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The Nobility of the Bereans

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed.

Acts 17:10-12a



h, to be more like the Bereans!

Paul was on his second missionary journey. In Thessalonica he and Silas preached the gospel of Jesus Christ first in the Jewish synagogue, as was their custom. Some of the synagogue believed. Soon, however, the unbelieving Jews of the city caused an uproar so that Paul and Silas had to flee. The brethren immediately sent them away unto Berea.

In Berea they found the members of the synagogue more noble

than those of Thessalonica. This was evident in that the Bereans received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures, whether these things were so.

The Bereans are an example for the brethren today. We do well to be more like the Bereans.



The nobility of the Bereans!

Nobility characterizes one who by reason of birth finds himself among the rich and powerful. Because of his birth and the privilege of birth, he is also well educated and well mannered.

In like manner were the Bereans noble. No, the synagogue of Berea was not the gathering of the cultured, the educated, and the powerful of Berea, for their nobility was not earthly or physical. Their nobility was spiritual. Their nobility consisted in the spiritual virtues they possessed. They were highly educated and cultured in true virtue. This came to them from their birth. The term "noble" means "well born." The Bereans were well born in that they were

born again by the grace of God. By a great work of grace God had transformed them, delivering them from the depravity into which all mankind is born and making them to be new creatures. Through this spiritual rebirth they became the sons and daughters of God, who reflected in their lives the virtues of God Himself. They had spiritual nobility.

Not only were the members of the synagogue of Berea noble, they were more noble than those of Thessalonica. This means that the fruits of the new birth were more evident and developed in the Bereans than in the Thessalonians. Certainly the fruits of the new birth were evident with the Thessalonians. But these excellent virtues were more developed and in greater evidence among the Bereans. Spiritually the synagogue of Berea far excelled that of Thessalonica.

This difference is explained by grace.

Also today we see different levels of spiritual nobility in individual saints as well as in churches. It is God's grace that makes one to dif-

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fer from another in this regard. The one has a richer measure of God's grace than another.

But bear in mind that God's grace is found and enjoyed only in connection with the Word. Except for the first workings of grace in our hearts, the grace of God always comes to us through means. And the chief means is the Word of God. God also uses the sacraments, prayer, and the fellowship of the saints to work His grace in us. But He uses primarily His Word. The conclusion is simple. The more we use the Word of God, the more we grow in grace and in spiritual nobility. In turn, when the Word is neglected, the level of nobility we attain is greatly diminished.

The great nobility of the Bereans is also explained by their faithful use of the Word of God. Mention is made of their searching the Scriptures. This indicates a familiarity with the Word and a long-standing practice of using the Word of God. The synagogue of Berea was a synagogue in which the Word of God was diligently preached, discussed, and taught to the children.



They searched the Scriptures, whether those things were so.

Many, when confronted with teachings and ideas of others, do not consult the Scriptures at all. Some evaluate what they hear solely on the basis of tradition. Others evaluate what they hear on the basis of the opinion of others or of the majority. Still others use as their basis of evaluation either their own reason or their feelings.

The Scriptures are the sole rule for doctrine and life. This is true because the Scriptures are the sole revelation of God to us. God will tell us what to believe and how to live. God has revealed this to us in the Scriptures and nowhere else. And so it is that we must judge all things according to the standard of the Scriptures. What is important

is not the opinion of others, not what seems reasonable to us, not what makes us feel good, but what God has to say in the Scriptures.

The great nobility of the Bereans is seen in that they searched the Scriptures. They did not accept uncritically what Paul and Silas proclaimed to them about Jesus Christ. Nor did they reject Paul's teaching simply because he came with some new thing. Rather they searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

The nobility of the Bereans was also evident in that they received the word of Paul and Silas with all readiness of mind.

It is often the case that when people discover what the Scriptures teach on something, they will reject it, sometimes with hostility, for the Scriptures teach contrary to their ideals or desires. Or perhaps it is that the Scriptures require of them something they do not want to do.

But the Bereans were different. As they searched the Scriptures day by day and came to understand that what Paul brought them was in harmony with the Scriptures, they received the Word with readiness of mind. This means that they embraced the teaching of Paul with great enthusiasm. They did so even though the gospel of Jesus Christ was vehemently rejected by others, even though their embracing of the gospel of Jesus Christ would bring persecution to them.

And receiving the teaching of Paul, they believed in Jesus Christ.

This is the evidence of true spiritual nobility. To respond this way to the Word of God shows that one is well born, born of God.



How do you compare to the Bereans?

The Scriptures here make a comparison between the synagogue of Thessalonica and that of Berea. Those of the synagogue of

Thessalonica were noble. But those of Berea were more noble.

How do you compare?

All those born again in Jesus Christ have spiritual nobility.

But how noble are you?

Do you look to the Scriptures to determine what you believe and how you live? Or do you tend to make tradition, or feelings, or reason, or the opinion of others the standard?


And what is your reaction to the Word of God? Do you receive it with readiness of mind? Or do you repudiate the Word of God when it tells you things that you do not particularly like to hear?

Our calling is to be like the Bereans. We are to excel in true spiritual nobility and show that by receiving the Word of God with all readiness of mind.

But that requires that we be busy with the Word. One excels in spiritual nobility only by diligent use of the Word.

The Word of God is neglected today. This is not only sad, but also ironic. The Bereans lived at a time when there was a low rate of literacy and scarcity of Bibles. Nevertheless they busied themselves with the Scriptures. Today the church is literate and has a glut of Bibles. Who in the church today doesn't have many copies available to him? Yet the Scriptures are seldom studied or searched.

Let us busy ourselves in the Word. Attend the preaching of the Word. Children, hear the Word of God brought to you in Catechism. Study and search the Scriptures at home. Attend the Bible classes in your church, where you can learn the Scriptures in the fellowship of the saints.

The fruit will be the nobility of the Bereans, a nobility that will lead you to judge all things according to the standard of the Scriptures and to receive the Word of God with all readiness of mind. 

The Kingdom of God (7)

"Who ... hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

Colossians 1:13

No one should fear identifying the church as the kingdom because he supposes that this limits the extent of the kingdom in the world. This is the fear of some. They think that the kingdom would be shut up in the narrow confines of the instituted church. In fact, one of the main charges made by postmillennial Christian Reconstruction against the identification of the church as the kingdom is that "this equation of the Church with the kingdom of Christ evades the issue of Christendom: the wider influence of the gospel in history" (Gary North, *Crossed Fingers*, Tyler, Texas, 1996, p. 59).

The mistaken notion of "Christendom" aside, this fear is groundless.

The truth that the church is the kingdom does full justice to the fullest extension of the kingdom in all the world, among all nations, and in every sphere of human life. Since the kingdom is the reign of God in Jesus Christ, the reign of God in Jesus Christ extends over all the world.

The Extension of the Kingdom in the Gathering of the Church

For one thing, the church is the servant that God uses to translate those for whom the kingdom has been eternally prepared out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom

of the Son of His love. This translation is accomplished by the church's preaching of the gospel, whether among the children of believers or on the mission field. In connection with this saving work of God, churches are established at home and abroad.

Thus the kingdom is extended.

Having called men, women, boys, and girls to the kingdom, the church continues to instruct and discipline these citizens in the life of the kingdom (Matt. 28:20).

The history of the church in the present age is proof that identification of the church as the kingdom does not result in restricting the kingdom, but rather in extending it over all the world. By the preaching, first, of the apostles and, then, of faithful ministers and missionaries, the kingdom spread from Jerusalem throughout the world in the form of true churches of Jesus Christ in all nations.

