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The Blessed Meek

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:5

The words of Christ here in the text are very familiar to us. We know them well. However, they just do not seem to be correct. The earth appears to be possessed by the bold and proud. In recent years the world has progressed very rapidly in all areas of learning. It would appear that the only way anything gets accomplished is for man to take things into his own hands. Certainly no room for meekness. No, one needs boldness and vision. One can even take courses that teach one how to take charge and control. The only way that one can get ahead is to take anything one can get and be ready to do so at the expense of others. Meekness is treated with scorn and derision.

Nevertheless, the words of the text are true. Meekness is one of the necessary characteristics of the

citizen of the kingdom of heaven. In Psalm 37 David reflects on this truth. He recognized that the wicked sought to accomplish many things. In doing so they plotted against the just, drew their swords and bent their bows to cast down the poor and needy. He saw, however, that they were soon cut down like the grass and that their place was no longer remembered. On the other hand, the little that the righteous hath is better than the riches of many wicked, for God blesses and preserves His people. He provides for them in their needs here on the earth, and afterwards brings them to glory. Yes, contrary to appearances, the meek shall inherit the earth.

There are two kinds of meek. First, there is the worldly and wicked meek. These are the ones that do not have much power and are not able to stand up for their rights. Consequently, they are walked upon by men and they allow this to take place. As a result, they are the butt of many jokes. Christ does not mean these, and there is no blessedness in this meekness.

Secondly, there is the godly meek. This is a spiritual characteristic which is the fruit of the work of the Spirit in one's heart. This must be seen in the true child of God and can be seen only in one who belongs to Christ.

There are three characteristics of true meekness. First of all, one who is truly meek recognizes his actual situation on the earth. He realizes that he is not the master nor the captain of his soul. Rather, he sees that he is dependent, both spiritually and physically. Physically he can do nothing to maintain his own life. Certainly he will consult a doctor, take his medicine, and avoid what is harmful to his health. Yet, even with that, he cannot add one day to his life or one beat to his heart. The same thing is true spiritually. He knows that it is not a part of his original nature to seek out or to love God or his neighbor. By nature he would not love God's law or Word. The meek one realizes that salvation is utterly impossible if it depended on him and his actions. This is the first and necessary part of meekness.

The second characteristic of

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meekness is that the meek one recognizes the source of all strength. That, of course, is none other than God, who is the fountain of all good, who creates and sustains all things, including my life, which He holds in His hands. In addition, God is the source of salvation for all His people. The God-ordained way of salvation is through the cross of Christ. This salvation He applies through the operation of His Holy Spirit who regenerates us. Having given us a new life, God calls us by His Word and Spirit, which leads to conversion and to a new obedience. All of this must come from God. None of it can possibly be the work of man.

The third and final characteristic of meekness is that the meek one is continually dependent upon God for Jesus' sake. He knows that he need not defend and preserve himself in his own strength. He knows that God is his rock and refuge through every trial and affliction. He knows that his God will protect and deliver him in spite of all opposition. The meek look to their God for all things.

This meekness bears fruit. One who is meek does not vaunt himself. He does not boast of his own wisdom, intelligence, or possessions. Nor does he boast in his willingness to seek God or to accept Christ in his own strength. The meek says, "I am what I am by the grace of God alone."

With respect to those who are around him, the meek does not fight back when the world shows its hatred, seeking to destroy or harm the church. He does not use the weapons of the world and use force to overcome the world. In turn he walks in faith, knowing that his heavenly Father will preserve and keep him. What the meek does use is his mouth, with which he testifies of the work of God in him and of his readiness to suffer for Jesus' sake. This very attitude of humble submission will call forth additional mockery and scorn from the world.

The fruit of meekness is also seen in regard to the fellow saint. The meek does not try to elevate himself above the fellow saint, but each considers the other better than himself. Rather than seeking to advance himself by destroying the brother, he seeks to aid and direct his fellow saint, that together they may glorify their heavenly Father.

As to the origin of this meekness, we can certainly agree that it is not an inherited characteristic. Man, including you and me, is naturally proud and boastful. He is proud of his physical strength and intellectual accomplishments. He points to the conquering of many fatal diseases, the placing of a man on the moon, and the fact that he has done more in the last fifty years than has been done in all of preceding history. But worse than this is that man wants to believe that it is he who must first seek God. It is his belief that he himself has the power to come to Christ if only he wishes. He believes that there is in himself some good which will make him pleasing to God. In man there is no meekness, only stinking pride. By nature we certainly are not meek. God did not choose us because He saw in us some meekness. As children of God we must fight constantly against this sin of pride within.

On the positive side, we see that meekness is rooted in the meekness of Jesus Christ. Never was one so meek as our Lord. The apostle Paul speaks of Christ's meekness in Philippians 2:6-8: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." In perfect meekness He bore what He personally did not deserve. Had He opposed this way for our salvation, there would

have been no hope for deliverance. But He submitted to the will of God by bearing the wrath of the righteous God for the sins of His people unto the end that they might have life through Him. His meekness merits life for His people. Therefore they can take no credit or glory for themselves, but glorify Him who saved them completely. In this meekness the child of God submits himself unto the will of his heavenly Father. He believes that even as his Father has provided the way of salvation, his Father will also preserve and keep him on this earth, and finally bring him to heavenly glory. Such is the meekness of the child of God.


Thus far we have seen what meekness is and its origin. There is more. We have yet to describe the blessedness which is the possession of the meek. Although it seems impossible, they shall inherit the earth. Ultimately this refers to the new earth which shall be formed after the judgment day. Then there will be a new earth where righteousness shall dwell. Renewed by fire it shall be a fit place for the meek saints. Just think of it, no more curse there, no more death or suffering. The meek, and only the meek, shall inherit this new earth. What the wicked denied the child of God in this life, the child of God will inherit in the life to come. Proud man seeks to establish himself now on earth. He fashions it after his own design and plans. It is his purpose to take it away from those whose hope is in their God. But he is not able to hold on to it. After life's brief span he dies, and he can take nothing with him. In spite of all his accomplishments, the earth shall be destroyed and be renewed for the meek.

Already this promise is somewhat fulfilled today for God's children. It may not appear that way, since we do not usually possess much of this world's wealth and we more often than not have to endure suffering for righteousness'

sake. What we do have is the Word of God. Listen! "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God" (II Cor. 4:15). And again in Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The

wicked may appear to prosper while the meek appear to suffer, yet God so directs all things that they must be for the sake of His people. Whatever God sends He does so for the eternal spiritual profit of His dear children.

What comfort that is for us! We are not to fear in this cruel and proud world. We simply exercise patience, also a gift of God. In His

own time God will give to us what He has promised: the earth. In thankfulness and gratitude we then walk in meekness even as Christ revealed this in the highest degree, believing that God will care and provide for His meek saints among whom we are numbered. Hold fast to this glorious truth, for in so doing we shall be exceedingly blessed. 

Editorial

Glittering Vices (2)

If the seeming good of the unregenerated is not the fruit of a gracious operation of the Holy Spirit within them, as the previous editorial argued it is not, how must this seeming good be judged? What must the Reformed church say of the works of unbelievers that glitter with the apparent glory of righteousness; mercy; love for family, neighbor, and country; and goodness? That there are such works is undeniable. Defenders of the teaching of the third point of common grace adopted by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in 1924 appeal to these works in defense of the teaching. These defenders are as numerous outside the CRC as within it.

It should be noted in passing that the avowed foes of the gospel of grace have always appealed to the seeming good of the ungodly in defense of their denial of total depravity and their affirmation of free will. Erasmus appealed to this seeming good in his historic controversy with Luther over the bondage of the will. This is ominous. It is a warning to Reformed churches and theologians who call the deeds of the ungodly good to beware lest they find themselves with semi-Pelagian Erasmus opposing the gospel of grace.

The Glitter

We must not think to expose the real wickedness of the seeming good of the unregenerated by attributing base motives to all who perform the glittering deeds. This is sometimes done. Then Churchill stood during England's and the West's dark hour only for personal glory. Every unbelieving husband is faithful to wife and children only because the peace of marriage and family is more comfortable for him. Philanthropists give large sums of money to hospitals only to get their name on public buildings. Worldly people stop to help a stranded motorist only so that one day others may help them.

This is not true. Nor will such a judgment on the seeming good of the ungodly ever convince the defender of the third point of common grace that the third point, with its roots in the first and second points, is false.

There is much of ignoble selfishness in the seeming good of the ungodly, as, alas, there is too much of it in the works of the godly. There are philanthropists who give only to see their name prominently displayed and to assure that their name will be known long after they die. There are politicians whose motive in serving their nation is the

service of themselves, as there are ministers in the churches whose motive is the same. There are husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers whose outwardly exemplary behavior disguises purely selfish interests. The father dotes on his son simply because the son reflects well on the father, whether in sports, education, business, or some other way.

But this does not account for all of the seeming good of the wicked. There is natural love—natural love for wife and children; natural love for the neighbor; natural love for country. This natural love can sacrifice self for the object of love. The Muslim mother gives her own life for her child. Natural love can also detest evil in the world. In love for his own nation and for earthly liberty, a Churchill could hate Hitler and Nazi Germany.

We recognize this. We too see the glitter of a certain glory in many of the deeds of unbelievers.

The Vice

But it is the judgment of God in the gospel that inasmuch as this natural love, which at its highest and noblest is man's love for man, does not include love for Him, indeed is not rooted in love for Him,

this natural love is sin. It is only sin. It is sin as regards the thought, desire, and feeling in the soul. It is sin as regards the deed.

This is the issue in the common grace controversy with specific reference to the third point. Can a desire, for example, the desire of a Churchill to destroy Nazi tyranny and preserve freedom, be good that does not desire the triune, one, true, living God? Can a deed be good that does not take Him into account, that does not aim at Him and His glory, that, in fact, aims away from Him toward other gods, including the god, Humanity; the god, Family; the god, Freedom; and the god, Nation?

One of the main biblical words for sin has the meaning, 'to miss the mark.' The mark is the glory of the God and Father of Jesus Christ revealed in the gospel. Whatever in men and devils misses the mark is sin. It is sin for this reason.

To leave God out is vice.

To leave God out in everyday, earthly life is civic vice.

The plowing—not the worship, but the plowing—of the wicked is vice (Prov. 21:4).

The seeming good works of the ungodly glitter with the beauty and glory of man. But "all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field" (Is. 40:6). The seeming good works of the ungodly are glittering vices.

