

THE *January 15, 2002* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

In This Issue:

MEDITATION

Rev. Rodney G. Miersma

The Blessed Merciful 170

EDITORIAL

Prof. David J. Engelsma

***Herman Hoeksema's Romans Sermons (2)
Their Value*** 172

MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS

Rev. Douglas J. Kuiper

The Qualifications of Deacons (7) 174

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

Rev. Steven R. Key

***Saving Faith —
A Living Connection with Christ (2)*** 177

ALL AROUND US

Rev. Kenneth Koole 179

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

Mrs. Connie Meyer

Telling the Towers to Our Children 181

FEATURE ARTICLE

Rev. Charles Terpstra

***The Believer's Role in Public Worship:
Active Participant or Passive Spectator? (2)*** 183

DAY OF SHADOWS

George M. Ophoff

The Types of Scripture (4) 184

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

Rev. Martin VanderWal

Adultery, Guilt, and Righteousness 187

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

Mr. Benjamin Wigger 190

The Blessed Merciful

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Matthew 5:7

It has been some time since we last looked at the beatitudes which Christ spoke in the first part of His sermon on the mount. There are seven of them, each indicating a virtue which must be evident in the child of God. So far we have treated four of them, each one being negative in character, pointing out that the citizens of the kingdom of heaven are nothing in themselves. They are "poor in spirit," "mourners," "meek," and thus they "hunger and thirst after righteousness."

The next three are positive spiritual virtues seen in the Christian. He is "merciful," "pure in heart," and a "peacemaker." In this way the Christian is presented as one who in himself is empty, but who is filled with spiritual blessings. These blessings are his for the

sake of his Savior Jesus Christ. At this time we look at the fifth beatitude, the beautiful virtue of mercy, a virtue seen only in the child of God.

Mercy is, first of all, an attribute of God. Eternally God is merciful in Himself, which means that to all eternity He desires His own blessedness. All that He is, all that He does, is directed to this end: that His name be most blessed forever.

This mercy He was pleased to reveal outside of Himself to His own glory. We see it manifested to Adam in Paradise in the state of perfection. In the very act of creating Adam He revealed that He would make a creature blessed even as God Himself is. Thus Adam was fashioned in the very image of God, in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Adam then sinned, and we see God showing His mercy to him also after the fall into sin. God would deliver His people from sin and death and bring them to the glory of heaven. From this point of view, mercy is God's desire to make a people who were dead in sin to be alive again in true righteousness. This mercy

is not directed to all men head for head, but is directed exclusively toward that people whom God elected in Christ." According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4).

Having spoken of mercy in general, we now see that God applies His mercy specifically. Scripture presents God's mercy as His desire to raise His people out of their sin and misery. "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted" (Is. 49:13). We see here that this mercy is directed toward the afflicted, a mercy which actually does deliver. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). This mercy is that which God shows through His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, through whose blood He saves us. He desires to make His people blessed in the way of having their sins removed. There is no other way for the mercy of

Rev. Miersma is pastor of Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.

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.

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

BUSINESS OFFICE

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

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

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

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

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

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: avcourtney@hotmail.com)

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

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

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

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

Website for RPPA: www.rppa.org

Website for PRC: www.prc.org

God to be shown. This mercy is not universally directed to every man without exception, but is directed only to some, to those whom He has eternally chosen. "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:16, 18). We may not pretend to be wiser than God, nor falsely claim that God is merciful to everyone without exception.

God's people also are merciful. As God is concerned with sin and misery and its removal, so is the child of God. He is not concerned simply with the external evidences of misery, but he is concerned with the root cause of it all. The merciful Christian insists that there must be repentance from sin, and he directs the sinner to the cross of Christ. That is being merciful.

This mercy is not found in natural, unregenerated man. He may perform many acts that are called merciful, but Scripture says "that the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Prov. 12:10). This is true because they do not regard the law of God, or perform their acts in the love of God or out of living faith. They certainly do remove some external miseries, but they have no concern for the root cause: sin. Such "tender mercy" is indeed "cruel."

True mercy proceeds out of a regenerated heart — and only out of a regenerated heart. It is the fruit of Christ's work in the heart of the born-again child of God. Where that mercy is not evident, there is no evidence that such a one is a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, where true mercy is seen, there is seen the indication that such a one is a child of God.

Many false attempts are made

to manifest mercy, most of which emphasize the social aspect. Many individuals help others in distress and assist them in their trials. Many volunteers donate their time and effort to help others. Some give of their wealth for the assistance of those who are worse off than they. This social aspect is often emphasized as the duty of the church. It is maintained that the duty of the church is to relieve the needs of the poor and the oppressed, to provide hospitals and clinics — especially for the poor, to fight for those oppressed people of the minority races, etc. Thus the church must be in the forefront of crusades for all sorts of things on earth. Mercy is understood to be mostly outward actions which show our concern toward mankind generally.

This shows a misunderstanding of the scriptural view of mercy. It neglects entirely or ignores the fact that the emphasis of the church is upon the preaching of the Word of God. The church is not called to concentrate upon the surface difficulties, but to get to the heart of the problem. One often proceeds from the idea that through outward deeds he will be able to convince sinners concerning the value of Christianity. Thus he will gain converts through his

own efforts and by his own example. However, neither persuasive speeches nor outward acts can convert sinners. What is essential is the work of the Holy Spirit, who causes sinners to be born again and leads them to repentance and confession before God.

The citizens of the kingdom of heaven must show proper mercy both within and without their church. Within the church it is their mutual desire to assure one another of the wonderful salvation which is theirs in Jesus Christ the Lord. Where there is need of warning against sin, that warning is given in mercy. Where there is need of

instruction in the Word of God, the faithful saint gives that in mercy. He does so because he desires that he and all the elect saints of God enjoy the blessedness God has promised for the sake of His Son. It is also the privilege of the child of God to assist his fellow saint in material things. In the church we find both rich and poor, as graciously determined by God. Those who have more can assist those who are in need. Therefore there is the privilege both of giving and of receiving in mercy. This is the fruit of the mercy of Christ shown to His people.

Today much of the privilege of showing mercy has been taken out of the hands of the church and given to the state. There is Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and a host of various welfare programs. This has not been to our spiritual profit. We must be encouraged to manifest true mercy by giving materially. In the New Testament we read of collections taken for the poor saints in Jerusalem during the time of famine. We read also that even the world observed the concern that fellow saints had for each other.

However, mercy is shown also to those outside of the church. This must not be equated exclusively with material assistance. Mercy is shown beyond the realm of the church centrally in the preaching of the gospel. Christ did not tell His disciples to go into all the world to found hospitals, to distribute food and clothing, and to abolish slavery, but to preach the gospel. To preach the pure Word of God is the expression of mercy by the church. It is the desire of the church that all those who are elect of God, but yet in their sins, may be brought to that blessedness which the church enjoys. In conjunction with the preaching, the church has the opportunity to assist those with whom she labors in their material needs. But primarily, if we are to keep our priorities straight, mercy is centrally con-

The church is not called to concentrate upon the surface difficulties, but to get to the heart of the problem.


nected with the good news of salvation.

The merciful shall receive mercy. Certainly it will be shown to God's children in the day of judgment. Christ shall return and confront all peoples of all ages and express His judgment. The wicked who revealed their cruel mercies shall be assigned to hell. They showed no true mercy, so no mercy will be shown to them. But the merciful shall enjoy the full manifestation of the mercy of God. He who eternally desired to make them blessed in Jesus Christ shall now do so to all eternity. For that final revelation of God's mercy the church throughout the ages has longed.

We do not have to wait until judgment day to receive the mercy of God. No, He shows that already

to us on earth, though not in its full and final form. From eternity God determined to show mercy in His Son Jesus Christ. In the fullness of time that Son entered our flesh to suffer and die under the wrath of God for the sins of His people. Now God assures regenerated, confessing children of God that He is merciful to them. He brings them to the consciousness of their sins and miseries. Yet, children of God are not discouraged, for God also brings them to the conscious belief that the blood of the Lamb has removed the guilt of these sins and that they are saved from sin and death. Now we enjoy the mercy of God's presence through the Holy Spirit. Mercifully He guides us by His Word every day. Already now we are blessed

in obtaining mercy.

This mercy is sure. Not because we show mercy does God then show us mercy. This is not in harmony with the scriptural doctrine of grace. Christ is emphasizing that the mercy of God is surely given. Those who have experienced the wonder of God's work in them, so that they show mercy, know assuredly that they *shall* obtain mercy of God. What God does is reward His own work in us. Those who show no mercy, into whose heart is not evident God's work, must not think that God will nevertheless show them mercy. But those who have shown the fruit of God's work in them, let them be assured without doubt that they shall enjoy the fullness of God's mercy finally in heaven. 

Editorial

Herman Hoeksema's Romans Sermons (2) Their Value

Hoeksema's sermons on Romans are valuable in several respects. First, they add to our knowledge of the theological thinking of a great Reformed theologian. The series contributes significantly to our knowledge of Herman Hoeksema's theology, inasmuch as in the series Hoeksema explains the book of Romans. From the time of the Reformation, the Protestant churches have recognized Romans as the one book of the Bible that, more than any other, sets forth the entire gospel of salvation by the sovereign grace of God in a thorough, systematic way. Martin Luther called the epistle to the Romans "the masterpiece of the New Testament, the purest Gospel of all." John Calvin declared that "this epistle [Ro-

mans], besides many other and singular graces found in it, has one proper and peculiar to it, which can never be sufficiently prized and esteemed; this is that anyone who has achieved a true understanding of it has as it were an open door through which to enter into the most secret treasures of Scripture."

All of the fundamental teachings that make up the gospel of grace appear in the book: the depravity and guilt of man; justification; the atonement by the death of Christ; sanctification; predestination; good works as fruits of faith; and more.

At the end of the series on Romans, in sermon ninety-seven, Hoeksema referred to the book whose exposition he was now com-

pleting as "one of the richest and most beautiful parts of the Word of God."