This spread of the kingdom in the form of true churches in all nations is the discipling of the nations that Christ mandated in Matthew 28:19: "Teach [Greek: 'disciple'] all the nations." In the conversion, salvation, and sanctification of the elect in all nations, regardless that they are and always have been a minority, and in the gathering of them as a church, the nations become disciples of Christ.

Not only is the church instrumental in the extension of the kingdom worldwide, it is also the agent by which the kingdom is maintained. The church defends the

kingdom of God. The church defends the kingdom of God by defending the gospel of the kingdom. The Messianic kingdom of God is always under attack, as the history of Israel in the Old Testament and the book of Revelation make plain. Only where a true church proclaims the gospel of sovereign grace and teaches an authoritative law of God as the rule of the life of the saints is the kingdom to be found.

Identification of the church as the kingdom in no way hinders, but in every way promotes the extension of the kingdom.

The Extension of the Kingdom in the Lives of the Citizens

For another thing, by the same royal Word by which people are naturalized as citizens of the kingdom of God, the church teaches and disciplines these people to live the life of the kingdom in every sphere of human life and in every ordinance of creation.

The kingdom of God—the reign of God in Christ—is extended *in the life of every genuine member of the church*. And the life of the member of the church is to be lived *in the world*. In the world, he lives the life of the kingdom as a citizen of this kingdom. This is a life of obedience to Jesus Christ as lord and king. In the life of the member of the church is, and is shown, the reign of God in Christ by the Spirit.

This is the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's

Day 48. In explanation of the second petition of the model prayer, "Thy kingdom come," the Catechism begins with the life of the individual citizen of the heavenly kingdom: "Rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee."

The rule of God in the life of the believer begins with his own very personal, spiritual life and experience. The kingdom comes more and more in him when he abhors himself as a sinner, trusts alone in the cross of Christ, loves his king, seeks the glory of God and the good of the neighbor rather than himself, and makes some progress in his fight against doubt, envy, bitterness, discontent, drunkenness, illicit sexual desire, or whatever may be his own besetting demon.

That demon, by the way, promotes the kingdom of Satan in the believer's life. The two kingdoms clash most violently and with the highest stakes, not out there in society in the culture wars. That clash is mere child's play in comparison with the war of the two kingdoms in the soul of every Christian.

To the noisy champions of a grand, showy, outward kingdom that is one day to Christianize the world, this personal spiritual extension of the kingdom is of little account. But to God, Scripture, and the Heidelberg Catechism—as to the battling believer—it is first and basic. The apostle of Christ virtually *defines* the kingdom in terms of its experience by the individual church member: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17). That the kingdom comes in the life of an elect sinner is a wonder of the almighty, life-giving, gracious power of the Holy Spirit.

The kingdom comes first and importantly in the soul and experience of the child of God. But then it necessarily advances into the ac-

tive life of the Christian in the world in every sphere and ordinance, with body and soul and with all his gifts.

As a citizen of the kingdom, he is a member with his family of the church, indeed of the purest manifestation of the church; is diligent in church attendance; submits to Christ's authority in the elders; uses his gifts for the good of the congregation and denomination; and lives in peace with the other members as much as possible.

As a citizen of the kingdom, the Reformed man marries in the Lord, loves his wife, honors marriage as a lifelong bond, rears his children in the truth, and rules his household well.

As a citizen of the kingdom, the Reformed woman marries in the Lord, submits to her husband with due obedience, honors marriage as a lifelong bond, is a "keeper at home," brings up her children in the faith, and cooperates with her husband's rule.

As citizens of the kingdom, the parents establish good Christian schools, to carry out the godly instruction of the children of the kingdom that they themselves cannot give.

As a citizen of the kingdom, the man labors faithfully in his job, whatever it is, high-powered or menial, as to the Lord, to provide for his own needs and for those of the kingdom. This includes that he recognizes and submits to the authority of his employer. If he is the employer, he treats his workers justly and pays them well.

As a citizen of the kingdom, the believer honors civil government as God's servant, submits to the authority of the state and its functionaries, obeys all laws that do not require him to disobey God, and pays the taxes that the state decrees. If he is the ruler, which is perfectly proper, although quite rare, he

keeps order in society, legislates in accordance with the law of God for national life, punishes those who disturb the common order, and protects those who are outwardly law-abiding.

As a citizen of the kingdom, the member of the church is honest and kind in his dealings with his neighbors, whether believing or unbelieving, and helpful to the needy as he has opportunity. As much as possible, he lives in peace with all men.

As a citizen of the kingdom, the Christian freely uses and enjoys the good creation of God his king, always in service of the kingdom and to the glory of the king of the kingdom. This creation, freely used and enjoyed, includes his own natural gifts of music, or art, or scientific study, or poetry, or gardening, or athletics, and much more besides.

Thus, in the active life of the member of the church the kingdom extends into all areas of human life in all the world.

None of the extension is divorced from the church. All of it proceeds from and is empowered by the church as the kingdom of God.

This all-comprehensive, all-invading, all-dominating kingdom-life is also the Reformed "world-and-life-view." It may not be the kingdom-life that Abraham Kuyper grandiosely sketched in his *Lectures on Calvinism*, or the triumphalist "world-and-life-view" of the Christian Reconstructionists. But it is the humble, down-to-earth, realistic kingdom-life and "world-and-life-view" of Ephesians 5:21-6:9; I Peter 2:11-5:14; the book of Titus; Romans 13; I Timothy 4:1-8; and the New Testament generally.

This aspect of the kingdom of God, namely, the extension of the kingdom in the lives of the citizens, is fundamental.

... in the active life
of the member
of the church
the kingdom
extends into
all areas
of human life
in all the world.

Where is it found today?

Where is it found even as regards those who are clamoring the loudest for a "world-and-life-view"? Where is it found among those who are constantly criticizing the Protestant Reformed Churches for their alleged lack of a broad, victorious kingdom-vision?

Fact is, we Protestant Reformed Christians are sharply critical of many of these "culture-transformers" and "kingdom-builders" exactly for their woeful shortcomings as regards the biblical, Reformed world-view. For all their talk about building and advancing the kingdom, the sin of many Reformed, Presbyterian, and evangelical people today is that they do not teach and live the life of the kingdom of Christ.

Many of them do not even belong to sound Reformed churches. They retain their membership in churches that do not preach the pure doctrine of the gospel, churches that corrupt the sacraments, and churches that neglect the discipline of public, impenitent sinners. They permit their children to be raised in such churches. All further kingdom-life is impossible where membership in a true church is lacking.

Many do not attend worship services twice every Lord's Day. They use the Lord's Day for their own work or pleasure, usually pleasure. Especially in the summer, these enthusiastic transformers of culture spend their Sundays in their boats, or on the beach, or at their cottages, or on the road to and from their vacations. Meanwhile their churches hold services with a handful of old people. It is common knowledge that a popular preacher of the "Reformed world-and-life-view" and the "full-orbed kingdom-life" runs out of the morning service on the Lord's Day to play golf the rest of the day.

Our day is seeing the murder of Sabbath observance by those who profess to be Reformed and Presbyterian. And the murder of Sabbath observance is the end of the kingdom of God among them. Voltaire, atheist philosopher that he was, could teach these Sabbath-desecrating advocates of a "Reformed world-and-life-view" the essential importance of Sabbath observance for the kingdom of God. "If you want to kill Christianity," that shrewd foe of Christ advised the French Revolution, "you must abolish Sunday."

