of the good in the full sense of the word, and of "what is truly good," and implies that there is also a good that is not truly good, not good in the full sense.

And he condemns as absolutism the view that the natural man can only sin and does sin at all times. This notion of relativity with respect to the sphere of ethics and morality is pernicious. For it creates a sphere of transition, a domain where righteousness and unrighteousness, Christ and Belial may have fellowship and live the same life. Of the practical results of the preaching and teaching of such a doctrine one fears even to think. For while the leaders, at least some of them, may be able for a time to maintain the dualistic position that the natural man is totally depraved, yet that he is not, and that the world is corrupt and in darkness, yet that it is flooded with light and manifests much goodness, those whom they instruct will not maintain that position. And they will be swallowed up by the world.

17. Have you any other objection against the teaching of the third point?

Yes; it also must be objected that it implies an impugning of the holiness of God. For, the so-called good that is performed by the ungodly is directly ascribed to the operation of the Holy Spirit and to the influence of God upon the sinner. What is admittedly a very imperfect good, a sinful good, a relative good, the withered fruit of an uprooted tree; what is in actual fact very corrupt and evil, is presented as the fruit of an operation of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who adorns the corrupt tree with good fruit, causes it to appear like a good tree and thus, according to the theory of common grace, creates what is virtually a lie! For it is declared that man himself is incapable of bringing forth these good fruits. He is dead in trespasses and sins. He is like a tree cut off from its roots. But the Spirit causes that dead tree to yield good fruit without making the tree alive!

These fruits, then, are not rooted in the love of God, they do not at all proceed from faith; they are performed by or through a man that stands in enmity against God. And of such fruits the Spirit is alleged to be the author! Is it, then, not literally true, that the third point makes God the author of sin?

18. What other objection have you?

The teaching of the third point is that of moral determinism, and it destroys the freedom of man as a moral agent. According to the presentation of the third point and its interpretation by the leaders of the Christian Reformed Church, man is no moral agent at all in performing the good he does, and for that reason he can lay no claim to any reward. Remember that by this influence of God or operation of the Holy Spirit the heart of man is not renewed. He is supposed to remain dead in trespasses and sins.

As such he remains totally incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. Even his supposedly good works do not proceed from his own heart. His *ego* is not involved. If he were let alone, he would only do evil. The Spirit, then, compels man to do good works wholly contrary to the intents of his own heart. The result is that the Spirit is the real author of the works of man, while the latter is a mere tool. And thus the moral character of man is destroyed, his responsibility is denied, and a theory of moral determinism is presented as Reformed doctrine!

19. What other objection is closely connected with the former?

It must be objected against the third point, that it attacks the justice of God. God's justice is always manifest in this that He strictly rewards the good with good and He punishes the evil. But the third point would have us adopt the view that the natural man performs much good in this world for the which he is never rewarded. It is emphasized that the natural man performs good works in this life.

If we judge according to the standard of the third point, it ought not to be difficult to find many men in the world who hardly sin. They commit no gross iniquities; they live temperately and chastely; in their external deportment they are blameless; they even will sacrifice themselves for the well-being of humanity.

All this is called good in the sight of God. The Lord judges it to be good. It may not be called sin. Yet, when they have thus walked their whole life they are, according to this theory, cast into eternal perdition. All these good works that sinners do have no reward whatever.

It is evident, then, that the entire moral order is subverted, and that the justice of God is denied.

20. What, however, is your principal objection?

That the third point is Pelagian.

21. What do you mean by this?

I mean that, when one sets aside all sophistical arguments by which it is attempted to defend the third point and to show that it is in harmony with the Reformed view of the truth, it is nothing but a denial of the total depravity of the natural man. And this is the main error of the Pelagian theory.

22. Do the exponents of the theory of common grace and the defenders of this third point admit this?

On the contrary, they most strenuously deny this and maintain that it is the only possible standpoint upon which the truth of total depravity can be maintained. They claim that, as we look about in the world, it cannot be denied that the natural man performs many good works.

The doctrine of total depravity, therefore, does not seem to fit. How, then, can we maintain this doctrine and yet explain the good works of natural man? By denying that they proceed from himself, from his heart, and by teaching that these good works are really the work of the Holy Spirit!

23. What is the fundamental error of this reasoning?

That it does not let the Word of God, but the sinful judgment of man determine what is good and evil. As we shall see later, Scripture nowhere teaches that the works of the natural man are good, even though they would appear


thus to our sinful judgment. But, in opposition to the plain teaching of Scripture, the reasoning implied in the third point proceeds from the error that sinners do much good.

24. What is the real teaching of the third point?

The third point teaches that man *would have been* and *would be* totally depraved, i.e., wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil, if there were no general operation of the Holy Spirit and influence of God upon him by which he is able to do good works. If there were no influence of common grace in the world, the natural man would be totally depraved. Now, however, he is not.

25. Are, then, the Three Points very dangerous errors?

They are, for they imply all the fundamental errors of Arminius and Pelagius. The first point is principally a denial that the grace of

God is particular, since it teaches that the preaching of the gospel is grace to all that hear the gospel; the second and third points are fundamentally a denial of the scriptural doctrine of the total depravity of the natural man. And these errors are all the more dangerous because they pretend to be in conformity with the Reformed confessions. It is no exaggeration to maintain that they are the wolf in sheep's clothing, the devil presenting himself as an angel of light. 

... when one sets aside all sophistical arguments by which it is attempted to defend the third point and to show that it is in harmony with the Reformed view of the truth, it is nothing but a denial of the total depravity of the natural man.

Innocent III and Papal Hierarchy

Introduction

Not all heresies in the history of the church of Christ involve matters of doctrine. Sometimes the heresies which appeared are matters of church government and the corporate worship of God in the church.

In a way, of course, these heresies are also corruptions of the truth. A corruption of church government, for example, is a denial of the truth of the Kingship of Christ over the church. An aberration in worship involves the doctrine of the nature of God and the obligation to worship God in such a way that the truth concerning His divine being is maintained.

In this article we shall be busy with the Roman Catholic corruption of church polity, that is, the proper and biblical rule of the church.

To illustrate the wrong of the Roman Catholic Church in the matter of church government, I shall discuss the pontificate of Innocent III, whose papal rule extended from 1198 - 1216. He is acknowledged, by all students of church history, as the most powerful pope that ever lived up to his time and that has occupied the See of Rome until the present. He was closer to the Roman Catholic idea of the papacy than any other single man in all the history of the church. He is an ideal figure, therefore, to demonstrate what Roman Catholic church polity is all about.

Innocent III did not suddenly come to this position of power. Papal power had slowly developed in the church from a very early date. It had grown through the centuries bit by bit. Weaker popes were often unable to make papal claims stick in the life of the church. Stronger popes not only held firmly to earlier developments, but often built upon what had already been done to expand papal power as much as they could. It is not necessary, I think, to trace that development over the centuries.

