

# THE *November 1, 2001* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

## *In This Issue:*

### MEDITATION

Rev. Ronald J. VanOverloop

**Comfort and Stablish You** 50

### EDITORIAL

Prof. David J. Engelsma

**"So Built We the Wall" (concl.)** 52

### LETTERS

54

### FEATURE ARTICLES

Mr. Andrew Clarke

**Report on the Ordination of Rev. Angus Stewart** 54

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra

**Luther, Erasmus, and the  
Bondage of the Will (concl.)** 56

Rev. Ronald H. Hanko

**Luther's Doctrine of Justification (2)** 58

### GRACE LIFE

Rev. Mitchell C. Dick

**On Getting a Life (3)** 61

### ANNUAL REPORT

Mr. Calvin Kalsbeek

64

### WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

Mrs. Connie Meyer

**Teaching Hands to War (3)** 66

### UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

Mr. Calvin Kalsbeek

**Understanding the Times: An Introduction** 68

### BOOK REVIEWS

70

### NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

71



# Comfort and Stablish You

*"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."*

II Thessalonians 2:16, 17

**T**here is always perfect harmony between divine admonitions and prayer. The Scriptures show that beautiful harmony many times, including in our text. Paul had just admonished the Thessalonians to stand fast, and then Paul falls upon his knees and prays for God to enable them to stand fast.

We can admonish, but we cannot make anyone obey our admonitions. Pastors and elders frequently must admonish the sheep they oversee to follow God's commands. However, their ability to

admonish does not mean that they have the ability to make the sheep obey. Humans can admonish, but humans cannot make obedience follow. That is why those given the responsibility to admonish must learn that they must quickly pray to the only one who is able to make for obedience.

In the context Paul speaks of the fact that in the last days many will fall away (v. 3). He even describes how they will fall away (II Thess. 2:11, 12). Then, lest the saints in the church become even more frightened, Paul assures them that they will not fall away, because God has elected them from the beginning to salvation unto glory (II Thess. 2:13, 14). He then admonishes them to "stand fast" (II Thess. 2:15). Immediately after giving them this admonition, Paul prays for them. And he lets the saints know that he is praying for them.



There are two things which Paul desires for the believers at Thessalonica. The first is that God would "comfort your hearts."

To comfort someone means that someone is called alongside in

order to speak words of encouragement. The believers in Thessalonica were already shaken and troubled (II Thess. 2:2) because of a false teaching concerning Jesus' imminent return. Then, although Paul can assure them that Christ's return was not imminent, nor will it be unknown, he teaches them that Antichrist will come. In fact, Paul describes in detail all the evil and deceiving power of this horribly wicked one. The knowledge of the tremendous power of the Man of Sin can be very troubling. So the apostle asks that Jesus call the Thessalonians alongside Himself in order that He might comfort them.

The comfort Paul desires for the Thessalonians is not little. He asks that they be comforted in their "hearts," i.e., in the very depths of their being. That is where their comfort was needed. When we are troubled in our hearts, then we are at a complete loss as to what to think or do. And when the heart (out of which all the issues of life proceed) is comforted, then it will eventually affect the rest of our person — our mind, our emotions, and our actions. So may the heart be comforted. Paul asks God to get to

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The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

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\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

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16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

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the hearts of His children. "Comfort them, Lord."

This is a most legitimate prayer. The Scriptures declare that God and Jesus consider the comfort of their people to be very important. God sends Isaiah forth with the familiar words, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God" (Is. 40:1). Jesus was clearly concerned about the comfort of His disciples, when, the night in which He was betrayed, He said, "Let not your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1). God desires that the normal condition of His children be one of rest, happiness, comfort, and delight. "Delight thyself also in the LORD"; "fret not thyself"; "trust in the LORD"; "rest in the LORD" (Ps. 37:1, 3, 4, 7).

Uncomforted hearts convey bad things. First, unhappiness or being negative dishonors our God with our doubts and fears. God not only wants His people to be comforted, but also He has done everything that is necessary for them to be comforted. When they are not, then they are declaring that He has not done enough. Their fears and doubts imply a charge of inadequacy brought against God. And second, just as a joyful and comforted spirit is a powerful testimony to others of what God has done and is doing for us, so also do we who are professing believers, when we are not comforted, give occasion for our God and His comfort to be blasphemed. We must pray for God to comfort us, and for the ability to live in that comfort.

Comforted Christians are stable. They stand fast. The second petition of Paul for the Thessalonians is that they be "stablished." With this, Paul means that they be founded firmly, i.e., that they not be quickly or easily shaken and troubled. He had just admonished them to stand fast. Now he prays that God will make them firmly stablished, immovable. To be established means that we are not quickly troubled. To be established is to know that our union

with Christ is unchangeably firm, so we need not fear.

Our being firmly established evidences itself in our doing "every good word and work." When we are at rest in the arms of God or are standing on the Rock of Christ, then our life shows this quiet stability in our words and deeds. Then our hearts are characterized by delight and quiet joy as we consider the innumerable blessings God gives to us in Christ. Then there is a compelling desire to praise God from whom all blessings flow. Then there is the showing forth of His praise to others. Then it is a pleasure to do His will by obeying His commandments. The everlasting nature of the covenant that God has established with us is constant incentive to live gratefully in all good works.

Though the storm of Antichrist may howl all around us, we persist in doing our Father's will in our lives. Our Leader, Jesus Christ Himself, is coming. So we speak and live as if He is coming. Blessed shall he be who is found faithful, firmly established when his Lord returns. He will not nervously wonder what he should be doing in light of the Lord's return. He will calmly be doing what he is always supposed to be doing — God's will as revealed in the Ten Commandments.



The comfort and establishment which Paul desires the Thessalonian believers to have are not something he can give them. They are divine gifts. They are the work of Jesus and of God. So Paul lets the believers know that he prays that Jesus and God will do this for them. The source of every blessing of God's people is always "our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God, even our Father."

Notice the names. Our Savior is identified as the anointed Savior, who is also Lord. And the God of heaven and earth is identified as Father.

"Our" modifies both Jesus and Father. The fact that Jesus Christ is ours is a tremendous source of comfort for the present and of hope for the future. Jesus Himself and all of His attributes and blessings are at our disposal. We must realize that all of Jesus' work is ours because He is ours. If God has given Him to us, will He not, with Him, also freely give us all things (Rom. 8:32)?

And the fact that God is *our* Father provides us with immense comfort and future assurance. That God is our Father assures us that the perfect Father will surely do His children only good. There is no more comforting truth in times of trouble than the truth that God is our Father. This name describes His relationship to us as well as His attitude towards us. He loves us, His children. He will seek only their good. He wants His children to be enjoying their relationship with Him. He does not want us terrified, as a slave or servant might be. He wants His children to rejoice in that He is their Father.

The text places special emphasis on Jesus. It does this with the word order in the original language. The word "himself" comes first: "Now himself our Lord Jesus Christ." This is meant to draw our particular attention to Jesus, the one who made it possible for God to be our Father. Is there any more sure source of comfort to the Christian than to know that Jesus cares? We are called to look at Him who offered Himself as the perfect atonement for His people, removing all our guilt and earning for us perfect righteousness. He is the complete Savior! And we are called to look at Him who is enthroned as Lord and Master of the universe — a position given to Him at God's right hand, where He rules over the reprobate in the power of His might and over the elect in the power of His grace. He is Lord. Look at Him, the Savior and the Lord — our Savior and our Lord. He, Himself, is asked to



comfort and stablish us. Is there any doubt about His doing it, in light of everything He has done for us already?



In order to strengthen even further the assurance of God's people that Jesus and God will certainly comfort and establish them as they stand fast, Paul presents two things. These two truths serve as tremendous assurances that Jesus and God will do what Paul is asking them to do.

The first is that God "hath loved us."

God loved us before the foundation of the world, because His love is an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). Before the mountains were created, God saw His people, and already then He loved them. How truly sweet is this truth. God loved us when we were dead in sins and trespasses (Eph. 2:4, 5). God loved us when we resisted His Spirit and despised His Son, loving us into a state of grace and into loving Him. Though often grieved by us when we sin, He yet forgives and graciously continues to love us. May


the fact of this great love comfort our hearts and hold us fast in the midst of any trial. And may the knowledge of God's love constantly be motivation for us to love Him by striving to do His will.

Second, God has "given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." The Greek word for "consolation" is also sometimes translated "comfort." Remember that this means to call someone alongside in order to give encouragement through words or actions. This consolation is an objective gift which God has "given" to us. This refers to encouragement spoken and given to us. It is hope in the sense of that which we hope for. It is called "everlasting" because God's comforts take us through all of this earthly life — even through the days of Antichrist. God's power to encourage His people is greater than any ability of Satan and of Antichrist to discourage. It is everlasting because it is ever with us, and is essentially perfected in glory. Encouragement is found in pardoned sin, and in our adoption into God's family.

The "good hope" is hope which

is well founded. It is hope which is based on the promises of God and on the redemptive work of Christ. It is a hope which is full of joy. It is a hope which never ends in disappointment. It is a hope which has as its object the triune God. Hope is good in the sense that the realization of this hope will prove that it is and has been most valuable.

All of this consolation and good hope is given to us "in grace." We are reminded that the love which prompts these gifts is a completely undeserved favor of God. All of His giving and all of the gifts He gives are by grace alone. All that God has given to us is the source of encouragement and hope. Therefore, we are bound to remain in the posture of waiting and hoping.

What a prayer! Let pastors pray this prayer frequently for their flocks. May elders pray this prayer for the congregations over which God has made them overseers. May parents pray this prayer for their children and grandchildren. Let us all pray this prayer for each other. 

## Editorial

# "So Built We the Wall"\* (conclusion)

*"So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work"*

Nehemiah 4:6

### A Difficult Work

**B**uilding the wall of Jerusalem was difficult for Nehemiah and Judah. The work itself was hard

work. There was truth in Sanballat's angry mockery: "Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" (Neh. 4:2) The city of Jerusalem was rubble and burned rubbish. Out of the ruin, the Jews had to find suitable stones, carry them to their place, and laboriously cement them, one on the other, to form a wall. They did this by hand.

\* The text of the speech given on the occasion of the opening and dedication of Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, Illinois on August 22, 2001. The first installment appeared in the October 1, 2001 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

The workers—the Jews who had returned from Babylon—were few: “What do these feeble Jews?” asked Sanballat in wonder. No longer were the people of Israel the millions that once they were, but only a few thousand, struggling to survive.