Despite the fact that marriage and the family are basic to the kingdom, many of the churches and theologians crying up a future, grand, outward, political, carnal kingdom of Christ tolerate, or even approve, divorce on other grounds than fornication (the only biblical ground for divorce) and the remarriage of divorced persons, with all the accompanying disaster for children, grandchildren, the

wider family, the church, and society at large. Christian Reconstruction, for example, approves remarriage after divorce for all—innocent parties, guilty parties, parties who are simply bored—except for someone who might have AIDS (see R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1973, pp. 401-415 and Ray Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Principles of Divorce and Remarriage*, Fort Worth, Texas, 1988).

To refer to no other corruption of true kingdom-life as prescribed by the Lord in Holy Scripture, in the vital creation ordinance of labor many of those who are vehement for the transforming of culture approve the subversion of the ordinance of labor by labor unionism. Either they themselves are members of a labor union, or they approve membership in the unions on the part of those with whom they regularly celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Our day is seeing the murder of Sabbath observance by those who profess to be Reformed and Presbyterian.

Every labor union stands before God and men with blood dripping from its hands. In enforcing their strikes, they have wounded and killed innumerable men and women who have opposed them, especially the "scabs." And the strike itself, the heart and soul of the union, is sheer, obvious rebellion by the workers against the God-given authority of the employer. By membership in a labor union, one makes himself responsible for the violence of the "brotherhood" and becomes party to the rebellion of labor against what Scripture calls the "master."

Against all this conformity to the culture of the ungodly, we Protestant Reformed churches and people vigorously promote, insist on, and, by the grace of God, begin to *live* the kingdom-life and *practice* a Reformed world-view.

Not apart from the church!

The church is the kingdom.

The natural eye cannot see it, for by earthly reckoning the church is small, powerless, and even shameful.

But to the eye of faith, which sees Christ the king in the church, the church is great, invincible, and glorious.

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge.... Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye wall her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following (Psalm 48:1-3, 12, 13).

And out of the church is our spiritual, our kingdom, life: "All my springs are in thee" (Psalm 87:7).

— DJE 

■ America At Risk

Perhaps the warning is not new or unexpected. One pays attention, however, when a syndicated columnist points out what ought to be the obvious. In the *Grand Rapids Press*, July 28, 2001, Linda Bowles of Creators Syndicate, Los Angeles, CA writes:

We are on the threshold of America's entry into a post-religious, post-constitutional era. Decades of liberal assaults on traditional values and institutions are bearing fruit—sweet or bitter depending on your allegiance. The final battles are under way, and the bulwarks erected to protect us from the dark side of our natures and from governmental tyranny are being battered down. The center is not holding.

The Constitution was carefully constructed by the founders to protect the people from overarching government. Centuries from now, historians will write that one of the greatest ironies leading to the demise of the grand American experiment was the fraudulent use of the Constitution to demolish the religious and moral underpinnings of the nation.

In 1984, Associate Justice William Hubbs Rehnquist in the case of *Wallace vs. Jaffree* stated: "The 'wall of separation between church and state' is a metaphor based on bad history, a metaphor which has proved useless as a guide to judging. It should be frankly and explicitly abandoned."

Was Rehnquist right? The short answer is, yes. The First Amendment says nothing about a "separation of church and state." It is a "hands-off" amendment, in-

structing Congress not to establish a state religion and not to make laws interfering with religious expression.

The founders did not set up a "wall of separation between church and state." It was erected by slick lawyers, arrogant jurists and unprincipled politicians to isolate religion from the mainstream of American life and to discredit people of faith. It is not the first time in history that unscrupulous men saw religion as a barrier to their personal ambitions and ideological agendas....

The article concludes by presenting some interesting quotes from our "founding fathers" and others that are well worth considering.

In his farewell address, George Washington said, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports." He maintained that "...reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

No one explained it better than President John Adams: "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

In "The Lessons of History," Will and Ariel Durant stated: "The greatest question of our time is not communism versus individualism, not even East versus West; it is whether man can live without God." They cited French historian Joseph Ernest Renan, who wrote: "If rationalism wishes to govern the world without regard to the religious needs of the soul, the experience of the French Revolution is there to teach us the consequences of such a blunder."

Based on their lifelong study of the rise and fall of civilizations, the Durants drew the conclusion that: "There is no significant example in history before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion."

The American culture is journeying through muck and smut, looking for lower ground, not of necessity but of depravity. Unless we change course, and soon, our destination is either moral anarchy and social chaos, or the surrender of all our freedoms to Big Brother in exchange for his promise to protect us from ourselves.

Amen!

So when George W. Bush was elected (chosen?) president, there was a collective sigh of relief from the conservatives of the land. We would go from one whose sexual escapades were broadcast across the land, from one who was impeached and almost removed from office, to one who has high family values (as far as is known). We have a man in the highest office of the land who is opposed to abortion and the smut and corruption found in our land. Here is a man who can perhaps turn things around so that once more we are a nation of high moral standards based upon religious truths.

Now we have a man in highest office who dares propose (despite the cries of "separation between church and state") a "faith-based" initiative. Religious charities would receive government funds to assist them in their charitable work. Could not these non-profit organizations better distribute to the needy and help in their difficulties than could a bloated government with its layers of bureaucracy?

This proposal, at the time of this writing, awaits the approval of congress. When President Bush said that they were "considering a

request from the Salvation Army, the nation's largest charity, to issue a regulation that would protect government-funded religious charities from state and local workplace discrimination laws that include sexual-orientation," there was a great outcry. It remains to be seen whether this "faith-based" initiative will include exemption from anti-discrimination laws.

Is it not thrilling to have this kind of reversal from that steady slide into depravity and immorality and atheism?

However, is not this "faith-based" initiative an extremely dangerous, even evil, proposal? Is it possible for religious organizations to escape anti-discrimination laws? Will the government give funds to those organizations which refuse to hire homosexuals, and in fact condemn homosexuality as sin? Will the government continue to give funds to such religious organizations who dispense these in the "name of Christ"? Will these organizations be forbidden to seek the repentance and salvation of the sinner when dispensing these funds?

And these funds, given to "faith-based" organizations, will be given to whom? Will these funds be given alike to "Christian" as well as Muslim, Hindu, and other such religions? Are they all governmentally recognized as "faith-based"? How can a "Christian" president or Congress dare to claim this?

But there is another serious objection to this initiative. John W. Robbins of the Trinity Foundation eloquently expresses it. (The article is found on his web site: www.trinityfoundation.org.) He points out some of the statements of the president, who defended his proposal.

It's not sufficient to praise charities and community groups; we must support them. And this is both a public obligation and a personal responsibility.

The War on Poverty established a federal commitment to the poor. The welfare reform legislation of 1996 made that commitment more effective. For the task ahead, we must move to the third stage of combatting [sic] poverty in America....

Government has an important role. It will never be replaced by charities. My administration increased funding for major social welfare and poverty programs by 8 percent. Yet government must also do more....

So I have created a White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives. Through that Office we are working to ensure that local community helpers and healers receive more federal dollars.... We have proposed a "Compassion Capital Fund," that will match private giving with federal dollars.

And we're in the process of implementing and expanding "Charitable Choice" – the principle, already established in federal law, that faith-based organizations should not suffer discrimination when they compete for contracts to provide social services. Government should never fund the teaching of faith, but it should support the good works of the faithful.

Some critics of this approach object to the idea of government funding going to any group motivated by faith. But they should take a look around them. Public money already goes to groups like the Center for the Homeless and, on a larger scale, Catholic Charities. Do the critics really want them cut off? Medicaid and Medicare money currently goes to religious hospitals. Should this practice be ended? Child care vouchers for low income families are redeemed every day at houses of worship across America. Should this be prevented? Government loans send countless students to religious colleges. Should that be banned? Of course not....