Many Reformed people, including the scholars, will be interested in this work simply to discover what Herman Hoeksema believed concerning various doctrines. For example, sermon forty on Romans 7:4 ("Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law ... that ye should be married to another") shows that already by the late 1930s Hoeksema believed, and publicly taught, that marriage is an unbreakable bond for life.

Just as the marriage relation between man and wife is exclusive, so the relation between Christ and His people is exclusive. Christ belongs to the church, and the church

belongs to Christ and to no one else. If she flirts, she becomes an adulteress. Finally, it is a *union for life*. The union cannot be broken, even as the marriage relation cannot be broken. The marriage relation is a union for life.

Second, the value of the sermons is that they are models for Reformed ministers. The example of the Romans sermons should encourage ministers to preach series. It should also encourage the people to desire the preaching of series of sermons on an entire book of the Bible. Series preaching edifies the church as the preaching from texts haphazardly chosen—or *purposefully chosen*—from here and there and everywhere does not. By the preaching of series, the minister himself grows.

The series on Romans should encourage ministers to preach through *doctrinal* books. The sermons will also give guidance, how to do this.

These sermons will be of help to ministers, how to choose the theme of a sermon and then develop that theme by arranging the material of the passage in two or three main thoughts. The sermons are models of homiletics. No more than it is right simply to go to the pulpit with any other man's work would it be right for a minister to preach these sermons as his own, but they can certainly instruct in the craft of sermon making. I can see them becoming a text for the homiletics course, and not only at the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Above all else, the worth of the sermons is that they are a sound, penetrating exposition of the Word of God in the book of Romans—a commentary on Romans. They are a rather complete commentary. In the nature of the case, they are not a commentary on every verse and every word. Nevertheless, the exposition covers the entire book; treats all the main thoughts; includes word study of important, or difficult, words; concerns itself

with significant connections and relations; and, even though concentrating on the main verse in a passage, usually brings in and briefly explains the other verses in the passage.

For example, when he came to Romans 7:1ff., Hoeksema preached verse four, about our marriage to Christ. In the course of the exposition of verse four, he commented also on verses two and three, which teach the truth that earthly marriage is for life and thus serves as the basis for the spiritual reality of our marriage to Christ.

If Hoeksema's exposition of Romans lacks the helpfulness of a commentary that proceeds verse by verse and virtually word by word, it has the great advantage that it gives the meaning of each of the chapters and, indeed, of all the particular passages or individual texts that make up the chapters. The exposition makes the meaning perfectly plain to the people of God. In addition, it applies the doctrine of the text or passage to the life and experience of the saints. *Righteous by Faith Alone* is a devotional commentary: a genuine exposition that carries out the purpose of the Holy Spirit with the book of Romans, namely, to edify the body of Christ.

Qualified Interpreter

Hoeksema was uniquely qualified to explain the book of Romans. He was naturally gifted, widely read, and a theologian who by the time he preached the series had worked long and hard at disciplined theological study, both as a pastor and as a seminary professor.

In addition, like the apostle Paul himself, who wrote the book of Romans, Hoeksema was zealous for the glory of God in His sovereignty. Only such a man can rightly explain and preach the book of Romans. It was this zeal for the glory of the sovereign God that made Hoeksema fearless in acknowledging God's sovereignty where it is found in Romans, as it

made him diligent in exploring God's sovereignty within the limits, *but then to the full extent of these limits*, of the revelation in Romans. Lack of this zeal for the glory of God is the reason why so many commentators falter and fail in their exposition of Romans, especially when they come to chapters eight through eleven, on divine predestination.

There is in the Romans sermons explanation of certain passages that even corrects the erroneous interpretation given by Calvin in his commentary on Romans. One of the weakest and most dangerous sections of Calvin's Romans commentary is his explanation of "all men" in Romans 5:12ff. Commenting on the phrase in verse 18, "even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life," Calvin wrote: "Paul makes grace common to all men, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is offered to all. Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, yet not all receive Him" (John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, tr. Ross Mackenzie, Eerdmans, 1961, pp. 117, 118).

Regardless whether one agrees or disagrees with the doctrine that amazingly escaped from Calvin in these two sentences (were I of higher-critical bent, I would suggest that some later editor inserted these lines, and that this editor was James Arminius), this doctrine is not the teaching of the apostle in the text. Romans 5:18 does not teach that the grace of righteousness is ineffectually offered to all, but that it effectually comes upon all, so that all are righteous and live. As effectually as Adam's offense rendered all condemned, so effectually did Christ's righteous deed justify all men.

Hoeksema corrected Calvin, though not explicitly, explaining the "all" who are justified by Christ


as all who are represented by Him according to eternal election. In sermon thirty-three, Hoeksema said this about the "all men" in Romans 5:18 to whom the righteousness of Christ came:

"Upon all men," the text says. There are some who, regardless of anything Scripture teaches elsewhere, insist that "all men" means every individual of the human race. According to them, the verse teaches that as every individual is under condemnation because of the one offense, so justification of life comes upon every individual of the human race because of one righteousness. There are two dis-

tinct theories about this. One theory teaches that every individual is saved. This is consistent. The other theory recognizes that not all are saved. It teaches that all men are justified in Christ as far as God's *intention* is concerned, there being a condition upon which the fulfillment of God's intention depends. The question to every man then becomes, "Do you want it? Do you want to be justified?" In other words, this theory explains it in such a way that the justification of Christ was not a justification after all.

The truth is that those who according to God's verdict are justified are also saved, even as those

who are condemned according to God's verdict must die. Scripture says, "Whom he justified, them he also glorified" [Rom. 8:30]. The simple meaning is this: all men in the one man, and all men in the other man. Just as, on the one hand, the rule is, through one man condemnation upon all who are in him (and this is all men), so through one man justification of life upon all who are in Him (and this is the elect church). Christ did not make of justification a *chance*. The judgment took place 1900 years ago. Even as all in Adam die, so all in Christ are justified.

— DJE
(to be continued...) 

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Doug Kuiper

The Qualifications of Deacons (7) Their Proving

In telling His church what kind of men her deacons must be, God sets a high standard.

We have examined this standard in the past several articles. The deacon must be full of the Holy Ghost, of wisdom, and of faith; he must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience; he must manifest God's inworked grace by living a blameless life, being grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; he must be faithful to one wife, ruling his children and house well; and his wife must be grave, not a slanderer, sober, faithful in all things.

One requirement must be noted yet — one which will also underscore how high the standard for

deacons is. We read in I Timothy 3:10: "And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless."

We have already examined the idea of the deacon being blameless (cf. *SB* October 1, 2001). But how do we know if a man is blameless or not? The answer is: prove him! Only after he is proved, and found to be blameless, may he be installed into office as a deacon.

We should be clear on what is meant by this proving, and how it is done.



To prove something is to test it, examine it, try it, to see if it is genuine.

We often use the word "prove" with reference to metal ore. Gold ore, for instance, contains many impurities. To remove them, so that one can have pure gold, one puts the ore through a fire. The fire re-

moves the impurities by burning some up and by melting the gold so that other impurities can be removed from it. That which is left behind is genuine gold — it has been "proved" to be such.

Scripture also uses the word "prove" with reference to God trying our faith (James 1:3, for example). Persecution, for instance, is a means by which God proves the members of His church on earth, to make known whether or not their faith is genuine. The fact is that to have one's membership in a Christian church does not mean one is a child of God; in the church are also unconverted unbelievers. From time to time God sends persecution or other afflictions upon His church. Persecution causes those who are not truly God's children to leave the church, and it strengthens the faith of those who are.

We see that proving something, in the sense in which the word is used in our text, results in a sepa-

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

ration between that which is genuine and that which is not.

Now the Holy Spirit in our text requires that the church prove men for the office of deacon. There are many men in the church; but do not think that all of them are qualified to be deacon! A process of proving must take place, to know whether one is fit to be a deacon or not. Some men, when proved, are found not to be blameless. They may not be put in office. Others are found to be blameless; they are qualified.



How ought this proving be carried out?

The point of the passage is not to require a formal, oral examination of prospective deacons, in the way in which candidates for the ministry are examined. According to Peter Y. DeJong a certain Jacobus Koelman did argue that the text required such an examination:

Thus before anyone might be publicly installed he would have to submit to an examination on doctrine, conduct, and general knowledge of the nature and functions of this office. This was to take place before the elders and deacons who already held office in the congregation.¹

Reformed churches have not adopted this idea, however. John Calvin says rightly, "This trial is not for a single hour, but consists in long experience."²

Some have argued that this proving is accomplished by allowing the prospective deacon to begin doing the work of the office on a trial basis for a period of probation, after which a final determination is made regarding his ability to do the work.³ The problem with this idea is twofold: first, a man must not be put into office until *after* being examined, according to this text ("*then* let them use the office of a deacon," emphasis mine, DJK); and second, in such an examination the emphasis shifts from

the *qualifications* of the man, to whether he does the *work* well. But the text requires the church to examine whether he be qualified for office. If he is qualified, and if God calls him to the office, he *will* do the work well, by God's grace.

The best way to fulfill the requirement that a deacon first be proved is simple: councils must evaluate each man whose name comes up for the office, whether he is truly fit for it or not. The men of the council must discuss the person amongst themselves, in confidentiality but also in true love for that person and the church. The question must be openly and honestly faced: "Are there reasons that can be brought forward why such a man is not qualified for the office?" So DeJong writes:

Undoubtedly this passage refers to one of the responsibilities which rests upon the consistory at the time of making nominations. The church must be assured that those who are appointed to this work possess the gifts of wisdom and gravity so highly essential in the diaconal ministry.⁴



What standard should be used in proving them?

Of course, the standard of God's Word, in I Timothy 3:8ff. The council must ask itself whether the prospective deacon measures up to these qualifications. DeJong says:

A warning ought to be sounded against the rather prevalent attitude that any young man who is a member in good and regular standing and possesses a measure of business acumen has the necessary qualifications for the ministry of mercy. Often the hope is expressed in such cases that because the deacon's work is not too difficult such a candidate if elected will soon be able to perform the work suitably. This, of course, is contrary to the spirit of the text of Scripture.⁵

Nothing other than the qualifica-

tions of Scripture are the standard!