As if this did not make the work sufficiently difficult, the work was opposed by enemies: the half-Jews and half-heathens, who were the Samaritans, in league with the surrounding heathen nations.

Make no mistake, the determined opposition was a testimony to the importance of the work. The enemies knew the necessity of the wall for the welfare of Judah and for the glory of Judah’s God.

Nevertheless, the work, hard in itself, was burdened by opposition. That opposition took the form of mockery. The Jews have no strength for the work. They lack suitable materials for the work. The result of their work will be complete failure: “Even that which they built, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall” (Neh. 4:3). Mockery is an especially effective form of opposition, for it discourages the workers.

In addition, there was open threat of force and violence: “[The enemies] conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it” (Neh. 4:8). Because of this danger, half of Nehemiah’s personal servants worked, while half stood guard with weapons. As for the men who labored, they could work with only one hand. With the other hand, they had to hold a weapon.

Was this not difficult labor?

No wonder that the people were discouraged: “And Judah said, the strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed [Hebrew: failing], and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall” (Neh. 4:10).

This was the daunting difficulty of the work that was necessary for the covenant and Christ of

God, work that God Himself commanded.

“So built we the wall, in such hard circumstances and in spite of the difficulty,” said Nehemiah.

Likewise, the work of Christian education is difficult—specifically, establishing and then maintaining and developing Heritage Christian High School. The numbers are comparatively small—few students and few supporters. The labor is great and exhausting—teaching, administering, and supporting a high school. The cost is high. And I would not be surprised if the work has its detractors: “What do these feeble ‘PRs’? Do they think that they can carry out the demanding project of a high school with their meager resources? And even if they educate a few students, the students will be badly taught and poorly prepared for real life in the world.”

We must not minimize the difficulty, not at all, but we may remind ourselves that the difficulties of the present work are not new. The work of Christian education has always proceeded under these same difficulties.

In 1876, Christian Reformed people—and they were our spiritual and even physical forebears—started what is now Calvin College with one teacher teaching seven students every subject of a high school, college, and seminary curriculum on the second floor of an old building in a poor section of Grand Rapids.

I myself saw my own parents and the parents of the girl who is now my wife, with a handful of others in Hope Church, at that time—1946—fewer than 25 families, all of them barely able to make ends meet, put up a grade school of nine grades for the children of that church.

When Abraham Kuyper’s Free University of Amsterdam opened in December 1880, it had no building of its own. So was it struggling financially, that many said that the professors would soon be

enrolled in Amsterdam’s poor-house. It had exactly five students, one for each of the five professors. It was bitterly opposed, not only by the world and its universities, but also by leaders in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. As for ridicule, every morning when the professors and five students came to school they found written anew in chalk over the door of the building that they were using these words: “Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here”—words that Dante had inscribed on the portals of hell in his *Inferno*.

I point out that all three of these schools survived and flourished!

But we must recognize the reality that God does not make the work of Reformed, Christian education easy. As regards Christian schools, always those who work for them have to say, “So built we the wall, despite great difficulty.”

### A Blessed Work

Despite the great difficulty of the work, those who built the wall of Jerusalem persevered, so that they made good progress with the wall. It was not the case that the wall was finished at the time that Nehemiah and the others said, “So built we the wall.” The wall would be finished. It would be reared up to its full height. It would completely encircle the holy city. Its strong gates would be set in place. We read of the completion in Nehemiah 7. The service of dedication is recorded in Nehemiah 12.

But at the time that Nehemiah said, “So built we the wall,” the wall was only “joined together unto the half thereof,” that is, the wall went all around Jerusalem, but only to half its full height. And it was still lacking its gates.

This was progress. It was progress that encouraged Nehemiah and the other workers on the wall. This progress was due to the blessing of God upon the work. God blessed the work that He Himself commanded and that was nec-



essary for His covenant, His church, and His name. The form that the blessing took was the willingness of the people to work: "for the people had a mind to work." Literally, the Hebrew of Nehemiah 4:6 says that the people had a "heart" to work. God gave that heart. God gave that heart despite all the difficulty. He gave that heart by binding on the people's heart His command and the necessity of the wall.

Still, the building was not finished. The wall was in progress. All the difficulties remained. Opposition continued. Critics still mocked. According to earthly

judgment, the outcome of the work was yet uncertain. Nehemiah and Judah had to keep on building. They had to keep on building in trust in the blessing of God.

"So we went on building," said Nehemiah, "praying to, depending on, and hoping in God. The wall and work are His."

Similarly, you who work in this area on soundly Reformed secondary education must go on building, trusting in the blessing of God. This night marks a beginning—a good, solid beginning. You have made progress. God has blessed the work of preparation stretching back now some 20 years.

But obviously much remains still to be done.

Board, supporters, parents, students, and teachers, look to the blessing of God for furthering the work now in progress. Look to the blessing that gives the people a heart to work. Look to the blessing that maintains the school and then brings it to completion. Pray the petition of Psalm 51:18: "O God ... build *thou* the walls of Jerusalem."

So you continue building the wall of the sound instruction of the church's children in the Reformed faith and life, by the blessing of our covenant God.

— DJE 

## Letters


### Thoughtful Review

Thanks to Rev. Key for his thoughtful review of the initial volume of *Unfolding Covenant History*. Perhaps this will be the impetus for those of your readers who

have not purchased or read this book to do so.

Rev. Key suggested that a textual and a subject index would be helpful. Your readers will be pleased to know that while a subject index is not contemplated, a

comprehensive textual index for all volumes is planned at the end of the final volume in this series.

Mark H. Hoeksema  
Hudsonville, Michigan 

## Feature Articles

# Report on the Ordination of Rev. Angus Stewart

Andrew Clark

**O**n 4<sup>th</sup> July 2001, Angus Stewart was installed as the minister of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena Northern Ireland. As yet, the congregation does not

have their own building to meet in, so Ballymena Town Hall was rented for the occasion. The ordination was well advertised. Personal invitations were sent to those who had expressed an interest in the work of Covenant. The preparation paid off — there was a good number attending, made up of church members, friends of the congregation, and relatives of

Rev. Stewart. We were also delighted to have with us Rev. Barry Gritters and Elder Erv Kortering from Hudsonville PRC. This was a first-time visit for Elder Kortering, while Rev. Gritters has become well-known to the congregation through his frequent visits, and is held in high esteem for his warm preaching and wise advice. It was highly fitting that he

*Andrew Clarke is a member of the CPRC in Northern Ireland.*





*Ceremony of the "laying on of the hands of the presbytery"*

*l. to r.: J. McAuley, B. Crossett, B. Gritters, E. Kortering, J. Clarke*

preached at this milestone in the congregation's history. He took as his text II Corinthians 11:1, 2: "For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ."


In a clear, direct manner, the text was explained. At the time when the letter was written, it was customary for the bridegroom to select a friend to help with the marriage preparations (somewhat like a best man today). It was the task of the friend to watch over the bride-to-be, and to ensure that she remained faithful until the day of the wedding. This is the analogy Paul is using here. Christ is the Bridegroom, the church is bride, and the minister acts as the bridegroom's friend, watching over what has been entrusted to him. And what dangers threaten! Seducers will try to corrupt her with false but flattering doctrines that undermine all that Christ has done for her. Others may break down the antithesis and try to dazzle the bride of Christ with the offerings of the world. The bride herself can even destroy her beauty with pride,

luke-warmness, or a lack of love. All these must be exposed, denounced, and warned against. The church must constantly be reminded of the glory of Christ. Then too, there is the danger that the friend of the bridegroom himself might try to seduce the bride. He might seek popularity, wealth, or a good reputation at the expense of faithfulness to Christ.

Instead, he must be filled with a godly jealousy over his flock. He must, to the best of his capacity, reflect the love and jealousy of the Bridegroom. The content of his preaching must be the messages of Christ to His bride. They must be delivered with the feeling and sincerity that a friend will have. His pastoral duties will be designed to care for and nourish the congregation. Finally, the friend himself will be rewarded at the marriage feast.

Rev. Gritters, the elders of the congregation, and Elder Kortering then ordained Rev. Stewart. In recognition of his office, he was invited to close the service with the benediction. Afterwards Brian

Crossett, an elder in Covenant, made a brief address of welcome and thanks to those present. He expressed the gratitude that the congregation especially felt towards the Protestant Reformed Churches in America for helping Angus and the congregation reach this point through their general financial assistance, the sending of Rev. Hanko as a missionary, and their wise advice on numerous occasions. Rev. Stewart also spoke, giving a brief testimony and explaining his call to the ministry. The meeting was closed in prayer by Elder Kortering. Afterwards there was a time for food and fellowship.

Not only was the service encouragement for the members but also a good witness to those visiting. The fact that the congregation has a minister of its own has also sent out a message to those in Ballymena and elsewhere in Northern Ireland that the congregation has regained stability, and is looking forward to a new period of growth under the blessing of God. It would be foolish, however, to underestimate the task ahead. The congregation earnestly desires the prayers of their friends in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the United States for Rev. Stewart and his wife, and for the rest of the congregation. 



*Session:*

*Jonathan McAuley, Ivan Reid, Rev. Stewart, Brian Crossett, Allister Pattison, John Clarke*



# Luther, Erasmus, and the Bondage of the Will (concluded)

Prof. Russell Dykstra

**L**uther's *Bondage of the Will* was a thorough refutation of the notion of a free will in fallen man as set forth by the world-renowned Desiderius Erasmus in his refined discourse entitled *On the Freedom of the Will*. This was the crucial issue in Luther's mind. He praised Erasmus because he alone among Luther's opponents had recognized that the doctrine of free will was "the grand turning point of the cause." Luther wrote, "You, and you alone saw, what was the grand hinge upon which the whole turned" (Section 168).\*

As noted in the first part of this article (October 15, 2001 issue), Erasmus desired that the discussion be conducted peacefully. He affirmed his belief in Scripture, but insisted that at issue was the interpretation of Scripture. He claimed that Luther stood virtually alone in his position among theologians going back to the ancient fathers.