The question in the controversy over the third point of common grace is our Reformed judgment of the seeming good performed by the unregenerated. This question is raised anew by the article, "Common Grace, Theonomy, and Civic Good: The Temptations of Calvinist Politics (Reflections on the Third Point of the CRC Kalamazoo

Synod, 1924)" in the November 2000 issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal*. The question is answered clearly and authoritatively by the Reformed confessions.

It is nothing less than amazing that the CRC officially confessed that the works of the ungodly are

good—*real* good, the fruit of the grace of the Holy Spirit in the soul—and then cast out ministers and churches that objected, *in the face of the clear, decisive testimony of the confessions*.

It is nothing less than amazing that to this day a majority of Reformed and Presbyterian churches agree with the CRC and dismiss the objection of the PRC—and the PRC themselves—as an Anabaptist, hyper-Calvinist, and what not else, *in the face of the clear, decisive testimony of the confessions*.

"Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?" asks the Heidelberg Catechism in Question 8. To this question, the answer of the universal Reformed faith is: "Indeed we are, except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God." Neither here nor anywhere else in all of the Reformed confessions, whether Reformed or Presbyterian, is there any mitigation or qualification of total depravity, as described in Question 8, by a "common grace."

Nor is the Catechism proclaiming a theological abstraction: "This is what unregenerated men and women *would be if* ... (it were not for common grace)." The Catechism is as little interested in abstractions as is the gospel. Like the gospel the Catechism is judging real, flesh-and-blood people with a judgment that lays bare our real misery. Apart from regeneration

we and every human are *so* corrupt that we are *wholly* incapable of doing *any* good and are inclined to *all* wickedness. Such is our misery that the only deliverance from it is regeneration. And this misery we must know, if we are to know our redemption and gratitude and if we are to enjoy the only comfort in life and death.

The CRC's abuse of the Canons of Dordt, III, IV/4 in its effort to prove the third point of common grace is notorious, as indeed it should be. In his article on the third point in the November 2000 CTJ, Dr. John Bolt acknowledges this abuse. Hoeksema, he says, "rightly observes that the Kalamazoo Synod in citing this passage in defense of common grace distorted matters by omitting the nuanced negations of the second half of the article" (p. 229). The synod of 1924 quoted only the first half of the article, where Dordt recognizes the seeming good of the unregenerate. Even here, however, Dordt refuses to speak of the good that the wicked do, though it be merely earthly, or of their righteousness, though only civic. Convinced as it was of the truth of total depravity, Dordt will only speak of fallen man's having "some regard for virtue, good order in society, and ... maintaining an orderly external deportment." This, it attributes, not to grace but to "the glimmerings of natural light" that remain after the fall.

But in the second half of the article, Dordt explicitly states that the unregenerated man is "incapable of using [the glimmerings of natural light] aright *even in things natural and civil*" (emphasis added). Dordt goes further: "This light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God."

The judgment of the Reformed confessions of the seeming good of the unregenerated is that these deeds are nothing but glittering vices.

...it is the judgment of God in the gospel that inasmuch as this natural love, which at its highest and noblest is man's love for man, does not include love for Him, indeed is not rooted in love for Him, this natural love is sin.

In Question and Answer 91 the Heidelberg Catechism defines a good work. To be good a work must meet a threefold test. Its source must be faith; its standard must be the law of God; and its aim, or goal, must be the glory of God. This definition weighs with Professor Bolt. In his article on the third point, he reformulates the third point so that it will no longer ignore the definition of a good work given by the Catechism.

This move is heartening. But it must be understood that the Catechism's definition of a good work derives from the Reformed conviction that God alone is good. He is goodness. Goodness in the works of men and women, therefore, must be *from* Him ("from a true faith"), *according to* Him ("according to the law of God," the heart of which is "love the Lord

your God!"), and *unto* Him ("to His glory"). So is God good, that whatever deed a man may do that does not originate in Him, accord with Him, and end in Him is sin. It is sin, though it be a mother's selfless love for her child, or a patriot's courageous dying for his country, or a man's altruistic devotion to mankind.

In the controversy over the third point, the issue finally is not Anabaptism, world-flight, civic righteousness, theonomy, politics, or even total depravity, although all of these issues are involved, especially the last. The issue is God. The issue is God as Jesus knew Him and revealed Him when Jesus said, "There is none good but one, God" (Matt. 19:17).

What then of the seeming good done by unbelievers?

Many deeds of the ungodly seem good to men. They seem good to us. At least, they seem good to us as long as we too leave God out of the picture. But we do not determine what is good. We have neither the right nor the ability. It was a mistake of the CRC in 1924 to call works good on the basis of human observation and opinion. In its definition of good works, the Catechism adds a warning against this very error: "... and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men."

The rightful and righteous judge of the deeds of men is God in the gospel.

God is not impressed with glitter.

His judgment is: glittering vices.

— DJE

Luther on the Seeming Good of the Ungodly

The position that the seeming good works of the ungodly are glittering vices was that of the Reformers and of Augustine before them. In his attack on the gospel of the Reformation, Erasmus argued for the free will of the sinner, upon which salvation must depend. In support of free will, Erasmus asserted that there is some good still in unregenerated men, some ability for good, and the actual performance of works that are good. These are Erasmus' words: "Not every energy in man is [sinful] flesh. There is an energy called the soul, and one called the spirit, by which we aspire to what is upright, as did the philosophers; who taught that we should welcome a thousand deaths sooner than commit a vile action, even if we knew that men would never learn of it and God would pardon it."

To this assertion that the ungodly retain some good and are able to do good works, Luther responded in his great book, The Bondage of the Will. What follows is this response by Luther. The quotation is from the translation by Packer and Johnston, James Clarke, 1957, pages 251- 253.

The reader should know that "I" in the quotation is Luther himself; "you" is Erasmus; and the "Diatribes" is Erasmus' book against Luther, the Reformation, and the gospel of grace.

—DJE

You say: "Not every energy in man is flesh. There is an energy called the soul, and one called the spirit, by which we aspire to what is upright, as did the philosophers; who taught that we should welcome a thousand deaths sooner than commit a vile action, even if we knew that men would never learn of it and God would pardon it."

I reply: One who has sure faith in nothing can easily believe and say anything. I will not ask you, but let your friend Lucian ask you, whether you can point it to anyone out of the entire human race, though he be a Socrates twice or seven times over, who has succeeded in carrying out their teaching as you here state and report it? Why then do you chatter on with empty words? Could they aspire


to upright action, when they did not even know what an upright action was? If I should ask you for the most outstanding example of such uprightness, you would say, perhaps, that it was nobly done when men died for their country, for their wives and children, or for their parents; or when they refrained from lying or treachery; or when they endured exquisite torments rather than lie or betray others, as did Q. Scaevola, M. Regulus, and others. But what can you show us in all these men but the external appearance of their works? Have you seen their hearts? Why, it is at once apparent from the look of their works that they did it all for their own glory, so that they were not ashamed to acknowledge and to boast that it was their own glory that they sought. The Romans, on their own confession, performed their valiant acts out of a thirst for glory. So did the Greeks. So did the Jews. So does the whole human race. But, upright though this may be in men's eyes, nothing is less upright in the sight of God.

It is, indeed, the supreme impiety and the height of sacrilege, inasmuch as they did not do it for the glory of God, nor did they glorify Him as God. By the most ungodly robbery, they robbed God of His glory and took it to themselves, and were never less upright and more vile than when they shone in their highest virtues. How could they work for the glory of God, when they knew neither God nor His glory? — not because it was not visible, but because the flesh did not allow them to behold God's glory, by reason of the mad fury with which they sought their own glory. Here you have your "spirit that rules," your "principal part of man, which aspires to what is upright" — a plunderer of God's glory, and a usurper of His majesty! And that applies most of all

when men are at their noblest, and are most distinguished for their own highest virtues! Now deny that these men were flesh, and were ruined by ungodly affection!

The Diatribe may raise this still outstanding question: "Even if the whole of man, and the most excellent thing in man, is called flesh, must all that is called flesh be at once and for that reason called ungodly?" I reply: I call a man ungodly if he is without the Spirit of God; for Scripture says that the Spirit is given to justify the ungodly. As Christ distinguished the Spirit from the flesh, saying: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," and adds that what is born of the flesh "cannot see the kingdom of God," it obviously follows that whatever is flesh is ungodly, un-

der God's wrath, and a stranger to his kingdom. And if it is a stranger to God's kingdom and Spirit, it follows of necessity that it is under the kingdom and spirit of Satan. For there is no middle kingdom between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, which are ever at war with each other.

These are the arguments which prove that the brightest virtues among the heathen, the best works among the philosophers, the most excellent deeds among men, which appear in the sight of the world to be upright and good, and are so called, are really flesh in the sight of God, and minister to the kingdom of Satan; that is, they are ungodly, sacrilegious, and evil in every respect. 

Letters

■ A Clear Command to Sing Only the Psalms

I have read your editorial, "Shall We Please God or (Certain Kinds of) People? — or, the Regulative Principle of Worship (4)" (*Standard Bearer*, Vol. 77, No. 3, November 1, 2000). If I am not mistaken, the general thrust of your editorial seems to be that the Second Commandment (i.e., The Regulative Principle of Worship) does not require that the church sing the Psalms of the Old Testament exclusively in her worship. However, even though the Second Commandment does not require exclusive Psalmody, the Synod of Dordt, the Protestant Reformed Churches, and all who truly stand in the tradition of the Dutch Reformed Churches sing Psalms *almost exclusively* for other reasons.

When you gave the basis for these assertions, there didn't seem to be much support given from Scripture or our major Confessions. The basis for your reasoning

seemed to be opinion, tradition, or the popularity of certain ideas with the people. You only reference Scripture twice in your entire article, and that is near the end, where you site Colossians 2:23 and the Second Commandment in demonstrating the importance and seriousness of the Regulative Principle. When you state that the Regulative Principle does not require exclusive Psalmody, you base this claim not on proof from Scripture or our Confessions but on the fact that Article 69 of the church order, as drafted by the Synod of Dordt and maintained by us, does not require this.

Now, it is my understanding that the concept of "The Regulative Principle" is taught by our Confessions. Therefore, how our Creeds instruct us concerning the proper worship of God is of vital importance to this decision. We read in Lord's Day 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism as follows:

Question 96. What doth God require in the second commandment?

Answer. That we in no wise ^a represent God by images, nor worship ^b him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.

a. Deut. 4:15; Isa. 40:18; Rom. 1:23ff.; Acts 17:29.

b. 1 Sam. 15:23; Deut. 12:30.