Robbins continues by pointing out some of the errors in the reasoning of the president with his proposal of "faith-based" initiatives:

Ronald Sider, writing in *Christianity Today*, unwittingly put it this way: Scholars...cite a wide range of studies showing that "religion is strongly associated with good citizenship and improved physical and mental health." Active participation in a religious group correlates with lower suicide rates, drug use, and criminal behavior; better health; and altruistic behavior.... [While] Nonreligious funders [contributors to charitable organizations] may overlook a perfunctory prayer to start the day, ...they often refuse to support holistic social programs run by Christians who think that encouraging the adoption of a specific religious faith is an essential component of their social program.

Sider makes it clear: The adoption of a specific religious faith is a component of a social program. This is theological paganism, a complete reversal of Christian doctrine and priorities, which teach that all social programs (if there are any at all) are secondary at best, and that the proclamation of the Gospel and the whole counsel of God is primary. Christians are to set their minds on things above, not on earthly things. They are to fear him who can destroy both body and soul, not him who can kill only the body. They are to recognize that a person is not what he eats, but what he thinks. They are to teach that God's kingdom comes, not by might, nor by power, but by his Spirit working in the minds of men. They are to warn all men that this earthly life is brief, and the things of this world are passing away; that wrath is coming, and the life (or death) that follows the Judgment is everlasting. They are to warn everyone that what they think of Jesus Christ will result in their everlasting happiness or their never-ending agony.

The Great Commission is not a component of some larger social program; it is the whole program, and it is not social. Whatever charitable works are done by individuals, private organizations, and churches (not governments, whose purpose is the punishment of evildoers, not the ministry of

mercy) are to be done in the furtherance of that mission. To reverse ends and means is to deny the Gospel. Christ said, contradicting Ronald Sider and all other proponents of the Social Gospel, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." To make earthly things the goal, and to make the kingdom of God and his righteousness the means, is a damnable perversion of Christianity.

Writing of an earlier proposal to bastardize Christianity and make it a useful contributor to good citizenship and a component of a social program, J. Gresham Machen said, "We find proposed to us today what is called 'character education' or 'character building.' Character, we are told, is one thing about which men of all faiths are agreed. Let us, therefore, build character in common, as good citizens, and then welcome from the various religious faiths whatever additional aid they can severally bring.... What surprises me about this program is not that its advocates propose it, for it is only too well in accord with the spirit of the age. But what really surprises me about it is that the advocates of it seem to think that a Christian can support it without ceasing at that point to be Christian."

Robbins points out in his article that Roman Catholics generally and most Evangelicals support the president's proposal. Robbins labels the proposal "Faith-based fascism." He quotes figures showing which "conservative" religious organizations already receive government subsidies.

What must the Christian say or do? Robbins comments on the solution presented by the head of the president's "faith-based initiative":

In his speech to the NAE, DiIulio attempted to answer objections to faith-based fascism. To those who think it would corrupt their organizations if they were to participate, his answer is simple: Don't participate. Good advice,

but worthless. Under fascism, non-participation is not an option. We are compelled to pay taxes to support fascist government-by-proxy. We are compelled to obey the government's proxies. The freedom not to participate should be extended to the collection of taxes, not just to the distribution of stolen property that DiIulio calls federal funding. One slogan of Italian Fascism was "Everything within the State; nothing outside the State." Our home-grown fascists operate on the same principle, working to expand a political system that already penalizes those who oppose institutionalized and legalized theft and rewards those who favor legalized theft. Their goal is to politicize what remains of private charity.

Robbins presents some conclusions worth consideration and discussion:

Faith-based fascism will increase the size and scope of the federal government, extending it to organizations that have hitherto been outside the state. That is the explicit goal of the policy, as expressed by the President himself. "Everything within the State; nothing outside the State."

Faith-based fascism will increase, not decrease, the constituencies of the welfare state, creating new special interest groups, government-funded religious organizations, that will pressure officials to grant them more money.

Faith-based fascism is based on a political delusion. John DiIulio and President Bush tell us that federal grants will be awarded and withdrawn on the basis of results. DiIulio asserts: "Opening competition for federal funds to all, including tiny local faith-based organizations, could usher in a new era of results-driven public administration. Scores of federal welfare programs could be cured or killed." For someone who has co-authored a textbook on American government, DiIulio shows little understanding of how government actually works. Government-grant awards and denials are decided by political clout, political cronyism, and political bi-

ases. With the addition of government grants to faith-based organizations, we must add religious clout, religious cronyism, and religious biases. Tax funds will flow to political and religious friends and be withheld from political and religious foes.

Robbins makes this correct conclusion:

And let's be clear about charity. Charity is not compelling someone else to give his money to the poor. It is giving one's own money away; it is freely contributing one's own time. Government charity is a contradiction in terms, for government has no money except what it collects by force from others. What President Bush proposes is not greater charity, but aggravated theft and increased compulsion. There is nothing Christian or charitable about it. It is a violation of the Ten Commandments.

This writer has heard no "Christian" leader give the correct answers to the President's questions. They have already agreed in principle with the President's faith-based fascism. Long ago they abandoned the whole counsel of God, choosing which Biblical doctrines they would believe and teach, and which they would ignore. Many of them have abandoned the Gospel of the substitutionary death of Christ for his people and justification by faith alone. Now they have denied what the Scriptures teach on private property, the role of government, and the social order.

The salt has lost its savor; it has become worthless; and it deserves to be trodden underfoot by men.

What do you think? The government will collect taxes by force from all its citizens in order, in part, to give some of this to the charities of the land. Robbins is correct—that is not what charity is all about.

Does not this growing alliance between "church" and state point out again the obvious development of the kingdom of the Antichrist?



The Calling (2)

We are considering the biblical doctrine of the saving calling, that work of God in Christ by His Holy Spirit by which He gives us the conscious participation of the blessings of salvation as we lay hold of Christ and all His benefits. Through the Spirit of Christ the triune God addresses the elect, regenerated sinner by the Word of the gospel, enlightening the understanding and drawing him out of darkness into the light of life.

Having seen several beautiful characteristics of that saving calling, we must give attention to the means by which God works that wonder work in us.

We have seen that God draws us unto Himself by making us willing to come to Him. Christ calls His sheep irresistibly, so that they hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:27). They hear Him by means of the preaching of the gospel. This also is the Spirit's work.

So we are brought to the consideration of the external aspect of the calling.

How does God call His people?

He calls them externally through the preaching of the gospel and internally through the operation of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Those two aspects cannot be separated when we speak of the saving call.

God uses a means that men would call "foolishness." That "foolishness" is preaching. God will have His Word preached by

ministers whom He calls and sends. By that preaching, Christ speaks His Word to His people. He speaks not merely to our physical, but to our spiritual hearing. With His Holy Spirit working in our hearts and applying that Word to our spiritual consciousness, Christ speaks powerfully, efficaciously. He calls savingly. So He brings us to a consciousness of our blessed relationship with Him.

Even when we speak about the external aspect of the saving call, we must not overlook the fact that we are yet speaking about the *saving* call. We speak of God bringing His *elect* into the consciousness of their saving union with Christ. Though the preaching of the gospel goes forth promiscuously, i.e., without regard to the faces of men (let alone the hearts, as if we could read them), the saving call is directed to the elect alone.

The Scriptures clearly connect the saving call with election. Romans 8:30 teaches that those who are called are those whom God did predestinate unto glorification. II Thessalonians 2:13, 14 confirms that those who are saved are those who are chosen by God, and that their election and salvation come to expression through God calling them by the gospel, "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Those whom He has taken to Himself in eternity, He gathers to Himself in time by the preaching of the gospel.