Erasmus' arguments in support of the doctrine of free will are mainly these:

1. The fact that God commands implies that man has the ability to obey the commands.
2. If man does not have the free will to obey God and/or to believe, then God is unjust to demand it of man.
3. Erasmus denies that natural man can only do evil. Even the pagans, he insists, do good.
4. Erasmus maintains that natural man's will is weak, but not

powerless. Man's will needs grace to accomplish the good. He distinguishes several kinds of grace supposedly given to man to assist him.

5. Perhaps the most important element in Erasmus' apology for free will is that man can merit with God.

How, then, does Luther answer this brilliant scholar and defender of free will? In a word, Luther devastates Erasmus' arguments. First of all, Luther contemns Erasmus' efforts, so much so that he considered not even answering it. Writes Luther, "On so great a subject, you say nothing but what has been said before: therefore, you say less about, and attribute more unto 'Free-will,' than the Sophists have hitherto said and attributed." Luther contends that all these arguments have often been refuted. He adds, "I greatly feel for you for having defiled your most beautiful and ingenious language with such vile trash" (Introduction).

As to the dispute itself, Luther addresses Erasmus' desire that these discussions ought to be conducted without fighting. Luther points out that this is not the way of the history of the church, or of the spread of the gospel, because

[t]he world and its god cannot and will not bear the Word of the true God: and the true God cannot and will not keep silence. While, therefore, these two Gods are at war with each other, what can there be else in the whole world, but tumult?

Therefore, to wish to silence these tumults, is nothing else, than to wish to hinder the Word of God, and to take it out of the

way.... And as to myself, if I did not see these tumults, I should say the Word of God was not in the world (Section 19).

Luther identifies the central issue, and its unspeakable importance. It is essential, he writes, "for a Christian to know, whether or not the will does any thing in those things which pertain unto Salvation. Nay, let me tell you, this is the very hinge upon which our discussion turns." That, because it involves knowing what God's power does, and thus knowing God Himself. If there is anyone who yet thinks that the issue of a free will is of no importance for the Christian faith, he must hear Luther:

But if I know not the distinction between our working and the power of God, I know not God Himself. And if I know not God, I cannot worship Him, praise Him, give Him thanks, nor serve Him; for I shall not know how much I ought to ascribe unto myself, and how much unto God (Section 7).

As to the term "free-will," Luther prefers that the term never be used, because it deceives people with "the most destructive mockery." It implies that men have the power of free choice in the matter of salvation, when the opposite is true. If the term must be used, Luther would have all to remember that man has

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\* All quotations from *The Bondage of the Will* are taken from the translation by Henry Cole, printed by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1976.



as to his goods and possessions the right of using, acting, and omitting, according to his "Free-will"; although, at the same time, that same "Free-will" is overruled by the Free-will of God alone, just as He pleases: but that, Godward, or in things which pertain unto salvation or damnation, he has no "Free-will," but is a captive, slave, and servant, either to the will of God, or to the will of Satan (Section 26).

Luther answers the charge that he is opposed by the church of all ages, which would mean, if Luther is correct, that God allowed His church to be in error for centuries. First of all, Luther asserts that Augustine is very much in his corner, a fact that Luther demonstrates repeatedly. Secondly, he points out that the church, externally considered, from Israel to Luther's day, often did err. Yet, he insists that the church of God and the members are hidden, and that God was pleased to preserve His saints even through those times. The calling, therefore, is to try the spirits. This every Christian can and must do because, on the one hand, he has the Spirit, and, on the other hand, the Scriptures are clear. Luther demonstrates this by quoting copiously from Scripture itself. He asks rhetorically, "[I]f the Scripture be obscure or ambiguous, what need was there for its being sent down from heaven?" Then he turns the argument back on Erasmus — "And why do you also, Erasmus, prescribe to us a form of Christianity, if the Scriptures be obscure to you!" (Section 36).

It is worth noting that Luther demands logical consistency in the formulation of doctrine. He shreds Erasmus' arguments by exposing the contradictions found throughout. He notes that Erasmus' definition of free will is hopelessly vague and thus open to various interpretations. Erasmus claims that man has a will able to choose the good without grace, and in other places maintains that man can will

nothing good without the grace of God. Writes Luther, "Hence then, Erasmus, outstripping all others, has two 'Free-wills'; and they, militating against each other!" (Section 48).

What then of the many conditional statements in Scripture adduced by Erasmus — "If thou wilt hear" or "if thou wilt do"? Do these prove that man has a free will to do or to hear? Or is it so, that by these God mocks man, because man cannot obey them anyway? Luther rejects those conclusions. He writes, "Why is this not rather drawn as a conclusion — therefore, God tries us, that by His law He might bring us to a knowledge of our impotency, if we be His friends; or, He thereby righteously and deservedly insults and derides us, if we be His proud enemies" (Section 52).

Similarly, Luther dismisses the Pelagian error that the various commandments of God imply that man has the ability to keep them.

And this is the place, where I take occasion to enforce this my general reply: — that man, by the words of the law, is admonished and taught what *he ought to do*, not what *he can do*: that is, that he is brought to know his sin, but not to believe that he has any strength in himself. Wherefore, friend Erasmus, as often as you throw in my teeth the Words of the law, so often I throw in yours that of Paul, "By the law is the knowledge of sin," — not of the power of the will. Heap together, therefore, out of the large Concordances all the imperative words into one chaos, provided that, they be not words of the promise but of the requirement of the law only, and I will immediately declare, that by them is always shewn what men *ought to do*, not what they *can do*, or *do do* (Section 56).

Furthermore, Luther takes pains to show that Erasmus proves too much. If all these conditional sentences and commands indicate that man can *will* to do what God

enjoins, it necessarily follows that the same statements prove that man can actually *do* what God commands. Repeatedly Luther reminds Erasmus of the necessary implications — there is no need for the Spirit or grace of God to work in man. He can keep the commandments; he can save himself. Indeed, there is no need even of Christ or the cross.

Luther is quick to remind Erasmus that the Scriptures present a very different picture, namely, "a man, who is not only bound, miserable, captive, sick, and dead, but who, by the operation of his lord, Satan, to his other miseries, adds that of blindness: so that he believes he is free, happy, at liberty, powerful, whole, and alive" (Section 58).

The question naturally arises, why then do some believe and obey, and others do not, if all men are in bondage. Luther asserts that this is due to the "SECRET AND TO BE FEARED WILL OF GOD, who, according to His own counsel, ordains whom, and such as He will, to be receivers and partakers of the preached and offered mercy" (Section 64). Even the conditional sentences must be understood in light of predestination. Writes Luther,

"If thou wilt": that is, if thou be such with God, that he shall deign to give thee this will to keep the commandments, thou shalt be saved. According to which manner of speaking, it is given us to understand both truths. — That we can do nothing ourselves; and that, if we do any thing, God works that in us (Section 68).

Luther takes on the giant — the issue of merit. Luther rejects Erasmus' conclusion that the promises of reward prove that the will can merit with God. He reminds Erasmus that the promises are exactly that — gracious promises of what God will do. In addition, he points out that these are promises to God's people, and the promise



is no longer to the supposed free will of fallen man, but to men "raised above 'Free-will' in grace, and justified" (Section 69).

As far as anyone ever being *worthy* of reward, that is impossible, Luther maintains. For if "Free-will" cannot of itself will good, but wills good by grace alone, (for we are speaking of "Free-will" apart from grace and inquiring into the power which properly belongs to each) who does not see, that that good will, merit, and reward, belong to grace alone (Section 70).

On the other hand, Luther draws the logical consequence that if it be allowed that man can by free will choose the good, then God is "robbed of His power and wisdom to elect." He adds:

Nay, we shall at length come to this: that men may be saved and damned without God's knowing anything at all about it; as not having determined by certain election who should be saved and who should be damned; but having set before all men in general His hardening goodness and long-suffering, and His mercy shewing correction and punishment, and left them to choose for themselves whether they would be saved or damned (Section 81).

Not only so, but Luther points to other considerations which absolutely rule out the possibility of a free will in man, namely, God's sovereignty and His foreknowledge. God is omnipotent, otherwise "He would be a ridiculous God." At the same time, God "knows and foreknows all things, and neither can err nor be deceived." The "inevitable consequence" is that there is no such thing as a free will. Luther recognizes that this is an offense to man, "that the God, who is set forth as being so full of mercy and goodness, should, of His mere will, leave men, harden them, and damn them, as though He delighted in the sins, and in the great and eternal torments of the miserable." Luther's response?


And who would not be offended? I myself have been offended more than once, even unto the deepest abyss of desperation; nay, so far, as even to wish that I had never been born a man; that is, before I was brought to know how healthful that desperation was, and how near it was unto grace (Section 94).

But that man should be offended does not lead Luther to tamper with the truth of Scripture. God is

sovereign and omniscient. Man is not free, though his sins are his own, not God's, for man is not forced to sin.

Having demolished the arguments of Erasmus, Luther contends for the grace of God against free will. He demonstrates the truth from Scripture that all men are depraved, guilty, and incapable of doing or willing good. Man's salvation is all of grace. Man merits nothing. His righteousness is from Christ, imputed freely and by grace.

Hence Luther reveals the seriousness of the matter when he writes, "And I would also, that the advocates for 'Free-will' be admonished in this place, that when they assert 'Free-will,' they are deniers of Christ. For if I obtain grace by my own endeavours, what need have I of the grace of Christ for the receiving of my grace?" (Section 157). And again, "And thus, while you establish 'Free-will,' you make Christ void, and bring the whole Scripture to destruction. And though you may pretend, verbally, that you confess Christ; yet, in reality and in heart, you deny Him" (Section 159).

So far Luther, defender of the irresistible, saving grace of God in Christ. 

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## Luther's Doctrine of Justification (2)

Rev. Ron Hanko

### Milking a Ram with a Sieve: Works Righteousness Rejected

**I**n the previous article (October 15, 2001) we examined the essential points of Luther's Reformed and reforming doctrine of justification. In this article

we wish to look at some supplementary points, and, first of all, a little further at his opposition to the pernicious doctrine of justification by works. In his own inimitable way he expresses his opposition to the doctrine of justification by works:

Trying to be justified through the Law, therefore, is as though

someone who is already weak and sick were to ask for some even greater trouble that would kill him completely but meanwhile were to say that he intends to cure his disease by this very means; or as though someone suffering from epilepsy were to catch the plague in addition; or as though a leper were to come to another leper, or a beggar to another beggar, with the aim of giving him assistance and making him rich. As the

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proverb says, one of these is milking a billy goat and the other is holding the sieve.<sup>1</sup>

Luther means that any talk of works in connection with justification is an attempt to cure man's disease with the disease itself — to cure his wicked working by more works. How angry he would be, therefore, to find that the majority of today's evangelicals are doing just that by making faith itself a work. He knew from experience that it could not possibly be so.