A discussion of this matter, however, does leave us with one difficult problem. I refer to the fact that we are confronted with the question of why God allowed the church to remain under a terribly wrong church government for most of the history of the new dispensational church. Tendencies towards the papal system appeared in the church as early as the third century. After Innocent III, they continued in the church until the time of the Reformation, another 300 years after Innocent. So, of the twenty centuries of the history of the church since Pentecost, more than thirteen of them were centuries in which the church lived under a less than biblical church government. The question is, Why?

I do not think that a satisfactory answer to that question can be given. In this respect, too, the ways of God are inscrutable. One idea suggests itself, however, as a possible answer.

Innocent III came closer than any single individual in the entire new dispensation to being the Antichrist. This may surprise some, for we are all acquainted with the

worldwide power of Rome, with the rule of cruel dictators who extended their authority over large areas and many countries, and who attempted to crush and destroy the church.

I am saying that papal claims come closer to the final claims of Antichrist than any other institution presently in the world. It just might be that through all those years God was teaching His people that, as John puts it, antichrist is always in the world, and that part of the church's life is to live, if not under, at least present with and influenced by antichrist.

I leave it to the reader to evaluate that matter in the light of what I write.

Innocent III's Rise to Power

Innocent III was born in 1160 in the city of Anagni, Italy. He was born of noble parents in a city well known in Italy because it served as the favorite summer home of the popes. His parents named him Lothario, a name which he kept until he adopted the name Innocent III at his induction into the pontificate.

It seems that Lothario lived the life of a scholarly son of a wealthy family. He went to the best universities in Italy and France, Bologna and Paris. But Lothario was not the idle and spoiled son of nobility. He was an extremely gifted scholar who quickly mastered his subjects. Bologna was famous as a center in the study of canon law, and Paris was the center of study in theology. In both, Lothario excelled.

Early in his studies he began a literary career, and his first book was a stern, dark book on the as-

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

cetic life. It was a reflection of his own devotion to asceticism and the importance of living the life of a monk. The book gave him a reputation as a gifted young man who was dedicated to the welfare of the church.

The result of this reputation was an appointment to the college of cardinals at the early age of 29. He was, however, too young to make it to this exalted position on his own merits, brilliant man that he was. He had three uncles who exerted influence on his behalf and paved his way into the Roman curia. We ought not to consider this strange. Simony (the purchase of offices in the church), bribery, and political influence were more important than abilities and gifts in those days.

The college of cardinals was the highest hierarchy in the church under the pope. It was really the administrative body in the church and was responsible for carrying out papal directives and decisions. It was to a pope what a president's cabinet is today in the executive branch of government in America. It was also the body that chose a new pope when the incumbent died. It was enormously influential, and in it Innocent learned thoroughly how the church operated and where were the reins of power.

When the man who was pope at the time died, a new pope was chosen who was from another branch of Italian nobility, and who turned out to be an enemy of the noble house from which Innocent came. Innocent was forced to retire from the college of cardinals under the pressures of an antagonistic pope. But the time of retirement was well spent in studying literature and writing.

Innocent became pope in 1198. He was chosen by the college of which he had been a member and was called out of retirement to assume the papal chair and tiara or crown.

The crowning of a pope was a glittering pageant. An old observer described it in a passage quoted by Schaff.

At the enthronization in St. Peter's, the tiara was used which Constantine is said to have presented to Sylvester, and the words were said, "Take the tiara and know that thou art the father of princes and kings, the ruler of the world, the vicar on earth of our Saviour Jesus Christ, whose honor and glory shall endure throughout all eternity." Then followed the procession through the city to the Lateran. The pope sat on a white palfrey and was accompanied by the prefect of the city, the senators and other municipal officials, the nobility, the cardinals, archbishops, and other church dignitaries, the lesser clergy and the popular throng — all amidst the ringing of bells, the chanting of psalms, and the acclamations of the people.... Arrived at the Lateran, the pope threw out handfuls of copper coins among the people with the words, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee." The silver key of the palace and the golden key of the basilica were then put into his hands, and the senate did him homage. A banquet followed, the pope sitting at a table alone.

It is interesting to ponder what Peter would have thought of such pomp, though the pope considered himself to be a successor to the humble fisherman from Galilee who suffered martyrdom for the cause of the gospel.

So Innocent became pope, and he developed into the most powerful pope and individual the world has ever seen. One biographer says, "No other mortal has before or since wielded such extensive power." Another, a contemporary, upon hearing that Innocent was now pope, and that at the relatively young age of 37, saw what this meant for Christendom. His plaintive cry was, "Alas! the pope is so young. Help, Lord, thy Christian world."

Innocent's Character

Schaff describes Innocent as:

Well-formed, medium in stat-

ure, temperate in his habits, clear in perception, resolute in will, and fearless in action. He was a born ruler of men, a keen judge of human nature, demanding unconditional submission to his will, yet considerate in the use of power after submission was once given, — an imperial personality towering high above the contemporary sovereigns in moral force and in magnificent aims of world-wide dominion.


It appears as if all the emphasis ought to be placed on one characteristic of the man: he was a man of iron will. He had control of himself and his own life. In an age when popes were fornicators, gluttons, drunkards, and murderers, not one stain has ever been attached to his character.

But he also had an iron will in dealing with the curia, so that he bent it completely to his will. It was a rod in his hand to wield as he saw fit. He allowed no opposition, no dissent, no individual initiative in the actions of the members.

That iron will extended to his dealings with the kings and princes of Europe. So adamant was he in his purposes and so forceful in his determination to have his way that, by the end of his reign, every ruler in Europe, no matter how powerful, had bowed before his throne.

Innocent was totally dedicated to the church and was determined to make the church over which he ruled the dominating institution in Europe. He not only attempted to accomplish this goal through his own personal diplomacy and iron-fisted rule, but he preached at every opportunity and wrote countless letters, of which 500 are extant. In his sermons and letters he promoted the hierarchical view of church government and advanced the power of Roman Catholicism.

He was a startling picture of what the Antichrist will ultimately be.

... to be continued 

■ Any Story But...

It is possible for schools to read stories and show movies about virtually anything. One shudders in hearing of some of the subjects taught in the public schools. One reads of the violence committed within those schools. But one thing, at least in some public schools, is strictly off limits—reading a Bible story. The *Greeley Tribune*, September 21, 2000, presents the following strange report, written by Charles Haynes:

Did a first-grade teacher violate Zachary Hood's rights when she barred him from reading a story from the Beginner's Bible?

After a four-year legal battle, we still don't have a final answer. Earlier this month the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals split 6-6 on the question, leaving in place a lower court ruling in favor of the teacher. Zachary's family will now take their case to the U.S. Supreme Court with the help of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty of Washington, D.C.