In the Belgic Confession, Article 7, and Article 32, we read:

Article 7: The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures, to be the Only Rule of Faith.

We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For, since the whole manner of worship, which God requires of us, is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul saith (Gal. 1:8). For,

since it is forbidden, to add unto or take away anything from the word of God (Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18, 19), it doth thereby evidently appear, that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects....

Article 32: Of the Order and Discipline of the Church.

In the meantime we believe, though it is useful and beneficial, that those, who are rulers of the Church, institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the Church; yet they ought studiously to take care, that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted. And therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws, which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever....

Based on these articles from our Creeds, it is my understanding that from a positive point of view we are taught: We must worship God only in the way that He has commanded in His Word. And negatively we are taught: If God has not specifically commanded a certain element of worship, then it is forbidden. This view is significantly different from that of the Lutherans who say, "If God has not specifically forbidden an element of worship it is lawful for the church to incorporate that element as she sees fit."

When explaining why Dordt drafted Article 69 of the Church Order the way they did you say, "... Dordt *permitted* (emphasis mine — DJ) a few, specified hymns. *The reason why Dordt mentioned these hymns was that they were part of the songbook in use at the time and were popular with the people* (emphasis mine — DJ). Nevertheless, Dordt could permit them, as a synod holding that exclusive Psalmody is a requirement of the regulative principle could not have done."

I must ask, what is the scrip-

tural basis that Dordt, and we, use to support the idea that the Regulative Principle does not require exclusive Psalmody? If Dordt did not believe that the Regulative Principle requires exclusive Psalmody, and we believe that they were correct, then there must be a reason from scripture that we can give to establish our position. You state specifically that "The reason why" Dordt allowed the few hymns in our Church Order was because of tradition and popular opinion. Were they not then pleasing people instead of God? We must be reminded again, if God has not specifically commanded a particular element of our worship, it is forbidden. Whether or not *we* like particular songs, or think there is anything wrong with them or not is completely irrelevant.

In the *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 68, No. 18, July 1, 1992, you responded to a letter about the Regulative Principle with these comments: "The mention of a few hymns in Article 69 of the church order of Dordt *was a concession to a difficult situation* (emphasis mine — DJ) then obtaining in the Dutch Reformed churches (cf. VanDellen and Monsma, the *Church Order Commentary*, Zondervan, 1954, pp. 282, 283). The spirit and intent of the Article, however, are that only the *Psalms* be sung in the public worship of the Reformed churches." Similarly, in the article "Music in the Church" in the *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 71, No. 15, May 1, 1995 you speak of the contents of Article 69 of the Church Order this way, "The exceptions to the Psalms mentioned in Article 69 (some of which are quite unknown to most of us) find their place there through curious, historical circumstances: the popular Dutch songbook of the time of the Synod of Dordt contained also these hymns; *rather than to disturb the people, Dordt made allowance for these hymns* (emphasis mine — DJ). But the spirit and principle of Article 69 is: 'In the churches only the 150 Psalms of

David shall be sung. Period!'"

If Dordt did not believe that the Regulative Principle requires exclusive Psalmody, and we agree, then it seems rather odd to me to speak of the hymns included in Article 69 as "concessions" or "exceptions that originated out of curious historical circumstances," or even to say that they "permitted" or "allowed" them. Concessions or exceptions to what, the correct position? We do not "permit" what God has commanded. We *require* it. Twice you mention that the spirit and intent (or principle) of Article 69 is that, "In the church only the 150 Psalms of David shall be sung. Period!" Why would we say such a thing if we believe along with Dordt that Article 69 reflects the command of God found in Scripture? If this is really what we believe, then we must say that the spirit and intent of the Article is exactly what it says. Period! If Dordt made "concessions" to please people rather than basing the contents of Article 69 on Scripture alone, then I question our continued persistence in defending its few exceptions to the Psalms.

Article 7 of the Belgic Confession tells us that all human writings must be held up to the light of Scripture and we may not look to tradition or popularity, etc. as our guide. I quote:

Article 7: The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures, to be the Only Rule of Faith.

We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For, since the whole manner of worship, which God requires of us, is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul saith (Gal. 1:8). For, since it is forbidden, to add unto or take away anything from the word of God (Deut. 12:32; Rev.

22:18, 19), it doth thereby evidently appear, that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. *Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all* (emphasis mine — DJ); for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore, we reject with all our hearts, whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God (I John 4:1). Likewise, if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house (II John, 10).

The view in the early part of our history was significantly different than the one you present in your article. I quote from the article, "Hymn Singing in Public Worship," by Rev. P. Vis (*Standard Bearer*, Vol. 20):

Scripture nowhere demands of us that in our singing we confine ourselves to the Psalms nor does it forbid us to sing hymns. Rather it does the very opposite. For we read in Ephesians 5:19, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." And again in Colossians 3:16, "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." From these verses it is evident that rather than to limit us in our singing to the Psalms God even encourages us to sing hymns in addition to these. This was also seen and understood by the Church in the past. Therefore it allowed the Song of Mary, Zacharias, and Simeon, the Morning and Evening Hymns, and the Hymn of Prayer to be sung in Divine worship and gave them a place in the Psalm book and Psalter. Hence the question

is not at all whether we may sing hymns. Scripture plainly teaches us that we may and this the Church has always realized.

Here, Rev. Vis defends the content of Article 69 based on what he, and all the ministers in the PRC at the time, believed to be the correct interpretation of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. My point here is that he bases his position on Scripture, though erroneously. Apparently, through the study of this topic in the 1960s (see Supplement 24, from the Committee Re Changing Article 69, of the "Acts of Synod," June 1, 1960), the PRC became aware that rather than promoting the use of Psalms and "other songs," these passages refer specifically to the categories of the Psalms in the Septuagint or Greek Old Testament. In the Septuagint, the Psalms of the Old Testament are classified as Psalms, Hymns, and Songs. This is exactly what Paul was referring to in these two passages, and this is exactly what the Colossians and Ephesians would have understood him to be referring to.

There are two sermons preached by our ministers which demonstrate, both from the Old and New Testament Scriptures, that God *does* require the church to sing only the Psalms, and they give the correct interpretations of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 (1. "Our Calling to Sing Psalms," preached by Reverend Steven R. Key, is taken from Psalm 105:2, Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19, and I Chronicles 16:9. 2. "God's Calling to Sing," preached by Reverend Barry Gritters, is taken from Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16). These sermons are available on the Internet in Real Audio format at the Fayetteville Reformed Fellowship's web site. The web address is http://www.rsglh.org/exclusive_psalmody_realaudio_sermons.htm.

There have also been articles in the *Standard Bearer* from our more

recent history (e.g., "The Hymn Matter Continued," by Rev. G. VandenBerg, Vol. 38, No. 15, May 1, 1962; "The Songs of Zion: What Shall the Church Sing," by Professor Herman Hanko, Vol. 74, No. 8, January 15, 1998; and "Music in the Church," by Professor David J. Engelsma, Vol. 71, No. 15, May 1, 1995), and a pamphlet ("Psalm Singing: A Reformed Heritage," by Reverend Jason Kortering) that give correct interpretation to Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. Also, issue number 26 of the *British Reformed Journal*, April – June 1999, published by the British Reformed Fellowship in Northern Ireland, was dedicated to exploring the subject of exclusive Psalmody. It contains several articles in which detailed and sound exegesis of key passages of Scripture show clearly that God commands His church to sing the Psalms exclusively in her worship. This is only a small list of resources that offer a sound scriptural basis for exclusive Psalmody. There are many more.

If you take away Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 as proof for the idea that God commands His church to sing the Psalms and "other songs," then you have completely run out of any *credible* support from Scripture for this position. And again, the Reformed believer must be reminded that our Confessions teach us that we must worship God only in the way that He has commanded in His Word. And negatively we are taught: If God has not specifically commanded a certain element of worship, then it is forbidden.

There are other passages in the New Testament that also support the assertion that the Second Commandment requires the church to sing only the Psalms. In James 5:13 we read, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." Let us also consider the last Passover attended by our Lord Jesus as found in Matthew 26:18-20 and Mark 14:13-26. At this Passover we

see the beautiful transition from the old dispensation of types and shadows to the new. We see that Christ ate the Passover with His disciples in keeping with the Law of Moses and then He Himself institutes the Lord's Supper. The old is fulfilled in Christ and gives way to the new as *instituted* by Christ. Consider that the church only recognizes the Lord's Supper as an official Sacrament and proper element of worship because the clear command of God is found in Scripture to do so.

Notice, however, that although the old falls away, we read in verse 30 of Matthew 26 and verse 26 of Mark 14, "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." Now, it is our position that what Jesus and His disciples sang was the Great Hallel (i.e., Psalms 113-118; I make this assertion based on information found in the sermons, *Standard Bearer* articles, pamphlet, and *British Reformed Journal* articles cited above). If you will notice, they sang after the Passover and after Christ had instituted the Lord's Supper. Notice too, that although the Passover falls away and is replaced by the New Testament sacrament, Christ sings the Psalms. Christ could have instituted a new way for the church to worship in song, and would have if that were now God's requirement for the new dispensation. He could have given to the apostles the command and ability to compose a new songbook for the church. Instead, He reaffirms God's command to sing the Psalms in worship by leading His disciples in doing just that.

There is another point I need to make. In your article you cite several reasons, other than the Second Commandment, why we sing the Psalms *almost exclusively*, even though God, so it is said, does not require this of us. I quote from the article:

According to H. Bouwman, the grounds of the Dutch Reformed churches for singing the Psalms in worship are these:

- 1) God has given the church one collection of Psalms for singing, but no collection of hymns.
- 2) The Psalms far surpass the hymns in spiritual depth; also, the Psalms express the abiding truth of God of all ages, whereas hymns have a temporary character.
- 3) The use of hymns invariably crowds the Psalms out of the worship altogether.
- 4) To these should be added a healthy fear that the introduction of hymns will lead to the introduction of Arminian hymns.

First, I would say that reason number one appears to me to be a point that can and should be made to support the assertion that the Second Commandment requires exclusive Psalmody. God's command is implied in the fact that He gave us *a* songbook. If He intended or desired the church to sing other things there would be no songbook or at least clear (very clear) direction in Scripture to sing the Psalms and "other songs." Where is this *clear* command to sing other things found?