In this connection, note one qualification which we have not yet examined: the deacon must not be a novice.

It might seem at first that Scripture nowhere makes this requirement of deacons. Of the *elders*, not the *deacons*, we read: "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (I Tim. 3:6). However, the Spirit refers to this verse just quoted when in verse 10 He says of deacons: "and let these also first be proved." Notice: "also!" That is, just as men who are relatively new to the faith should not be put into the office of elder, so also men who are relatively new to the faith should not be put into the office of deacon — prove them first! A person who recently joined a congregation might appear to have the natural and spiritual gifts necessary to hold the office of deacon, but not actually have them. After some time, as the council and congregation observe the individual and get to know him better, they will be able better to determine whether or not he has the necessary qualifications.

Does the requirement that a deacon first be proved, and that he not be a novice, mean we should impose a minimum age requirement on deacons?

Some have imposed such restrictions on deacons. The Council of Carthage in 397 decided that

1. Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1963), page 101.

2. Cf. Calvin's commentary on I Timothy 3:10.

3. Charles W. DeWeese, *The Emerging Role of Deacons* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), page 74. DeWeese does not say that he personally takes this view, but he says that some Baptist churches do.

4. DeJong, *op. cit.*, page 101.

5. DeJong, *op. cit.*, page 102.

deacons must be at least 25.⁶ James Barnett defends this:

This age allows time for individuals to gain sufficient maturity and Christian formation to make responsible decisions in so weighty a matter and yet at the same time be young enough for their patterns of living to be shaped more readily in this ministry.⁷

In 1967, Pope Paul VI fixed the minimum age at 25 for single men, and at 35 for those men who were married. The Catholic Bishops in the United States went a step further by requiring all deacons, whether married or not, to be at least 35. The American Episcopal Church in 1952 set the minimum age at 21.⁸

When a Reformed person hears that this is the rule of the Roman Catholic Church, he might be tempted to see this as one more way in which precept has been added upon precept, and in which churches have gone beyond that which is required by God. Perhaps it is another instance of such, in the particular case of the Romish church. However, the church of Jesus Christ is free to set guidelines in this regard, if her purpose in doing so is to guide her in being faithful to the requirement of Scripture. Some of our churches have done essentially the same thing, in requiring that a man be a member of that congregation for a certain period of time before being considered for office in the church. The ground for this requirement is found in the Word of God, "And let these also first be proved."

Even if we do not set a minimum age limit in stone (and I think we ought not), the fact is that councils do well to consider the age of a man when determining whether or not he is qualified.

A danger that must be avoided in considering a man's age is that we say of a prospective deacon, he is too old, let us consider him for elder, and find younger men to fill

the office of deacon. No support can be found in Scripture for a notion that the deacons should be the younger men of the church. Let the deacons also be proved to be mature men.

Maturity is the real issue, then. We must ask about a man's age, because it is one indicator of his maturity. Admittedly, it is not the only indicator — that is why putting a minimum age limit in stone would not be helpful or wise. One man might be mature enough at the age of 24 to hold the office of deacon; another might not be mature enough even though he is 42.

And not just physical or intellectual maturity, but *spiritual* maturity, is the real standard. He must be found to be *blameless*. Is he found to be that in all his life? Is his walk godly in every respect? Is his theology sound? The real point of the qualification "let him first be proved" is that, not just any man, but only the best, be selected for the office of deacon. So Calvin succinctly states the point of the passage when he says:

In a word, when deacons are to be ordained, the choice must not fall at random, and without selection, on any that come to hand; but those men are to be chosen who are approved by their past life in such a manner that, after what may be called full inquiry, they are ascertained to be well qualified.⁹




Councils, is this your desire, that when you nominate men for the office of deacon you settle not just for the mediocre men, with the best being selected for elder; and not just for the younger men, with the older ones being selected for elder; but you select the *best* men for both offices? That is how God would have it!

In light of this requirement that the deacon be proved, some words of advice are in order for any man who desires the good work of the office of deacon in his

particular congregation. First, get to know the people of the congregation, and show them that you love them. Attend the Bible Studies regularly, prepare well for them, and contribute wisely. Talk with the people of God after church; mingle in different groups; and let your talk be on spiritual subjects. Show a concern already for those who are ill or in need.

Second, be a godly man in all of your life, even at work, or on vacation, and at other times when the church's leaders and members will not notice you. Let the *world* see that if your congregation selects you for office, you are a man fit to serve!

Third, make it your business to read and study on your own. A deacon must be a theologically sound man!

Finally, do none of the above, if you will not do it from a sincere heart. This advice is not intended for one who looks only at the earthly honor and power he could have in the church if he holds the office of deacon, and who is therefore looking for the best way to campaign for that office. Such a man is singularly unqualified for the office! The advice is for the man who desires to serve God and His church in this office. Then do the things mentioned above, and you will prove yourself fit to serve. 

6. Cf. James Monroe Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), page 182.

7. *Ibid.*, page 182.

8. Cf. Jeaninne E. Olson, *One Ministry, Many Roles: Deacons and Deaconesses Through the Centuries* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House), pages 358-359, and page 367, as well as Barnett, page 182, for this information.

9. Cf. his commentary on this passage.

Saving Faith — A Living Connection with Christ (2)

We have seen that a proper understanding of faith begins, not with the activity of believing, but with the truth that faith is first and essentially a living connection with Christ, the bond which God by His Holy Spirit establishes when He grafts us into His own dear Son.

God's Work Alone

When we consider the establishment of that graft, we get to the very heart of the truth of the Christian faith.

It is in wisdom that the Heidelberg Catechism approaches the question of salvation with this question (Q. 20): "Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?" The answer is: "No, only those who are ingrafted into Him."

That same question could conceivably have been asked in different ways. If salvation were in any way the work of man, then the question might be asked this way: Are all men going to accept Christ? But when we consider the truth of the Scriptures that we read in Ephesians 2, that salvation is the work of God, then the question has to be put this way: Whom does God save? "Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?"

You understand immediately that the question is an extremely serious question from the viewpoint of the sinner! We *must* have the correct answer to that question!

We must not be motivated in our answer by our emotional ties to our flesh and blood and our loved ones. That happens very quickly. When Scripture tells us that not all men are saved, it also reminds us very pointedly that those who perish may be our own flesh and blood! Those who perish may include our own children or family members! They may include our neighbor with whom we are well acquainted and who is such a nice man or woman.

Oh, when it comes to foreigners or heathen it is very easy to be dogmatic. It is very simple to talk about election and reprobation when you talk about people in the abstract, those whom you do not know and whom you have never seen.

But when those who perish may involve your own flesh and blood, your own children, your own brothers and sisters, that changes the picture, doesn't it?

If you then must answer this question, and you are influenced by your emotions, you may give a wrong answer. You may be inclined to soft-pedal the truth, to change it just slightly. You may be afraid to point your loved ones to the everlasting consequences of their sins, to the necessity of that living graft with Christ. You may

be afraid you will lose them if you talk about such things.

The preacher might do this within his congregation. It is much easier to seek a superficial and outward peace than to preach with conviction the truth that not all men shall be saved. It is much easier to pacify than to declare that all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, stand exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation so long as they are unconverted, so long as they are not partakers of that living graft of salvation.

But if that happens, we have departed from the truth of Scripture and the way of salvation.

Therefore, we must not face the question, who shall be saved, from the viewpoint of our own emotions and feelings; but we must seek from *God* the answer to this question. And He has given us the answer in His Word.

God saves those who are grafted into Christ. This graft is established by God alone.

That is the truth set forth in the Scriptures.

It is a truth corrupted by many today.

Some claim that ultimately all men that ever lived shall be saved. Because the modern church generally teaches that God loves all men, there has been an increase in the number of those who hold to the idea of universal salvation. The moment men begin to twist the truth and teach that God loves ev-

everyone, what will certainly follow is the conclusion that God *saves* everyone. Whom God loves He will save. That must certainly follow. It may take several years after the initial departure from the truth, but it will certainly follow.

We have had ample opportunity in other connections to refute that heresy. We are all acquainted with the scene in Matthew 25, which speaks of the judgment day. Of them who were not His own and who did not His works, Jesus says in Matthew 25:46: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

Most of those who fall into the error of the Arminians agree wholeheartedly with the fact that not all men are saved. Followers of Arminian thought will even agree with you when you say that faith is a gift of God. If they know their Bibles at all, they will remember Ephesians 2:8. They will acknowledge that "by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

But if you want to have clearly before you the scriptural truth of the establishment of faith, you have to ask this question: "To whom does God give faith?"

The Arminian says, "God gives faith to those who will it. That grace of God which alone saves can enter your heart only if you will it. You must open the door of your heart a crack, or at least unlock the door, in order that God may give you faith." That is the position of the Arminian.



Over against that, you and I must stand on the basis of Scripture and say, "Here we part ways." For Scripture teaches that God gives faith to them to whom *He* wills to give it.

"Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ? No, only those who are ingrafted into Him."

This ingrafting is a work of God under which you and I are completely passive. The establishment of a living graft is a divine mystery.

How foolishly applied to the scriptural figure of the living graft is the idea that you must graft yourself into Christ. Shall we place as a ground for salvation the condition that you must graft yourself into Christ? Does such a thing ever take place in nature? Does a twig pick itself up off the ground and graft itself into the living vine?! How could Jesus then even use such a figure as in John 15 and Romans 11?

Our salvation is a wonder work of God.

Ephesians, Chapter 2

That is also the truth expressed throughout Ephesians, chapter 2. Let us do a brief overview of that passage.

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Notice how strongly the apostle puts that. You were dead. A dead man has no hand with which to accept Christ. A spiritually dead man has not the power to believe, let alone to graft himself into the source of life. And the apostle repeats that devastating view of man in verse 5, "we were dead in sins." That death is described in the verses 2 and 3.