School officials in this New Jersey public school will continue to argue that the teacher had the right to exclude Zachary's story on the grounds that it came from the Bible. The teacher's concern? If a student should read a Bible story to the class, other students might think that the school was endorsing religion.

But the Hood family will continue to insist that Zachary was only fulfilling the teacher's assignment. When the children were told that they could bring a favorite story from home to read aloud to the class, here's what Zachary selected:

"Jacob traveled far away to his uncle's house. He worked for his uncle, taking care of sheep. While he was there, Jacob got married. He had 12 sons. Jacob's big fam-

ily lived on his uncle's land for many years. But Jacob wanted to go back home. One day, Jacob packed up all his animals and his family and everything he had. They traveled all the way back to where Esau lived. Now Jacob was afraid that Esau might still be angry at him. So he sent presents to Esau. He sent servants who said, 'Please don't be angry anymore.' But Esau wasn't angry. He ran to Jacob. He hugged and kissed him. He was happy to see his brother again."

...Both sides in this case invoke the First Amendment to support their opposing positions. The teacher argues that the establishment clause could be violated if the school is perceived as promoting religion. The family responds that censoring Zachary's story denies his free exercise of religion and his free-speech rights....

...It's hard for me to understand how allowing Zachary to read the story of Jacob and Esau would "inculcate" religion. On the contrary, keeping him from reading the story strikes me as "inhibiting" religious expression protected by the First Amendment.

That's why this small incident has large implications. If the lower court decision supporting the teacher is allowed to stand, it could have a chilling effect on student religious expression in public schools everywhere.

Right now, schools are being advised by the U.S. Department of Education that "students may express their beliefs about religion in the form of homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free of discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions."

What happens to these guidelines if Zachary's family loses their appeal? More importantly, what happens to the religious-liberty rights of students in public schools?

One cannot help but wonder how any public school can allow

any form of religion in the school. The philosophies of these schools are directly opposed to God's Word. On the other hand, one cannot help but note how every attempt is made to exclude the Bible and Christianity. Whole generations are arising who know not God's Word. Increasingly we see a society which allows everything and anything—except that which is biblical. How long can such a society endure?

■ Not Dutch?

There is a saying which some "died-in-the-wool" Dutchmen love to repeat: "You're not much if you are not Dutch!" Yet, after reading of developments in the "old country," one is inclined to hide his Dutch heritage. A country which has a large minority of Roman Catholics and especially a large minority of Reformed churches has taken actions which are beyond comprehension. The first is a report appearing in the *Grand Rapids Press*, December 21, 2000 with the headline: "Dutch legalize same sex marriages, adoptions."

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands – The Dutch parliament will begin sifting through tomes of law to expunge phrases such as "father and mother" and "man and woman" after legalizing marriage and adoption by gay couples.

Two bills extending equal rights to same-sex couples won endorsement by the upper house Tuesday after clearing the more powerful lower house in September.

By the time the law takes force next April, the wording of civil codes will be brought into line by referring to "partners" rather than male-female pairs.

Although several other countries register same-sex couples and some even call them marriages, the Dutch law goes further in eliminating reference to gender. It

also gives all couples equal rights to adopt children after living together for three years and approval by a court.

The Vatican assailed the law, calling it "a grave attack on the family in its natural and Christian model."

Gay couples won the right to register their relationships in 1998, but only one partner was recognized as the parent.

Under the new law, registered couples can change their status to married without further ceremony. Both will be considered parents if the other biological parent relinquishes parental rights.

"This was the last step," said an exultant Henk Krol, editor of the gay newspaper *Gay Krant*, which began the campaign to legalize same-sex marriages in 1986. "From now on, there will be no more gay marriages in the Netherlands. There will be only marriages between two people."

The legislation will affect about 20,000 Dutch children in same-sex households by clearing away ambiguities on inheritance, pension rights and tax laws....

Still proud of being Dutch? Then read this from the *Grand Rapids Press*, November 28, 2000:

Euthanasia, which has been tolerated in the Netherlands for decades and practiced in thousands of cases every year, is about to become legal here.

Parliament was due to pass historic legislation today legalizing mercy killings. Advocates say it puts the Dutch in the vanguard of patient rights, and opponents say it will replace caring with killing.

"What we are going to vote for is to take euthanasia out of the criminal arena," Justice Ministry spokesman Wijnand Stevens said.

The final debate last week appeared to confirm the bill will pass the 150-seat Second Chamber without difficulty. Only small Christian parties attempted to block it.

Subsequent passage by the Senate is seen as a formality, and Stevens said it was expected to become law sometime next year.

Doctors operate under strict guidelines requiring them to seek a second opinion before granting a euthanasia request. The decision is reviewed by a commission that includes a medical expert and a lawyer.

Unlike current practice, however, the prosecutor's office will no longer review euthanasia cases except if misconduct is suspected.

"If the regulations are met, there won't be a threat of criminal charges," Wijnand said.

In 1993, the Dutch adopted euthanasia guidelines, by which it was understood doctors would not be prosecuted even though assisted suicide technically remained a crime punishable by a maximum 12-year prison sentence.

The guidelines state that a patient must have irremediable and unbearable suffering, be aware of all other medical options and have sought a second professional opinion. The request must be made voluntarily, persistently and independently while the patient is of sound mind. Doctors are not supposed to suggest it as an option.

Under the new law, a patient will be able to make a written request for euthanasia, giving doctors the right to use their own discretion when patients become too physically or mentally ill to decide for themselves....

Doctors honor about one-third of assisted suicide requests in the Netherlands each year, according to government estimates. In 1999, 2,216 cases were recorded, but there also were believed to be a larger number of unregistered cases....

Scripture has the statement, "How has the gold become dim!" One might add: "Shades of Sodom and Gomorrah!"

■ What Money Cannot Buy

The *Rocky Mountain News* contained an interesting article by Paul Campos.

Would Americans be better off if we were 10 times richer?

Given the endless chicken in every pot rhetoric of both major par-

ties this must seem like an absurd question. In a culture that worships money and celebrates conspicuous consumption how could a tenfold increase in the average American's wealth fail to usher us all inside the gates of Eden?

Yet consider that, to have enjoyed something approximating the economic lifestyle of the average American family today, a family in 1940 would have required an income of several hundred thousand dollars per year (in present dollars). In fact, at that time the average family income was less than \$20,000 (again in present dollars).

Thus in terms of what might be called objective wealth – that is, in regard to the quality and quantity of the goods and services we enjoy – Americans are on average at least 10 times wealthier than we were 60 years ago. How much happiness has this historically unprecedented explosion of wealth managed to buy?

The answer would appear to be: None at all.