The third and fourth reasons given above are very true. History shows that, without exception, the inclusion of hymns in the worship has resulted in the loss of the Psalms, and that the precious doctrine of sovereign and particular grace gives way to Arminianism. This has taken place rather quickly in some cases and over a great deal of time in others, but the end result is always the same. The reason for this can be seen in the promise that accompanies the second commandment. In Exodus 20:5b, 6 we read, "... for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." God is jealous of His glory, and when we worship Him in ways that He has not commanded in His word we assault that glory. When churches

offer up strange fire on the altar of Jehovah, the Second Commandment makes it very clear that God gives over the sinning people to their sins and errors, and the worship degenerates, *in their generations*, at an alarming rate. Even the purity of the preaching is removed, and the people are imprisoned in the darkness of their own sins.

Now I ask, if the Second Commandment truly does not require exclusive Psalmody, then why must we be warned like we read in points three and four above? Why must we say, "we had better limit ourselves to *almost* exclusive Psalmody, so that we don't fall into the snare of losing the Psalms and the snare of false doctrine"? If it pleased God to include Psalms *and* "other songs" in the worship, then these things would not be a real danger to the church. God *only blesses* a church worshipping according to His will with spiritual prosperity and the strengthening of their love for the truth.

Also, the way we are using numbers three and four above sounds strangely close to what the CRC said when they adopted the Three Points of Common Grace. They said (I paraphrase), "This is the truth of Scripture and the Creeds ... this is the will of God, *but* we must warn the people of the danger of worldly mindedness." Throughout our history we have pointed out that this reasoning only serves to demonstrate the absurdity of their position. And yet, we now employ very similar logic when we say, "The Second Commandment doesn't require exclusive Psalmody. Look at our Church Order ... there is no problem singing certain other hymns in worship, *but* we must be warned of the danger in doing this too much ... it will lead to apostasy and false doctrine." I say to this, that obeying the will of God is *never ever* associated with the possibility that we will fall away from the truth. If God commands us to sing the Psalms and "other songs," and by

His grace we do it, there can never be even the slightest possibility that we will be cursed of God in our generations.

Consider again Exodus 20:6, "And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments," and consider Psalm 1:1-3, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." If our delight is in the Law of Jehovah, including the second commandment, then our leaf shall *not* wither, whatsoever we do *shall* prosper, and we experience the mercy and salvation of God in our generations. This is the sure promise of God to all those who by His grace know and love the truth and keep His precepts.

In my view, Scripture is very clear on this matter. We find throughout the word of God the clear command to sing the Psalms in our worship, and the command of God to also sing other things is notably missing. Again, as Reformed believers, we must remember what our creeds teach us: We must worship God only in the way that He has commanded in His Word, and if God has not specifically commanded a certain element of worship, then it is forbidden.

It is my prayer that God will give us the grace as churches to truly study this issue in the light of Scripture and our Creeds, and put aside our traditions and feelings. Ultimately, we must either correct the "concessions" of Article 69 in our Church Order, or support its existing content on the sure foundation of Scripture and our Confessions, showing conclusively that Dordt, and we, make no "concession" and "permit" no error.

We must without question, or compromise, do what God commands in His word. We must not add to it, and we must not diminish from it (see Deut. 12:28-32).

David Jessup
Grandville, MI

RESPONSE:

In the November 1, 2000 editorial referred to above, I explained Article 69 of the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches (RRC), which was adopted by and has come down to us from the Synod of Dordt. Article 69 of the Church Order of Dordt requires the churches to sing the Psalms. It virtually restricts the singing of the Reformed church in public worship to the Psalms.


However, the fact that Article 69 does include a few, specified hymns shows that Dordt did not think that the regulative principle of worship requires exclusive Psalmody. Dordt and the Continental Reformed tradition have insisted on the singing of the Psalms at worship, but on other grounds than that the regulative principle demands exclusive Psalmody.

I explained Article 69. I did not prove it from Scripture. I did not intend to prove it from Scripture. As part of our adopted Church Order, Article 69 is binding in the PRC. One who supposes that Article 69 is in error must prove his contention in an overtture to synod.

As regards Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, there is good reason, in my judgment, to understand "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" as a threefold description of the Psalms. Such exegetes as Calvin, Greijdanus, and Herman Hoeksema, however, do not interpret the passages this way. Even if "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" do refer to three kinds of Psalms, the passages cannot be used to prove exclusive Psalmody at church. For in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 the apostle is describing the everyday holy life of the saints in the world. He is not prescribing the elements of public

worship.

If these passages on singing, understood as referring to the Psalms, are made to express and enforce the regulative principle of worship, they require Christians to sing only Psalms at their unofficial programs and informal gatherings, in their devotions at home, and, indeed, while traveling alone in the car or, as opportunity allows, while at work. In this case, for a choral group in our churches to sing the *Messiah*, for a family to include in their devotions "Glory Be to the Father," or for a farmer to sing "Rock of Ages" in the praise of God as he milks the cows is violation of the regulative principle, that is, disobedience to the second commandment.

In the editorial of November 1, 2000, I did explain how the singing at church by the PRC in accordance with Article 69 of the Church Order is governed by the regulative principle. I refer the interested reader to that editorial. 

— Ed.

The Salt of the Earth

Ye are the salt of earth,
The Savior tells His own,
This earth without God's people
Will soon be overthrown.

While we the earth inhabit,
Our calling is to be
Lights in this world of darkness
For all mankind to see.

Live only for His glory,
Give witness all around,
For Christ will come in judgment –
His glory will abound.

The men who in this life
To please themselves aspire
Will hear: "Depart from me
To everlasting fire."

Those purchased through His
blood
Through grace will then be told:
"Come, enter and inherit
My blessed heavenly fold."

Thelma Westra

The Qualifications of Deacons (1)

An Important Subject

By the time you read this article, most of our Protestant Reformed Churches will have again installed new deacons for the year. For two or three years these men, believing themselves to have been called of God Himself to their office, will devote themselves to the work of administering the mercies of Christ to the poor and needy. A weighty calling!

The question is: what kind of men have been put into this office? Councils and congregations, what kind of men did you nominate and elect? Deacons, what kind of men are you in all your life?

One great danger for the church and for believers is that we begin to form our own ideas of what kind of men are best able to serve in church office. Our nature would lead us to nominate or vote for the men whom we like best, or who are related to us; or for a good businessman who we think will be well equipped to handle our money; or for one who sees things (earthly things, non-essential spiritual things, or anything) our way.

Following the lead of our nature in nominating or voting for deacons, however, is wrong. It ignores the fact that the church is the house of God, that is, the house which God redeemed through Christ, and the house in which God is the master. It ignores the fact

that ultimately God determines who will serve as stewards of the mercies of Christ in His house. It ignores the will of God, set forth in I Timothy 3:8-12, regarding who may serve in the office. The result of ignoring all these things is that we choose men to serve in church office in the same way in which secular society selects men to serve in positions of government.

Councils, you did nominate men who are truly qualified, in accordance with the qualifications found in God's Word, didn't you? And men of the congregations, you did vote for the men whom you considered to measure up best to the standard God gives us, right? I pray it was so.

Because the diaconate is one office through which Christ is present with His church, and because the deacons themselves must administer *Christ's* mercies, it is imperative that the deacons be qualified men. We should know, therefore, just what the qualifications are. We begin treating this subject by stressing its importance.



The importance of the subject of qualifications is demonstrated first by the fact that God sets forth in Scripture what these qualifications are. Inasmuch as Scripture is God's will and Word, and our guide for faith and life, everything that is taught in Scripture is important to the church and child of God. We must abide by God's Word!

The first place in which Scripture sets forth the qualifications of

deacons is Acts 6:3, 5, part of the record of the institution of the office. The apostles directed the church to select seven men for the work of the diaconate, according to verse 3: "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." One of the men whom the church chose was "Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost" (v. 5). The apostles understood the need to have qualified men for the work, and they knew that the chief qualification was that one be filled with the Holy Ghost. For the instruction of the church in later years, Scripture records that these requirements were followed. Stephen in particular was an eminently qualified man. The church in that day understood the importance of a deacon being qualified.

Scripture sets forth the qualifications in more detail in I Timothy 3:8-12: "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well."

In writing those words, and in writing previously of the qualifications of elders, the inspired apostle Paul means to underscore for the young pastor Timothy the

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importance of these qualifications. Men who do not meet these requirements may not be put into the office of deacon in the church. Paul says in verses 14-15, "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

How to behave in God's house — an important matter indeed!



A second way in which the importance of the issue can be shown, and again from Scripture itself, is to note that when Scripture speaks explicitly of the office of the deacon, it says very little about the *work* of the diaconate, instead placing the emphasis on the *qualifications* of the deacons.

Of course, none of us would argue that the kind of work which the deacons do is not important. Nor is it the case that Scripture says nothing of their work. Acts 6:1-2 does say that these seven men should "serve tables," that is, care for the widows in the "daily ministration." Romans 12:8; I Corinthians 12:28, and other passages speak to the subject of the deacons' work. But when Scripture clearly indicates that it is giving instruction regarding the office of deacon, as it does in Acts 6:1-6 and I Timothy 3:8-13, that instruction takes the form of teaching us what the *qualifications* for the office are. Certainly God also views the deacons' work as important, but He seems to be impressing on us that He is *as* concerned, if not *more* concerned, with what kind of men they are! The wrong kind of man trying to do the work of the diaconate will not be a blessing to the church!

In light of Scripture's emphasis on the qualifications rather than the work of the office, we note with interest that our Reformed confessions emphasize exactly the oppo-

site. They speak to the work of the diaconate, and the manner of calling the deacons, but say very little about the matter of qualifications.

Our Belgic Confession, the only one of our Three Forms of Unity which mentions the diaconate, sets forth briefly the work of the deacons and the general importance of the diaconate. Its only mention of the qualifications is found in the concluding sentence of Article 30, and applies as well to elders and pastors: "By these means everything will be carried on in the church with good order and decency, when faithful men are chosen according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his epistle to Timothy."

The Church Order says nothing about the necessary qualifications of deacons, but instead explains how the deacons must be chosen to office, and what their work is.

The Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons speaks primarily to their work. In four places, the Form does imply, but not specifically state, that the deacons must be qualified men. The first question put to the elders and deacons is, "whether you do not feel in your hearts that ye are lawfully called of God's church, and consequently of God Himself, to these your respective holy offices?" The feeling in one's heart that one is lawfully called, and especially called of *God*, implies that the deacon-elect has examined in his heart whether he is qualified for the work. The third question asks, in part, "Do you also jointly promise to walk in all godliness...." Godliness — that, in sum, is what is required of the deacon according to I Timothy 3:8ff. In the exhortation section, the Form quotes, without saying so, I Timothy 3:9,13. The form says, "... and hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.... In so doing you will purchase to yourselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.... "

While Paul wrote these words regarding the deacons, the Form applies this to elders also! Lastly, as regards the Form, the prayer includes petitions for God's spiritual gifts to come upon them, that they might do their work. The church thanks the Lord that "Thou hast at present granted us in this place men who are of good testimony, and we hope endowed with Thy Spirit. We beseech Thee, replenish them more and more with such gifts as are necessary for them in their ministration — with the gifts of wisdom, courage, discretion, and benevolence, to the end that every one may, in his respective office, acquit himself as is becoming" Important gifts are prayed for; but only by implication does one think of the qualifications set forth in I Timothy 3.