The Call of the Gospel

With a view to the gathering of His elect people, God has the gospel preached indiscriminately and without distinction, to all men

where He in His good pleasure sends that gospel preaching.

The gospel is preached, not as an offer of salvation which man can freely accept or reject, nor as an invitation, but as an authoritative command to repent and believe. It rests upon the inescapable demand of God to all men that they love Him. That is the calling with which man was created. It is the obligation which man failed to perform, transgressing God's law and calling forth His judgment.

That preaching, expounding the Word of the Scriptures, sets forth the truth of our guilt and sin, the guilt and sin of all human beings, without exception. It presents the person and work of Jesus Christ as God's provision for the salvation of guilty and depraved sinners, and points to faith in Christ as the only way to salvation. It proclaims the command to repent and believe, and promises forgiveness and salvation to all who believe. Furthermore, it sets forth the certain consequences of damnation on all who reject Christ and His Word.

So we confess concerning this call of the gospel (Canons of Dordt, I, 3), "And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings to whom He will and at what time He pleaseth; by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified."

That call of the gospel, promiscuously proclaimed, is clearly seen in many examples of gospel preaching found in the Bible.

It is seen in the apostle Peter's sermon immediately following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at

Pentecost. His faithful exposition of the Scriptures came to culmination in Acts 2, verses 38 and 39, where we read, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

The apostle Paul followed the same pattern in his preaching, as we see in Acts 17:30, 31, where he addressed the Athenians, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." And as he explained his preaching to King Agrippa (Acts 26:19, 20), Paul said, "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

It is this same preaching, this same call of the gospel, as to its contents, that is set forth in our Heidelberg Catechism in Question and Answer 84, where the question is asked, "How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?"

"Answer: Thus: when according to the command of Christ it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the

wrath of God and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted; according to which testimony of the gospel God will judge them both in this and in the life to come."

Notice, the Catechism gives no place to a well-meant offer. Though the preaching is promiscuously proclaimed, the promise itself is particular. There is a command to all. The promise of salvation is only to those who repent and believe. Damnation is declared to all those who continue in impenitence and hardness of heart.

So the call of the gospel goes forth, the authoritative proclamation of the preaching of the gospel. It never leaves the outcome up to man. That preaching *works*. By the Spirit of Christ it works.

That gospel makes distinction. Not, the preacher makes distinction, as if he should determine the worthiness of the hearers. The preacher preaches to every person who will give ear. The church brings that gospel by her ministers and missionaries into all the world, wherever God in His good pleasure sends her. It isn't the church or her preachers that makes distinction and separation. We are called to "set forth Christ" and Him crucified. The *gospel* itself makes distinction, or *God* makes distinction by that means, converting some and hardening others, and that according to His own eternal and sovereign decree.

This is also a confessional matter for us. The Canons of Dordt maintain the same in the First Head of Doctrine, Article 6. "That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree, for 'known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world' (Acts 15:18)."

By that gospel God purposes to reveal the inexcusable rejection of Him by the reprobate who hear that preaching. So the righteous Lord will ultimately reveal His own justice in damning the unbe-

liever for that great wickedness of rejecting and despising that gospel.

But concerning His elect it is God's purpose to gather them by that gospel, and by His own efficacious and irresistible call through that gospel.

God's Intention to Save

Not all who come under the preaching of the gospel are saved! What, then, do we say about that means of the saving call when it comes to those who are not saved? Is the calling of God of none effect in them?!

Again, remember that the *saving* call applies only to the elect. But as far as the call of the gospel or gospel preaching is concerned, we have the promise of God that His Word never returns void (Is. 55:11). In fact, it not only accomplishes that which is pleasing unto God, but it prospers in that purpose for which God sends it. "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14).

For those not chosen by God, the call of the gospel serves to reveal God's perfect justice. That preaching comes to the reprobate, not to offer salvation, not to give them a chance, but to reveal fully their wicked hearts.

To sinners who do not repent, that Word comes as a work of God's wrath, aggravating their judgment. That Word, holding forth the exalted Lord Christ, is a stone of stumbling and rock of offense to the reprobate. While it is the power of God unto salvation in all who believe, it is that which condemns and hardens those appointed unto death. That same Word works as a savor of life unto life in some, and of death unto death in others.

And so it is unto God a sweet savor of Christ (II Cor. 2:15).

Those who reject that call of the gospel are left without excuse. Their rejection of that call reveals their guilt of despising Christ and holding God's goodness in contempt. To them awaits an even

greater punishment than that of the heathen who never heard the preaching, but held in unrighteousness the truth of God revealed in creation.

But this work of hardening, this work of blinding, is also God's work by His Spirit. It is a matter of the preaching of the gospel serving His sovereign purpose. The Spirit who reveals to some, hides from others. That also is the Father's good pleasure (Matt. 11:25, 26).

Even so, the primary purpose of the preaching of the gospel is to serve as God's means to call His elect to the consciousness of their salvation in Christ. The call of the

gospel proclaimed promiscuously is the means for the saving call.

Several years ago, while working in a lumber yard, we occasionally would gather the sawdust from around the table saws. That sawdust could be put to other uses. But because there would be nails and screws and other metal objects in the mill area, whenever the sawdust would be gathered, a careful check had to be made of the sawdust. The best way for that to be done was to take a large magnet and pass it over and through the pile. Any metal objects would be picked up.

The preaching of the gospel is not unlike passing that magnet through the sawdust pile. But the

saving call attracts only those whom God has chosen unto salvation. And it effectually calls them out of darkness into the light of their life in Christ.

But that saving calling differs from a magnet in a very significant respect. For the wonder work of the Holy Spirit in the saving call is not a mechanical work. He works *in* us who are His, not only drawing us, but giving us ears to hear the voice of our Savior and a will to come to Him. So we lay hold of the riches of our salvation, and glorify our Redeemer.

Our salvation is the Lord's work! It is marvelous in our eyes!



Grace Life

Rev. Mitchell Dick

On Getting a Life (2)

There's this article in front of me entitled "'Do or Dye.'"

The title refers to hairdos. Seems nowadays that if you don't perm or spike or shave or braid or bleach or color your hair or go with girls that do — you are not much.

Just another of the many ways this strange world we live in is calling us to "Get a life!" 'Do or Dye! Color your hair blue, spike it, or you simply are one of those conformists with the flat EKG.

In a recent article we have mused about this world's call to "Get a life!"

Seems that there is some ideal life, the nature of which is often defined, at least for us in the US, by folks from either of our east or west orifices. Maybe in Holly-

wood. Maybe on Broadway. There's lots of intense philosophical work going on behind the scenes and where all the world is a stage to discover the meaning of life and to urge the rest of us wannabes and deadlings to get with it and get with them, with their styles, their values, their politicians, their religion.

Many things of this "life" to which we are called change. It's hair today. It's gone tomorrow. Hula hoops. Bell-bottoms. Pink hair. Punk rock. But one thing remains: the life the world wants us to get is a life without God.

Now we know that is absurd. There is no life without God. Really! For all the glamour and glitz and prestige and power and wealth and world you can get if you get the life of Madonna, still you are a dead man or a dead woman according to the Word of God. For this, this, *this!* is eternal life: that

they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent (John 17:3). And this, this, *this!* according to the Word of God, is the state of all of us in Adam: dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). And this, this, *this!* is the profit of a man, woman, or child and the whole troupe of them which gains the whole world, gets all the life that the world would breathe into us: zilch.