There is, then, the teaching, so very common today, which makes of faith a decision or act of a man's own free will. It suggests that faith, the only requirement for justification, must proceed from man, and it entirely forgets what Ephesians 2:8-10 says about faith. That teaching comes in the guise of well-meant "offers" of salvation, altar calls, decision theology, and such like, and accompanies the notion that salvation, by Christ's death, is available to all. It is as much the death of all true theology as was the Romish doctrine of salvation by other works.

Luther himself points out the error of this kind of thinking:

The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin, so that he becomes doubly guilty.<sup>2</sup>



But who can bear this blasphemy that our works beget us, or that we are the creatures of our works? In that case it would be permissible to say, contrary to the prophet, "We have made ourselves, and God has not created us" (Mal. 2:10; Ps. 100:3).<sup>3</sup>

Forde, in his book on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, correctly analyzes this modern form of work righteousness. He says:

Theology tries to describe accurately what the situation is, but in

the fallen world descriptions always turn into prescriptions. Then they become deadly, especially when they turn up in sermons! So, talk of humility, or faith, or grace tends invariably to slip over into prescriptions for what we are to do to make ourselves as humble as possible, or to get some faith, or to decide for grace, and so on. In the theology of the cross, however, the point is that the language is to be used in such a way that every prescription is cut off.... Thus the important question of whether or not humbling oneself or falling down and praying for grace is "doing something" can only be turned back on the questioner: "When you humble yourself and plead for grace, are you making the claim that you are doing something? If so, you are not pleading for grace, but only your own cause. And so you are still lost. Give up and believe the gospel!"<sup>4</sup>

#### Like a Beast Between Two Riders: The Bondage of the Will

The chief reason Luther rejected the idea that faith is a work of man was his belief in the bondage of the will. Unlike most Christians today, he completely rejected the idea that the will of fallen man could ever act autonomously, on its own:

Man's will is like a beast standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills.... If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek, but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have and hold it.<sup>5</sup>

Faith cannot, therefore, be an act of man's will, a decision for Christ or a choosing between God and Satan, between salvation and damnation, between heaven and hell.

It is at this point, therefore, that Luther differs the most from modern Christianity. The church today, for the most part, has gone back to the doctrine of Rome and Erasmus,

against whom Luther wrote his most famous work, the work from which we have just quoted. The sad thing is, of course, that the modern church has not only gone back to Rome's doctrine of the will, but is, as a result, on its way back also to Rome's doctrine of justification as well. There are prominent evangelical leaders like James Packer who cannot distinguish between Rome's doctrine and that of historic, biblical Protestantism.

Modern Protestantism's doctrine is not exactly the same as Rome's doctrine of justification by works, but it is much more subtle and dangerous than that of Rome. It is the teaching that salvation is of man's willing, where Rome teaches that it is of man's running (Rom. 9:16), both just different forms of what Luther considered blasphemy.

#### No Holidays: No Faith without Works

By way of emphasizing that faith is not another work, but a gift of God, Luther often said that we have *nothing at all to do* in our justification:

He is not righteous who works much, but he who, *without work*, believes much in Christ.

The law says, "do this," and it is never done. Grace says, "be-

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1 *Luther's Works*, vol. 26, pp. 403, 404, "Lecture on Galatians 4:9."

2 *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, p. 40, "Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 16." An excellent analysis of the "Heidelberg Disputation" is found in Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans: 1997).

3 *Luther's Works*, vol. 34, p. 114, "Theses Concerning Faith, 69, 70."

4 Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, p. 63.

5 Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, ed. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (London: James Clarke: 1957), pp. 103, 104.



lieve in this," and *everything is already done*.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of the fact that some of Luther's own associates misunderstood him and fell into antinomianism and libertinism, denying good works altogether, Luther himself never had any sympathy for such teaching. Though we, said Luther, have nothing at all to do for our justification, there is much that we do as a result of justification:

For it (faith) surely must not be such a sluggish, useless, deaf, or dead thing; it must be a living, productive tree which yields fruit. Therefore this is the test, and this is the difference between faith that is genuine and faith that is false and colored: where faith is true, it manifests itself in life. A false faith, to be sure, bears the same name, employs the same words, and boasts of the same things; but nothing results from it.<sup>7</sup>



Where faith is of the right kind, there deeds also follow; and the greater the faith, the greater the deeds. Faith of the right kind is indeed something powerful, mighty, and active. To it nothing is impossible; nor does it take a rest or take a holiday.<sup>8</sup>

How few there are today who are so taught of God — who can stand firmly against all efforts to make of faith another work, but who can also stand against those who think that any mention of works is a denial of grace.

### The Only Organs of the Christian Man: Faith by Hearing

In his desire to preserve the doctrine of free and gracious justification, justification by faith alone, Luther emphasized very strongly that the chief action of justifying faith is to hear the Word. The Christian, for Luther, is in the most literal sense "all ears":

But the word "ears" is emphatic

and forceful to an extraordinary degree; for in the new law all those countless burdens of the ceremonies, that is, dangers of sins, have been taken away. God no longer requires the feet or hands or any other member; He requires only the ears. To such an extent has everything been reduced to an easy way of life. For if you ask a Christian what the work is by which he becomes worthy of the name "Christian," he will be able to give absolutely no other answer than that it is the hearing of the Word of God, that is, faith. Therefore the ears alone are the organs of a Christian man, for he is justified and declared to be a Christian, not because of the works of any member but because of faith.<sup>9</sup>

Timothy George suggests that: "*Fides ex auditu*, 'faith out of hearing,' 'faith by means of listening,' is perhaps the best summary of his Reformation discovery."<sup>10</sup>

Why did Luther place so much emphasis on hearing the Word, to the extent at times of identifying faith and hearing? The answer seems plain. On the one hand, Luther wanted to make it as clear as possible that faith is from God and not from man himself. If it comes by hearing, it *must* come from God. On the other hand, over against the idea that faith was some kind of substitute work, Luther emphasizes in this way the "passiveness" of justifying faith. It *works* nothing; it only hears. The Christian man, the believer, is *all ears*.

### Plagued by the Devil: The Necessity of Being Justified

Because he himself had learned the truth of justification through long spiritual searching and struggling, Luther insisted that only those who are in fact justified by faith and who by faith knew Christ and had taken refuge in Him could understand and receive the biblical doctrine of justification. Any other faith than true justifying faith is no faith at all and cannot profit:

I say that, if we are ever to stand

before God with a right and uncolored faith, we must come to the point where we learn clearly to distinguish and separate between ourselves, our life, and Christ the mercy seat. But he who will not do this, but immediately runs head-long to the judgment seat, will find it all right and get a good knock on the head. I have been there myself and was so burnt that I was glad I was able to come to the mercy seat.<sup>11</sup>

Luther has reference here, of course, to faith which thinks itself self-produced, and which believes itself to be "doing something." Such faith cannot find the mercy seat — cannot find Christ — and only gets "knocked on the head."

Not only was Luther's love for the doctrine of justification the result of his own experience (it was for him, as we have seen, the "gate of paradise"), but his opposition to any hint of work righteousness was also the fruit of his own spiritual struggles. He knew the spiritual danger posed by false doctrine to deceitful human hearts:

Whoever is interested may learn a lesson from my example, which I shall now confess. A few times — when I did not bear this principal teaching in mind — the devil caught up with me and plagued me with Scripture passages until heaven and earth became too small for me. Then all the works and laws of man were right, and not an error was to be found in the whole papacy. In short, the

6 *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, p. 40, "Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 25, 26." Quoted from Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, pp. 103-110.

7 *Luther's Works*, vol. 24, pp. 264, 265, "Sermon on John 15:17, 18."

8 Quoted from Leaver, *Luther on Justification*, p. 81, note 55.

9 *Luther's Works*, vol. 29, p. 224, "Lectures on Hebrews (10:19)."

10 Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Press: 1988), p. 54.

11 *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, p. 282, "Sermon on the Sum of the Christian Life."



only one who had ever erred was Luther. All my best works, teaching, sermons, and books had to be condemned. The abominable Mohammed almost became my prophet, and both Turks and Jews were on the way to pure sainthood. Therefore, dear brother, be not proud or smug, and certain that you know Christ well. You hear what I confess to you, admitting what the devil was able to do against Luther, who is supposed to be a doctor in this art, who has preached, composed, written, said, sung, and read so much in these matters but must still remain a


student and sometimes may not be either master or student. So take my advice, and do not celebrate too soon. Are you standing? Then see that you do not fall (I Cor. 10:12)!<sup>12</sup>

A timely warning indeed!

He pointed out, too, that not only the believer, but the church must ensure that it does not lose this doctrine:

If the article on justification hadn't fallen, the brotherhoods, pilgrimages, masses, invocation of

saints, etc., would have found no place in the church. If it falls again (which may God prevent!), these idols will return.<sup>13</sup>

How many churches, once standing, have begun to fall through loss of this doctrine in the teaching of the church and in the consciousness of its members. May we stand. 

12 *Luther's Works*, vol. 14, pp. 37, 38, "Sermon on Psalm 117."

13 *Luther's Works*, vol. 54, p. 340, "Table Talk."

Grace Life

Rev. Mitchell Dick

## "On Getting a Life" (3)

**T**his is the life. Spike (your hair). Do (affirmative action). Study dispassionately (stem cells). Hug passionately (yon tree). Live (for money). Go (to the Laughing Church). Believe (in Yourself). Play (the lottery). Swim (across Lake Superior). Love (the things Madonna loves). Rock. Roll. And Sin (in everything).

The life — saith the world! Come and get it!

But, dear youthful reader—don't! For the world's life is no life. Theirs is life without God. Vanity. Terrible depraved death-life now. And then death-death forever. *Saith the Lord!*

Dear young Christian readers: *your* life is so different! Yours is Grace life. Life with God. A gift of grace. The Life.

Now we want to talk about *getting* that life — the grace life you

have. That's right. We *have* the good grace life. But just a beginning of it. The rest of our life is a *getting* of that life.