"And you hath he quickened." Or again, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

There you have the truth as we are considering it. God Himself and God alone has made us sit together in Christ Jesus and to receive all His benefits. That is the gospel of our salvation.

And how does God make us sit together in Christ Jesus? Through faith!

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of your-

selves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Faith is that bond, that living graft, established by God alone. And by that living graft we are united with Christ, in order that we might receive all His benefits and bear fruits unto the glory of God into all eternity.

A Fruitful Graft

The establishment of that graft bears a fruitful consequence. Christ, in whom we now live, not only merited life and salvation for us, but He bestows them upon us. He bestows the blessings of salvation upon us by His Holy Spirit.

Do you understand what that means as a matter of your own salvation and experience?

There are millions upon millions of elect from the beginning to the end of the world, as innumerable as the stars of the sky in multitude and the sand upon the seashore. Think of what must happen in all of those elect throughout their lives. Think only of your own life. Yes, Christ bestows upon us what He has received from the hand of His heavenly Father — an inexhaustible supply of fruits, the Spirit beyond measure!

And the wonderful way in which we receive those benefits is the way of our own personal experience.

That salvation does not come to us through a funnel. The connection is spiritual. We are grafted into Christ Himself, to be fruitful partakers of His life and attributes. We receive all His benefits. The living branch draws its life from the vine, and itself bears fruit.

Except you abide in Christ, you cannot bear fruit. That is John 15:5. But it is impossible for one who is grafted into Christ with that living graft of faith not to bear the fruits of Christ. Jesus says, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

You and I ought to be conscious of our own emptiness. But we ought also to be conscious of

Christ's fullness and our own experience of that fullness. The more we study the concept of this living graft, and the more conscious we are of the fact that we dwell in Christ only as a wonder work of God's sovereign, irresistible grace, the more we shall not only be fruitful, but *abound* in fruitfulness.


Do not overlook that truth expressed by our Lord, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

That much fruit is borne by the activity of saving faith. The bond begets the activity. So faith is seen as God's work in and through us.

The activity of faith we shall proceed to consider in our next articles, God willing.

Conclusion

From heaven echoes the eternal decree of election. God confirmed it in the fullness of time with the sending of His Son, who

died and rose again that we might have life, and that more abundantly. He grafts us into Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. He sends forth His Word throughout the history of this world, by the preaching of the gospel. And He crowns His work. For when the sinner cries out, "God, be merciful unto me! How great thou art!" then God's name is glorified in the fruit of His grace. And shall be forever and ever. 

All Around Us

Rev. Ken Koole

■ An Alarming Milestone in Human Cloning

Yes, human cloning is back in the headlines again, and in blockbuster fashion. Advanced Cell Technology, a small biotech start-up company in Worcester, MA, announced in mid-October that they have successfully engineered the world's first cloned human embryo. Due to the complex, fragile structure of human DNA, this breakthrough occurred sooner than most had thought possible, taking most by surprise. But, as expected, it was news stirring up reactions of greatest contrast. Many applauded it as the breakthrough of the young century; others responded with consternation and horror. *U.S. News & World Report* magazine, which was granted exclusive rights by the ACT company to follow its progress for publicity reasons, wrote a most glowing report. *U.S. News'* slant on things was apparent already from the cover of their December 3 issue describing the American scientists responsible as those who

"made history by creating lifesaving embryo cells." (Note the word "lifesaving." This, mind you, before there is one iota of evidence that the promised benefits will ever be anything but theory.) The cover article opens by trumpeting that "The breakthrough promises cures for terrible diseases." No question which side of the issue this magazine, known for its conservative perspective, stands on.

On the other hand, *World* magazine (December 8, 2001) entitled its cover story on the breakthrough, "Monstrous, Inc." (in reference to ACT, the company responsible). There seems to be little middle ground between the two reactions. You either applaud and shout down all criticism and warnings, or you are filled with alarm. Put me in the latter group.

What is especially alarming is the approach that the *U.S. News* magazine chose to introduce the cloning breakthrough to the world and nation. The article opens by introducing you to a certain Judson Somerville, paralyzed from the chest down due to a cycling accident, who donated some skin from his useless legs so it could be used for the experiment and lab work.

Somerville did not make the decision [to donate his skin cells] lightly. As a conservative Repub-

lican, a longtime contributor to President Bush, Somerville knows how controversial cloning is for many of his political compatriots. But he is also a devout Episcopalian. After consulting with his church leaders, Somerville concluded that being one of the first humans to be cloned — not to produce a baby, which he would never do, but to create healthy new cells for ailing patients — would be one of the best things he could do for his fellow man. His decision wasn't completely selfless, however. Neurons derived from his own cloned embryo could end Somerville's paralysis.

Now, Somerville may be a step closer to that walk [walking his daughter down the wedding aisle — KK], and humanity is moving into uncharted medical and ethical territory.

So the cloned cells come from one who is paralyzed, conservative, Republican, church-going, evidently anti-abortion, and wanting to walk his daughter down the aisle (with his bishops' blessing besides). So much for objective reporting. About the only thing lacking is the blessing of Mother Theresa. And someone dares to raise objections to what science is trying to accomplish on behalf of this man and his dreams? What is it with you Christian "fundamentalists"? You, unfeeling in your health, would rather

Rev. Koole is pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

have others suffer, than to experience (or at least have a chance at) being healed and able to walk again and be pain free, and to use all parts of their bodies and brains. Old Ebenezer Scrooge had more of a soul than your sort. Christianity, indeed!

This is not a debate that will be carried on in a calm, scientifically detached fashion. Major geological plates of the ethical sort collide along these lines. The aftershocks still rumble, with more to come. As *U.S. News* goes on to admit:

The accomplishment presents huge challenges to every premise of scientific, religious, and legal thought. Given the intensity of last summer's national debate over human embryonic stem cell research, ACT's work is sure to become a lightning rod for conservative critics when the issue is taken up again in the months ahead. It will be condemned as an ethical abomination akin to playing God and described as the creation of embryos for spare parts. It will also be hailed as the hugest medical breakthrough of the past half century — an accomplishment that could cure many diseases of aging and provides hope for people like Somerville.

About this, *U.S. News* is correct. The question is, how does this reputedly conservative magazine justify its unqualified support? Well, you have to choose the right label. They speak not of "reproductive cloning" (which would be used to create a human being), but of "therapeutic cloning" (creating embryos to produce the all-important stem cells which, once stripped from the embryo, can be used in what is called "a therapeutic way"). This, then, is supposed to put everything into a different light. There are those who beg to differ. In an informative article entitled "Australian Pro-Lifers Challenge Stem-Cell Terminology," Patrick Goodenough (Bureau Chief

of the Pacific Rim News Agency) writes:

The signatories (of a letter by religious leaders to various branches of the Australian government) attacked the use of the labels "reproductive" and "therapeutic" in the cloning debate.

The terms have generally been used to distinguish between cases in which an embryo cloned in a lab will then be implanted into a womb and carried to birth, and those in which an embryo is cloned in order to be stripped of stem cells, and is destroyed in the process.

The latter case is known as "therapeutic" cloning because of the therapeutic benefits embryonic stem cells are believed to possess in the treatment of diseases. On the basis of this distinction, Britain earlier this year legalized "therapeutic" cloning, while insisting a ban on "reproductive" cloning would be enforced.

But pro-lifers argue that the term "therapeutic cloning" is a misnomer, intended to fudge the issue....

"They've called it therapeutic cloning to try to cause society to think, 'This sounds good, we're cloning for therapy, to help people with Parkinson's Disease or whatever.' But in fact it's the dismembering of the embryo by removing the stem cells. The embryo itself gets no therapy at all, rather total destruction."

In their letter, the Australian religious leaders and others tackle this issue.

"To produce an embryo is always 'reproductive'; to destroy an embryo is never 'therapeutic,'" they write....

In fact, the signatories argued that cloning with the intention of destroying the embryo once it is harvested of its stem cells is even worse than cloning a human being which is allowed to be born and develop as a child.

"Much worse than cloning human beings to reproduce children would be the creation or use of human embryos for the purpose of destructive experimentation," they say — while making it clear

this does not mean they support the former.

And so the battle is joined. Great issues at stake. But how can one say "No!" to what "promises" to be the miracle of healing and the end of suffering (and not be reviled as merciless and cruel!)?

World magazine puts the "breakthrough" into perspective.

The experiment was not an unqualified success. Although ACT was able to "parthenogenically activate" 22 human eggs and perform nuclear transfer on 17 eggs, none of the embryos survived beyond just a few cell divisions — all short of producing the stem cells for which the researchers had hoped. Some scientists quickly declared the experiment a failure.

But the ACT announcement is a major milestone in medical ethics. A moral threshold has been crossed, and proponents of cloning are certain that time is on their side.

The reality is, there is no going back. The only question is, what emergency legislation can be put in place to patch the dykes together for a time, and how long before the dykes and restrictions are swept away completely. Variations of Frank N. Stein organ-part by organ-part are only a petri dish away.

■ Christian Radio in UK Cited for Offensive Programming

In case you haven't heard enough bad news to begin the new year, consider the following article by Martha Kleder of Cross Walk News Channel. Censure of Christianity in every form continues to rear its ugly, dragon head.

London's only Christian radio station, Premier Christian Radio, has been cited by Britain's Radio Authority (RA) for seven breaches of programming rules resulting from a broadcast found 'offensive' by listeners.

The RA also issued a Yellow Card — a serious warning that threatens a station's license renewal — to Premier. The Yellow Card was issued for an "Insight For Living" broadcast by Dr. Chuck Swindoll that warned Christians about dabbling in the occult, a practice Swindoll said was "ensnaring" and "addicting" people. He then urged listeners to "burn books and all items" of such religions.

The Mysticism and Occult Federation, which filed the complaint against this broadcast, labeled such action a "hate crime." That group filed 12 of 13 complaints against Premier in the July-September 2001 quarter. Of those, seven were either fully or partially upheld.