As concerns Christian youth: I would urge you, young people and young adults, to consider the force and the wiles of this "Get a life!" appeal. For there is a god behind it: the god named "Devil." And according as you are you, just you, you are little old sinful you, and the Devil's mincemeat. If left to ourselves tomorrow our hair would be blue, and life would be a bungee jump, but our spiritual heart would be ripped out of us.



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Five reasons "Get a Life!" is a deadly threat.

First, the "Get a Life" people are in the vast majority. So, for example, many people think THE LIFE is a beach, and especially a naked beach. Skin is in when it comes to suiting up for summer fun. People just like to strut around and lay out and bob up and down in public waters in what amounts to little more than underwear. The temptation is to believe the majority report on what is acceptable swimming attire. To do what everybody is doing — revealing itself. To be modest only when the Baptist Camp tells us to be.

It is tough, I know. When a whole society and culture are doing something, and selling only loin clothes for clothes, and when the Bible does not say that this number and this number only of square inches of flesh may be revealed, why not just swim with the Romans? What's a young Christian to do? Is there such a thing as a Christian bathing suit and Christian beach? Christian bikinis? Can you say oxymoron?

But then, moving on — the same "Get a Life!" majority controls and corrupts most of the television programming, the video games, and the radio. It tells us that Sunday is just a fine day to work and to play, and would convince us that one can be homosexual and morally straight. What are a few Christians to do against such overwhelming numbers? There is a great power in the numbers, an almost irresistible tug to go with the flow right down this world's river no matter where it is flowing. Yes, the Force of The Many is with them, and not with us!

Second, the "Get a Life!" message sounds so urgent. It is not, after all, as if the "Get a Life!" people are calling you to eat asparagus tips. Whether it is subtle or shouted, the message is of life and death. GET A LIFE! they

shout. Like there must be people all over the place, even standing over there talking, or working, or driving down the road — *dead!* Even so dead that they are in so many early and latter stages of social or intellectual or physical or religious rigor mortis. The Get a Life! people call for nothing less or different than a general resurrection. They leave you thinking: if I am not doing the calling (the calling to Get a Life!), I must be among the called, and therefore among the lifeless.

Third, Get-a-lifers can sound so kind — like they are offering you, well, the world. They really play up their Life. It is the life like Victoria, or Brad, they say. A life of exciting secrets. A life of glitz. A life of adventure. A life of good times. The real thing. Fun. Pretty women. Strong men. A life of good too. An easy-going tolerance of all (which is good for your blood pressure and mine). Opportunities to save the rain forest, and feed the poor. And religion. Even Church Life at — La Grave. And RESPECTABILITY! — Well, who could refuse such a kind call to such a kind of life?

Fourth, the Lifers appeal to our own deeply imbedded love of stuff. Lifers, posing again as our True Love, come bearing gifts, gifts, and more gifts of the things which we so easily crave. Why, here's twelve snowmobiles! Here's eleven jet skis. Ten '65 convertible Mustangs (White. 3-speed. 350 or 351 engine or something like that) — and a partridge in a pear tree! And we think: why yes, I may have these. God has given the good things of the earth to be used and enjoyed. And we forget texts like I Timothy 4:5. And virtues like moderation. And concepts like Christian stewardship, and seeking the kingdom first. And that on the other side of every door of opportunity and delight every Lifer would have you open is the Devil's slippery slope. For those who say Get a

Life! want your life to be of the earth, and of the earth only. They want you to agree with them that "if it ain't in the atom, it ain't!" They call us not only to come bungee jump once with them, or just buy this latest style and then go back to your burlap sacks, but they are saying come live the bungee jump *life*, come hip-hop your *life* away. And that, *for yourselves*. It is the *life style*, the *way* of life that is the problem. It is the life very full *just* of people, places, and things, and which even delights in **forbidden** things, but a life without regard to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And this is a real temptation to us Christians still with our hulk of an old nature.

Fifth: Get a Life! is *aimed*. The Devil himself takes aim behind every "Get a Life!" Especially at Christians, and *young* Christians, does the Devil aim, with laser-precision, his temptations. "Get a Life!" sometimes openly, often subtly derides the Christian life. "Get a Life!" coaxes you when your parents have just shouted at you. "Get a Life!" comes and will come to you right at your weakness. Right when you and I are thinking this Christianity thing is boring, the Devil says, "Why here is just the life for you!" Right when we were thinking it was good enough to have been at church, and that I am safe (and free) because the friend I'm cruising with goes to my church, then come the thoughts of Pearl Harbor, and the self-justifications, and the hunches that "no one will know."

"Get a life!" the Devil urges. OK, just get a *little bit* of Britney's life. Try it. It won't hurt. And grace is a very fine thing. You know something good will come of it, just as the Romans are telling you (and doesn't Romans say something about that too?). God is so good. And underneath, when you fall tonight, as you are planning on doing, isn't it true, there will be the everlasting arms?



"Get a Life!" Popular. Upstanding. Humanistic. Enlightening. Sensible. Fun. Gratifying. Come on: GET IT! GET THIS LIFE WE HAVE! says the unbelieving godless world.

Well, dear readers, we don't need to. And we wouldn't want to for the world. We have a life:

the eternal life with God in Christ Jesus our Lord. But the temptation to "get" the life of the sin-dead world is real, and great. And many are those who fall for it, and in so doing make the world's day, and the Devil laugh.


Next time: How to resist the call of the world to get its life. And how to *live* THE LIFE, the Christian life. Which means, oddly

enough, how to *get* the life you already have in Christ.

You've got to do some pretty strange things. Like believe. Like serve. Like obey your parents. Like listen to a wee little preacher man. Like date well. Like dance the Christian dance.

Ready to be strange?

Grace life.

Get it! 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Connie Meyer

Teaching Hands to War (1)

Do we have to be taught to war? Do we have to teach our children to war? Isn't there enough war? Talking of war seems so negative. Why not teach peace? Doesn't that sound much better?

Yes, we can talk of peace, and even prosperity. But let it be *real* peace and *real* prosperity. Let us sing with joy and gladness the lines of Psalter #393, the versification of Psalm 144:

O happy land, whose sons in youth, in sturdy strength and noble truth, like plants in vigor spring;

Whose daughters fair, a queenly race, are like the cornerstones that grace the palace of a king, the palace of a king.

O happy land, when flock and field their rich, abundant increase yield, and blessings multiply....

What happiness abounds, what spiritual peace and prosperity, to see our children in grace and truth! "Yea, happy is that people, whose

God is the Lord." This is the conclusion of Psalm 144, an exultant strain of peace and joy, glorying in the most that any people could possess.

The question is, how does this conclusion come to be true? Does it just happen? Let us look at the rest of the Psalm for the answer. We find then that, no, it doesn't just happen, there is a way that brings it about, and the way is set forth very clearly already in verse one. The way is very striking. The way is *war*.

"Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight" (Ps. 144:1).

This isn't physical war. And physical peace isn't the goal. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). Yes, we have to talk of war. Spiritual war. It is, in fact, the only way in which genuine peace — spiritual peace — will abide inside our doors.

This is not a popular message. Apostate, contemporary Christianity propounds a purely positive, always smilingly happy, physically

healthy, and prosperous life. An earthly victory is the goal. Guilt, struggle, fighting with one's sin and other spiritual foes — these are all disdained. That is not living "victoriously." If there is a battle, it is a battle against intolerance and absolute truth. (Read "All Around Us," SB, April 15, 2001, for just one example.)

