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The Divine Dwells with the Humble

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Isaiah 57: 15

God with man! God dwelling with man. The infinite, Almighty, Holy One dwelling with finite, weak, sinners. So amazing! So wonderful! Yet so often taken for granted!

Let us constantly strive to be in awe at the wonder that God would dwell with man. Any time we take this gracious relationship for granted we are walking in pride — horrible pride.

Consider the striking fact that God does not dwell with those who are proud. The proud can be the reprobate wicked, who in their folly say that there is no God. The proud can be those who believe

that they are something in the eyes of God or of man because of what they have done or who they are. The proud can be those who presume their relationship with God or who do not repent or who live as if they do not need God.

Anyone who has the fantastic privilege of having the Almighty, Holy God dwell with him will be humble! And grateful — eternally so!

Isaiah is continuing to write words of warning to Judah. He warns of judgment and captivity. What characterized the nation as a whole was pride. They believed that God would never send the sons of Abraham into captivity. They saw themselves as God's special people. In their pride they refused to humble themselves. They refused to repent. Therefore God speaks from His throne to this indifferent people, a people who presumed upon their relationship to God, a people who were often without God in their thoughts and hearts.

Who Dwells?

God presents Himself first. He

is first. We must always have Him to be first. He reveals Himself as the "high and lofty One," the One who "inhabiteth eternity," and the One whose "name is Holy."

That God is the "high and lofty One" means that He is and lives in majesty. He is great — so great that He cannot be contained in any place. Dignity and grandeur so clothe Him (Ps. 93:1) that even the thought of Him inspires awe and reverence. The greatness of God is so surpassing that it is a sin to compare Him to anyone or anything else (Is. 40:25). "Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth!" (Ps. 113:5, 6). We believe it, but we find it hard to understand that God would even have to humble Himself just to see the things in heaven!

The "high and lofty One" is sovereign. He is sovereign in His creating all things out of nothing simply by speaking. He is sovereign in His upholding and governing all things in all the universe unto His determined end. He is sovereign as the Lawgiver, establishing the stan-

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dard for right and wrong for every rational creature. And He is sovereign as the Judge of all, determining whether His standard was met and executing rewards and punishments accordingly.

The high and lofty One "inhabiteth eternity." One immediately gets the idea that the truth behind these words is greater than the words. Eternity is one of God's own attributes, yet the prophet is inspired to write that God inhabits or dwells in eternity. Eternity cannot be understood by any creature. Every creature has a beginning, but not eternity. It is without a beginning and without an ending. We have difficulty understanding eternity also because as creatures we are so bound in time that we only understand time. And when we try to describe eternity the words we use are derived from time. Eternity is endless ages, a continuing forever. Also we cannot speak of eternity in positive language — we have to use negative terms, e.g., "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (I Pet. 1:4).

The eternal dwelling of the redeemed is a creation. But where God dwells is absolutely unapproachable by any creature. Even Adam, before his fall into sin, could not approach it. The triune, majestic One dwells in eternity.

And His "name is Holy." This name means that God is always separated from anything dark (evil, sinful, wicked, or corrupt). He is separated even from that which is a shadow. And the Holy One is positively dedicated only, exclusively, and eternally to that which is good, perfectly good, namely, Himself. As the Holy One, God seeks Himself in everything He says, does, and thinks. As the Holy One, God loves Himself exclusively and eternally. As the Holy One He loves good and hates evil.

With Whom He Dwells

The absolutely amazingly wonderful thing is that this high and lofty, eternal, and holy God dwells

with humans!

God announces that He dwells with humans. He who inhabits eternity has created for Himself a place where He is pleased to be with humans in the midst of His creation. The One who dwells in eternity has reserved for Himself a place on earth. This place is called the "high and holy place." This is obviously a place well known to the people of Judah, who received this word of God through Isaiah. The high and holy place was a clear reference to Mount Zion, the site of the temple. In the old dispensation God made His presence known in the temple. And that is where He dwelt in the midst of His people. The height of Mount Zion was a type of God's greatness. The holiness of the temple was well known to every Israelite, as only the Levites were allowed to work in it.

The high and holy place of the temple was where the Infinite God made His presence known among His people. This is where He showed His glory, namely, that He is "Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will be no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex. 33:18; 34:6, 7).

Over and over in the Scriptures is God's promise to be with His people. It is amazing how simple is the language: God with man. But how tremendously profound! This is the covenant, the relationship of friendship and fellowship. God taking man alongside Himself to be his sovereign Friend!