In his book *The Loss of Happiness in Market Economies*, Yale professor Robert Lane points out that if one compares the growth of America's gross national product since 1940 with the changing percentage of people who respond "very" when asked how happy they are, one finds that overall levels of happiness appear to decline in tandem with – and arguably in response to – overall increases in wealth.

Far from buying happiness, money seems to purchase the opposite commodity....

...Classical economics tells us that what people desire are evermore elaborate possessions, along with the leisure to consume all the wealth those possessions represent. Yet we have produced a society that is awash in unprecedented levels of consumption and seems if anything ever less satisfied with what it has....


No amount of wealth can cure our envy of those who have still more, nor can the most magnificent collections of material goods do anything to salve the feelings of alienation and emptiness that afflict so many modern lives.

It has been famously remarked that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. The politics, economics and culture of contemporary American life often resemble nothing so much as an increasingly frenzied search for very small camels and very large needles.

That search is doomed to failure as long as we fail to recognize

that the rich man is barred from entering not because he owns too much, but rather because, despite possessing so much, he still owns nothing worth keeping.

The man has the correct idea. Scripture states it simply, more clearly, and better: "Therefore take no thought saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: For the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." (Matt. 6:31-34) 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Connie Meyer

Family Heirlooms (2)

We've been talking about grace as a family heirloom from the point of view of teaching our children about the beautiful, cherished truths of particular, sovereign, covenantal grace. They must come to see and know this priceless treasure for what it is. They must love it and guard it as their most precious possession.

They must also live it.

One of the ways God teaches His children about grace is through parents, but there are other means God uses to apply that grace actually to their hearts. It is to our benefit that we also consider this application, because therein lies practical implications for us as parents as well.

The chief means God uses to apply grace to His people is the preaching of the Word (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 25). How it helps to be reminded of this truth! In the context of parents teaching children, this means first of all that parents must bring their children to the place where the full truth of

grace is preached. While many of us might be tempted to take this for granted, let us remember that for many others this may not be possible. Nevertheless, in whatever place on the globe God has put us, and in whatever circumstance He has placed us, the calling remains the same. We are to worship Him in the "...place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell...." We find that exhortation in Deuteronomy 12:11 and further in II Chronicles 6:20. Although this command comes to us out of the Old Testament, there is a name revealed in the New Testament which makes this admonition clear for us in this age as well. That name is *truth* (John 14:6). (Also note Belgic Confession, Art. 28 — "That every one is bound to join himself to the true church.")

Secondly, that the chief means of grace is the preaching of the Word implies that parents must teach their children to listen to that preaching. Stop and consider this for a moment. This may be one of the most important

things we are called to teach our children — *to listen to the sermon*. And it is no small task. Teaching little ones to listen to a sermon can be a different challenge for each child. For some it is literally a battle. For others it comes much easier. But whatever a child's temperament and whatever a child's age, it is of utmost importance for their spiritual welfare. How can we go about this? Parents themselves know their children and will be the best judge in this matter. Yet there are some practical tips that may be helpful.

First of all, and this applies to all children, they must see us living the example. Do they see us attentively listening to every word, and discussing and applying what we've heard on the Lord's day and throughout the week? Do they see us relish that spiritual meal from week to week as it is the food we love the most? Do they see us strive to be in the Lord's house as

much as is physically possible — minor illness, vacation, or no? These are the type of things we ought not hide from our children,

This may be one of the most important things we are called to teach our children — to listen to the sermon.

Mrs. Meyer is a wife and mother in Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan.

but openly let them see.

We can also teach this more directly. Providing paper and pencil for taking sermon notes may be helpful. There is some debate as to whether this helps to keep one's attention on the sermon, or whether half of the sermon is missed while trying to write the other half down. This is an individual matter, depending on one's ability to listen and write. Nevertheless, it is a method that is worth considering. Even very young children who cannot yet read or write are able to make tally marks behind key words that their parents have written down ahead of time. This can be a great aid in developing listening skills. For children who are older and are able to write in sentences, taking notes can help train them to focus their attention on the sermon. But for children of any age, having notes to look back upon for review is alone a viable reason to take notes.

Another direct method is to discuss the sermon with our children. Did they understand the main points? What can they glean from the main points or other details that might apply to their lives? If notes were taken, we can use them for a basis of discussion. Even with the "tally-mark" notes we can ask — why did the minister say this word so often? What does it mean? As we ourselves listen to the sermon, we can be tucking away questions in our minds to use as material for later discussion.

We ought not underestimate our children's ability to hear — spiritually hear — the Word, for it is the Spirit who works that even in children very young. Sometimes, after just a few questions, we can be amazed at the depth of understanding they have been given! (The modern practice of taking the children out of the sanctuary for a special children's message is so far beneath this, that it is barely worth mentioning. May we never once consider it.) The sacraments are

also an important tool in the application of grace, and it is our responsibility that our children understand what these visible and touchable pictures mean for them. Let us remember, too, that our Lord uses the catechism and society rooms as well as the sanctuary to dispense His grace. Neither ought we to underestimate the importance of such gatherings for the young. In all these things the Word is central. In all these things may we as parents give *this* our consideration: what is a chief means of grace for us, is a chief means of grace for our children as well.


Another aspect of grace also affects us as parents. This aspect lies in the very essence of what grace is. We know that grace is unmerited favor. We know that grace is beauty sublime. But grace is also ... power. Real, efficacious, irresistible, and almighty power of God. This is what Paul said of God's work of grace in his life: "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Cor. 15:10). It took tremendous power for Saul to be made into the apostle Paul. The blinding light on the road to Damascus is evidence of that. It was a tremendous work of grace! But it is the same God who works that same grace in us and in our children. In that work we may trust and be at peace. It is our confidence and unfailing comfort. When things go well, we may be sure He is working His grace according to His will. When things do not go well, we may be sure He is working His grace according to His will. For parents of healthy children, ill children, obedient children, erring children, young chil-

dren, or older children, the power of grace means comfort. The power rests in the hands of our heavenly Father, and so there is where we rest as well.

Again, we have no power to work grace in the hearts of our children. We are just as powerless to apply the so-called mystery of life to a dead and dormant seed of corn. But plant that seed, water it, provide a place of warmth and light, and that hard, lifeless little kernel becomes a tall and flourishing stalk of fruitful grain. God gives us the ability, strength, and will to plant and tend to that little seed — and He gives the life and the increase, too. That we depend upon and trust in God for applying His

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life and grace to our children in no way diminishes the covenant calling He has set before us. Plant, water, till, and weed. Nurture, love, discipline, and teach. We must do it all. But this dependence and trust in God does allow us to sleep at night. We are at peace, knowing our heavenly Father's will *will* be done. What unspeakable blessing and comfort for us imperfect, dust-formed parents who bear imperfect, dust-formed children!