But this is not Scripture. Nor is it reality. The Christian life is one of spiritual warfare from the cradle to the grave. All of history is itself the story of this conflict from Paradise to the present. God Himself established this war when He declared to the enemy in the garden of Eden: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Not only was the war established, so was the Victor! Read what Rev. H. Hoeksema wrote about this "mother of all promises" in a pamphlet entitled "The Gospel":

But God had provided some better thing for His people, a better thing that could not otherwise be realized than through this night of sin and death. For, He put enmity between man and the seed

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of the serpent. He realized His everlasting Covenant.... Henceforth, the children of the promise would have to walk in the night. But in that night they walked in the light of the promise.... In the light of that promise and in the strength of that hope which is the substance of all their life, they struggled and fought the battle, they condemned the world, they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth and were looking for the city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

This war serves His purposes as it serves His victory. If we want to talk about victory, this is real victory — spiritual victory — and the only way to that victory.

The enemy has his purposes too. Satan would have us lay down our arms, deceiving us into thinking that there is no war. All is peace. Let us have only peace. Strive for peace, both in the church and in the world. Doesn't that sound nice? Churches united? Nations united? How wonderful. And it's happening. This is the message of Antichrist, and it is well established, even at our doors. To be tolerant of every doctrine and evil under the sun is to live in this "peace."

Yet, for all of Satan's and his cohorts' talk of peace and tolerance, there is none. They accomplish unification, that is true. But that is not peace. And their tolerance abruptly stops at the absolute, righteous truth of Scripture. Rather, there is a uniting of the false church and the world *against* God and His anointed ones. Satan is busy deceiving the world into thinking it is peace and harmony they are after, when really their unity merely becomes a tool, a very willing tool, in his hands to try to destroy Christ and His Body.* For all his persuasion concerning peace, Satan is well aware of the war.

And so ought we to be.

To be oblivious to and ignore

the forces of darkness around us is to give that darkness the advantage. *We are working. We are playing. We are busy, busy, busy. But stop and take time to study Scripture? Read works of sound doctrine? Be concerned about maintaining and growing in our understanding of the Reformed truth? We're much too busy for that! ... and darkness gains the hour.*

But the war is real. When Israel had, for the most part, procured the land of Canaan, God purposefully left enemies around them in order "to teach them to war" (Jud. 3:2). This is certainly for our instruction as well. The book of Judges gives us a clear and chilling picture of what our lives really consist of on this earth. We battle the world around us, the world just outside our borders, and the world that tries to inch its way within. For us, worldliness and Philistia are one and the same. The antithesis looms large upon our path. And every parent knows what battle lies in store for him as he attempts to fight the influence of the world's philosophy, amusements, and adornments with regard to his children. "Everyone does it." "We just want to have a little fun." "This is the style now." It is tempting to let it pass. After all, is it really that serious? Is it really worth the battle that will ensue in our families over it? Israel was sometimes tempted to ignore the battle, too. Recall Samson's lone effort in the conflict, unsupported by his own countrymen who ought to have rallied behind his leadership. Let us beware. Let us train our senses to the never-ending encroachment of the world and her allurements. Babylon can only be more enticing and deceptive as we approach the Last Day.

But as severe as Israel's battles were with the Philistines and surrounding Canaanites, the fiercest battles did not compare to Israel's fight with her closest enemy — the enemy within herself. We find the account in Judges 19-20, and it is a

tragic history to read. The casualties were staggering. The tribe of Benjamin had asserted itself, and its tenacious grab for vindication of sin and power went beyond all sanity and logic. Scripture instructs us in many places that our worst persecutors will be those within the instituted church: "my own familiar friend" (Ps. 41:9). "For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:12). "Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death" (Matt. 26:59). And that final False Prophet, who "deceiveth them that dwell on the earth..." shall have power to "cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed" (Rev. 13:14, 15). Persecution from within our own borders will hurt more than persecution from without. Let it not come as a surprise then. We have been warned. Let us beware.

But this is not the end of it. There is something even more awful. There is a treacherous and insidious accomplice of Satan from whom we cannot hide. So close is this foe to us that until our last breath is drawn, we can never be free from his vicious, strangling grasp. He is a piranha-like parasite whose leeching, if left unchecked, will leave us spiritually anemic, weak, and fatally sick. The trouble is, this leech is not a separate entity within ourselves. It cannot, by a simple operation, be plucked off and removed. Why not? This is the awful part: *because it is I*. It is my old man of sin. True, it is no longer the most basic part of me. And, in fact, this old man is defeated and doomed. He's as good as dead — just like my earthly flesh is as good as dust. But just as this earthly body must die in order to be changed into the

* For more on this subject, read Herman Hoeksema's exposition of Revelation 13 from *Behold, He Cometh!*, RFPA.


heavenly (unless Christ returns first), complete removal of the old man requires physical death as well. The combat doesn't get any closer than this.

And not one of us is exempt from this horrible conflict within our souls. Even Israel was aware that her real battle wasn't so much against the Philistines around her, as it was against her own sin. Over and over in the book of Judges we read: "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord...." Again, and again, and

again. Israel's physical battles had everything to do with her sin: "That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord ... or not. Therefore the Lord left those nations..." (Jud. 2:22, 23). Let us beware. Let us be warned. Israel gained the victory, even over the tribe of Benjamin, but it was not without a most gruesome and terrible slaughter. There is instruction there.

The Lord teaches our hands to

war and our fingers to fight. If He, as our Father, teaches us these things, then it follows that we must teach our children these things, too.

We have considered a brief overview of the spiritual war we are engaged in and the spiritual enemies we encounter. Let us be fully aware of this militant state in which our Lord has placed us, and let us teach our children to be conscious of this as well. We will consider some of the battle more specifically next time, D.V., along with scriptural strategies for the fight. 

Feature Article

Mr. Robert Drnek

Trinity Protestant Reformed Church

It is with joy and thanksgiving to our faithful heavenly Father that the council of Hudsonville PRC can report the birth of another daughter congregation. On the evening of Wednesday, July 18, 2001 the organizational worship service of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church was held. This, the newest church in our denomination, is located in Hudsonville, Michigan and is the third daughter congregation of Hudsonville PRC. The service took place in the Hudsonville Reformed Church building on the corner of School Street and Van Buren Avenue in Hudsonville, the church building that Trinity plans on purchasing. The service was led by the consistory of the Hudsonville PRC, the church chosen by Classis East to oversee this organization.

Rev. B. Gritters, Hudsonville's

pastor, chose for his text that evening Psalm 122:6 "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee."

After the message, the actual organization took place. The charter members of Trinity PRC consisted of 33 families and 5 individuals from Hudsonville, 1 family each from Georgetown and First of Holland, 2 individuals from Faith, 3 families and 1 individual from Grandville, 4 families from Southwest, and 1 individual from Hope. There were 99 confessing members and 67 baptized members for a total of 166 souls.

The meeting continued with the election of 4 elders and 3 deacons, their signing of the Formula of Subscription, and their installation into office. The evening concluded with a closing doxology and benediction, followed by refreshments in the basement of the church.

This is the conclusion of a process that started in December of 1999, when the council of Hudsonville PRC appointed a committee to look into the need to form a daughter congregation. Two circumstances were prompting this action. First, Hudsonville PRC had grown to more than 155 families. Not only was the church overcrowded but the council found it difficult to perform their duties with a congregation that size. In addition, at this time another church in Hudsonville had put their building up for sale. Hudsonville Reformed Church was planning the construction of a new facility and they were looking to sell their church. If a new group



Future Trinity PRC church building

Mr. Drnek is clerk of the consistory in the newly organized Trinity PRC.

would be interested in purchasing this church, it could be a quick and less expensive way to acquire a building.