In my view, this relative silence of our confessions about the qualifications of the diaconate further emphasizes the importance of the scriptural qualifications in I Timothy 3. The Belgic Confession explicitly drew attention to this importance. The silence of the other confessions on the matter indicates that Scripture's teaching is clear. The confessions speak to areas in which we need more specific direction, because Scripture gives only broad principles regarding the work and calling of deacons. Regarding their qualifications, however, Scripture's principles are not broad; they are direct and specific. The church needs no confessional guidance here. God will have only such men as fit the qualifications of I Timothy 3:8ff. be deacons in His church!



The faithful church has always considered this issue of proper qualifications of deacons to be important. I did not write that "the church" has always considered this important, for she has not; when the church became unfaithful to God's Word, she lost her sense of the importance of God's require-

ments of a deacon in I Timothy 3:8ff. But the "faithful church," being faithful to God's Word, viewed God's Word in I Timothy 3 as important. A few historical notes about the church's view of this matter will suffice to demonstrate this.

In the post-apostolic age, when the church was still fairly strong, the church kept in mind the requirements of I Timothy 3. Peter Y. DeJong refers to at least three documents to substantiate this claim. The *Didache*, written about A.D. 98, says: "Appoint, therefore, for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, not lovers of money, truthful and approved...."¹ Toward the end of the second century, the *Apostolic Constitutions* was written, which required deacons to have been proved, be exemplary in conduct, and have a family with children. Also the *Book of Clement* indicates that I Timothy 3 was followed.²

The decline of the diaconate had begun by the fourth century, and lasted until the Reformation period. One aspect of the decline of the diaconate was that the qualifications for the office were

changed or ignored.³

John Calvin emphasized the need for deacons to be qualified.⁴ In London, John à Lasco did the same thing.⁵

Today as well, faithful churches will know and seek to follow the requirements of I Timothy 3:8-12, and will consider them important.



Why is this matter one of such great importance?

First, as has been mentioned, because it is a matter of the Word of God. That is reason enough. But we can add more.

Second, because the deacon is the representative of God to His people, the personal representative of Jesus Christ to His church! He must, therefore, be Christ-like. Dishonor would be brought to the church and the office if a deacon were not a godly man. Remember that by David's sin, great occasion was given to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

Third, because God gives deacons. We do not merely choose them; God gives them! How can the church be sure that those cho-

sen are ones by whom God will bless her? By choosing those who are qualified.

We must never forget the great importance of this subject. The qualifications set forth in God's Word must always guide councils in nominating, and male voting members in choosing, men to the diaconate. The chairman of the meeting does well to read I Timothy 3 every time the council nominates, and at every congregational meeting in which officebearers are elected. Currently serving elders and deacons do well to read the chapter at home, in private devotions and in preparation for coming to the meeting in which nominations will be made.

That we might rightly behave in God's house! And manifest also in this way our faithfulness to Him!

1. Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), page 45.

2. *Ibid.*, pages 46, 47.

3. The reader can consult volume 75, pages 327-329 of the *Standard Bearer* to refresh his memory about this.

4. Cf. his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 4, Section 3, Paragraph 12.

5. Cf. DeJong, *op. cit.*, page 65.

Prediluvian Period

Chapter VII

God's Judgment on Wicked Man(2)

God's Judgment with Regard to His Dealings with Man

A second, closely connected, statement of Genesis 6 is the one in verse 3, concerning the Lord's dealings with man in the prediluvian period.

What is the meaning of this striving of God's Spirit with man?

There is an interpretation of this expression which holds that there is a nonsaving and nonregenerating operation of the Holy Spirit whereby sin is graciously restrained in man, so that he is not as depraved as he might possibly be and so that he is even capable of doing good. According to this view, the striving of the

Spirit signifies a general working of the Spirit, restraining man's wickedness and restraining the development of sin. This operation of the Spirit, then, continued throughout the period from the Fall to the Flood; and the verse under consideration declares that God will cease this restraining operation and abandon man to his own counsels and wickedness, with the result that after 120 years man's days shall be ended.

Exegetically, however, this view is impossible. In the first place, we point out that *striving* is not the same as *restraining*. The expression means, rather, a judging, an opposing by speech. In the second place, the simple fact is that sin was not restrained during this period, but had, on the contrary, become great. In the third place, the meaning of verse 3 is not that the Lord *now*, that is, at a point 120 years before the Flood, abandoned man and ceased to strive with him, but rather that this striving would end after another 120 years, that is, in the final judgment on the human race in the Flood.

In the light of the above reasons, this idea of a restraint of sin certainly falls away. But let us take a moment to consider this entire matter. For this is important with respect to our understanding of history — not only the history of this particular period, but all of history. Is this history, and all history, to be construed in terms of such a dualistic conception, according to which sin is some kind of power apart from God, but a power which He restrains? Or is it rather true that the Lord our God follows a straight course in the realization of His counsel concerning all things, along the lines of sin and grace, so that always — also with respect to sin — it remains true that His counsel shall stand, and He performs all His good pleasure; so that all things are realized as fast as they possibly can be with a view to God's purpose, and so that the final purpose of God is achieved

as soon as possible, and that, too, along the lines of sin and grace; and so that always the motif of God's work is expressed in the words, "Behold, I come quickly"? The latter, not the former, represents the correct understanding of history.

The Scriptures are very clear on this point.

Consider, in the first place, the simple fact of Bible history that in the space of sixteen and a half centuries the first world became ripe for judgment, final judgment for that age. Put that in terms of the new dispensation. This would mean that the world would have been destroyed already three centuries ago! Comparatively, the pronouncement of verse 3 would have been made about the time of the Reformation! If it is true of our New Testament era that the Lord comes quickly, then how true it was of that first era of world history that there was no restraint whatsoever, but a rapid and ever-accelerating degeneration.

Consider, in the second place, the fact that repeatedly and in various ways the Scriptures hold up the world before the Flood as a prime example, not of a world which produced much good and in which the power and operation of sin were checked by the Spirit of God, but of a world at its very worst. There never was a period in all of history in which sin revealed itself so terribly and in so short a time and in which the world became ripe for judgment and destruction so quickly as that period before the Flood. This is plain from the context in Genesis 6, a context which speaks of amalgamation of the church and the world, which speaks of the fact that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, which speaks of the fact that the earth was filled with violence by wicked men. There is not a hint of a sin-restraining process in this entire history; all one can read of is ever-increasing wickedness. Besides, this testimony is repeatedly

corroborated in the New Testament. This is the testimony of the Epistle of Jude. It is the testimony of Peter. It is the testimony of the Lord Jesus Himself. The men of this period were completely characterized by fleshly lusts and by striving after the things of this world and of the flesh. God was not in all their thoughts.

Thus it was that in that short span of time wickedness had so developed and progressed that the Scriptures use the strong expression that the Lord was grieved at His heart and it repented Him that He had made man on the earth, and that He was resolved to destroy the whole world. No, far from any kind of checking of the development of sin, the entire record of the Scriptures bespeak a swift and ever-accelerating development of sin by which the entire world hastened to destruction.

This striving of the Spirit was something which is in a way the very opposite of restraint. It constitutes an important element in the explanation of the fast development of the race in wickedness.

As we said already, "to strive" does not denote some mystical and direct operation of the Spirit upon the ungodly. It means "to contend with, to testify against, and thus to judge and to condemn." Thus the term is used more than once in the Scriptures as meaning "to contend with someone, to disagree, to contend in speech with an opponent, and thus to condemn his attitude and works." This is what God did by His Spirit during that first period of history. God made Himself known. He witnessed of Himself. He did this through His Spirit. He did this in opposition to the wicked schemes and imaginations and works of man. Thus He judged and condemned and bound the responsibility of their wickedness upon men's own hearts. Briefly, this testimony of God was that He *is*, that He is *righteous*, and that He must be *served and glorified*.

Objectively, this testimony was conveyed not only in the things that are made (Rom. 1:18ff.), but by His word. This took place in more than one way. God spoke directly, as in the case of Cain. He spoke through the testimony in word and deed of the true sons of God at that time, who shone as lights in the midst of darkness and who by walking as children of the light condemned the unfruitful works of darkness. Thus, for example, there was the testimony of a righteous Abel over against his wicked brother, a testimony wrought by the Spirit of God. Moreover, God spoke through His prophets. Enoch was a prophet. The mere fact that all of his prophecy is not recorded in the Scriptures (Jude, 14, 15) makes no difference. Enoch prophesied. He not only condemned the world by his walking with God, but he was outspoken and sharp in his condemnation of the world and in his warning that the Lord was "coming with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all." You may depend on it that just as the idea of the second coming of Christ is today known all over the world, though believed only by the children of God, so the coming of the Lord for judgment was by no means an idea foreign to that world. It was known everywhere, though only the people of God believed it. Noah also was a prophet: a preacher of righteousness, according to the Scriptures. He not only built the ark during the 120 years before the Flood. He preached! He warned of the coming judgment, though none heeded him. Mind you, for 120 years! It was the Spirit of God who spoke in these prophets. Thus God strove with and opposed wicked men at that time through His Spirit.

Subjectively also, however, the Spirit of God strives with man. He witnesses — in connection with that objective testimony — in the heart of every man. He convinces and convicts men that that objec-

tive testimony is true, that it is indeed the word of God. He convicts men that God is, and that He is good, and that transgression of His law is wicked and deserves condemnation.

Thus it can be understood also that this very strife of God with wicked men became a means whereby they hurtled all the more rapidly down the road of iniquity unto final destruction. For the result of this striving is not that man is left altogether unaffected. In the spiritual, ethical sense a man never stands still. He either repents and returns to God, or he advances on the road of iniquity. Moreover, this takes place exactly under the impetus of the word of God. Surely, wicked man is not changed spiritually by this striving of the Spirit. But this testimony of the Lord, when it is not mixed with grace, does not leave him unaffected. It hardens man's heart.