While the temple was the typical place where God dwelt with man, the ultimate fulfillment, of course, is Jesus. His very name is Immanuel — God with us (Is. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). In the likeness of our sinful flesh He came, and thus God dwelt among us! And His prom-

ise at the time of His ascension was, "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:20).

Not only is Jesus the perfect fulfillment of God dwelling with man, but He is also the reason why it is possible. God cannot dwell with sinners, but He can dwell with sinners who have been forgiven and made righteous. Jesus, in His substitutionary life, death, and resurrection realized forgiveness and righteousness for those given to Him.

God does dwell with man, but not with all men. From the viewpoint of objective, dogmatic truth, God dwells only with the elect. However, the word of God in our text speaks from the real life, experiential perspective of God's elect people as they live and walk on the earth. God dwells with him "that is of a contrite and humble spirit."

God does not dwell with the proud. Not with the proud reprobate. Nor experientially with the elect when they are walking in pride. Humility ought to characterize the elect always. Anyone who is the conscious recipient of the undeserved favor and love of God — grace — is humble. God not only requires that His child "walk humbly with thy God" (Mic. 6:8), but also that His children, when standing before Him, know of no other posture than that of humility. They live in the awareness that they deserve only wrath and eternal judgment. And they know that their having been chosen to belong to God's family and to the Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, was not because they made themselves worthy of being chosen. It was divine grace. It was and is only grace, always grace. The continued presence of their sinfulness and their continued sinning is a constant reminder of the tremendous power and undeservedness of grace. They are humbled to receive grace.

Those with whom God dwells are described as the "contrite and humble." A contrite spirit is liter-

ally one of the dust, i.e., broken, sad, and sorrowful. A humble spirit is literally one that is low. The organic connection every human has with Adam means that man's spirit is naturally proud and arrogant. Man does not like to be a creature, but wants to be independent of and above God. It is powerful and irresistible regenerating grace that crushes man's spirit and makes it see what it really is from God's perspective. Whenever the light of God's Word comes to such a spirit, it reveals God as eternal majesty and perfect holiness. Then this spirit is humbled. When God reveals Himself to our broken heart, then we experience our smallness and insignificance, our vanity, but also our filthiness. This is the spirit of him who sincerely declares himself to be the chief sinner (I Tim. 1:15).

God is not put off by such a humble spirit. We are inclined to back away from those in the dust, but not God. He "dwells" with the contrite and humble. This is the place which He prepares for Himself, where He is comfortable. The holy God dwells, not with those sinners who are unrepentant (filled with excuses), but with those who acknowledge their sin. Such a spirit agrees with God about the horrible nature of sin. Such a spirit cries out its need for God's forgiveness.

Unto What Purpose He Dwells

God's purpose for dwelling with the contrite and humble spirit is "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." To revive is to renew or to continue life. A reviving implies that there was life before. The previous life is regeneration, which evidences itself in humility and contriteness. God's first work of grace in His children is that He humbles them. He shows us His great majesty and our sin.

Then reviving is needed. The picture is that of someone who is sick, discouraged, or faint. As a withered flower is revived by water, so God's very presence is sufficient to revive or renew the spirit of the brokenhearted. The heart oppressed by the knowledge that it has sinned against God has no greater blessing than that the very God it has sinned against comes consciously near to be with it.

God's dwelling with us revives us. This shows that when God humbles us He does not squash or destroy us, but gives us real life. Real life for man is to stretch out toward God, just as a flower does toward the sun. When God comes near to the humble and contrite He expresses agreement with their judgment of their sin and sinfulness (they first agreed with Him), and He proclaims His forgiveness

and righteousness. The humble spirit hears God's voice in Christ, and opens to Him. Then God promises, "I come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). And He promises that He will not leave us nor forsake us. He will be with us.

God with us! That is sweet communion for the humble spirit. To know that God is with us revives the spirit. It gives relief. It gives joy. It gives confidence. There is nothing like it. "Whom have I in heaven, but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Ps. 73:25).

In sweet communion, Lord, with
Thee
I constantly abide;
My hand Thou holdest in Thy own
To keep me near Thy side.

Then,
Tho' flesh and heart should faint
and fail,
The Lord will ever be
The strength and portion of my
heart,
My God eternally.

Be humble before the high and lofty One, whose name is Holy! Then experience true spiritual revival in knowing that He is with you always. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Listen, "Fear not: for I am with thee" (Is. 43:5).