The preaching, power, and truth of sovereign, particular, efficacious grace. May we lead our children to the pure preaching of that grace, knowing it is by His power of grace — worked in us by that very preaching — that we and our children are brought into His covenant life. "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:6, 7). Sovereign, particular, efficacious grace. Love it, maintain it, and live it — our heirloom of inestimable worth. 

The Prediluvian Period

Chapter VII

God's Judgment on Wicked Man (1)

In close connection with the account of the amalgamation of the sons of God and the daughters of men, the church and the world, in Genesis 6, stands the account of God's evaluation of man and of mankind from a spiritual, ethical point of view, a statement of God's dealings with man in this wicked state, and a most important revelation concerning the effect of man's wickedness upon God.

As to the first, we read in Genesis 6:5: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." In connection with this, the statements in verses 11-13 must be considered also: "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, the end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth." It must be kept in mind, of course, that these statements are partly made with particular application to the time immediately preceding the Flood, but partly generally to be applied with reference to human nature of all times. The significant point is that here we have a revelation of the Lord's judgment and

evaluation.

As to the second, we read in verse 3: "And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." The Spirit of God strives with man — up to a certain point. Then the end comes. At the point in time mentioned here, that end is 120 years away. And, as is clear from verse 13, this "end of all flesh" was revealed to Noah.

As to the third, the effect of man's wickedness upon God, we read in verses 6, 7: "And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them."

A proper understanding of prediluvian history and of its consummation requires careful attention to the three elements mentioned above.

God's Judgment with Regard to Man's Wickedness

Briefly stated, the judicial ground for the destruction of the whole world lay in the fact of a universal and total depravity which had become manifest in actual sin and corruption to its full extent, so that the measure of iniquity of that first world was filled.

We must notice that when Scripture states that God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, it does not merely

state a judgment concerning total depravity in general; but the reference is to the actual sinful deeds, the sinful life and walk, of the world of that particular time. This is confirmed by the further description in verses 11-13. It is important to understand this, in order to understand why, as far as wicked mankind is concerned, the Lord comes in final judgment at a certain time. Mankind is always totally depraved; but the Lord does not come in final judgment at any arbitrary time. There is a certain process of history which must be completed. There is a certain course of development. And only when the spiritual, ethical development of the fallen race has run its full course does the Lord come to destroy the world.

From this point of view, the term "great" as it is used in verse 5 must be understood relatively. It certainly does not and cannot mean that before God wickedness is not always great. This is always true of sin, both in its principle and in its manifestation, both as far as man's nature and as far as man's walk are concerned. Sin is never trifling, never insignificant, for the simple reason that it is sin against the infinite majesty of God. Neither does this statement suggest that before this particular point in history, evil was to some extent mixed with good. But the point is that sin develops and becomes more abounding and comes to fuller manifestation in the process of history. Great men commit great sin with great power. The means of sin in the earth increase, and the

opportunities for sin increase, and the race of sinners increases; and as all of these develop, sin also develops.

Hence, the description "great" here means two things. In the first place, men did tremendous things in the world, and committed tremendous sins. As we have seen, there were men of renown in the world of those days, men of great physical and mental power, geniuses. These men of renown committed sins of renown. We must bear in mind that there is always a close relationship between man's natural status and development and his spiritual, ethical manifestation and development. Thus, for example, the godless scientist of a powerful mind commits much greater sins than a godless simpleton. The godless man of civilization commits much greater sins than the godless savage.

In the second place, the world of that day committed *many* sins. The prediluvian world had become a great world, especially since the family of Lamech had displayed its genius. As a result, people had *many means* with which to sin. Besides, the wicked race had multiplied tremendously. This numerous race with these numerous means lived fast and committed many sins. The wickedness was great in the earth. This picture is confirmed, as we said before, by the description in verses 11-13. But it is confirmed in the rest of the Scriptures as well, at every point where there is any reference to the first world. Confer Jude, 12-15; I Peter 3:19, 20; II Peter 2:5; 3:3-5; Matthew 24; Luke 17.

Here, by the way, is an important principle with regard to all of history. Mere progress — external, natural progress, progress in civilization — is not improvement. In the service of sin it leads inevitably to the same conditions which prevailed in the prediluvian world.

But to return to the subject at hand, let us also notice that the Scriptures furnish us here with

God's judgment on man. It certainly was not man's evaluation. In fact, it is very evident that this judgment was bitterly resented by the first world when it was preached to them (as, for example, by Enoch), even as it is always bitterly resented by the world. Man's evaluation of that world was that it was a great world to live in: there was progress and civilization everywhere! We must bear in mind, too, that this divine evaluation, as is plain from the rest of the Scriptures and as is correctly pointed out by Calvin in his comments on this passage — this divine evaluation does not hold only for that particular period, but refers to man's nature in general and at all times. For the Scriptures do not only speak of the actual wickedness of that world, but of man's nature which was the source and fountain of that wickedness: God saw that *every* imagination of the thoughts of man's *heart* was *only* evil *continually*. And notice that there is no room left for any human good in this statement!

This evaluation involves, in the first place, man's *heart*. That heart is the center of man's life from a spiritual, ethical point of view. All the issues of his life, spiritually considered, are from his heart. As the heart is, so is the man. This divine evaluation, therefore, concerns man's inmost being. In the second place, there are the thoughts. The heart labors and counsels. And from that heart (from a spiritual point of view) arise the thoughts, the purposes, the considerations of the mind. In the third place, there are the imaginations. The thoughts of the heart assume concrete shape. Images of objects to be desired are formed. Images of deeds to be accomplished come before the mind. Of all these the judgment of God is that they are only evil, and that too, continually, every day, every moment. Never a thing arises out of that heart that is good. Never a thought or an imagination comes

before the mind of man that is good. Man in his inner nature is wicked. From that nature as a foul fountain arise only evil deeds. That great and teeming world manifested itself as altogether wicked. God was not in all their thoughts. Enmity against God controlled them. God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth. The earth was filled with violence.

(Note: It should be clear that the above description is closely connected with the conclusions which we reached in connection with the genealogy-chronology of Genesis 4 and 5.)

... to be continued 

Truth's Insight

Oh Truth, some say
Thou canst not be —
Thy very life deny.

Oh Truth, some say
Thou art not He —
Thy very name is Lie.

Oh Truth, what grievous,
blindness sore —
to ignore
and twist Thy frame,

To cast Thee off
as One ne'er born
and putrefy Thy name!

Oh Truth, I say
Thou art my Lord —
my love, my lot, my light.

Oh Truth, I say
Thou art my Sword —
my salve, my salt, my sight.

But Truth, now why cannot I
see
all of Thee
at once this day?

To see the Truth
you cannot lose
one sight along the Way.

Mrs. Connie L. Meyer

Shall We Dance, Rock, and Play?