When God speaks, wicked man, untouched by the grace of conversion, sets himself against that testimony. He resists it, opposes it, refuses to heed it, contradicts it. He cannot and will not and cannot will to do anything else. For the carnal mind is enmity against God. What happens then? The striving of the Spirit rouses the enmity of the natural heart into more furious and ever more determined opposition to God. When God says, "Yea," wicked man with rebellious fist raised says, "Nay." When God very emphatically and seriously warns him of wrath to come and of judgment and demands that he turn from his wicked way and repent, the wicked, untouched by the power of divine grace, responds with ever more determined refusal. As God's strife becomes more forceful and emphatic, the natural heart hardens itself, becomes ever more insensible even from a natural point of view, and develops more determinedly in sin. Thus man becomes hardened and ripe for judgment, holding the truth under in unrighteousness.

Neither is such hardening of the heart to be viewed only from man's point of view, independent of the operation of the Spirit of God. For the Scriptures plainly teach that God hardens the heart of the wicked, that He gives them a spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear. He employs His own word to harden whom He will. God's word is always living and powerful. Always it performs that to which He sends it. Always it either melts the heart into floods of repentance, or it hardens it unto stubborn rebellion. It quickens, or it kills. It is a savor of life unto life, but also a savor of death unto death. It brings men into the delightful experience of covenant communion with the living God in Christ, or it hastens them to everlasting destruction and ripens them for the day of judgment. It removes the burden of sin and death, but it also brings double stripes. It is a testimony which man hears and to which he reacts as a creature with mind and will, indeed, but it is also a word which God employs and by which He fulfills His own sovereign purpose. As God employs it, He is absolutely sovereign; because man employs that word and reacts to it, he remains morally responsible. But let it be clearly understood that the natural man is dead in sin and misery, and that he will not and cannot and cannot will to do anything but assume an attitude of rebellion over against the testimony of the word of God, except for the regenerating grace of a sovereign and sovereignly predestinating God.

In this light this striving of the Spirit can be understood as part of the narrative of the conditions and circumstances and the judicial ground of the destruction of the first world by the Flood. In this light we can understand this striving of the Spirit as the means whereby the sovereign Lord was executing His own counsel even in and through the wickedness of

wicked men, to the end that His own determinate purpose might be reached in the Flood.

God's Judgment with Regard to the End

Genesis 6 teaches us plainly that God was terribly displeased with the wicked world — the very opposite of the idea of a common favor of God. It repented God that He had made man in the earth.

We must not lose the significance of this statement when we call it an anthropomorphism, a human way of speaking about the divine mind. Of course, we must remember that God is immutable: there is no variableness or shadow of turning in Him. He knows all things from eternity in His own determinate counsel. From this point of view, God's repentance means that what is true with God eternally and unchangeably is revealed in history in a succession of moments. But the significance of God's repenting does not lie here. The root idea of the term is that of sorrow, of pity. It conveys the idea of pitying oneself with regard to something, of grieving. And thus, it implies the desire to *undo* a thing — something which is impossible with man, but possible with God. Hence, the meaning is that God is so terribly displeased with man's works in the earth (God's earth), that God grieved over it, would tolerate it no longer, and thus desired to destroy man from the earth.

In the second place, we learn from verse 3 that the Lord determined upon a definite end. His Spirit strives with man, but shall not *always* strive with man. There will come an end to this continual striving and contending. The reason is that man is flesh: the more


clearly the light of God's testimony was made to shine upon the ungodliness of men, the more glaring and naked became their rebellion, and the more fully it became manifest that man, mere, natural, fallen man, was but flesh, utterly carnal and without God in the world. His very nature is corrupt. And therefore the contending of the Spirit does not continue forever. There comes an end. There is but one end possible, namely, that in righteous judgment and destruction God reveals that He is God and makes man feel and acknowledge that He is God.

At this point in history, the contending of the Spirit would continue for only one hundred twenty years. They are not years of grace for the wicked world, but years of the continued striving of the Spirit, and thus years of announcement of coming judgment, especially through Noah. This is the final striving of the Spirit. By it the sinfulness of the sin of that dispensation would be fully revealed and exposed. Thus the measure of iniquity would be filled, and God would be justified in His judgment.

Then would come the revelation of the righteous judgment of God in the Flood.

Thus the purpose of the manifestation of God's grace must be served. It must be plain that nothing will save the world except the forgiving and regenerating grace of God in Christ Jesus. Apart from that grace, certain destruction is inevitable.

Besides, in connection with the positive development of the history of this period, we must not forget that all of this stands in the service of the work of God's grace in and in behalf of the seed of the woman, His people. Positively speaking, it was for their sake that the world and all created things existed. As

long as they were in the earth, so long the world must stand and cannot be destroyed. But when there is none left except Noah and his seven, then it is time for the Lord to arise in His mighty vengeance, to deliver His own and to execute judgment upon the world. Thus, when the world developed and became stronger in power and in all kinds of accomplishments, and when the people of God were decimated both through the defection of those who amalgamated with the world and through persecution, the number of the people of God became steadily smaller until finally only Noah and his family were left. But remember, it was for the sake of the seed of the woman, for the sake of the church that the whole creation existed. If they were gone, then there would no longer be any reason for the world to exist. Remember too, however, that though as far as this prediluvian dispensation was concerned, its history was fast drawing to a close, yet it was not the final end. The Great Seed of the woman had not yet come. The final victory over the devil and his seed had not yet been won. Hence, the people of God might not be cut off. Noah and his seven, the church, must be preserved! But at this stage in history, if the world were allowed to continue, the seed of the woman would be completely destroyed. Things had reached a breaking point in history. The power of sin had so developed and become manifest that the earth was *filled*, universally filled, with violence. The measure of iniquity for that age was filled. It was time for God to work! Zion must be redeemed through judgment. The time for the judgment of the world, which is at the same time the salvation of the church, had in a relative and typical sense arrived. And so the end of all flesh was come before God, but in the service of the work of His grace and the maintenance and realization of His promise and His covenant. 

*God's word
is always living
and powerful.
Always it
performs
that to which
He sends it.
Always it either
melts the heart
into floods
of repentance,
or it hardens
it unto stubborn
rebellion.
It quickens,
or it kills.*

No Quick Way to Make Disciples



Recently I was walking towards the bus-stop when a young man who lives across the street from us pulled up to me on his bicycle and began to chat.

"I understand you are a pastor," he said. I affirmed the accuracy of his information. He continued, "I would like to come and join your church." That got my attention, though I felt a bit uncomfortable with his calling FERC *my church*.

"And why do you want to join my church," I interjected. "How many baptisms did you have last year?" he asked. I thought a moment, realizing he was speaking about adults who were converted. "Well, about five, if I recall properly." "My church had over a thousand," he gleefully responded. "See, you need me." By this time I began to realize the direction of our conversation.

The bus stop was looming closer, so I had to hurry. "I think you and I have quite a different idea of preparing converts for baptism," I bravely asserted. "When we baptize adult converts, we instruct them for at least a year, sometimes more, to prepare them. How much instruction do you give them?" "Oh," he said, "we baptize them in the Spirit and that's quick."

"And why do you think your

coming to my church will help us," I asked. His answer, "I have the power of the Spirit. I can speak in tongues. I feel I should use my gifts in a small congregation. My church numbers thousands."

Squeezed for time, I explained as best I could the difference between a biblical and Reformed view of saving souls and the perverted doctrine of the Charismatics. At the end he asked, "Did you feel anything while I was speaking with you?" "Nothing," I answered. "Then you don't have the Spirit and my efforts would be in vain anyway." With that he rode off with his bike and I waited for my bus. He is in National Service, so my guess would be he is about 20 years of age.

While I rode the bus, I reflected a bit on a recent article in the *Straits Times*, where it was reported that during this past year, Christianity in Singapore was the religion with the greatest percentage of growth. Even then, it still is only about thirteen percent of the population of about three million. Thinking about the "growth" in this young man's church, the statistics diminished in value. Then if we add to that the preponderance of Roman Catholics who fly under the banner of Christians, and the miserable persistence of Arminian error, the reported growth of Christianity has a rather hollow ring. Every convert ought to be a qualified disciple prior to baptism. What a blessing to be part of a church that carefully and faithfully works with converts in such a way that Christ may be formed in them (Gal. 4:19). That takes much travail.

Temptation of Easy Disciple-making

Now that we seem to be focused on numbers, there is a good way to look at numbers when it comes to the growth of the church. When Jesus gave those powerful words of Matthew 28:18-20, He was interested in adding more people, for as these disciples are made, the numbers of Christians increase. The book of Acts reminds us of the same thing, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). Surely, God blesses the Word preached in both senses of the sweet smelling savour (II Cor. 2:14-17). For the preacher and the church, there is a great desire and urgency of heart that God may be pleased to save the people who come under the preaching of the gospel. Though the sovereign God has limited desire to save, the preacher has broader desires. The reason is obvious: we are not God. We do not know whom God is pleased to save. Hence, the drive to reach out, preach, witness to the lost is exactly that they may be saved. How many of them become saved is God's sovereign domain. And always and again we finite creatures must bow before such a sovereign will and good pleasure.

From this perspective we can understand that easy disciple-making is a real temptation. Some are just plain lazy and want results without hard work. Others like to think God can do wonders in ways He has never promised. Then there are the temptations to gloat in numbers. After all, success is statistical, and that means counting

noses. For many churches the proof of missionary success is in the results, and that means numbers. For many missionaries, the burden of success is that the God they represent is able to save, and often times in dramatic ways which demonstrate power over false gods and demons and such like. Then one needs souls to prove it.

To satisfy this demand for numbers, Christian leaders have resorted to many schemes. If numbers dictate methodology, the human mind can be very inventive. The easy believism of Arminianism is an affront to a sovereign God. Man has a free-will to respond to the four spiritual laws, and if used properly these can bring a soul into heaven. Reaction against such "fundamentalism" stimulated the social-gospel message. Proponents of it insist that there is more to becoming a Christian than individual salvation. There must be cultural benefit. Churches and missionaries got on the band-wagon by involving themselves in social issues such as democratic forms of government, education, proper treatment of women, elimination of poverty, and such like. Between these two extremes, we find many missions given over to an attempt to hold to traditional Christianity but contextualize it into a palatable and understandable format for non-Christians. So we see that attempts at missionary success go on and on.

What they all have in mind is some easy way to make disciples. It is that the message is easier for the missionary to bring, more attractive to non-adherents, or the approach he takes is the result of the latest "think-tank" on mission strategy which suggests success.