"Getting" that life you already have is simply appreciating that life, and growing in it. It is not getting alive for the first time. It is not reading someone's manual on how to be born again and then following its directions and conceiving yourself. We're talking living out of the life we already have. Developing. Maturing. Keeping yourself from and even killing the things that would shrink you and stifle and even strangle your Christian life. Becoming more holy. Being conformed day by day into the image of Christ whose image you already bear.

Like Israel. She of all people had the life with God. She was the covenant-secrets-of-God-knowing community. She really lived! And she was also called to grow in that life. She, fairest woman of them all, had been given the land of Canaan. Once she passed over Jordan on dry ground she was in. Hers was the kingdom of heaven.

Her portion was *life with God* in that kingdom. But she still had to conquer, and to destroy or drive out the Canaanites. She still had to possess the possession. She had to get it. And that done, she had to get it some more. In 1000+ other ways. Like building a temple. Then offering 999+ bulls and sheep and goats.

You young believers have got lots of *getting* to do too — on the other side of Calvary and Pentecost! A whole life ahead of you (God willing) of getting the life. What a prospect!

Here's how to get it.

First, Faith. Fundamentally, faith. Faith. Faith. Faith.

That means believing.

That means first of all relying on God. It means looking around and seeing lots of sinking sand. Sinking sand underneath you. Sinking sand holding up Pentagons. Sinking sand under Afghanistan. Sinking sand under Man. Sinking sand under Freud. Sinking sand under the Beatles. Sinking sand under the Koran. Sinking sand under the great guys who



hit 70, and under the beautiful girls who top 10, and under the Forbes men and women who've accumulated 80 billion. In believing you see that sinking sand. But then the wonder of believing is that you will have none of it, and stand on none of it, trust in none of the people and institutions built on it. On Christ the solid rock you stand.

Amazing! Amazing grace, I say!

No one else even sees the sand. And they are all standing there sinking, and unhappy, and trying to climb to the top, and soon to be destroyed. But to you is given to *trust* in the living God and the only foundation for life which He has laid — Jesus Christ the Righteous. Amazing! Like the psalmist we believe, and in that activity we cast off reliance on chariots and horses, and, remembering the name of Almighty God, we set up our banners in His name (Ps. 20:5, 7). Believing we use doctors, we hear preaching — all means God uses to help our bodies and save the soul. But in God we trust. And, you see, it is in that activity of *utter humility, of earthlings acknowledging earthiness and sinners admitting sinfulness* before God that the living is real and the living is good. We've gotten the life!

Then this believing involves what I would call "bonding." If we are going to *get* the life of the Christian, truly to appreciate it, grow in it, live out of it, it will be by means of this faith, this believing, which is a bonding.

Here's what I mean. By faith we are joined to God in a living union. Jesus speaks of that in John 15. He is the Vine. We are the branches. Once withering on the vine Adam, now by grace through faith we are joined to Christ. By faith we are engrafted into Christ, the Catechism teaches (Lord's Day 7). Well now, in believing, in acting out of our faith, we draw nigh to God. We seek to know Him more, we pray to Him, we hear Him, we desire to receive more and more the life that He gives, the

blessings which He bestows, the Spirit and grace of Christ.

This is bonding. Bonding which is not only a *result* of our faith union made initially with Christ when we were first given faith. Bonding which is also a *process*, and an *activity* of believing — involving us and urged upon us in the Scriptures.

It is like this. Say there is a father and a child. They can just stand there and be father and child in name and nose only. Or they *do* the things father and child do to grow together, appreciate each other, and share life together — to *bond*. So it is with the heavenly Father and His children. God sovereignly and graciously comes to us and draws us to Himself to bond us to Himself. He is always doing that — He bids us to eat with Him, to spend time with Him, He calls us to church to speak to us, He is there next to us in the car telling us to turn off the radio and to think on His promises — all so that there might be this bonding, this development of the relationship we have in Christ and through His Spirit. And we, on our part, already joined to God, children of the Father, *we do draw nigh*, enabled by the Spirit within, seeking to grow closer to Him, to bond with Him and His blessings, through believing.

This believing. This believing which is looking up in reliance on God, which is reaching out to draw nigh to God, is truly *getting* the Life! In that conscious God-dependence, in that deliberate believing movement of the soul toward the living God, is the life! There, in that believing activity, are the vistas which eye hath not seen, and sounds of truth which ear hath not heard. Indeed, through that believing we are taken into another world — the world of God and the gospel.

It was like this. Without faith, and unwilling to believe God we could see (a Monet), hear (Mozart), taste (sugar pops), touch (our

nose), smell (like a sweet day in May).

But now it is like this: through believing we who are still in the world are at the same time given to know and enjoy spiritual things. For our faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of these things not seen (Heb. 11:1). In believing, these things of the Spirit Life that we have and are getting are made substantive *to us* so that we are convicted. So in the believing I can see, that is, I can truly know the God above. And in that believing I can also hear what devils don't want to hear and no dog *can* hear — the truth of God.

Believing is tasting and seeing beyond and more than the good World — even that the Lord Creator of the world is good (Ps. 34:8). Believing is touching which is a holding fast the salvation you have, that no man take your crown (Rev. 3:11), and an embracing of the wisdom of God (Prov. 4:8). It is detesting the rat-smell of sinful deeds, preferring by far the sweet smell of the sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God (Phil. 4:18).



Believing. Looking up to God, relying on God, being taken up into Father's arms, and you reaching to be taken up. And then, *getting* there, in that conscious fellowship with God, *knowing*, in delightful anticipation of how you will be known in heaven.

Oh, the knowing! As surely as, more sure than what and how you know and see and hear and touch and taste and smell on earth of earth, in believing you know and see and hear and touch and taste and smell the things of God and God Himself.

THAT IS THE LIFE! THAT IS GETTING THE LIFE!

Believe, young Christian! And you will *get* and keep on *getting* this life you have been taught since you were knee high to a pac-man. Christianity and God and Re-



formed doctrine and going to church twice on Sunday and being called to sacred factory work and World Trade Centers collapsing will then make more and more sense, move you more and more to fear and delight in and serve the Lord.

*Believe!* It is as simple, and yet as profound, as that. And in believing you can be sure that what you see is what you will get. The Life.

Right in Pockets. Or at the powerhouse gym. Or at the mall. Or in the hospital. Even in church. Monday morning at school or somewhere shingling. Friday night hanging out. In breaking off that relationship which began innocently enough, but is going nowhere fast (it wasn't innocent enough!). BELIEVE!

But just how, you say? Or believe WHAT, you ask? Well, that leads to the next thing vital in order for your spiritual EKG to register.

It is called the Bible. Let me tell you: this believing — what to believe, how to act in faith, and how in this way of believing we get the life from above — is revealed in Holy Writ. Holy Writ is to be our focus, therefore, in all our believing and in all of our life-getting. The life we get through believing must not be just charismatic, and nicotine free, and emotionally exhilarating, but grounded in and regulated by God's Word. Believing must be biblical, or we blow up.

God has revealed, discovered to us, what is to be believed. It is in the Bible. The God we are to trust: He is revealed there. The God we see by believing: He is revealed there. The God we are to hear: He speaks there. The salvation we are to taste and enjoy: all from Genesis to Revelation. What we are to touch, and what we are not to touch: in the Bible. What smells good and what will lead to a better sense of smell: it's in Holy Writ.

So the God above has spoken to us in a book that is down to earth and on earth, like we are. Words from heaven in earthly language. The eternal Father God talking down from heaven to the wee little children we are. Words for our learning. Revelation we can hold. An object of faith, which believing, turns us from itself to the God of its pages and the salvation of which it speaks.



So now you have a standard. *Getting the grace life is believing the Bible!*

And, if your believing be true (James 2!), *living by that Bible.*

So ...

You know, *from the Bible*, that sin is the problem, your problem. In believing you will then be upset about sin, more upset than about the car you just totaled or the prospect of having to tell your parents. And you will deal with this problem of sin. Repentance. Going to God and pleading the blood of the cross for forgiveness. These will be the things you will do in believing, and with that holy desire to get, and to enjoy with uninterrupted communion, above all things, the life.

So ...

You know, *from the Bible*, that to be clothed with the righteousness of the Christ is better by far than being decked out with the latest from Fitch. Believing, getting the life through believing, is then by far more concerned with righteousness than fashion. And all — *because the Bible tells you so, and that is what you believe!*

So ...

*From the Bible* we derive our understanding of what beauty is. And we believe it. So we have warts, or a bit of flab, and are not cheerleader material. The Bible says believers are the real beautiful people of the earth, for God will have nothing less than the most beautiful bride! So we will not to lose weight throw up. We will ad-

mire virtue more than brawn. And Christ will be the model we adore.

So ...

*From the Bible* another valuable lesson we learn in order to get the life is this: *No fear!* Or, as our delightful Tasmanian and Aussie friends tell us, *No worries!* Young people and adults: *fear not!* Though we think we are missing out on life, that we are too sinful — the Bible says there is a God who loves us. Though the World Trade Centers and Pentagons of our nation crumble before the terrorist attacks. Though there be a tornado threatening to suck us up and put one limb here, another there. Though there be the loneliness of single life sucking us down into depression's pit. Though we play and play but the NBA and not even Mr. DeVries (esteemed Charger coach!) takes notice, the Bible says: *no reason to fear!* For God is our refuge and strength, the Bible says, a very present help in trouble. *And, because God says so, THEREFORE will not we fear!* And because God says so, there *is* a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High (Ps. 46).

So ...

Because the Bible calls us to redeem the time (Eph. 5:16) and that this life is not a playground but a battleground (II Tim. 4:7), life will not be a baseball game or a beach or a strolling through the park. Young life won't be that way either. We will play. But as God's children. We will relax and play. And not live to play. Or play just to win. But play to be refreshed, and to enjoy, win or lose. And that, in order once again, after two sets not five, after one round a week not seven, after twenty miles a week (of running!) not one hundred, to get on with our work.



So ...

So ...

And so ...



Believing God and His Word and our living by it *in every so and so detail* of our life is the way we get the life we have by the grace of God through faith.

What a *getting!* I bid you too it, young friend!