Or: How Shall We Judge Contemporary Worship? (#4)

In contrast to the new forms of worship, what is proper worship?

Reformed, biblical worship is *covenantal*.

We ought to be as precise as possible with our terminology. Our worship is certainly not contemporary. But neither is it simply traditional. Traditional can mean a lot of things. Even *Reformed* does not mean much today, although our worship is “Reformed” if it’s anything. But I prefer not to describe it now as *Reformed*, or even *biblical*, although it is both.

Our worship—proper, God-glorifying worship—is also *covenantal*.

By that, I mean that our worship *emphasizes*, is *enjoyment* in, and is a *celebration* of, the gracious union of friendship between God and His people in Jesus Christ. The covenant itself is the experience of friendship.

Covenantal worship, then, is simply (profoundly!) the experience of God “tenting” with us (see John 1:14) in Jesus Christ, through the only thing we glory in—the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Friend of His people comes to them closely, lovingly, intimately, for mutual delight and God’s glory. Little is more important and mutually delightful to a Christian husband and wife than a loving, close, intimate relation. So a Reformed believer views worship of His God.

As covenantal, this worship centers in the *Word*. The worship

will have at its heart the Word of God preached, sung, prayed, confessed, believed. Every kind of worship that takes away from the Word is a service that undermines the great reality and exquisite delight of God’s friendship with His people.

How does the Word serve the covenant? In three ways.

First, the Word serves God’s gracious covenant in that, *by the preaching of the gospel, God gathers His covenant people to Himself*.

Because the preaching is what it is—the powerful voice of God Himself through a man called by the church—the preaching alone has the power to bring men and women out of darkness into the great light of His presence (Rom. 1:16; I Cor. 1:18-24; I Thess. 2:13, etc.).

Preaching creates life out of nothing in men as really as the voice of God in creation brought forth plants and animals out of nothing. Preaching raises from the dead as really as the voice of Jesus Christ brought Lazarus from the grave. When it does that, those raised from the dead and given life *come to God as His friends!* Worship is drawing nigh unto God. And since no one can come unto Christ, except the Father who sent Christ *draws* Him, the Father irresistibly draws by the preached Word.

Worship services that don’t have preaching are worship services that don’t make Christians. They may make members, or followers of

some minister, or something else, but they don’t make Christians!

Then, because God’s covenant also includes *children*, the covenant requires that we take children to worship services as soon as they’re able to sit still and be quiet.

We don’t have children’s church: sending out the children under a certain age to sit in another room to color pictures. We certainly don’t have children’s church where probably the minister’s wife sits on the podium all “cutesy-like” with the children in a circle telling a little story for the entertainment of the indulgent parents who smile and whisper politely to each other.

“Oh, we have children’s church,” I always tell questioners. We have it on Monday evening when the children of different age groups gather to hear the preaching of the gospel to them in *catechism*. Every Monday evening for the teenagers, every Wednesday afternoon for the children, we have “children’s church,” if you want to call it that—worship designed for the age level of the children. At the same time, God’s children learn very early to listen to the preaching with the assistance of their faithful parents. In an amazing way, the Holy Spirit provides them their milk, while their parents enjoy meat.

Second, preaching serves the covenant in that, *by preaching, the covenant of God and the God of the covenant are glorified*.

Preaching creates life out of nothing in men as really as the voice of God in creation brought forth plants and animals out of nothing.

Rev. Gritters is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

When the Word is preached as it ought to be preached, the great work of God to establish His friendship with His people is *proclaimed!* God's people need and want to hear that good-news proclamation. Preaching declares to the church that the great Creator of heaven and earth *determined* to be a friend with sinners! Preaching declares that the glorious covenant God *came* to live with sinners in the incarnation—that's the significance of John 1. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. But because a holy God doesn't fellowship with unholy people ("without holiness no man shall see God") preaching declares that the covenant Son of God *laid down His life* as satisfaction of the justice of God, so that the barrier of sin between Him and us could be removed. Oh, the glorious work of God to establish His covenant with us! And, because the covenant God is a faithful God, preaching declares that *He'll never forsake* His covenant friends. Never, ever, forsake them.

These things are preached. Oh, all these things are preached. Week after week these things are preached, so that the people of God may know the goodness of the God who is their Friend.

Third, *by preaching, God actually engages in covenant life with His people.*

Preaching is the actual fellowship of God with His blood-bought, eternally chosen children. In preaching, God speaks to us—the heart of fellowship as friends. He speaks tenderly, graciously, personally, to the hearts of His people. "The words that I speak to you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

But why preaching, ultimately? Why always the Word? Why the Word until kingdom come? Why the Word eternally in glory? Could not God have fellowshiped with His people in some other way? Why not in plays, with

drama? Why not with rock music? Why not with dances and banners and bands?

The answer: *Because God's own covenant life within Himself is a life of fellowship in the Word!* Eternally, God enjoyed communion with Himself by the Word and Spirit. What is Jesus Christ, but the eternal "WORD"? Think of God's eternal life within Himself as a sweet communion of conversation through the Word and Spirit. By His Word and Spirit, God is close to Himself, shares His own covenant life within Himself, delights in Himself.

Is it surprising then that I Corinthians says: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe"? To save by preaching is God's eternal decree. But it is no cold, hard, meaningless decree. It's His *pleasure*—the exquisite good pleasure of God. Why? Because it shows His own, active covenant life within Himself.

This is the heart of our criticism of any kind of contemporary worship that takes away from the preaching: It leads the people away from a true knowledge of God in Himself.



Is there nothing to be learned from contemporary worship? Indeed, but not what you might expect.

First, we learn how idolatrous our natures are. For we all are attracted to the visible, the sensational, the easy, the casual. We are all inclined to what's cute. We are idolaters in our nature.

Second, we should learn to be careful not to over-react to the chaos and anarchy of the charismatic worship, or the loose and casual worship of the mega-churches, so that we are tempted to embrace the liturgical formalism and pomp of Eastern Orthodoxy or Rome. There's no small temptation for people to do that. Hundreds are flocking back to the majesty and dignity and sense of reverence in Rome.

Third, let us learn to be fervent to bring the gospel in evangelism and

personal witnessing to those who would never darken the door of a church. One of the criticisms of Reformed worshipers is that they are not interested in evangelism. That stings. Of all people in the world, we Reformed ought to be most zealous in bringing the gospel to the ends of the world—and to our next-door neighbor who would never come into our church building. Why don't we do that?

Fourth, let us be careful to worship in Spirit and in truth.

One criticism of traditional worship is that it's staid, formal, cold, lifeless. But the new worship services are lively, spiritual, happy, loud thanksgivings to Jehovah God.

Is that true? Is your worship not heart-felt, lively, spiritual? Does your minister not speak to the heart of Jerusalem? Does his preaching not speak to your emotions as well as your intellect?