God's Way of Disciple-making

Just focus on the kind of disciple God has in view. The person to be baptized must be a true convert. Now, obviously, all such converts will not be alike. There is quite a difference between the aged

80-plus gentleman who is converted on his deathbed and the young teenager who is involved in the youth group. There is a difference between the educated businessman who boasted for years about his free-thinking and the Chinese educated who struggles with Chinese dialect and is encumbered with the superstitions of Taoism. Nevertheless, every disciple of Christ must be converted from all his past sins of unbelief and wicked practices and replace them with Christian faith both as to belief and life's practices. If a disciple is truly converted, he knows *God* as his God and Jesus as his Savior. He is overwhelmed with His sins of the past, and he desires forgiveness in order to be at peace with God. That peace can continue only in a life of obedience and thankful praise of the God who saved him. He must be a disciple willing and able to serve his Master.

That doesn't come quickly or easily. Some may enter glory with little of this experience, as is the case with deathbed conversions. But for anyone who has the sacred privilege of being converted and being used by God in the midst of His church on earth, the process takes much time, prayer, learning, struggling, and surrender.

I think of the contrast between Madam Yip (her real name) and Ah Moi (not her real name)

While CERC was out tracting (distributing flyers, inviting people to come to a gospel meeting), they came to the home of Madam Yip. She was in her nineties, not able to speak English, only broken Cantonese. She allowed the visitors to come in and talk. They shared with her the gospel, briefly, and asked if they could come again. This led to a regular Sunday afternoon visit by one of the sisters of the church (one of the few who could speak Cantonese). She went to her flat and read the Bible and explained the passage. This went on for over two years. As Madam Yip grew in her faith, the

church sent one of the elders/pastors who gave her more systematic instruction in the Christian faith. Within a year, she was prepared to express her faith in a simple, godly fashion. As the elder's questions penetrated deeper when he examined her to assess a "credible profession," she replied somewhat upset, "What more do you want, do you want me to take my heart out, so that you can see that I love God?" The work of the Spirit had borne its fruit. She was baptized at 91 years of age. Because all her children were non-Christian, she had to depend upon the church for her spiritual support. This was especially true when the relative with whom she lived hated her for becoming a Christian and thereby abandoning her family tradition. To give her a hard time, she filled the rooms of the flat with idol gods, fifty plus, all over the place. You could not look anywhere without seeing idols, and the old lady was overwhelmed with grief. Now she has been delivered from that frustration, as she is in an old-folks home. When she comes to church, one of the members summarizes in Cantonese the message. Since she is a little deaf, it gets a bit distracting, but we all understand. Even with such an aged saint, her conversion was not quick and easy, it took years. And her faith is very childlike, yet profound.

Contrast that with Ah Moi, the first young lady in Singapore that I led to Christ. She came to CERC quite unexpectedly. She had been on holiday to Australia and met a young man there. They took a shine to each other, but the young man was from the Reformed Church in the Netherlands and she was a Buddhist from Singapore. Correctly, he had said to her, I cannot be serious about marriage unless you become a Christian and also join a Reformed church. He flew back to Holland, she returned to Singapore. She looked up "Reformed Church" in the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory,

and CERC was the only one listed. That's how she showed up in church that first night.

She was a knowledgeable Buddhist and knew nothing of Christianity or of the Reformed faith. Fearful that this was conversion for marriage, I proceeded slowly. Every Saturday for over two years we spent an hour to an hour and a half in our study of the Bible. She explained to me Buddhism, and I taught her the truth of Christianity. She was not easily persuaded, not even to get a husband. The Lord worked slowly and persistently. Somewhere in the middle of her studies, her future husband came to visit her in Singapore and was quite pleased with her progress. It was with a mixture of fear and pleasure that I watched that romance bloom into marriage. She was baptized in CERC shortly before they were married in Singapore and then off they went to live in the Netherlands. I have to be honest, we did receive some letters sprinkled with tears and

frustration. How would she ever survive in *that* country? With God's help she worked out her difficulties, and both are now settled in his Dutch church and community. During her most recent visit to Singapore, her little girl was carrying an alphabet book with each picture described in Dutch.

The Spirit did not wave a magic wand over Madam Yip or Ah Moi and work quickly and easily. It took years of tears and struggle. And so it always is. There are no exceptions. God works through His Word, by His Spirit, as it is diligently brought to those whom God wills to save. The key is the Word of God. When we get away from that and think there is a shortcut and a quick fix because of magical revelations and divine communications, we get into serious trouble.

The way to the human heart is through the mind, and the way into the mind is the written and spoken word of instruction. God continues to gather His church by the preaching of the gospel.


Making Disciples, God's Work

It is so reassuring to read and reread the words of Matthew 28:18-20. There Jesus says that we are to make disciples by the ministry of the word and baptizing. As they come to conversion and faith, He adds, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The holy life is an inseparable part of conversion. That, too, must be taught. It doesn't come with the magic of baptism or by some quick infusion of grace.

My young neighbor, notwithstanding.

How precious is the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." That comes from Jesus, who had just asserted, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

How else would we give all the glory to God and erase any boasting of men?

God bless each one of you in your disciple-making. 

That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Miss Agatha Lubbers

Establishing Schools to Provide Reformed Covenant Education (7)

This article, one in a series of articles that began November 15, 1998, continues the examination of the critique by Rev. George M. Ophoff and Rev. Herman Hoeksema of six Specific Principles that were adopted in 1925 by the Christian School Union. The Christian School Union was later known as the national Union

of Christian Schools (NUCS) and is currently denominated the Christian Schools International (CSI). The critique was contained in articles that were written for the *Standard Bearer* by G.M. Ophoff in 1926 and by H. Hoeksema in the early 1930s. The writers contended that the six Specific Principles that had been composed by the leadership of Christian School Union were principles that were lacking in specificity and were not truly Reformed. They contended that these principles were not the kind

required for truly Reformed Christian schools. This series of articles has demonstrated that the ideas of G.M. Ophoff and H. Hoeksema have had a pronounced influence on the Protestant Reformed Christian schools because the ideas are reflected in their basic principles.

An Examination and Review of the Critique and Restatement of the Specific Principles

The world is steeped in sin. All aspects of life, individual and family, social and political, industrial and eco-

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nomic, even the animal world, nature and things inanimate, show the mars and scars, the subversions and perversions of sin (Rom. 8:22). The virtue, order, and beauty which is still present in the world is a manifestation of God's goodness (Matt. 5:45).

The Fourth Specific Principle

Herman Hoeksema began his article in the May 1, 1932 issue of the *Standard Bearer* (vol. 8, pp. 342-344) by stating that it was obvious that the specific principles were composed under the influence of the spirit that became manifest in 1924. This spirit, he said, had expressed itself in the "Three Points of Common Grace." Hoeksema said that he saw evidences of this same influence of common grace in the fourth plank in the platform that was adopted in 1925 by the Christian School Union only a year after the well-known synod of 1924.

Hoeksema indicated that the first part of the fourth specific principle had a positive sound. The principle speaks of a world that is steeped in sin. It speaks of the mars, the scars, the subversions, and the perversions of sin. The principle appears to teach that in all phases and aspects of life, sin becomes manifest and corrupts all things.

Although Hoeksema is willing to grant that the fourth principle has a positive sound, he immediately noted that the first part is ambiguous and is not specific. He asserted that this fourth principle is characterized by a certain verbosity that is deceiving. The first part of the principle leaves room for the second part of the statement that speaks incorrectly concerning the virtue, order, and beauty that is still present in the world. Hoeksema wrote as follows: "It is difficult to conceive how this last part could still speak of virtue in the world, of a virtue that is a manifestation of the goodness of God, if the first part actually teaches what it appears to express at the first sight" (p. 343).

Hoeksema contended that the

world is indeed steeped in sin and that every aspect of the life of the world reveals the subversions and perversions of sin. If that is true, how then could anyone still include the assertion that along with this perversity and perversion there also is virtue in the world?

At this point Hoeksema asked another very relevant and necessary question, "What is virtue?" He answered the question as follows: "It (virtue) is moral goodness and excellency. It is integrity of heart and mind. It is purity of soul. It is the power, the ethical power, to perform deeds that are good, that can carry God's own approval" (p. 343).

Having offered a definition and description of virtue, Hoeksema stated that the fourth principle states something that it does not prove. Hoeksema asserted that the authors obviously believed that everyone should simply assume that this statement is true. Hoeksema noted that the authors seem to think that it ought to be evident to everyone that there really is such virtue in man, such moral excellency and purity of soul, such integrity of heart and mind in the world — in a world that is steeped in sin.

At this point Hoeksema asserted that the authors of this specific principle certainly cannot have believed that the reference from Matthew 5:45 could relate to this statement. He said Matthew 5:45 speaks of rain and sunshine upon the just and unjust promiscuously, but it does not mention one word of a certain virtue of the natural man that is supposed to be a manifestation of the goodness of God. He also noted that the authors do not use any other passage from Scripture to provide proof for the fourth principle.

Hoeksema stated that the authors of the fourth principle could not have found any other passage in Scripture because the Word of God never speaks of the virtue and moral excellence of the natural man who is dead in sin and trespasses. The

Word of God teaches exactly the opposite — that natural man is wholly corrupt and perverse in all his ways.

Hoeksema noted that the tacit assumption of the authors of the fourth principle concerning the virtue in the world was their conclusion concerning their perception of the different aspects of life. Concerning this observation and their conclusion he said, "the conclusion is quite in conflict with the judgment of the Word of God" (p. 343).

Although Hoeksema provided no other references from Scripture, there are many references that could have been cited to prove that man is by nature not endowed with the virtue that the fourth principle assumes. Following are several passages from the Word of God that speak the truth concerning the condition of natural man.

♦ Genesis 6:5 — "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination* (or the whole imagination) of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (*The Hebrew word translated imagination signifies not only the imagination but also the *purposes and desires*.)

♦ Genesis 8:21 — "... and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth...."

♦ Jeremiah 17:9 — "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

♦ Job 14:4 — "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one."

♦ Ephesians 2:3 — "... and were by nature children of wrath even as the others."

Hoeksema also contended that the authors could not have appealed to the Reformed confessions. He wrote, "They (the confessions) do not teach there is virtue in the world of sinful men, but that the natural man by virtue of the remnants of natural light can have some *regard* for virtue" (p. 343). Hoeksema wrote that this *regard for virtue* is quite different from the statement in the fourth

principle that fallen man as he is by nature is actually virtuous.

The term "regard for virtue" used by Hoeksema in his critique is a crucial and well-known phrase found in the Canons of Dordt, III/IV, Art. 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 maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion, that *he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil*. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God."