Another complaint upheld by the RA was against "Leading the Way," where Michael Yusef stated that "the liberal church teaches the crazy idea that you can be a good Christian and a practicing homosexual," and that "there can be no healing outside Christ."

The RA found both statements to violate Rule 7.7 of the Radio Authority's Program Code on religious abuse. The code states, "Theological debates and disagreements may occur within religious programs. However, programs and/or follow-up material

must not be used to denigrate or attack the beliefs of other people."

... U.S.-based broadcasts were not the only ones running afoul of Rule 7.7. An advertisement for a local church, Liberty Church International, also generated a complaint because the church helps "deliver you from sickness, poverty, abuse, racism, debt, occultism and fear."

Infomercials for an upcoming seminar on occult practices and end-time events by New Zealander Barry Smith also generated a complaint. That complaint was upheld, as was another complaint against a show on the roots of Freemasonry.

However, the RA seems to be one-sided when dealing with Rule 7.7. A listener complaint was also filed against 96.4FM BRMB for offensive and ridiculing remarks made about the book of Leviticus. The RA decided in favor of the radio station.


Another complaint was filed against 96.9 Vikings FM for a call-in program asking listeners where they would like to have sex and requesting volunteers to have sex on the air. The RA ruled in favor of the radio station in that instance as well.

Neither did the RA act on complaints filed for derogatory comments about the Virgin Mary, sex-

ist and sexually suggestive jokes, insults to the poor, Welsh speakers, and the mentally handicapped.

The only complaint the RA upheld against a secular radio station program involved crass and insensitive comments applauding the murder of a child.

The double standard of censure going on in Western society is frighteningly obvious. Anything that sounds like it might trace its lineage back to the "Good News" and dares expose ungodly idolatry in any form is to be silenced. But every other abomination and desecration is considered "freedom of speech." If the media powers that be continue to have their way, "Silent Night" with a whole new meaning will be the Christless carol of the future.

But wait, this late breaking bulletin just in: Good News after all, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: The LORD shall have them in derision.... Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.... Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Ps. 2:4, 6, 12). 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Connie Meyer

Telling the Towers to Our Children

Come, children, let's take a walk together. There is something we want to show you. It is because of our great love for you that we want to show you this. Not that you are

our first love, though. No, there is an object of our love that we love even more than you. Does that scare you? It ought not. In fact, if we did not have this "first love," our love for you would be worthless. It would do you no good at all. So what is this "first love"? That is what we want to show you. Come. Come with us and see this wonderful thing.

There it is, over there on the

mountain. Do you see it? It is beautiful for situation, is it not? See how it reflects the light of the sun. It almost looks like a castle, but it is more glorious than that. It is a mighty fortress with towers that cannot be moved. As we come closer to it, you can see how very large it is. It's much bigger and stronger than any castle you have ever seen before. Come. We are very near to it now.

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

Look up. Look way up high and see how the towers reach up into the clouds. They are higher than you can imagine! They are strong, too. They are of such strength and magnitude that no weapon known to man can put one scratch upon them, much less knock them down. The walls surrounding the towers are just as strong. They are impenetrable. No enemy can touch you when you are inside these walls. When foes come and see this mighty fortress on the mount, they haste away in fear! This is a place of refuge where you are absolutely safe. Not a hair can fall from your head.

But there is more. This fortress is not only mighty, it is as beautiful as it is strong. Come, let us enter the gates. What glory is inside! The bulwarks are embedded with diamonds and rubies and all sorts of precious stones, stones not measured in carats but in pounds. Gold is the mortar that cements the ramparts in place, reinforced with platinum and pearls. In the courtyard, palm trees flourish near a sparkling fountain that bubbles up with purest, life-giving water. There is nothing but peace and joy and prosperity within the walls of this magnificent citadel!

Now this is the wonderful thing: *to love the truth is to be inside this glorious haven and refuge.* But where are the gold and rubies, you ask? Where are the palms and pearls? Well, this isn't a castle of the earth. It's heavenly gold and pearls that you must see. It is under the shadow of these heavenly towers that you must abide. It is only from behind these magnificent walls that God will keep you safe and use you to guard and defend, and to gather the rest of the holy nation inside. Let us walk around the palace yard now and see these wonderful things.

Look at the center tower of the fortress first. It is firm, founda-

tional, and constructed of purest gold. It is one, lone tower with several glistening spires soaring up into the sky. It is the sure and glorious truth that is the foundation of all we believe: salvation by grace alone. But this tower includes other pinnacles of the Reformation as well: Christ alone, Scripture alone, and faith alone.

Do you know these truths? Do you know what they stand for? Do you love them? Do you understand by them that we have perfect peace, perfect rest, and perfect safety in Jesus Christ our Savior? It's true! It's true for *you*.

Also built onto this central tower are formidable ramparts and walls, with bulwarks ascending just as gloriously high. There is the perseverance of the saints — we cannot lose our salvation! There is irresistible grace — God's work of grace is sovereign and particular, and we surely will receive it! There is limited atonement — Christ paid for the sins of only His people, and that payment is certain and complete! There is unconditional election — from all eter-

nity God chose us to be His people and appointed others to be reprobate, and His choosing had nothing to do with what our actions would be! And, yes, there is total depravity.

Total depravity? That we by nature are dead in trespasses and sins, unable to do, or even want to do, the very least act of goodness or faith, and only evil continually in all our thoughts, words, and deeds — this is a glorious truth? Oh, dear child, it is not only one of the precious towers of which we speak, it is also the very floor on which these towers stand! Look at it! Look down at the floor. In the polished stone and crystal of the pavement, do you see a reflection of yourself? You must see the true reflection! Do not hide from it. Do not run away. There you are, and you are ugly. You are ugly as sin.

But now look up. Look up and see the perfect, righteous, holy towers that could not possibly exist without this distinct and solid ground of truth. Look up and see that you are not responsible for your salvation in any way or in any part. You can't be! If you ever doubt that tower of truth, just take a glance down at the ground and you will remember and know that this would be impossible. It all depends on Christ. It all gives the glory to Him and no other.

But look up once more. See those tall spires, how they ascend up even into the clouds? Take note of those clouds. It is on the clouds of glory that our Savior will return. Keep looking up and watching those clouds. There are clouds of wars and earthquakes, disease and pestilence, persecution and death. But there is one cloud that overshadows them all — the gospel will go forth conquering and to conquer. Do not fear. The gospel is that same glorious truth in which we hide. It is that mighty fortress in which God gathers His own and keeps them to the end. Do not fear. You are safe, even in these last evil days, even unto death.

It is by this same grace of God that we walk together and dwell together in these wonderful, glorious truths.

Look up, for your redemption draweth nigh.

Let Zion now rejoice, and all her children sing;


Let them with thankfulness proclaim the judgments of their King.

Mount Zion's walls behold, about her ramparts go,
And number ye the lofty tow'rs that guard her from the foe.

Observe her palaces, mark her defenses well,

That to the sons that follow you her glories you may tell;

For God as our own God forever will abide,

And till life's journey close in death will be our faithful guide. 

*Mount Zion's
walls behold,
about her
ramparts go....*

The Believer's Role in Public Worship: Active Participant or Passive Spectator? (2)

A Conscious Involvement

God's people, we said, have a vital role in the worship of God. They are not passive spectators but active participants.

That brings us to our second main point, in which we want to examine specifically our conscious involvement in worship. By looking at the worship service and its various elements, we want to show how we are active and how we must be active.

We return to the idea that the Reformed worship service is to be seen as covenant fellowship or dialogue between God and His people in Christ. Keeping this in mind, we can divide the service into those parts in which God speaks to us and those parts in which we respond and speak to God. Let us look at some of the specific elements of our service to see how this works out in terms of our activity.

God speaks to us, for example, in the salutation ("Grace, mercy, and peace...") and benediction ("The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ..."). We might be tempted to say that, because we are silent when these things are being spoken to us, we are also passive. But such is not the case. This is the Word of greeting to us and the Word of parting to us from our covenant Father and Friend. And we must be active in hearing and receiving this Word! In this there is fellowship with the living God!

Are we passive when a friend

is conversing with us? Do we act as if nothing is happening and let the words pass over us? Of course not! How much more then in the worship of God! Also in listening to God's speech we must be bowing down before Him, serving Him, reverencing Him, and praising Him.

The same is true of God's speech to us in the reading of the law and in the reading of Scripture. We would even say it is true of God's Word to us in the singing! In each case, God is addressing His people covenantally. And we are to be active in receiving that Word of our covenant God! Passive we must not be! Hearing and receiving God's Word belongs to the work of worship! And it is hard work; it requires our conscious participation and strenuous effort.

Is it perhaps the case that because we have lost sight of this work and activity we can act bored and be sleepy and let our minds wander when God is speaking to us? Have we let our culture of entertainment so influence us that we, too, come to the service not to work and think but to be entertained? Then let us remember to be conscious of what we must be doing when God is speaking to us as our covenant Friend!

Furthermore, we are also to be consciously involved in the parts of worship where *we* are speaking to God. In the service we respond to God's speech by speaking to Him. There is, for example, the doxology, the opening song of praise. By means of that song we are ascribing worth to God, telling Him what we think of Him, why we would bow down before Him.

We must be conscious of that and think about that and weigh our words concerning that! In other words, this may not be done passively, but actively!

The same is true of the rest of the songs we sing in the service, the psalms and the hymns. Singing is a highly spiritual activity. It may not be done in a thoughtless and careless manner. Yet we often do. But then let us remember that when we sing, our covenant God is speaking to us, as we said. And we must think on His speech.

But we are also responding to Him and speaking to Him as His friends. We are praising and extolling and adoring Him, telling Him of His greatness and His glory. Clearly, that means conscious involvement!

In the psalms we also speak out of the wide variety of our experiences in life and express our deepest feelings. We not only ascribe worth to God, but we confess sin and mourn; we cry out because of suffering and pain and sorrow; we complain on account of the persecution of enemies; we pray and ask God to do things for us. All of this implies conscious involvement. Do we not think about what we are saying to God in these things? Do we not feel with the psalmists?!