After a number of informational meetings and surveys of the congregation it became apparent that there was sufficient interest to take the next steps in forming a daughter congregation. The committee from Hudsonville PRC began meeting with a committee from the Hudsonville Reformed Church and before long a tentative agreement to purchase the building was reached. Hudsonville PRC then began holding worship services for the group, with the morning ser-


vice in the gym at Heritage Christian School and an afternoon service in the Hudsonville Reformed Church building. Worship services continue still to be held on this schedule. The new congregation of Trinity PRC looks forward to taking full possession of the building in the spring of 2002, the Lord willing.

What a joyous occasion to witness the birth of another congregation in the Lord's church. The council and congregation of Trinity PRC thank the members of Hudsonville PRC for their generous financial and prayerful support and seek your prayers that the Lord will guide



Future Trinity PRC parsonage

them and bless this work.

For your information we also include here the name and phone number of Trinity's bulletin secretary. She is Ronda VanBemmel, phone: 662-9683 or e-mail: tgvan@altelco.net. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC has been active this summer with various projects. This year, as in the past, the committee has sponsored a booth presenting our denomination's literature at the Hudsonville Community Fair. Plans are currently being made for a fall lecture, together with a distribution of literature by mail. The committee has also been working at producing a website for the Hudsonville PRC which contains new information and audio sermons each week (www.HudsonvillePRC.org). Sunday sermon topics are usually listed on Saturday. A different Scriptural "Word" is given each week. The previous week's sermons are presented in audio form. Also a growing selection of sermons preached from Hudsonville's pulpit are listed in audio form (over 66 of these currently). To these have been added a few recordings of sermons from

Rev. H. Hoeksema, Rev. Gerrit Vos, and hopefully a few others of our early ministers. The committee also has produced a CD with 56 audio sermons from Hudsonville's pulpit. This can be played on a computer CD or an MP3 player (but not on the standard home CD player). The program to play the sermons is included on the CD obtainable from Hudsonville PRC, 5101 Beechtree St., Hudsonville, MI 49426, for \$15.00.

The Evangelism Committee of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI once again this summer sponsored their ever popular Summer Seminar. This year's theme was entitled, "Ready to Give an Answer: Responding to False Religions." For four successive Wednesdays in August, four of our denomination's pastors spoke on different false religions, starting August 1 with Rev. R. Cammenga, pastor of the Southwest PRC, speaking on "What Is Judaism?" followed the next three weeks by Rev. Doug Kuiper, pastor of the Byron Center, MI PRC, speaking on "What Is Buddhism?"; Rev. T. Miersma, home missionary of our churches, speaking on "What Is

Hinduism?" and Rev. W. Bruin-sma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, speaking on "What Is Islam?"

The Evangelism Committee of the Edgerton, MN PRC has set up a book shelf in their church basement. The shelf contains the books published by the RFPA, as well as some free literature. Members of Edgerton were encouraged to take a look at the books and purchase different titles if they were interested. In this way they could build their own personal libraries with good Reformed literature.

In mid-April we read in a bulletin from the South Holland, IL PRC that their Evangelism Committee has contracted to have the Reformed Witness Hour aired on a Chicago-land station beginning Saturday, April 20. If you live in the Chicago area you are encouraged to tune in to WYLL AM 1160 at 8:30 PM to hear Rev. Haak. And please spread the word to others.

Young People's Activities

The week of August 13-17 the Young People's Society of the First PRC in Holland, MI hosted the 61st annual Young People's Convention. This year's conven-

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

tion was held at the Lake Ann Baptist Camp on Lake Ann near Traverse City, MI. Much thanks goes to the young people and the entire congregation of First for all their hard work in preparing for the convention. A spiritually focused week of many activities was planned around the theme, "Christ — Our Guiding Light on the Sea of Life," with the Revs. Bekkering, Eriks, and VanOverloop speaking. We echo the thoughts and prayers of many parents and concerned church members when we say that it is our hope and prayer that the 405 young people who attended this year's convention may have been edified in their faith and walk with the Lord by this year's gathering.

Young Adults' Activities

The consistories of the First PRC of Edmonton and the Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, Alberta, Canada have given their support to the request of some of their members to

host a Young Adults' Retreat in Canada in the summer of 2002. These churches hope to make a Canadian Retreat an annual event, the Lord willing, with First and Immanuel alternating each year as host. Immanuel will be the host church for the year 2002. The retreat will be held at Deer Valley Meadows Conference Center near Alix on June 24-27, 2002. The retreat is open to all young adults 21 and older in all our PR churches in the US as well as our sister churches and mission stations. The retreat itself will be limited to approximately 50 young adults. The initial plans have been made and work is now being done on all the details. We will do our best to keep you informed as plans are made.

Minister Activities

The congregation of the Hull, IA PRC has extended a call to Rev. W. Bekkering of Pella, IA to serve as second missionary in Ghana.

The Doon, IA PRC presented to their congregation a trio from which one will be chosen to serve as missionary to the Philippines. That trio consisted of the Revs. W. Bruinsma of Kalamazoo, MI; A. denHartog of Redlands, CA; and R. Miersma of Lacombe. The Lynden, WA PRC called Rev. W. Bruinsma to be their next pastor, from a trio which also included Revs. B. Gritters and R. Miersma. The newly organized Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI formed their first trio, from which they planned to call a pastor. That trio consisted of the Revs. W. Bruinsma, C. Haak, and J. Slopsema.

Food For Thought

"We may be truly said to worship God, though we lack perfection; but we cannot be said to worship Him if we lack sincerity."

— S. Charnock

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Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 24, 2001, our beloved parents,
JIM and KATHY VANDER KOLK,

will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them and thank God for the many years He has given them together. We thank them for the Christian home and the spiritual guidance they have given us. It is our prayer that God will keep them in His care and bless their marriage for many years to come. "The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion; and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:5, 6).

- ❖ Mike ❖ Travis
- ❖ Clinton ❖ Lenora
- ❖ Jordan ❖ Loren

Grand Rapids, Michigan

REMINDER

With this issue, Volume 77 comes to a close. Bound volumes can be purchased for \$20.00 each (plus postage). Or, if you bring or send to the SB business office soon your own loose issues for binding, you can obtain the bound volume for just \$13.00. (The latter service can be provided best if we have your copies by October 15.)

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to our heavenly Father, the children of

GILBERT and LUELLA GRIESS

announce their 60th wedding anniversary on October 1, 2001. We are thankful for the love, the Christian upbringing and guidance, and the godly example they set before us. We are grateful to God for His covenant faithfulness in blessing their marriage for these many years. We pray that God will continue to care for them in the coming years. "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- ❖ Larry and Ileen Wrenn ❖ Dennis and Sharon Griess
- ❖ Ivan Griess ❖ David and Rachel Griess
- ❖ Leon and Vicki Griess ❖ Tim and Carmen Griess
- ❖ Glen and Twyla Griess

28 grandchildren, 1 deceased; 18 great-grandchildren, 2 deceased

Loveland, Colorado

IMPORTANT MEETING

The annual meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA), publisher of the *Standard Bearer* and of many Reformed books, will be held on Thursday, September 27, at 8 p.m. in Hudsonville PRC, Hudsonville, MI. Prof. David J. Engelsma, editor of the *Standard Bearer*, will speak on "Herman Hoeksema's Romans Sermons." The topic concerns a series of 97 sermons by Herman Hoeksema on the book of Romans that have never been published, but are now being published by the RFPA as a devotional commentary. The story of the existence of this valuable exposition of Romans is fascinating. All are welcome to attend the meeting. Show your support for the work of the RFPA by attending. Refreshments will be served after the meeting.