Editorial

"He Shines in All That's Fair" (and Curses All That's Foul) (6)

The second reason why Dr. Richard Mouw embraces common grace is his own "empathy" with the ungodly. (For the first reason, see the editorial in the *Standard Bearer*, May 15, 2002.)

"Empathy" is one's entering into the feelings of another so as to share those feelings. Dr. Mouw rejoices with the wicked in their prosperity. He sorrows with unbelievers in their suffering. This proves

the common grace of God, Dr. Mouw argues, since God must feel toward the wicked as Dr. Mouw feels. If Dr. Mouw shares the joy of an unbelieving husband and wife who reconcile after separation,

God must rejoice with them as well. If Dr. Mouw sympathizes with the Muslim woman who is raped by soldiers and whose baby is murdered before her eyes, God must grieve with her as well. But such empathy on the part of God can only be due to a gracious attitude of God toward the ungodly, which, of course, is a fundamental teaching of common grace.

God's "Empathy" for the Ungodly

Mouw advances this ground for common grace in a section of his book, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Eerdmans, 2001), headed, "Divine Empathy."

I want now to frame the issues [of common grace] in terms of divine empathy. Is it plausible for us to think that there are times when God looks favorably upon the non-elect in this sense: that he has empathy for their very real experiences of joy and sadness, just as he certainly does for those of the elect?

He imagines a non-Christian couple who are reconciled after the wounding of their marriage by the husband's adultery. The Christian therapist who has helped in the reconciliation sheds tears of happiness over the restoration of the marriage. Mouw proposes that "the Lord himself was involved in the joy of this reconciliation."

Similarly, according to the champion of common grace, God sorrows with the suffering unbeliever. To prove this contention Mouw relates a revolting incident from real life. After soldiers raped her as part of an "ethnic cleansing" campaign in Eastern Europe, the Muslim woman pleaded for her life on behalf of her baby. Whereupon one of the soldiers cut off the head of the child and placed it on the mother's breast. Mouw's response, like that of every Christian, is anger and sorrow. From his own sorrow, Mouw in-

fers the sorrow of God at the suffering of the Muslim woman. In a rhetorical question, Mouw affirms that "the heart of God also break[s] when something like this happens."

Dr. Mouw's conclusion is blunt and clear: "There is a divine empathy that is evoked when a non-Christian woman is brutally raped, or when marital reconciliation takes place between two thoroughgoing secularists." And behind this divine empathy is the common grace of God.

This argument for common grace is undoubtedly widespread and powerful. It need not be thought through in carefully reasoned propositions. It is simply felt. "I grieve with the terrible suffering of ungodly men, women, and children, and God must grieve too."

Is Our Attitude God's?

Nevertheless, the argument is, as they say, a stretch. It is by no means apparent that Richard Mouw may infer God's attitude toward the ungodly from Richard Mouw's attitude toward the ungodly. For one thing, Richard Mouw's attitude may be wrong, even sinful. This was the case regarding the attitude of King Jehoshaphat toward King Ahab of Israel. Jehoshaphat loved Ahab and empathized with Ahab's zeal to make war with Syria. The prophet of God sharply rebuked Jehoshaphat for his attitude toward the idolatrous king of Israel: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD" (II Chron. 19:2).

For another thing, certain attitudes toward events and toward our neighbors are proper for us human beings that are not at all the attitudes of God toward these same events and persons. Jeremiah lamented the destruction of Jerusalem with all its misery for raped women, murdered

children, and tortured men, but it was the LORD who did all this in His righteous anger. The prophet expressly says that God did not pity (Lam. 2:2). Eli warned his wicked sons with a father's loving desire that they not perish but repent and be saved. The attitude of God toward Eli's sons, however, was hatred that willed and accomplished their destruction (I Sam. 2:22-25).

One instance of a radical difference of attitude between God and us toward one and the same person will commend itself to defenders of common grace like Richard Mouw. Such defenders of common grace, following Abraham Kuyper, hold both a grace of God toward the reprobate ungodly as regards temporal life and a qualitatively different kind of grace toward the elect as regards salvation. Mouw confesses predestination, election and reprobation, as taught by the Canons of Dordt. He distinguishes God's common grace favor from His electing and saving grace.