Still more, in the worship service we pray. The congregational prayer is also part of our covenantal speech to God, and it too requires conscious involvement. Yes, the pastor or elder leads in this prayer. But it is the congregation's prayer! And we must be making it with and through the pastor/elder! That means that when the pastor

Rev. Terpstra is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.

is praying, we are following along carefully, saying and pondering the words with him. This is not nap time, or time to go over our weekly calendar of activities! This is prayer time! We are conversing with our heavenly Father, and it is the work of worship!

So it is also in the giving of our offerings. When we present our gifts in the offertory, we are responding to God and speaking to Him. We are expressing our thanks for His unspeakable gift of grace in Jesus Christ. We are thanking Him for His love that makes us love the poor and needy and contribute to their support. We are praising Him for the means He gives us to support His kingdom and cause in the world.

And again, all of this presupposes our conscious involvement. This activity must also be done with great thought and care and desire. The offertory is not a time to relieve ourselves, whether at the drinking fountain or in the bathroom. It is not a time to take a break from the work of worship, so that we can think about what we want and do what we want. Also our giving is to be an act of worship! It is a time for meditating on the grace of God to us, for giving thanks and praise as our hand places money into the plate! Let us do this, too, consciously!

There are a couple of other points we need to bring out yet to close out this part of our subject.

For one thing, we must not forget that these conscious acts of worship are to be performed in the godly attitudes that mark true worship. We must sing and pray and give and listen in the fear of God, with genuine thanksgiving, in true love for God and our fellow saints, and in real joy in the Lord. This is conscious involvement too. Worship without these is worthless and vain; it is blasphemous.


For another thing, we must remember that our active involvement in worship involves the whole person — heart, soul, and body. Our worship must come from the heart, our spiritual center. Our worship must involve our souls, i.e., our minds and our wills. There is thinking and willing to do, and they must be done. And our worship involves our bodies: our brains, our mouths, our hands, our legs — really the whole of us. Let us see to it that the whole of us, from heart to head to feet, is engaged and working spiritually.

And, finally, we have to realize that this kind of conscious involvement is the answer to the danger of formalism in our worship on the one hand and innovation on the other hand.

We use the same liturgy week after week. The form of our worship we believe is biblical and proper. But that does not mean we cannot fall into the sin of formalism, of using the right means of worship

in the wrong way, just going through the motions, as if the elements were empty, insignificant rituals. What keeps us from this sin is conscious, spiritual involvement, engaging ourselves in the real work of worship. We must know our place and know what we are doing and know whom we are serving.

So, too, is this conscious involvement the answer to the danger of introducing innovations into the worship of God. Why is it that many in the modern church want liturgical change and new forms? Not because there was something wrong with the old forms of worship, with the traditional elements of the service. But because they themselves have lost the wonder of worship, have forgotten to be involved in the conscious activity of bowing before and fellowshiping with the God of heaven. The services of many churches are dead because the worshipers are spiritually dead! Maybe for us too.

The answer, then, is not a changing of the service and the elements; not the introduction of the latest fads for worship. But the answer is change in people's hearts and minds, change in the way they handle the traditional elements, such that they involve themselves consciously in worship through the biblical means established. That is what we need: change in our hearts, in my heart. Change in the way we act in the worship of the great God of heaven and earth. 

Day of Shadows

George M. Ophoff

The Types of Scripture (4)

George Ophoff was Professor of Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary in its early days. Reprinted here, in edited form, are articles which Ophoff wrote at that time for the Standard Bearer.

We concluded our last article by stating three purposes which were served by the shadows of the old dispensation. The first of these purposes was that they demon-

strated to the believers of the Old Testament the great truths of sin and grace. The sum total of the shadows was unto the believers their pedagogue to bring them to Christ.

Shadows as schoolmasters

Let us examine this matter a little more closely. Why and how were the sum total of the shadows a pedagogue bringing believers to Christ? The shadows did this, we repeat, because they exhibited to believers the great truth of redemption. In elucidating this matter we shall set out by enumerating at least some of the fundamental truths exhibited by the shadows. We shall confine ourselves to the rite of expiatory sacrifice. What truths were impressed upon the soul of the offerer by means of this rite?

It is according to the testimony of Scripture that the carnal Jew failed to sense the message and the real meaning of this rite. His conception of the sacrifice was altogether pagan. The sacrificial victim was regarded by him as a gift to God instead of God's gift to him, and he offered for the purpose of bringing God under obligation to himself. Having sacrificed, he expected God to abdicate long enough to pay him homage.

It is also certain, from the words of the prophets, that the carnal Jew regarded the dedication of the victim to God as a symbol of the devotion of self upon the altar of service to God. But, someone may interject, can it be maintained that the wicked serve God? He does, but in doing so he is being actuated by a motive as carnal as he himself is. He insists that God, on His part, will agree to place Himself at man's service. A man may agree to serve God for the same reason that the sinners of whom Jesus spoke do good unto those who do good unto them. When carnal man discovers that God refuses to dance according to his music, he takes God off his list and begins to shake his fist in the face of the Almighty. The service of the wicked, when analyzed, turns out to be service of self. The essence of his service is pride and, hence, rebellion against God, and therefore an abomination in God's sight.

Furthermore, the carnal Jew refused to admit that he was covered from head to foot with spots and blemishes and that his devotion was, for that reason, a loathsome spectacle in God's sight. He failed to realize that his moral depravity rendered him totally unfit as a sacrifice. He imagined that he was permitted to sacrifice with hands covered with blood and that, irrespective of his bloody hands, his sacrifice had meritorious value. This accounts for the rebuke of the prophet Isaiah. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me.... And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Is. 1:10-15).

It is plain that God detested the sacrifice — the service — of the carnal Jew. And why? Because his hands were full of blood; because, in other words, he was a depraved and polluted sinner. It is a sad thing that the exponents of the theory of common grace insist, contrary to God's own statements, that the service of the wicked one is pleasing unto God, even though it be that he is sacrificing with hands full of blood.

The prophet thereupon faces the carnal Jew and announces to him that the only kind of sacrifice pleasing to Jehovah is the sacrifice of him whose hands are clean. In other words, the sacrifice in which Jehovah takes delight is the sacrifice of a perfect, holy life. It must be a lamb without spot or blemish.

Therefore these words from the lips of the prophet: "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Is. 1:16, 17).

The people of God realized that they could not render unto God the kind of service He requested. Further, brought under the conviction of sin, the devout sensed that they were unable to cleanse themselves from sin's guilt and pollution. Consequently, they would have become the victims of despair had not Jehovah informed them of His willingness to purge them from their sins. Therefore these words out of the mouth of the prophet: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Is. 1:18). God assures His people that, since they are powerless to remove those dark stains, He will do so. And when He does so, they will sacrifice to Him, not the sacrifice of pride, but the sacrifice of praise and of a broken heart. They will do this in the Lamb, who was slain and who redeemed them to their God by His blood.

I repeat, the carnal Jew did not sense the reason for and the message of the rite of expiatory sacrifice. But the believer did. Unto him this rite, as well as the shadows in general, was the pedagogue which brought him to Christ. Again we ask: how and why? In explaining the matter at hand we should have regard to the subjective element entering in. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews informs his readers that the gifts and sacrifices could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience. We quote the passage: "Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect,

as pertaining to the conscience" (Heb. 9:9). It is the guilty conscience which must be taken into account in explaining how it was that the shadows of the old dispensation led believers to Christ. The first manifestation of the presence of the Spirit of regeneration in the sinner's heart is that he begins to complain about his sin. His eyes have opened to the enormity of his guilt, under the weight of which he is being crushed to the earth.

Such also was the experience of the believer of the old covenant. He would turn to the sacrifice for relief. The animal to be slain in his room was led to the altar. Upon its head the troubled one would lay his hands — a sign of the transference of guilt. The victim was slain. Its blood was sprinkled upon the altar. But the offerer, not yet having learned to look beyond the sacrifice, found no relief for his troubled conscience. He learns his first great lesson, namely, that the sacrifices could not make him perfect as pertaining to the conscience. Yet, according to the testimony of Scripture, the devout of the old covenant knew the peace of God which surpasses all understanding — that peace of mind and heart arising from the consciousness that sin had been pardoned.

Let us quote from the Psalms. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32:1-5).

The sacrifices, then, could not make perfect as pertaining to the

conscience. Nevertheless, the believer rejoiced in the divine pardon.

We wish to know, now, what it was that secured for him the peace for which his heart had been craving. The answer is ready: it was his faith in Jehovah's mercy. Fact is, that the anxious one, deriving no peace and comfort from the sacrifice, now casts himself upon the mercy of Jehovah.

This, too, is according to the testimony of Scripture. "For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.... Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Return, O Lord, how long? And let it repent thee concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days" (Ps. 90:7-14). "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.... But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Ps. 103:8-17).

Looking beyond the sacrifice

Because God, to put it in the

words of the psalmist, fed His people with mercy, therefore had they peace. The offerer, it is plain, was taught to look beyond the sacrifice to Jehovah. Doing so, he received remission of sin and life eternal.

What, now, was the great object lesson of the sacrifice? It was this: Sin must be atoned for; there can be no remission of sin without the shedding of blood. The offerer understood, then, that Jehovah was his Savior, but in connection with blood. The sacrifice taught him that the mercy of God is permeated with justice. He knew that Jehovah and blood were responsible for the pardon and life which was his. In a word, the believer of the old covenant was taught, and empowered to lay hold on, that which constitutes the very heart and core of the economy of redemption, viz., Jehovah and blood. But whose blood? He had been taught to expect nothing from the blood of the sacrificial animal. He knew, too, that human sacrifice was an abomination in God's sight. Hence, he was compelled to conclude that Jehovah Himself would provide.

Jehovah and blood — these two constituted the mystery of redemption upon which the believer of the old covenant pondered and which

he attempted to penetrate. That he did so is according to the testimony of the apostle Peter. "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should

come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow" (I Pet. 1:10, 11).