Such a *getting* will be much thinking on God's Truth. I urge you to that. *Think!* Want to float down the world's river, live its dismal, hopeless life? Don't think! Just feel your way through life. Or grope. Or look goggle-eyed. Or drink, drink, and be stupefied. Or do the hokey-pokey. Or react to a pounding like a silly old knee. Or join the Church of the sacred woofers and tweeters. Want to live the Christian life? *Think!* Think on the Word of God. Remember God's truth. Delight in doctrine. Cogitate. Meditate. Muse upon it (Ps. 143:5). Be transformed by that Word by the renewing of your mind as you think upon it (Rom. 12:2). And behold how you will know and experience the salvation of the Lord!

So think! And you will *get* the life!

And pray! Your Christianity dullsville? Well, *the* Christianity is not! But the reason yours is *either because you ask not or you ask amiss!* God gives His grace and Holy Spirit to those, and those only, who ask for them (Lord's Day 45, Heidelberg Catechism). God gives spiritual growth in our life only to those who ask for it. Have you asked lately? Not demanded. Not made it second or third on your list, somewhere up there among your longings for wheels or a mate. But first. And humbly. And ardently. With the groanings and pleadings of a man or woman longing, truly longing for God.

*Get* the life! Pray for it! Because without God enabling, the Spirit moving, the grace sufficient, no one dead will live, and no one alive will grow.

And what shall I more say? Time would fail to tell me of all those who have gotten and are getting the life of faith! They, one and

all, have believed the truth of the Scriptures. They have sought and are seeking to live according to God's revelation. They think on God's Word. They pray. They love the preaching. To them to live is Christ and to die is gain. To them obeying their awful parents is virtue and yielding to youthful lusts is not. Indeed, to them the worst thing in the world is the bin Laden and World Trade Center-sins they find in their own heart and life. To them, repenting and fleeing to the cross and trusting in the cleansing blood of the Lamb and living for God's praise is the way of life.

And the way to get it.

Yes! You!


Get the life.

Though it be a cross.

Get it!

Do, or die.

Believe.

And live! 

## Annual Report

Mr. Cal Kalsbeek

# Annual RFPA Secretary's Report

Dear RFPA Members and Friends,  
**T**he preamble to the constitution of the RFPA states that we "... have organized for the express purpose of witnessing to the Reformed truth." A few quotes from readers of RFPA publications should illustrate that we continue to fulfill our purpose:

— A retired Marine Corps Major writes,

Thank you for your very sobering treatise on "A Defense of (Re-

formed) Amillennialism." For a moment there myself, my wife, pastor, and a few in our church thought we were the only sane people left. It is amazing the destruction these very intelligent men in the Postmillennial camp are causing to the Reformed church at large.

— A prison inmate writes,

... it was your book (*Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and His Church*) that finally enabled me to find

consistency with all of the scripture texts on the subject. I can only imagine the abuse you must take as a denomination bringing that 'hard saying' to the adulterous church of this day.

— A Presbyterian minister writes,

You brought it all together and also gave me a more detailed ecclesiastical context in which the debate arose. I know little of the PRC, and much of that is name calling. But if this book (*Hyper-*



*Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*) is reflective of the PRC, then praise God for the stand for orthodoxy you all have taken. It had not sunk in how blatant was the Arminianism being expressed by those who oppose the PRC and others as Hyper-Calvinists, when in reality they were attacking Calvinism.

Further evidence that our "purpose of witnessing to the Reformed truth" is being carried out is the continued interest in and requests to translate RFPA publications. During the past year we have approved requests to translate *The Five Points of Calvinism* into German, *Voice of Our Fathers* into Russian, and *Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and His Church* into Slovakian. We mention in passing that the Korean translation of *Marriage*, which was reported last year, has sold over 2,500 copies.

During this past year our organization has reprinted four books: *Behold He Cometh, Far Above Rubies*, *Studies in the Book of Genesis* (written by the late Rev. R. Harbach and initially published by the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church), and *Reformed Education* (initially published by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools). The last two of those books are now RFPA publications.

Two new books have been published by the RFPA since our last annual meeting. *Unfolding Covenant History, Volume 1*, authored by the late Prof. H.C. Hoeksema and edited by his son Mark, was distributed this past winter. *Particular Grace: A Defense of God's Sovereignty in Salvation*, written by Abraham Kuyper and translated from the Dutch by Mr. Marvin Kamps, came out this past summer. And soon the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema's sermons on Romans, as edited by Prof. D. Engelsma, will arrive from the printer.

Two additional publications are also available through the RFPA: *Our Goodly Heritage Preserved*, which commemorates sev-

enty-five years of God's faithfulness to the PRC, and *Leaving Father and Mother*, which formerly was a *Beacon Lights* publication. Incidentally, RFPA Book Club members will be receiving the latter book free as a token of our appreciation of their continued support. At present we have 900 Book Club members, an increase of 30 since last year. These members make it possible for the RFPA to continue to print new books without tying up our working capital. Thank you, members of the Book Club! We realize that all our new publications will not be of equal interest to all of you, but your willingness to receive them all in order to promote the cause is greatly appreciated.

Currently we have about ten works in progress. These include new books and reprints. The *RFPA Update* will keep you informed concerning all current and future RFPA publications.

While publishing good, Reformed books is a challenge in itself, marketing them is even more so. Although our book sales continue to be brisk (last year 8,384 volumes were sold), your board is convinced we can do better. Consequently the Board is becoming more active in this respect. The following board decisions of the past year reflect this: we approved spending about \$2,500 to improve our web site; a delegation was sent to the National Christian Booksellers' Convention in Louisville, Kentucky; we decided to promote some of our publications through the Amazon Advantage Program; and we approved joining the Christian Booksellers Association. We believe these decisions will give our publications broader exposure than they have ever had in the past.

From what has been reported thus far, one might conclude that book publishing is all the RFPA does. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The publishing of the *Standard Bearer* continues to be the crown-jewel of the Reformed Free Publishing Association. In

fact, if you think about it, many of our books have appeared first as articles on the pages of the *Standard Bearer*.

Subscriptions to the *Standard Bearer* have remained about the same as last year. We are currently mailing 2625 copies. Thirty-three of these are new subscribers gained from our promotion to non-subscribing Protestant Reformed families during this past year.

The "Businessmen's Special," an attempt to promote the *SB* in business offices and waiting rooms, was a disappointment. Only one business is taking advantage of having free issues of the *Standard Bearer* sent to their place of business. By the way, it is not too late to take advantage of this opportunity. You can do so by contacting the *SB* business office.

The RFPA Board has been active in other ways to promote the *Standard Bearer*. Just recently the Board decided to offer a free one year subscription to all newlyweds in the PRC and new confessing members who join from outside the PRC. Consistories have been asked to submit names and addresses of those who qualify. Also, the Board has approved sending a voucher to every regular subscriber. By means of this voucher each subscriber will be able to give a non-subscriber the *SB* for six months at no cost to them. Look for this voucher in your December 1 issue. Further, work is being done to prepare an introductory issue of the *Standard Bearer*. This issue will be used to introduce the RFPA and our distinctives to those outside the PRC.


All that has been reported thus far takes money and work. Our Treasurer's Report indicates a tremendous amount of financial support on the part of many: support from within and outside the PRC. For this we express our humble gratitude. In addition, we express our thanks to those whose faithful labors have contributed to the publication and distribution of our



magazine and books during this past year. These include our editor-in-chief, writers, business managers, department editors, secretaries, proofreaders, and numerous

volunteers who perform a myriad of tasks. Though this work can be difficult at times, we must not forget the privilege which is ours in promoting the Reformed faith.

Thanks be to our covenant God for this unspeakable gift.

For the RFPA Board  
Cal Kalsbeek, secretary 

*When Thou Sittest in Thine House*

*Mrs. Connie Meyer*

## Teaching Hands to War (3)

**T**he first enemy we encounter on this earth is our own sin. And our first attack upon this foe consists of searching for it in our own hearts and lives and repenting of it. This is a spiritual battle, for this is a spiritual enemy. Nevertheless, there are some physical steps that can be taken in order to avoid this enemy. If we want to avoid drunkenness, we won't let our feet walk into the party or the bar. If we want to avoid the lustful entertainment of this world, we won't let our finger push the button (if indeed our hands have put such a button in our home at all). We will choose our companions very carefully, fellowshiping only in the light. And we will spend our time wisely, studying Scripture and sound works of Reformed doctrine whenever possible. All this and more we will strive to do.

It might seem that this would take care of the battle. Victory would be the cry! But oh, how much more ground must be won. And the terrain is full of ruts and rocks and all kinds of places for

the enemy to hide. Victory over outward sin is hard enough, but conquering inward sin — that is much more difficult. That is where the battle becomes the bloodiest. Yet, as difficult as it is to engage in this warfare, it is absolutely necessary if we are to experience complete victory. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Ps. 19:12).

Pride, unbelief, and self-righteousness. These are sins that no one can see, but they lurk deep inside every crevice of the chaff of our soul. "I can do it myself!" (Sound familiar, parents of two-year-olds?) But how like us all. "I'm a pretty good person, better than most. I can do my part, even if it isn't much. Besides, I'm not so sure God will help me anyhow." That's pride and unbelief, and that's Satan's burning dart-of-choice for shooting deep within our hearts, trying to destroy any faith that might be there. In fact, it would seem that the outcome is decidedly against us, for our own sinful nature grabs ahold of these lies with complete surrender and relish. The situation looks rather bleak.

Yes, we have to search for these deep, embedded sins within ourselves. We have to help our children see these sins, too — not

just the unkind words, but the pride beneath those words. But who are able to see these things within themselves? Who even want to admit they're there? They're ugly! Who can bring themselves to look for such horrible things? As the psalmist said — who can understand them? No, the situation is not only bleak — it is impossible.

But may we see that it is impossible. And may we help our children to see that as well. May we see the hopelessness of our ever attaining any victory by ourselves. For then — then — the victory is God's. Then we can confess in the boldness of God-given faith: "I can do nothing on my own, but God can and will!" "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." Greater even than Satan. Greater even than my old man of sin. "Search me, O God," for I cannot do it myself. I can't even want to!

The Catechism follows this order as well. We must know our own sin first. We must know the impossibility of our ever gaining any victory over our sin. But *then* we know our deliverance must be outside of ourselves. And *then* we experience the victory! "How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die hap-

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



pily? Three: the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance" (Lord's Day 1, Q. and A. 2). Indeed, when speaking of deliverance and victory, the Catechism knows of only one impossibility: "for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness" (Lord's Day 24, Q. and A. 64).