The confessions that Hoeksema referred to include the Heidelberg Catechism. Lord's Day 3, Question and Answer 8 states: "Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness? Indeed we are, except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God."

Concerning the intended meaning in the minds of the authors of the fourth principle, Hoeksema rhetorically asked, "Now surely the authors of this platform do not express themselves correctly, when they ascribe this virtue of the world to a certain goodness of God. It must be due to a *goodness of man, a goodness that remained in him and that is preserved in him by the 'restraining grace'* that is mentioned in the preceding article (Art. 3) of these Specific Principles. We may safely assume that this is just what the statement implies."

In his analysis of the fourth principle Hoeksema attempted to determine how it is conceivable that the authors of the principle could speak of "a certain virtue in the world" in the light of the first part of the prin-

ciple. This first part speaks of "a world that is steeped in sin."

Here Hoeksema returned again to his concern about the ambiguity of the principles. He contended that they are not as specific as they claim to be. Hoeksema wrote:

It may be pointed out that the term "world" in the Specific Principle is ambiguous. It is not quite clear whether by it the authors mean "the evil world of ungodly men" or "the organic world of creation," for in the rest of the Specific Principle they speak of both, including animals, nature, and inanimate things (p. 343).

It cannot escape our attention, that the Specific Principle merely states that the aspects of life *show* the subversions and perversions of sin (p. 343).

Hoeksema pointed out that the fourth principle declared that in every aspect of life — the family, society, the state, political, economic, industrial — are the mars, the scars, the subversions, and the perversions of sin. Hoeksema expressed surprise that the authors had not added the ecclesiastical dimension because he did not believe this aspect of life was exempt from these mars, scars, subversions, and perversions caused by sin.

Concerning these statements in the fourth principle, Hoeksema observed that the writers assume that we must "understand that in these aspects of life, alongside these manifestations of sin and depravity, there is still room for a manifestation of virtue, of integrity of heart, of purity of soul, of moral excellence. In the world, in every phase and aspect of life, you behold manifestations of sin and of virtue side by side" (p. 343).

At this point in the argument, Hoeksema asked a series of pertinent and probing questions. They are:

1. Why Christian schools if this is the truth?

2. Is the line of demarcation between God's people and the world not entirely obliterated in

this statement (principle)?

3. Is not this description of the ethical condition of "the world" exactly applicable to the church as well?

4. Why did the authors omit the mention of the ecclesiastical aspect of life?

5. We are not Roman Catholics, are we, so that we divide the world into different aspects and call one aspect holy?

6. Is it not true that the Christian lives in these different aspect of life, and that the subversions and perversions of sin become manifest in all these phases as well as the goodness and virtue that is due to the grace of God?

Hoeksema responded to his litany of questions as follows: "And thus the distinction between God's people and the world is clearly denied. And with the denial of this distinction there is no conceivable *raison d'être** for separate Christian schools." (*Reason or justification for being in existence.)

Hoeksema concluded this discussion of the Specific Principles of the Christian School Union as he had concluded all the others with a proposed revision. He suggested the following version as Principle 4:

In the midst of and in distinction from the evil world, that lieth in darkness and is perverse in all its ways because of sin, it is the calling of the people of God to live by grace from the principle of regeneration according to the will of God in every sphere of life — individual, family, social, industrial, political, and ecclesiastical — so that they may be children of light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Hence, they insist that all education, that must prepare their children for such an all-sided Christian walk in the world, shall be adapted to this purpose.

We conclude our review and discussion with an observation similar to that which we have made several times before. We again should observe that the proposed

principle is more than a last paragraph in an article written nearly seventy years ago. The basic kernel and truth of Hoeksema's re-statement and proposed principle is found in the constitutions adopted by the Protestant Re-

formed Christian Schools. An example will illustrate this point.

Our sovereign, triune, covenant God has from eternity chosen and in time forms a people unto Him-

self, that they may stand in covenant relationship to Him, and live to His praise in friendship and loving service in all spheres of life, in the midst of a sinful world.

... to be continued 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

On Friday evening, January 26, and again on Saturday morning, January 27, the Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Holland, MI sponsored their Third Annual Reformed Bible Conference. This year's conference looked at Pentecostalism and asked the question whether it is a "Spirit-Filled Blessing or a Dangerous Heresy?" Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on Friday evening under the theme, "Pentecostalism — Its Identity, History, and Influence." He was followed the next morning by Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, speaking on the subject, "Pentecostalism — Its View of Special Gifts," or the subject of speaking in tongues, faith healing, prayer, and on-going revelation. This was supposed to be followed by Rev. C. Terpstra, pastor at First in Holland, speaking on the topic, "Pentecostalism: Its View of the Christian Life," or the question of the second baptism, perfectionism, joy, etc. I say was supposed to be, because Rev. Terpstra was ill that Saturday morning and was unable to present his part of the conference. So that subject will have to wait until a later date. I will even be so bold as to add here that if you would be interested in a tape of either of the speeches that were given you can simply write First's Evangelism Committee at 3641 104th Ave., Hol-

land, MI 49424 and request one, they are \$4.00 each.

We will also add here by way of a reminder to our readers in the west Michigan area that our Grandville, MI PRC is hosting an Elders' Seminar this month. Perhaps it is too late to attend the March 1 class on "The Office of Elder," but hopefully you can make plans to attend the other three sessions. March 8 on "Qualifications of the Office"; March 15 on "Elders and the Care of the Congregation"; and March 22 on "Elders and Visiting the Sick." The teacher for all four of these classes will be Prof. R. Decker, Professor of Practical Theology at our churches' Theological School.

Once again this year the congregation of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI, through their pastor, Rev. M. Dick, and their Evangelism Committee, has been busy with an outreach program at Grand Valley State University, a school just to the west of Grace Church, with an enrollment in excess of 18,000 students. For ten weeks last fall and again for ten weeks this winter, they have hosted a weekly lecture/discussion known as Christianity on Campus. This outreach is centered in God's Word and topics of special interest and importance to young people. Each week the group may vary in size from anywhere between 40 and 60 students, with some being from our area churches and some from different backgrounds and faiths. Since January, some of their meetings have dealt with subjects ranging

from "John Lennon and Jesus Christ ... Imagine" to "The Devil and the Sermon on the Mount." Regrettably, since classes at GVSU will be over next month, there are only three more weeks that this class will be held. On March 21 & 28 there will be a two-part series looking at "Worship: Under the Big Top ... or In Spirit and In Truth." It will take a close look at worship in the church and what it is supposed to be. Praise bands? Puppet Shows? Preaching? How does one know what is pleasing ... to God? and how does one profit personally? This will be followed on April 4 with a discussion entitled, "Of Laura, the Gays, & the Scouts: Who's Morally Straight?" Some quote the ten commandments, some recite the Scout law, others quote their conscience. Who is right — all, some, or none? Each meeting begins at 7:30 P.M. in the Muskegon River Room in the Kirkhof Center. If you have any questions or would like more information about the class or Grace PRC, you are encouraged to give Rev. Dick a call at (616) 791-9277.

Young People's Activities

A couple of issues back we made mention of the fact that the young people of the First PRC in Holland, MI will be hosting this year's convention, and that the young people of the Loveland, CO PRC had agreed to host the convention in 2003. But what about next year? Well, we learned that the Federation Board of the PR Young People's Societies has asked the Young People's Society of the

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

THE STANDARD BEARER

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Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI to host next year's convention and they have accepted.

Mission Activities

Our missionary to Ghana, Rev. R. Moore and his wife, Janet, have both recovered from malaria and are regaining their strength. May God give healing according to His good pleasure to them and to all those that are sick.

Young Adults' Activities

On January 19 and 20 there was a retreat for post-high young

adults in Kalamazoo, MI. Plans called for a night of discussion, games, and fun. The discussion centered in God's Word as it applied to "Giving to Charities."

Minister Activities


Rev. B. Gritters, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC declined the call he had been considering to serve as pastor to the Randolph, WI PRC. Rev. R. Cammenga, pastor of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI has declined the call he received from the Lynden, WA PRC.

Our Seminary currently has

two third-year seminarians. Tentative plans have been made to have Seminarian Rodney Kleyn do his internship in Faith PRC in Jenison, MI under Rev. K. Koole, and to have Seminarian David Overway do his internship in the Hull, IA PRC under Rev. S. Key. These internships will begin this summer, the Lord willing, and will go through the end of the year.

Food For Thought

"He who prays as he ought,
will endeavor to live as he prays."

— John Owen 

Announcements

FLORIDA WINTER REFORMED CONFERENCE

March 9, 10, 2001

"Ezekiel 16: A Short Course in Church History"

◆ Friday, March 9, at 7 P.M.:

"The Birth of the Church"

◆ Saturday, March 10, at 2 P.M.:

"The Marriage of the Church"

The conference speaker is Prof. David J. Engelsma, professor of theology at the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, MI.

The public is invited to attend. Reservations are not necessary.

On Saturday morning, March 10, from 10:30 A.M. to 12:30 P.M., as part of the conference, there will be an Officebearers/Wives Workshop on "The Nature and Duties of the Special Offices," led by Prof. Engelsma.

All meetings will be held at the First Presbyterian Church, 5600 South Biscayne Dr., North Port, Florida.

Prof. Engelsma will also preach at both services of the First Presbyterian Church in North Port on the Lord's Day, March 11. Services are at 10:30 A.M. and 5:00 P.M.

For more information, call (941) 426-1230.

NOTICE!!

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan is inviting applications for a full-time high school teacher with a major/minor in math and/or science for the 2001-2002 school year. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, biblical inerrancy, 6-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Applicants should send a letter of application and résumé to: Tom Nagel, 18230 Michigan Ave., Three Rivers, MI 49093. For more information, phone 1-616-279-7373.

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2001, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

MARCH 2001 LECTURE SERIES

Pentecostalism: Spirit-filled Blessing
or a Dangerous Heresy?

The Evangelism Committees of First PRC and Southeast PRC are sponsoring three lectures in the auditorium of the First Protestant Reformed Church — Grand Rapids.

◆ Pentecostalism: Its Identity, History, and Influence

Professor David Engelsma
Friday, March 16, 7:30 P.M.

◆ Pentecostalism: Its View of Special Gifts (speaking in tongues, faith healing, prayer, on-going revelation)

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma
Friday March 23, 7:30 P.M.

◆ Pentecostalism: Its View of the Christian Life (second baptism, perfectionism, joy, etc.)

Rev. Charles Terpstra
Thursday, March 29, 7:30 P.M.