The individual believer and the church at large were being taught

The individual believer and the church at large were being taught to expect all from Jehovah, not only salvation, but the means of salvation as well.

to expect all from Jehovah, not only salvation, but the means of salvation as well.


At last the expectation of the church reached those heights determined upon by God. That was the fullness of time. God sent "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). "And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:25-32).

The salvation of the elect of God of the old covenant is perplexing to the mind of many. Were the devout, so it is asked, capable of looking beyond the lamb to Christ? This, we reply, is a matter of conjecture. Nevertheless, the salvation of the just of the old covenant was altogether permissible. It was a contrite, brokenhearted sinner who cast himself upon the mercy of Jehovah, realizing that the mercy with which he desired to be satisfied was a just, though unmerited, mercy. What was there preventing God from granting such a one the desires of his heart? God could show such a one mercy, and pardon his sins. He could do so without lowering Himself in the eyes of His moral creatures. For He had taken care to demonstrate unto them that the sin pardoned must somehow be atoned for and His mercy merited. It was not for nothing that blood played so prominent a part in the typical transactions of the old dispensation. The Spirit of

God empowered the people of God to sense the meaning and message of the blood.

It is plain that the shadows led men to Christ. Jehovah, by means of them, trained His people to expect all from Him — salvation and the means. The church (the true church) was awaiting and expecting the consolation of Israel. When He came, there was rejoicing among the devout.

It is plain that the shadows did indeed lead believers to Christ. Having passed through the course of training insisted upon by Jehovah, the believers of the old covenant perceived that Jehovah alone can save. He saves, however, in conjunction with blood, not the blood of the animal, but the blood which Jehovah would provide. Now, Christ is God and blood, the latter signifying the human nature in which God suffered and died for His own. In fine, the Old Testament believer was empowered to lay hold on that which constitutes the very heart and soul of redemption, Jehovah and blood. 

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Martin VanderWal

"Adultery, Guilt, and Righteousness"

Matthew 5:27-32

The passage we now consider is the solid ground for one of our distinctive doctrines, the unbreakable character of marriage. It is also the solid ground for one of our distinctive practices, the forbidding of divorce, except in cases of adultery, and the forbidding of remarriage in every case.

This is a hard doctrine and a hard practice to maintain. The world at present knows almost nothing about a lifetime commitment of husband and wife to one another. More to its shame, the same is also true of the church world at present. The divorce rate is the same in the church as in the world. It is even the same among those who put themselves in the category of "born-again evangelical."

A hard doctrine and practice we readily admit. One of the main

reasons the church ignores the biblical doctrine and practice is because it is, in their words, too hard. There is a lack of ethical and doctrinal discipline that leads to such a failure in marriages. This lack is both on a corporate, institutional level, and on an individual level. In the passage before us Jesus Christ affirms that it is so. He brings us to the root of adultery, in the heart. It is only there that we can properly and fully deal with it, under His guidance and by His grace.

Rev. VanderWal is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

Similarly, the teaching of Christ in this passage must not only teach us about marriage, adultery, and divorce, it must also teach us about sin in general. We learn here of the source of sin as it comes to manifestation in every area of our lives. We say this because this passage has a very distinct place in the section consisting of verses 21 through 48. This section is the practical exercise of Jesus' words in verses 17-20. He proves that He has not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. He is showing how the law is to be fulfilled and done, even in its least matters. He is showing the sort of righteousness that exceeds the righteousness so-called of the scribes and Pharisees. The particular force of the verses we consider in this installment apply not only to the root of sin, but to the necessary work of eradication.

In this way, we see that the text divides up readily into three parts. Verses 27 and 28 treat the beginning principle of adultery. Verses 29 and 30 address the difficult work of dealing with sin. And verses 31 and 32 address the manifestation of that sin, and its proper treatment, even from an external viewpoint.

Adultery of the Heart

As we have seen before, the teaching "of old time" belongs not to the law of God itself. That is, while the form of the words is the same as the seventh commandment, the substance is different. Those of old time represent the traditions of men. For many ages men had taught that adultery was only a matter of what one did with his body. As long as one did not commit adultery with his body, he was in perfect conformance with that commandment.

This had two important effects upon the popular conception of righteousness. First, if one's external life measured up to this seventh commandment, he was declared to be righteous because he *was* righteous. There was no need of the pardoning grace of God, nor any

need of divine righteousness to cover that sin. In the hearing of the commandment many might puff out their chests, boasting of their own, self-produced righteousness. This conception excluded any need for an external, divine righteousness. Second, as the traditions of men strictly regulated the application of the commandment to one's external conduct, one was left absolutely without obligation in other areas. The thoughts of the heart, the look of the eyes, even the actions of one's hand, did not fall under the purview of this commandment. With the external conformance, there might be an internal lawlessness.

With one pronouncement, Jesus overturned this entire tradition. "But I say unto you." He presents not a contradiction of the formal statement, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." He has not come to destroy the law. He presents the true application. That application was wholly contrary to the tradition "of old time." The righteousness of this law, explained by the King, goes all the way to the heart. The commission of adultery happens "in his heart."

Understand very carefully what is on the foreground here. This adultery of the heart is not merely the imagining of the activity of adultery. Nor is it merely conceiving in the heart the ways and means to such an activity, without executing such a plan. A man cannot say that he is free of this sin if he so restrains his thought-life that he does not go that far. He is not righteous even should he keep his eyes to himself. Rather, the purpose is identified, the *reason* why he looks at a woman. He has lust in his heart: to lust after her.

This is the point: sin does not enter in through the eyes, to snare a man in the sin of adultery. It begins in his heart. It directs his eyes to a woman, picks her out, and makes her the object of his lust. Sin is in the heart, even as it governs the motion of the eyes.

This teaching of Christ is pertinent to the present day. We refer to the deep doctrinal separation of the Protestant Reformation from the Roman Catholic Church. The same separation we can easily use to distinguish biblical, Reformed thought from modern, evangelical thought. This has to do with the motive of the heart, whether there is sin. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that one need not confess or repent over lust in the heart. If one should, upon noticing that lust, harbor and treasure it in his bosom, then it becomes sin. Much of modern evangelicalism, following in this same way, says the same thing. This is the natural consequence of a Semi-Pelagian view of the sinner. The teaching of Christ is that this lust, apart from any other consideration, is itself sin. Sin is not only in the deed; it is in the nature that gives rise to the deed.

Separation From Sin

It becomes an all-important question, then, what to do about that sin. In the two verses which follow, Christ gives the answer. This answer is radical. He requires the cutting off of that which offends. Two examples are given. One is the right eye; the other is the right hand. If these members cause a person to stumble into sin, the Lord gives the remedy: Cut them off, and cast them from thee. Do not think such a thing difficult. It ought to be an easy thing, when we remember the consequences. It is better that such a member should perish, than that the whole body should be cast into hell. There is no comparison, after all. The worst pain that could be felt in losing a limb, even in the most horrific way, cannot compare with a moment of that awful suffering of the wrath of God. How many of the wicked, suffering eternally in hell, would wail and gnash their teeth that they had not obeyed such a word. What is the loss of an eye, a hand, when compared with enduring unending millennia in such depths of fire unquenchable?

Let that truth sink in for a bit. Think upon it. We ought to give all heed to the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, in order to possess it. We ought to work as hard as we can to avoid the things that cause offense, even to the point of removing eyes and hands from our bodies. The stakes are high: the kingdom of heaven, or hell.

We acknowledge that these two verses have been greatly abused in the past. In their deep desire to escape every influence of sin, monks and ascetics have been known to mutilate themselves. They attempted to obey these words of Christ. So afraid were they of their bodies being cast into hell that they tore out their eyes, or cut off their hands. Others were unwilling to go that far. Instead they applied much pain to their bodies. They voluntarily submitted to various kinds of torture. In so doing, they attempted to purify themselves of sin. There is also the thinking that this same thing applies to the soul as well. Immediately after death, the souls of believers enter purgatory. In their souls they suffer pain in order to be prepared for heaven. After thousands of years, then they will be ready to enter heaven.

How terrible a thing to misunderstand and misapply this passage in such a dreadful way! Freedom from hell is not so easily had! It ought to be obvious, though, that the sin that brings condemnation is not removed so easily. Something harder, something more painful is required than amputation.

Understand the distinct direction that these words must take us. If we must speak of things that truly cause offense, we must not speak of the right eye or the right hand. The problem with adultery is not the eye that sees or the hand that grasps. If the right is removed, there is still the left. We must instead speak of the true source of offense: the heart that directs the

eye and the hand. The problem is in the heart. The will is naturally inclined toward sin, and away from righteousness. Again, sin is in the nature, the deepest part of that nature.

The work of cutting off and casting this cause of offense from self is a most difficult thing. Out of love for the kingdom of heaven, out of fear of hell, one must work within, in the spiritual center: the heart. Whenever he uncovers sinful, impure motives that move his eyes or limbs toward sin, he must undertake a spiritual self-amputation. He must hate and abhor the sin and corruption of His heart. He must confess it before God, and he must seek its forgiveness at the cross. He must seek all grace from God in order to fight against and overcome that sin in his heart.

At the same time, this work is the reflection and result of the work of God's sovereign grace. That grace is already at work in the heart, long before anyone does this spiritual amputation. This is the work of Christ that Ezekiel prophesied. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezek. 36:26, 27).

The External Sin

Again, in verse 31, we are presented with the traditions of men. When we compare verse 31 with the teaching in Deuteronomy 24:1 we see an immediate difference. Deuteronomy 24:1 gives the reason, or occasions, for divorce. Without going into the exact nature of that reason, that reason is wholly lacking in Matthew 5:31. That verse

only states the procedure. In such cases of putting away, a document is necessary.

The point that Jesus makes in the correction of this tradition goes again to the guilt of adultery, in relationship to the act itself. What the tradition established was only a transaction. The truth is far deeper, going to guilt and righteousness.