The instance of two different attitudes is this. A Christian father with a wayward child will grieve over the child's unbelief and disobedience. All his life, the father will warn the child and pray for him. If the child dies evidently outside of Christ, the father's heart will be broken. This sorrow arises from the father's love for his child, a love that vehemently desires the child's salvation. And this sorrow with its source in love is right, although it must always finally be qualified by submission to the will of God. But no one may conclude from the attitude and feelings of the father that God's attitude toward the child is the same as that of the father. Assuming that the child is a reprobate, an Esau, Dr. Mouw will readily grant that God's attitude toward the child is an attitude of hatred according to which God in His just judgment passed the child by with the grace of election from

eternity and withheld the grace of salvation from the child in time (Canons I/15). The father loves the child, desiring his salvation; God hates the child, purposing his damnation.

In the matter of attitudes and feelings toward human beings, we may not draw a line from the attitude of the Christian toward his neighbors to the attitude of God toward these same persons. The Christian is related to other humans by the strong ties of mutual flesh and blood. Out of this shared humanity wells up empathy. In addition, the Christian is called to love the fellow humans whom God puts near him, as neighbors, by seeking their good. God's relation to these same humans, however, is not that of neighbor. It is the relation of Creator and creature. As regards the relation between God and sinful men and women outside of Jesus Christ, it is that of the awful, holy, and just Judge and guilty, foul creatures. Scripture reveals that God "shines in all that's fair." It also reveals that He curses all that's foul.

Ungodly Joy

Does God rejoice with the ungodly in their prosperity?

Psalms 73 is God's own answer to this question. As regards the "prosperity of the wicked" (v. 3), by His giving the wicked many good things and in their enjoyment of a comfortable earthly life, God sets them "in slippery places." He casts them "down into destruction," so that they are "brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors" (vv. 18, 19). No empathy of shared joy here!

God has no joy in the pleasures of the ungodly. He has no joy in their life at all. Their life angers Him, for they live apart from, and in enmity against, Him. All their pleasures are sinful pleasures, for whether they eat or drink, work or play, marry or divorce, they do nothing to the glory

of God. What joy can God have in sin?

God has no "feeling" of delight in the things that most please and gladden the ungodly. As far as He is concerned, *they* have no business rejoicing in those things. "Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD" (Jer. 9:23, 24).

God has no joy in the reconciling of two unbelievers, for their reconciliation dares to propose peace apart from God in Jesus Christ. God has no joy in the "repentance" of one whose "repentance" does not include, indeed, is not rooted in, sorrow of heart that he has sinned against the good God. God has no joy in a non-Christian's forgiveness of her adulterer husband, for she "forgives" without any reference to the sole ground and source of forgiveness, namely, the grace of God in the atonement of the cross. God has no joy in the loving marriage of two secularists, for they do not thankfully receive the great good of marriage from God its maker, nor live in it according to His will, nor devote it to His praise.

We opponents of common grace have this against the theory, that it is a spiritual soporific to the ungodly in their decent, comfortable, pleasurable, brief lives in the world. It is as if the preachers of common grace run along the banks of the lovely river on which the ungodly are drifting—ever more swiftly!—in their fine vessels, enjoying themselves to the fullest, shouting to the ungodly, "God loves you! He rejoices in your joy of floating comfortably down the river! He has a gracious purpose

with your blessed river cruise!" And around the next bend are the dreadful falls that will plunge these ungodly into eternal perdition.

I wonder whether, since the defenders of common grace would not listen to the testimony of the Protestant Reformed Churches, God will not have the damned convince them of the error of common grace. On the day of judgment, before the condemned depart to their place, they will turn to those who taught and defended common grace, and say, "Why did you go out of your way to leave the impression with us that all was well with us in the very favor of God? Why did you not warn us, sharply and incessantly, that God's wrath lay on our prosperity, that He was angry with our joy, and that His curse was in our house, so long as we remained unconverted to Him, to whom all life ought to have been lived? Why did you Calvinists not teach us what your own Heidelberg Catechism plainly asserts in Lord's Day 50, namely, that God's good gifts are one thing and His blessing quite another, that people can have the gifts without the blessing, and that the gifts without the blessing do not profit?"

Ungodly Sorrow

God does not empathize with the joys of the ungodly. Nor does He sympathize with the suffering of the wicked. Dr. Mouw is deeply grieved at the suffering of the Muslim woman to whose rape is added the misery of the cruel murder of her baby. Understandably and rightly so! Who has not groaned over the anguish of his fellow humans in this world of unspeakable woe? I suppose that everyone has burned into his soul a particular incident of heartrending distress. For Dr. Mouw, it is the event involving the Muslim woman. For me, it is an incident described in William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. There is the great

hole containing the bodies of many Jews already machine-gunned by the S.S. In the new batch of Jews lined up at the edge of the pit is a little Jewish boy, about ten years old. As the Nazis wait, cold, callous, even enjoying what they are about to do, cigarettes dangling out of their mouths, the little boy, not comprehending, but fearful, clings to his father. Looking down on his son's anxious but trusting face, the helpless father tries to comfort his child. In a moment father and son will go down into the huge grave, atop the mass of dead bodies, to be shot.