This is no little danger for us. It is unbiblical to say that worship is primarily for the intellect (unless by that is meant that the intellect is to be addressed *first*, and not *only* or *mainly*.)

Finally: We are reminded that we live in a radically wicked, swiftly changing world, where people think differently than a generation ago, where people don't read and think, but watch and feel.

Ours is a generation of electronics, of images, of videos and computers and entertainment. It's one of the most difficult ages in which to be faithful in serving God that there ever has been. This is the world our children are growing up in.

How will we teach them? What will we say to them? We must change the way we worship? God forbid. By the grace of God we will continue to teach them to read, to think, to reason, to meditate on the precious Word of God in Jesus Christ.

And we will remind them with personal, experiential joy, that the "everlasting gospel" is: "Worship God." In Spirit, and in truth. ❖

Financial Stewardship (1)

Money consumes a large part of our lives.

One of the reasons for this is that we all need money. It is impossible to survive in today's society without it. We need it for the very basics of earthly life: food, clothing, and shelter. It is not simply a commodity, but a necessity.

But money also consumes a large part of our lives by choice. We not only use it for the necessities of life, but for many other things besides. We are constantly dealing with it — either earning or saving or spending. We ourselves give it a prominent place in our lives.

Another reason why money is so much a part of our lives is because we have so much of it. We live in affluent times. None of us really knows what poverty is. Many of us think we are poor. But one who is truly poor possesses nothing and does not know where his next meal will come from. When we say we are poor, usually that simply means we are not as wealthy as others.

All of us are inclined to misuse the money God has given us, either by wastefulness or foolish spending. We are also tempted to place far more importance on it than we should. We often find it very difficult to handle money properly.

What we must remember is that our money comes from God. We are merely stewards of this gift. God gives it to us and tells us how

to use it. And as stewards, we are answerable to Him. We will have to give an account, one day, of what we have done with every dollar and cent we ever possessed.

The question then is this: As stewards, what should we do with our money?



There are four basic principles of stewardship.

The first is that God is the absolute owner of the universe and of all that is in it. He created it and He upholds it. Everything exists only because of Him. "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). Every creature belongs to God; every plant and bird and mountain and man. And so does money. "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts" (Hag. 2:8). The second principle of stewardship is that God gives to us some of the things He owns so that we may use them for a time. He gives us all kinds of things: the world, time, opportunities, relationships, ideas, life, family, money. Each person receives a different amount. And each receives different things. But the only reason anyone has anything is because God has given it to him.

This principle of stewardship implies two things. It implies first of all that we should not state absolutely concerning our possessions that they are ours. Really, they are not. We have them in our possession for a while, but they belong to God. Secondly, this principle implies that God has every right to take our possessions away from us.

He may do so whenever, however, and to whatever extent He wants. Job acknowledged this when he said, after God had taken from him all he had, including his children, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

The third principle of stewardship is that we must use what God has given us in the way He prescribes. As stewards, we have been given control of our Master's goods. We have the responsibility to care for those goods. We are the ones who make decisions concerning what to do with these things. But we must always be led and motivated by one thing, the good of our Master. We do what our Master expects of us with His goods. We are to use everything for the benefit and glory of God, and not for ourselves.

The fourth principle of stewardship is that God requires that we give an account to Him of our stewardship. We often forget this, but one day God will ask: "What did you do with all the things I gave you? Did you use wisely the \$24,000 I gave you in the year 2000? On what did you spend your money in 2001?" In asking us these things, God will have the perfect right to determine whether or not we were faithful in our stewardship. To some He will say, "Well done! You were a faithful steward." But to others He will say, "You were unfaithful. You misused My goods!"

As we apply these principles directly to money, the point to remember is that the money we have is not really our own; it belongs to God. The question the child of God

asks, therefore, is: "What does God want me to do with it? I know I must give some back to Him, but how much? And how much may I use for myself? And if I use it for myself, what may I spend it on? And if I have money left over, what should I do with it?"



The Lord teaches us in Scripture to give first to the causes of His kingdom. This is part of what is meant by seeking first the kingdom of God. We must give to the church, to the seminary, to missions, to evangelism, to the poor, to Christian schools. In this way we support the ministry of the gospel and the spiritual advance of God's kingdom in this world.

This use of our money must be first in priority as well as first in order of giving. When we receive our paychecks, before we begin paying the bills, money should be set aside for and given to the causes of God's kingdom.

Perhaps the difficult thing is to know how much we ought to give. Some say we ought to tithe — to give ten percent. This guideline of giving is still practiced in churches today. These churches follow the Old Testament principle that one tenth had to be given for the support of the priests and Levites (Num. 18:20-32).

However, tithing is wrong for the New Testament believer. It belonged to the Old Testament. The child of God who lived in the Old Testament times had every detail of his life governed by the law. But in the New Testament we are, through Christ, freed from bondage to the law. We are free from the rule of paying one tenth.

The New Testament Scriptures do not support tithing. It is mentioned three times in the Gospel accounts (Matt. 23:23, Luke 11:42, Luke 18:12), but each time in a negative way. Besides, these references to tithing really belong to the Old Testament, for the New

Testament era did not begin until after Pentecost. The other New Testament reference to tithing is in Hebrews 7. This passage speaks of Abraham giving a tenth to Melchisedec. In this text, too, tithing is spoken of as something that belonged to the Old Testament.

Tithing has been replaced by a new principle of giving, namely, to give as God has prospered us. This is set forth in I Corinthians 16:2a, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." The freedom that we have from the bondage of the law means that we are not restricted to one tenth. We can give much more than that.

In the New Testament, the exact amount that we should give is left for each of us to decide. We are free to figure it out for ourselves. That is not always easy. But Christ has poured out His Spirit upon the New Testament church. We have His wisdom in our hearts. Using this sanctified wisdom we apply to ourselves the principles of giving found in the Word of God.



The Scriptures not only set forth the truth that we must give as God has prospered us, but also mention a few things that ought to characterize that giving.

First of all, we must give liberally. We are inclined to ask the question, "How much of my money *should* I give?" But the question should be, "How much *can* I give?" We ought to give as much as we possibly can. Remember, it isn't ours anyway. As Christ said, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8).


Secondly, we should give cheerfully. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7). We may not say, "I wish I could keep more for myself." Nor may we think of how

much more money we would have in our pockets if we didn't give to the church collections. One who is thankful to God wants to give. He counts it a privilege, as did David: "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (I Chron. 29:14). Cheerfully we give back to the Lord what He has first given us.

Thirdly, our giving must be done privately. By nature we are like the Pharisees who sounded a trumpet when they were about to give their offerings. We often have the same desire, wanting to be seen of men and praised by them for our generosity. But Christ said, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:3, 4). God blesses and rewards secret giving.