The fruit of thankfulness, i.e., victory over sin, comes by faith. We must "put on the whole armor of God, that [we] may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). Truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, salvation, and the Word of God. These are all necessary parts of that armor. But of all the pieces of armor listed in Ephesians 6, there is one in particular that is above all: "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Eph. 6:16). Faith is our main defense.

So what exactly is this shield of faith? Let us go to the Catechism again. Faith is a certain knowledge and a hearty confidence (Lord's Day 7, Q. and A. 21). *I know* God's Word is true, and *I'm sure* God's salvation is for me. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Where there is substance and evidence, there are no questions. It is sure. It is fact. I know it.

But *how* can I be so sure?

Here is the pith of the twig. See this, and you see the whole glorious, victorious tree, you and your children, and all those who are called afar off, all the elect, all part of that tree. Again, how can I have this faith? Because not one part, not one jot, not one particle of it depends upon me. It all depends upon God. It is His to give. Faith? I have none. But *God* is my faith!

*God* is my righteousness! *God* is my shield.

That's what our children need to know and have in order to be equipped for the battle. "God is our refuge and strength" (Ps. 46:1). "He is our help and our shield" (Ps. 33:20). These aren't mere words. It is the truth. It is this true Word that builds this true faith which He gives us. Indeed, the Word *is* Christ our Lord (John 1:1)! It is the Word as it is given to us by His Spirit of truth. It is the Word as it is interpreted in the Reformed creeds and as it is faithfully and distinctively preached according to those creeds. When we hear that Word — that salvation is *all* of God — then we have faith. I am nothing. God is everything. That is the basis of our faith. That is the basis of our defense and shield.

But there is more we can say about this shield of faith, for faith is also a bond. Faith is that living connection between Christ and His own; between the Head and the Body; between the branches and the Vine. This bond, this living connection, connotes communion. And communion, in turn, connotes prayer. It is in prayer that true faith is exercised in the most intimate way, for we pray to our Father with Christ as our advocate, based on faith in the promises He swore by His name. The Catechism concludes with a discussion of prayer for a reason. "Why is prayer necessary for Christians? Because it is the chief part of thankfulness..." (Lord's Day 45, Q. and A. 116). It is, therefore, the ultimate expression of good works and sanctification — of gratitude — of victory!

Indeed, as the Lord teaches us to war, He teaches us to pray. "Lord, teach us to pray," the disciples asked. And Jesus taught them to pray that perfect prayer in Luke 11: "Our Father which art in heaven..." From our children's earliest days we fold little hands and teach them these words, too.

How important it is that we do this, along with helping them to understand what this prayer they are reciting means. Much can be said about this whole prayer, but for now let us note only the final petition, for it especially applies to our battle on this earth: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Lead us not into temptation, O Lord, for we are weak and cannot stand, but Thou hast the power over all our tempters! The devil and his hosts, the ungodly world, and our own sinful flesh — we abhor and dread the sin that all these foes would have us do. Deliver us, O Lord! Show us our sin, that we may fight it! Show us Thy truth, that we may be equipped to fight it! Grant us Thy grace and Thy Spirit, that we may have the strength to fight it! And come, O Lord, in that final Victory, when sin and lies shall be no more.\*

The Psalms echo this prayer over and over. It is a prayer that is to be uttered in perfect confidence. In perfect faith. In our perfection? No, that rotten old man clings to us as ever he did. But in the perfection of Christ it is uttered. He utters it as our advocate on the right hand of God. And not only that — by His Spirit who dwells in our inmost being, He prays for us with unutterable groans! In Him it is a perfect prayer. In His psalms it is a perfect request: "Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me" (Ps. 143:9). "For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me ... they are more than the hairs of my head: therefore my heart faileth me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me..." (Ps. 40:12, 13). "Keep me, O Lord,

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\* See also Lord's Day 52, Q. and A. 127, and chapters 9 and 10 from *In the Sanctuary: Expository Sermons on the Lord's Prayer*, by Rev. H. Hoeksema, RFPA, 1981.




from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man..." (Ps. 140:4). "Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood" (Ps. 144:11).

And the answer is just as perfectly sure: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them,

because they trust in him" (Ps. 37:37-40).

This is the trust that must be built in us and in our children if we are to stand in these evil, last days. Let us do nothing that would take that assurance from us or our children. Let us do nothing that would cause doubt to lurk within our souls. Pray that the Lord Jehovah, mighty over all His enemies, may grant that faith by His Word and Spirit. And may we have the confidence that he, as our Father, will surely grant that request. Our Lord taught us this in Luke 11 as well: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father

give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (v. 13). He will do it. He said so. Go forth and be strong in Him. Psalm 144: "Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me" (vv. 1, 2). "That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as cornerstones, polished after the similitude of a palace" (v. 12). "Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord (v. 15). 

Understanding the Times

Mr. Cal Kalsbeek

# Understanding the Times: An Introduction

*"And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their command."*

I Chronicles 12:32

**S**aul was dead! Support for David had grown to the extent that all the elders of Israel came together to anoint him king in Hebron (I Chron. 11:3). Gradually David gained more and more support of

the mighty warriors in Israel. We read in I Chronicles 12: 22, 23, "...at that time day by day there came to David to help him, until it was a great host, like the host of God. And these are the numbers of the bands that were ready armed to the war, and came to David to Hebron to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the Lord." What follows in I Chronicles 12 is a listing of the number of warriors that came from each tribe to fight in support of David. In the middle of that listing we find the verse quoted above: I Chronicles 12:32.

Yes, Scripture records in the context that many of the other tribes also had specific, noteworthy characteristics, but only of Issachar is it noted that they "had

understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do."

One could hardly overestimate the importance for David and Israel of having these men of Issachar on hand. David faced many present and future challenges: How could he gain the total support of those within the tribes of Israel who had previously followed his antagonist Saul? Then there were the nations around Israel, notably at this particular time the Philistines. How should Israel be prepared in case they decided to follow up on their recent victory at Gilboa? Further, Israel was in a sad state of affairs spiritually, a situation to which wicked king Saul had contributed.

In essence it is no different for the church of our day. It's true that

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the glory days of valor on the physical battlefields of Palestine and the surrounding areas are over. We are thankful that those battles were only for the Old Testament period of types and shadows. Nevertheless, essentially we are confronted with the same challenges as Old Testament Israel. Consequently, like the men of Issachar we need to be "understanding of the times to know what Israel (the church) ought to do." That will be the burden of this rubric: to scrutinize the times in which we live in order that we may grow in our understanding of the times, and consider what we ought to do.

### The Big Picture

Before we look at some of the specifics of the times in which we live, it might be good for us at the outset to consider some broad, biblical truths concerning these times.

The apostle Paul expresses the perilous situation for the New Testament church this way: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

For the twenty-first century believer to be actively involved in this spiritual wrestling match, Paul says he must "put on the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:11). And the context clearly shows that this means the child of God must go to the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." It would also suggest that the child of God, like the children of Issachar, must have "understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do."

For us to do battle effectively with these principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, and spiritual wickedness, it is necessary that we see them for what they are as they reveal themselves in this present age. In his commentary on Ephesians John Calvin writes concerning these principalities and powers:

He (Paul) calls them...princes of the world; but he explains himself more fully by adding — of the darkness of the world. The devil reigns in the world, because the world is nothing else than darkness. Hence it follows, that the corruption of the world gives way to the kingdom of the devil; for he could not reside in a pure and upright creature of God, but all arises from the sinfulness of man. By darkness, it is almost unnecessary to say, are meant unbelief and ignorance of God, with the consequences to which they lead. As the whole world is covered with darkness, the devil is called "the prince of this world."

By calling it wickedness, he denotes the malignity and cruelty of the devil, and, at the same time, reminds us that the utmost caution is necessary to prevent him from gaining an advantage. For the same reason, the epithet *spiritual* is applied; for, when the enemy is invisible, our danger is greater. There is emphasis, too, in the phrase, in heavenly places; for the elevated station from which the attack is made gives us greater trouble and difficulty.

Not only is it important for us as children of Issachar to know whom we fight against, we would also do well at the outset to have a general idea concerning what the conflict involves in our times. We are thankful that Scripture does not leave us in the dark. In fact, we are given the enemy's battle plans. Revelation 12 is very helpful in this regard. (The reader would profit by reading what Rev. H. Hoeksema writes about this in his commentary on the book of Revelation: *Behold He Cometh*.)

In the first place, Revelation 12:12 gives the New Testament warrior a tremendous incentive. There we are told that the ultimate victory is already won. Although it is true that woe is pronounced to the "inhabiters of the earth" because the devil has come down to earth and he comes "having great wrath," the comfort is that the devil "knoweth that he hath but a short

time." And he has but a short time because he has been defeated. Therefore, as children of Issachar, we do not fight *for* victory, rather we fight *in* victory. The Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension have accomplished that.

In the second place, we learn from Revelation 12 that, although the devil comes in "great wrath," we have a place of refuge, namely, "the wilderness" (Rev. 12:14). Rev. Herman Hoeksema explains the meaning of this wilderness of refuge for the church in this way:

The church as such is a separate institution in the world. She has her own King. And as an institution the church does not recognize any other ruler.... From this it follows that the church has its own laws.... The church as an institute is a separate institution. She has her own King, her own laws, her own life. She does not mingle in politics as such.... She lives in separation. Even as the children of Israel in the desert lived in separation ... so also the church of the New Testament is in the wilderness with regard to the world and its power and its life.... The church as an institution is separate from the life of the world. She has received a God-prepared place in the wilderness.

This information is of utmost importance for the New Testament children of Issachar. As we live in and consider the times in which we live, we must continually remind ourselves of the importance of the instituted church. The church is our life! To place ourselves outside the instituted church, to exclude ourselves from the many facets of its life, to minimize its importance, or to seek to change its mission is to put ourselves in grave danger.

In the third place, Revelation 12 supplies the children of Issachar with a map containing the devil's battle plan. It does this by informing us *how* Satan seeks to destroy the church, namely, by casting "out of his mouth water as a flood after



the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood" (Rev. 12:15). Concerning this plan of Satan, Rev. Hoeksema writes:

He knows that he cannot approach the woman in her isolation in the desert. He cannot touch her.... Hence he casts a stream of water after her, that she might be borne up by that flood and be carried out of the wilderness.... He does not mean to drown her: that would be impossible. But he means to lift her from her isolation ... and thus be borne into the world from which she fled.