It breaks our heart.

But the suffering of the reprobate wicked outside of Jesus Christ does not break the heart of God. God Himself inflicts their suffering by His almighty power of providence as punishment for their sins. The human agents of the cruelties, the soldiers in Eastern Europe engaged in "racial cleansing" and the Nazis bent on genocide, are responsible, and they alone. God holds them responsible and will punish them for their brutalities, if they do not repent. Let these rapists, murderers of babies, and slaughterers of old men and little boys be damned! But in His sovereignty God acts through these despicable murderers and evildoers to punish the ungodly in righteousness.

The evils that anger and grieve Dr. Mouw—and me—as dastardly deeds of men are also aspects of the death that God pronounced and now visits upon a human race that rebelled against Him and fell away from Him (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23). As such, these deeds must elicit from Dr. Mouw—and all of us—the response of awe before the God who is terrible in His justice and of a living sense of the greatness of our sin that it should deserve such punishments as these.

The very deeds that outrage and sadden Dr. Mouw—and me—rape and the murder of a baby, whose severed head is then cruelly

laid on the mother's breast, are deeds that Scripture says are done to the ungodly by God. So far is it from being true that God sorrows over these sufferings of the wicked that, on the contrary, God Himself brings them upon the wicked. Isaiah 13 prophesies that the Babylonians will be thrust through with the swords of the Medes. The Babylonian children "shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished" (v. 16). It is Jehovah God who will bring all these evils upon Babylon: "I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible" (v. 11).

In fact, God brought these same atrocities upon His own people. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, young and old lay slain in the streets, maids were ravished, princes were hung up by their hands, and mothers boiled their own children. In all of this, "the LORD hath done that which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old; he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied" (Lam. 2:17).

Divine "Empathy" and Hell

If now the defender of common grace objects that a God who does not sorrow with the sufferings of the ungodly, but rather inflicts these sufferings, is not the loving God of the gospel, I respond, "What about everlasting hell?" Will not the loving God of the gospel punish all reprobate ungodly men and women with the torment of hell? Will not that suffering be far worse than the horrors endured by the Muslim woman or by the

Jewish father and his son? Certainly, there will be no everlasting breaking of the heart of God over that most dreadful of all suffering.

We opponents of common grace have this against the theory, that it obliterates the wrath of God in history. Let some catastrophe befall the world, causing misery to the children of men, and common grace immediately cries out, "Oh,

God is so sad at what has happened! God is suffering right along with the stricken people. Let's get up a committee to help with the relief!" Common grace finds it hard to say, "The wrath of God is falling upon an ungodly world of unbelieving and disobedient people, who have

now almost filled the cup of iniquity! Flee for refuge to the cross of Christ!"

Obliterating the reality of the wrath of God in history, common grace has a hard time with the wrath of God in eternity. Would not the move in the coming eternity from common grace to undiluted wrath signal a change in God? Would not the absence of His common grace in the coming eternity mean the loss of one of His precious virtues? Must not a God who empathizes with suffering idolaters now, empathizes so, that His heart breaks over their suffering, necessarily abolish, or empty, hell? And can God sympathize with men and women—truly suffer with them—apart from the incarnation and cross of Jesus Christ? Hebrews 4:15 connects the sympathy of the Son of God with the high priesthood of Jesus.

It is vital that we proclaim, "He shines in all that's fair."

Everything is at stake in confessing also, "and curses all that's foul."

— DJE 

So far is it from being true that God sorrows over these sufferings of the wicked that, on the contrary, God Himself brings them upon the wicked.

■ "Restoration" Promises to National Israel

I have just read your series defending amillennialism (*Standard Bearer*, Jan. 1, 1995-Dec. 15, 1996) and have benefited very much. However, I have a few questions.

Can we not hold amillennialism and still look for certain "restoration" promises to national Israel to be fulfilled? The Puritans themselves were partially responsible for opening the door for Israel to come back to their land, because they understood that God would restore the nation according to Romans 11.

By restoration, I do not mean by any other way than through the means of the gospel. While there is sure to be apostasy toward the end times, is there not room for a Romans 11 "life from the dead" revival? By this I do not mean Christian Reconstruction, but simply revival — the world seeing the Jews coming to Christ and the Holy Spirit using that to open ears to the gospel?