Finally, we ought to give regularly. As I Corinthians 16:2 points out, we should give every Lord's day — not just once or twice a year. If we do the latter, then quite likely we will find we don't have the money for it. The practice of giving regularly is taught in Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which states that part of keeping the Sabbath day holy, as required by the fourth commandment, is that we "diligently frequent the church of God, to ... contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian."



These principles guide us in our giving to the causes of God's church and kingdom. This comes first. But what principles should guide us in the use of the rest of our money? We will consider this, along with the dangers of money, in a future article, the Lord willing. 

January 10, 2001
Georgetown PRC

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, January 10, 2001 at the Georgetown PRC. Each church was represented by two delegates. Rev. A. Spriensma was the chair for this session.

Considerable time was spent on an appeal from a brother against his consistory because of their placing him under discipline. Classis denied this appeal and thereby upheld the decision of the consistory. Classis also had to deal with two requests from consistories for the erasure of a baptized member. Classis approved these two requests. One other request for the increase of censure to the second step was not approved. These are difficult decisions for the delegates to make, and the seriousness of these decisions is reflected in the time that classis devotes to each case.

The church visitors reported on their work and found that, for the most part, there is peace and har-

mony in the congregations, the consistories are faithful in their labors, and the churches are prospering under the blessing of God.

Classis considered an overture from Georgetown PRC concerning the Rules of Classis East. Classis East adopted the new and expanded rules as proposed by Georgetown with just a few minor changes. These new rules are now very similar to those employed by Classis West. A copy of these new rules has been sent to all the consistories of Classis East.

Voting for synodical delegates resulted in the following: **MINISTERS:** *Primi:* R. Cammenga, B. Gritters, J. Slopsema, C. Terpstra, R. VanOverloop; *Secundi:* W. Bruinsma, M. Dick, K. Koole, Doug Kuiper, A. Spriensma. **ELDERS:** *Primi:* D. Doezema, C. Jonker, L. Meulenberg, D. Ondersma, P. VanDerSchaaf; *Secundi:* H. Boer, G. Kaptein, H. Langerak, G. Terpstra, J. VanderWoude.

In the voting for delegates *ad examina*, Rev. Dale Kuiper was elected to a three-year term as a

primus delegate and Rev. K. Koole to a three-year *secundus* term. Rev. J. Slopsema and Rev. R. Van Overloop were elected as church visitors, with Rev. Dale Kuiper as alternate. Rev. M. Dick was elected to a three-year term on the Classis East Committee. The new Rules of Classis require that there be an Assistant Stated Clerk. Accordingly, Rev. Doug Kuiper was elected to a three-year term in this office.

Classis approved 2002 subsidy requests of \$20,500 for Kalamazoo PRC and of \$35,000 for Covenant PRC. Classis also approved Covenant's request to contact the churches in Classis East for collections for their Building Fund. A similar request will be sent to synod 2001 for the purpose of contacting the churches in Classis West.

Expenses for this session amounted to \$1,887.32. Classis will meet next on May 9, 2001 at the Southwest PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

News From Our Churches

Minister Activities

The pastors, professors, and seminary students of our denomination have been very busy helping other congregations and mission fields of our churches recently. Classis East is supplying the pulpit of our vacant Lynden, WA church for two Sundays a month, while Classis West is supplying the pulpit of the Randolph, WI PRC. The Contact Committee is arranging supply for the Covenant PRC of Northern Ireland. Rev. G. VanBaren was there through the

first Sunday of February. The Mission Committee has been arranging pulpit supply for a group of saints in Fayetteville, NC. Rev. Mahtani goes every other month to Fayetteville, and a minister from the Grand Rapids, MI area goes on the alternating months. Without a doubt we can agree with the words of Matthew 9:37, 38: "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest."

On January 10 the Lynden, WA congregation extended a call to Rev. R. Cammenga, pastor of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, to serve as their next pastor.

The faculty of the Seminary

has licensed Seminarian David Overway to speak a word of edification in our churches. Seminarian Angus Stewart gave the last sermon of his six-month internship at the Hudsonville, MI PRC on January 14. May the Lord richly bless these two students as they continue in their studies, and may He continue to use them to the glory of His name.

Mission Activities

Revs. J. Slopsema and W. Bruinsma, on behalf of our Domestic Mission Committee, were in Pittsburgh, PA for several days during the week of January 15 to meet and discuss with Rev. Mahtani the mission policy for the

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

eastern U.S.A. Rev. J. Mahtani was scheduled to leave for Fayetteville, NC on January 20th, and return, the Lord willing, on January 29th.

From the bulletin of our mission in Ghana we learned that their church building continues to progress. Plans called for construction of the roof in mid-January, as well as a fence wall around their property.

Young People's Activities

If you are interested in more information about this summer's young people's convention, then we encourage you to use your computer and contact our First PRC in Holland at their website www.hollandprc.org for all the details.

Congregation Activities

The committee appointed by the council of the Hudsonville, MI PRC to investigate the possibility of starting a daughter congregation reported to their council that it is working on an agreement with the Hudsonville Reformed Church for the possible purchase of their building. If there are enough families interested in forming a new congregation, they could pursue this as a less costly and quicker alternative to building a new facility. Hudsonville is also going ahead with plans to organize worship services for those families who might be interested. These services are scheduled to start on February 18 and run for at least eight weeks to measure the degree of interest. At least one of these services each week will be in the Hudsonville Reformed Church.

The congregation of the Doon, IA PRC was invited to an activity night on January 12 at the Doon Community Center. Plans called for all those high school age and

older to try their skill at a variety of activities, including volleyball and table games. Doon's bulletin also included a reminder to their congregation that on January 16 the students of Dordt College would be returning for another semester of school, and they were asked to remember these students by again having them over for Sunday dinners. They and their parents certainly appreciate this very much.

Members of the Lynden, WA PRC were encouraged to come together on January 4 for a Combined Bible Study Night. All societies were planning on meeting on the same night each week and studying the same passage of Scripture. Lynden's three societies, Young

People's, Young Adults, and Adults, agreed to the study of Ephesians.

Evangelism Activities

In a brief note on the bulletin of the Loveland, CO PRC we learned that Rev. G. Eriks and two men from his congregation were planning on visiting the prison in Florence to lead a Bible Study on January 8.

Food For Thought

"If you want your neighbor to know what Christ will do for him, let the neighbor see what Christ has done for you."

— Houston Times, All-Church Press

Announcements

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 résumé to the school at

1545 Wilson S.W.
Grand Rapids, MI 49544.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope PRC (Walker) extend their Christian sympathy to fellow members, John DeVries and Martin DeVries in the death of their brother,

GERALD DE VRIES.

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

John Buiter, Pres.
Harry Rutgers, Sec'y.

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2001 - 2002 academic year should make application at the March 15, 2001 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

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

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 15 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

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