Understood in this sense, the

meaning is not difficult to grasp. The devil realizes that in the isolation of the church as an institution from the powers of this world lies her strength, and as long as the church remains in this state of separation he cannot do anything against her. And therefore he makes the attempt to establish an alliance, to unite the church and the world. He tries to carry the church into the world.

In the fourth place, Revelation 12 reveals to the children of Issachar the devil's last resort, namely "to make war with the remnant of her seed" (Rev. 12:17). It

would appear that when his plan to push the instituted church away from her God-ordained mission is unsuccessful, Satan does what in his view is the next best thing: he focuses his attention on individual believers to persecute and destroy them and bring them to apostasy.

Equipped with that biblical, big picture, we plan, the Lord willing, to consider in future articles some specifics concerning this battle of faith as it must be waged in our times.

As children of Issachar our goal and battle cry must be, "Understand the times and live." 

## Book Reviews



*The Satisfaction of Christ: Studies in the Atonement*, by Arthur W. Pink. Forest City North Carolina: Truth For Today Publications, 1996. 313 pp. \$21.95 (hard cover). [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.]

Most of our readers are acquainted with Arthur Pink's book, *The Sovereignty of God*. In its original edition (not the truncated edition published by The Banner of Truth) Pink set forth the central truth of God's sovereignty in a way which has been used by God to bring many to the truth of sovereign grace. Pink's work was characterized by clarity and by the fact that it was based solidly on Scripture. The same is true of this work on the atonement of our Lord.

The book is a treatment of all aspects of the atonement: its nature, design, efficacy, results, extent, and proclamation — to mention a few. What is particularly attractive in the book is Pink's determination to proceed in his development of the atonement from the viewpoint of God's glory. That truth, says Pink, is the fundamental principle that determines all we say. Pink begins with God, not, as

so many of today's theologians, with man.

In pursuing that theme, Pink roots the atonement in the will of God. He writes: "Of necessity this (the will of God) must be the starting-point when considering the ultimate source of anything, for God 'worketh all things after the counsel of his own will' (Eph. 1:11). It is nowhere said that He worketh all things according to 'the requirements of His holiness,' though God does not and cannot do that which is unholy. There is no conflict between the Divine will and the Divine nature, yet it needs to be insisted upon that God is a law unto Himself. God does what He does, not simply because righteousness requires Him so to act, but what God does is righteous simply because *He* does it. All the Divine works issue from mere sovereignty" (p. 20).

Important themes run through the book: such themes as satisfaction being the heart of the atonement; the federal Headship of Christ in relation to His people, and thus the vicarious nature of the atonement; the limited character of the atonement, i.e., that it is for the

elect and for them only.

Pink shows that the Arminian view of the atonement (that Christ died for all) dishonors and ultimately destroys the atonement, for it destroys the efficacy of Christ's substitutionary death.

In connection with the proclamation of the atonement, Pink condemns the idea of the gospel as a well-meant offer, and explains this proclamation in a solid and biblical way. He is not a hyper-Calvinist because he insists that the gospel must be preached to all and that all who hear must be confronted with the command to believe on Christ. But the efficacy of the gospel of the atonement is directly connected to the efficacy of the atonement itself: The Christ whose death was efficacious for the elect saves the elect through the efficacy of the gospel.


Never does Pink treat the doctrine as mere abstract dogma. He insists that, contemplating the truth concerning Christ's death, we must contemplate it from the viewpoint of Christ's death being for *our sins*; and that His perfect satisfaction is appropriated by faith and brings the wonder of the atonement to our



hearts in the glorious truth of the forgiveness of sins.

The book is beautifully printed and bound. It can be ordered from

the address at the top of this review. It is so solid, especially in comparison with the God-dishon-

oring ideas of the atonement being taught today, that it comes as a cool breeze to quicken the hearts of God's people. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Minister Activities

**R**ev. B. Gritters, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, has been extended a call to serve as pastor of the Lynden, WA PRC. Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, declined the call he received from the newly organized Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. Rev. A. denHartog, who recently accepted the call to serve as minister-on-loan to the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore, will preach his farewell sermon in the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA on November 11, the Lord willing. This is necessary to give him and his family opportunity to take care of many things related to the move to Singapore. Though no definite date is set at this time, Rev. denHartog, his wife Sherry, along with two of their children, Matthew and Laura, will probably be leaving for Singapore sometime in the middle of January 2002. Before this time they will have to travel to Grand Rapids, MI and Hope PRC for his installation.

### Denomination Activities

**T**he Hope Herald's presented their annual Fall concert September 16 in the auditorium of the Grandville, MI PRC.

Members of Adult Bible Societies of our various congregations in the west-Michigan area were invited to attend their yearly Fall League Mass Meeting, held this year on September 18 at the Byron

Center, MI PRC. Prof. H. Hanko spoke on II Peter 3:8, "Growing in Grace and Knowledge."

The annual meeting of the RFPA was held September 27 at the Hudsonville, MI PRC. Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on the fascinating story of the late Herman Hoeksema's soon-to-be-published series of sermons on the book of Romans.

### Mission Activities

**O**ur missionary to Pittsburgh, PA, Rev. J. Mahtani, was scheduled to be on WORD FM 101.5, October 2 from 3:00-4:00 P.M. Among other things, he planned to discuss the subject of death, applying the Word of God to the recent events in our nation. He also planned to use that time to highlight Pittsburgh's new fall study season, which began that same week in October, as well as the upcoming Reformation Celebration the first week in November. The radio station plans to give Rev. Mahtani a free hour then as well, when Rev. C. Haak will be there both to lecture and to preach, D.V.

Also, we remember Rev. W. Bekkering and his wife, Phyllis, and their family before the throne of God's grace, through the means of our prayers. Rev. Bekkering's installation as missionary to Ghana took place last month, so he labors now in that capacity, even though, because of all the preparatory work that must be done, it will be some time before he actually leaves for Africa.

### Evangelism Activities

**W**e are happy to report that a joint evangelism effort by the congregations of the First PRC in Edmonton, and the Immanuel PRC

in Lacombe, AB, Canada, has resulted in the Reformed Witness Hour being on the air in their area each week. It can be heard each Sunday at 6:30 P.M. on CJCA 930 AM.

In late September the Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC signed a contract with radio station WYLL 1160 AM to air the Reformed Witness Hour from 3:30 until 4:00 on Saturday afternoons. This time slot is the best they have been able to negotiate during peak air time when the station is operating at 50,000 watts of power. WYLL reaches all of Chicago and beyond, reaching northern Indiana, southern Wisconsin, and even portions of lower Michigan.

### Congregation Activities

**A**t a congregational meeting on September 19, the members of the Byron Center, MI PRC approved a proposal presented by their council to hire an architect to draw plans for a building renovation and expansion.

The consistory of the South Holland, IL PRC recently approved proposing to the young adults in their congregation the formation of a new society in place of their current young adults class. The new Young Adults Bible Society would be for their young adults who have graduated from high school and are no more than thirty years old. This society would be for both singles and married couples. South Holland reported that they currently have approximately seventy individuals in this age group. An organizational meeting was held on September 9 and their first meeting took place two weeks later.

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



## Sister-Church Activities

We couldn't help but notice in a recent bulletin from the Covenant PRC of Northern Ireland that they began family visitation in October. This is not the first time they have enjoyed this tradition, but it is the first time they have been visited by their own pastor, which no doubt made the visits just a little bit special.

## School Activities

With apologies to friends and supporters of Eastside Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI, we include, belatedly, this bit of news. This year's annual Picnic on the Patio, August 23, was extra special because, along with the usual back-to-school activities, this year's "Picnic" also included a groundbreaking ceremony for their new

building. We hope this news comes before Eastside actually moves into their new building.

## Food For Thought

"I must often be glad that certain past prayers of my own were not granted."

-- C.S. Lewis 

## Announcements

### TEACHER(S) NEEDED:

Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, IL is now in its first year of operation, teaching freshmen and sophomores. As we plan for the addition of a junior class for 2002-2003, we see our greatest faculty needs in the areas of math, science, business and technology, and foreign language courses. Interested individuals, please contact our Administrator, Ralph Medema, at (708) 339-1733 [rmedema@earthlink.net] or Education Committee Chairman, Bill DeJong, at (708) 946-6126 [bill@dejongequipment.com].

### YEARBOOK CHANGE

Please make the following street address change for the clerk of Cornerstone PRC in your yearbook (*Acts of Synod 2001*), page 344:

Don Bruinsma  
151 W. Tam O Shanter Dr.  
Crete, IL 60417

### Station Listings

Station	Location	Frequency	Time/day
KCCF .....	Ferndale, WA .....	1550AM .....	8:30 A.M./Sunday
KLOH .....	Pipestone, MN .....	1050AM .....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
KDCR .....	Sioux Center, IA .....	88.5FM .....	5:30 P.M./Sunday
KCWN .....	Pella, IA .....	99.9FM .....	3:30 P.M./Sunday
WMRH .....	Waupun, WI .....	1170AM .....	8:30 A.M./Sunday
WYLL .....	Chicago, IL .....	1160AM .....	3:30 P.M./Saturday
WFUR .....	Grand Rapids, MI .....	102.9FM .....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WFUR .....	Grand Rapids, MI .....	1570AM .....	4:00 P.M./Sunday
WORD .....	Pittsburgh, PA .....	101.5FM .....	10:00 A.M./Sunday
WFNC .....	Fayetteville, NC .....	640AM .....	9:30 A.M./Sunday
WELP .....	Spartanburg, SC .....	1360AM .....	4:00 P.M./Sunday
WFAM .....	Augusta, GA .....	1050AM .....	4:00 P.M./Sunday
WBXR .....	Huntsville, AL .....	1140AM .....	9:00 A.M./Saturday
CJCA .....	Edmonton, AB .....	930AM .....	6:30 P.M./Sunday

### Topics for November

Date	Topic	Text
November 4	"The Blood of the Everlasting Covenant" .....	Exodus 13:12
November 11	"Where Are the Nine?" .....	Luke 17:11-17
November 18	"The Great Thanksgiving" .....	Ephesians 1:3
November 25	"Comfort in Dying" .....	Acts 7:59