With this instruction of Christ, freedom from the guilt of adultery becomes very narrow. It is not merely the woman who is divorced for whatever reason, and who marries another, that is guilty of adultery. He also is guilty of adultery that puts her away. The only man that is clear of such guilt is he who has put her away for the sake of fornication.

This "whosoever" is very broad. It matters not whether the woman who is unlawfully put away actually does marry another. Where she does marry, he does indeed share the blame for this adulterous marriage. But even if she does not marry, he is guilty. He has presented the occasion for her to sin.

The guilt of this sin is still present, and is brought upon still others. There is another "whosoever." He marries a woman who has been put away, lawfully or unlawfully. That marriage is a marriage. However, it bears the stamp of adultery. He that marries in that way commits adultery with her that is put away. How sin multiplies and grows, even out of the heart of one, to involve so many others!

This Scripture stands clearly as the basis for the teaching and practice of our churches concerning divorce and remarriage. Where Christ has declared guilt, so must the church. The church must do this without fear of being out of step with popular culture. This is the popular culture in the world. This

*Where Christ
has declared guilt,
so must the church.
The church
must do this
without fear
of being
out of step with
popular culture.*

is the popular culture in the church world. Many correctly observe that such a teaching as held by the PRC makes for small churches and a small denomination. Many churches and many teachers and leaders within those churches understand the word of Christ in this text, and its hard character. Yet, out of a fear of losing members, they refuse to speak and exercise this truth. May we prefer faithfulness to the King of the church, rather than conformity to the world.

In our promotion and defense of this doctrine and practice, we must again go to the root of the matter: the heart. Those churches that would remain faithful to this word of Christ must continually penetrate there. The lust of the heart must be exposed through the preaching. The sin of the heart must be named, and repentance over it must be urged. The penitent must be taught that the righteousness of Christ covers that sin. He is the fulfillment of this law. The church must also teach that the strength to fight against this lust is only by Jesus' death on the cross.

But the lust of the heart must be replaced with a love and fidelity toward God. The church must be taught to consecrate herself to God, to be a bride adorned for her husband. This is the glory of self-denial, devotion, even costly, to the faithful, loving God.

In that context, the heart is ready to hear the positive calling of Matthew 5:27-32. That positive calling we bring out in the words of the apostle Paul, Ephesians 5:25. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."

Questions for Meditation and Further Study


1. What other Scriptures teach the same as our text? How do they work together to substantiate the one teaching about marriage, divorce, and remarriage?

2. The position of our churches is not popular and not widely held? How can this affect our interpretation and application of these verses?

3. Why is it so necessary to deal with the heart in such matters as

adultery? Can sin be properly dealt with apart from consideration of the heart? What work is required of the individual believer here?

4. What distinct teachings of Scripture can be used to strengthen our conformity to this word of Christ?

5. How does this Scripture stand in the service of the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ? 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

Evangelism committees from two of our churches, the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA and the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, have recently completed work on their own home pages on the internet. If you are interested in giving them a look, we encourage you to check them out at www.kalamazooprotestantreformedchurch.org or www.hopeprc.org.

Kalamazoo's Evangelism Committee also continues to be busy

each week hosting a radio program on WKPR in Kalamazoo. This program airs on Friday afternoons at 12:10 P.M. and is entitled, "The Word of Truth." Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor at Kalamazoo, is the host, and he speaks for ten minutes on some subject of doctrine. This past fall Kalamazoo aired their seventy-fifth broadcast.

The Hope Pregnancy Center, a pro-life crisis pregnancy center in Fort Lauderdale, FL, recently requested 100 copies of "Knowing the True God" from the Evangelism Committee of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL. The Evangelism Committee filled this request, and sent along some other pamphlets for information and consideration.

School Activities

Instead of exchanging gifts among themselves, the teachers and students at the Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN decided to donate money towards buying books for the mission field in Ghana. This idea was expanded even further when the students contacted everyone in their congregation to ask them for donations as well.

The Student Council of Covenant Christian High School in Walker, MI sponsored a food drive during the weeks before Christmas to assist families in the PR churches in the west Michigan area.

The students of the Hull, IA PR

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

Christian School presented their all-school program on November 20. The theme for this year's program was "Trust."

Congregation Activities

The congregation of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI was busy this past fall with what was called the "Valaszut Christmas Project." This consisted of sending Christmas packages to individual students of a small Christian School in Valaszut, Romania. A short presentation in conjunction with the final packaging of the gift boxes for this school was given on December 2 at Georgetown. A group of those from Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, Indiana who visited this area last summer were also present to answer any questions, and everyone interested in this work was invited to attend.

Georgetown's congregation also met together for a Fall Harvest Outing on October 31 at the greenhouses of one of their members. In addition to a potluck supper in the greenhouse, there were hayrides, a bonfire, and flashlight tag following supper.

At a recent congregational meeting the members of the South Holland, IL PRC approved the recommendations of their council to install a Stannah stairway chair lift to the basement and to replace the eight glass entry doors of the church.

Members from the Hudsonville and Trinity PRCs in Hudsonville, MI joined their voices together on December 2 to present their annual choral program of thanksgiving and celebration of our Savior's birth.

December 16 the choir of the Loveland, CO PRC also presented their Christmas program. That same evening the choral society of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI presented their Christmas program of praise and thanks through the gift of music. A collection was taken to help the saints of the Covenant

PRC in Northern Ireland with their building fund.

Sister-Church Activities

The collection for Northern Ireland at the Faith choir program reminds us that in recent news from Ballymena, Northern Ireland we learned that the loan which was taken out to purchase the property on which they hope, the Lord willing, to build a church home on someday, has been paid for. We are thankful for this evidence of God's continuing care for the church there.

Young People's Activities

Some of the young people from Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL were able to accompany their pastor, Rev. C. Haak, on December 1 and 2 when he traveled to Randolph, WI to install Rev. Doug Kuiper as their pastor. A Saturday evening activity was planned, and housing was provided by the families of Randolph.

The Young People of the Edgerton, MN PRC invited members of their congregation, as well as those from the Doon and Hull, IA PRCs, to attend a Christmas Singspiration Sunday evening, December 16.

Minister Activities

Rev. A. Spriensma accepted the call he had been considering to serve our churches as missionary to the Philippines. Plans now call for him to preach his farewell sermon on January 6 and be installed as missionary on January 18 in Doon, IA and possibly preach his inaugural sermon on January 20.

The Grandville, MI PRC has a new trio consisting of Rev. C. Haak, Rev. C. Terpstra, and Rev. R. VanOverloop. Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ has formed a trio consisting of Revs. W. Bruinsma, D. Kleyn, and R. Smit. From a trio of the Revs. B. Gritters, K. Koole, and R. VanOverloop, the Byron Center, MI PRC extended a call to Rev. VanOverloop to serve as their next pastor.

Food For Thought

"It is no good reason for a man's religion that he was born and brought up in it; for then a Turk would have as much reason to be a Turk as a Christian a Christian."

—William Chillingworth 

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].

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Cornerstone PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to Steve and Mary VanDrunen and family in the death of his father,

JOHN VAN DRUNEN.

May they find comfort in the words of I Corinthians 15:20-22, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Rev. Nathan Brummel, Pres.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On December 3, 2001, our parents,

ART and CARRIE BLEYENBERG,

celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. We are grateful to God for the covenant parents He has given us, and for His faithfulness in blessing their marriage for these many years. We pray that God will continue to care for them in the coming years.

"For the Lord is good, his mercy endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Ethel and Harold Steenstra
 - * Arvin and Rose Bleyenbergh
 - * Arnie and Charlotte Bleyenbergh
 - * Bill and Jeanette Bleyenbergh
 - * Betty and Alvin Bleyenbergh
 - * Carla and Larry Kane
 - * James and Gloria Bleyenbergh
 - * Bob Bleyenbergh
 - * Art Jr. and Mary Bleyenbergh
 - * Eugene and Elaine Bleyenbergh
 - * Gary Bleyenbergh
- 68 grandchildren
85 great grandchildren
Edgerton, Minnesota

NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado on Wednesday, March 6, 2002 at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the classical agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, February 4, 2002, thirty days before Classis convenes. An office-bearers' conference is being planned, Lord willing, for Tuesday, March 5. Delegates or visitors in need of lodging or of transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Loveland, Mr. Robert Brands, 1417 Arikaree Drive, Loveland, CO 80538. Phone: (970) 669-1265. E-mail: BPBrands@juno.com

Rev. Daniel Kleyn,
Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Faith PRC extends its Christian sympathy to fellow elder Arie Griffioen and his wife Anne in the death of her mother,
MRS. MAYNARD VEENSTRA.

"For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." Romans 14:8

Rev. Kenneth Koole, Pres.
Peter VanderSchaff, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 16, 2002 our parents and grandparents,

JIM and CHAR SCHIPPER,

will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary. We are thankful for the many years the Lord has given to them and the covenantal instruction, spiritual guidance, and godly example they have given to us.

May the Lord's abundant blessings continue to rest on them as they continue their lives together. "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Gord and Nancy Schipper
Dale, Eric, Kevin, Ryan, Alana
- * Randy and Lindy Looyenga
Brent, Jared, Kristin
- * Dan and Julie Kaiser
Ross, Alex, Mitchell
- * Nathan and Jill Kamps
Sydney, Nicole, Grant

Grand Rapids, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 30, 2002, the Lord willing, our parents, grandparents and great grandparents,

MR. and MRS. HENK NIEUWENKAMP,

will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to the Lord that He has blessed us with God-fearing parents who have instructed us in His ways.

"Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord. The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128: 4-6).

- * Henry Nieuwenkamp & children
- * Albert & Maryse Nieuwenkamp
& children
- * Pat & Korien Sampson
& children

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of the First PRC of Holland express their Christian sympathy to their fellow members, Cornelius and Frances Doezeema, in the death of Fran's sister

MISS JEAN DYKSTRA.

May they be comforted by God's word in Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

T. Elzinga, Pres.
S. Casemier, Sec'y.

NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Jeffrey Kalsbeek, phone: (616) 735-3608. This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 11, 2002, D.V.

Student Aid Committee