I am not challenging you. I think I agree mostly, but I do not know how to reconcile a couple of other things. Isaiah 60:10: "In my wrath I struck you, but in my favor I have had mercy on you" — to say that this and similar passages apply only to spiritual Israel is confusing. How do we reconcile such verses with God's new creation church — did He ever strike them or forsake them and promise to receive them back?

And finally, Zechariah 14 has all the nations coming against Israel, and the Lord fighting on their behalf. How might that chapter apply in light of the New Testament?

What is the reason that national Israel is still around today if God has no "national" intentions for them? By all odds, they should have disappeared long ago.

Again, I am starting to consider myself an amillennialist, but I have researched quite a bit, and no one seems to address these issues.

Rick Bell
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Response:

Yours are penetrating questions. Nor is there any reason why you should not feel free to challenge me.

There is no fundamental objection to the idea that towards the end God will convert a greater number of racial Jews than He has converted at any one time throughout the present age. If this is to be the case, Romans 11 is the chapter that foretells it. In this case, these Jews will be converted by the same gospel that brought us Gentiles to faith, and the Jews will be added to the church, not established as a restored kingdom of Israel. Romans 11 teaches that Israel will be grafted into the one olive tree.

Against this view, however, is that it invariably is part and parcel of a postmillennial doctrine of the last things. So it was for the Puritans; so it was for those who adopted the Savoy Declaration; so it is for those in the Reformed churches who maintain it today. Second, a widespread conversion of Jews at the end is not the teaching of Romans 11:26, probably the chief basis of the view. Verse 26 does not say, "And *then* all Israel shall be saved," but, "And *so* (that is, in this way) all Israel shall be saved." Paul teaches that individual Jews, like himself, are continually being saved throughout the New Testament era — elect Jews — and "so" all Israel, that is, the true Israel of God according to election, shall in the end be saved, just as the fullness of the Gentiles is also saved.

Your suggestion that "national Israel" has a future, however, is

simply erroneous. Nor does the return of Jews to Palestine in our time have any biblical significance whatever. The kingdom of God has been taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles as a spiritual kingdom consisting of the reign of Christ by the gospel in the hearts and lives of believers and in the true church (see Matt. 21:43). Speaking to believers, that is, the New Testament church, Peter says, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," etc. (I Pet. 2:9). What held true of Old Testament Israel now holds true of the New Testament church, because the New Testament church *is* the reality, the fulfillment, of Old Testament Israel.

Palestine has no significance biblically whatever. The New Testament reality of that land is the spiritual rest, milk, and honey of dwelling with God by faith in Jesus Christ, which the elect believer enjoys now in beginning and which he shall enjoy perfectly in the Day of Christ in the new world (see Heb. 11:10, 16). No Jew living in Palestine, now or ever, enjoys Canaan by virtue of the fact that he inhabits Palestine. I am in Canaan, who lives in Western Michigan, not because I live in Western Michigan, but because I am in Christ by faith, who is God's Canaan. The "Holy Land" is not that sliver of ground on the east side of the Mediterranean, but wherever Jesus Christ is by His Word and Spirit (see Heb. 4).

As for Isaiah 60:10, Zechariah 14, and all the other similar prophecies of the Old Testament concerning Israel, the fundamental question is this: Who is Israel? The answer must be determined from the gospel of the New Testament! God's Israel is, and always was, His elect people in His elect Son and Servant, Jesus Christ. In the

New Testament time, they are the believing, confessing church made up of elect Jew and (mostly) elect Gentiles. Old Testament Israel was the immature church; the church is Old Testament Israel come to maturity (Gal. 3; 4:1ff.). The believing church is the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16).

According to Isaiah 60:10, God smote His church in wrath in the cross of Christ. In that same cross of Christ, God had mercy on the church in His favor.

According to Zechariah 14, at the end the forces of Antichrist shall attack the church, as amillennialism, and amillennialism alone, teaches in light of the New Testament.

Here we face the question of the literal or spiritual interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. Those who insist on a restoration of national Israel also insist on a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, as though the New Testament did not show that all Old Testament prophecy is spiritually

fulfilled in Christ, His spiritual salvation, and His spiritual people, the Spirit-filled church (II Cor. 1:19, 20).


Regarding Zechariah 14, notice where the literal interpretation gets those who insist on it. Shall there be again an earthly keeping of the feast of tabernacles, as though believers do not really keep that Old Testament feast by faith in Christ and as though the apostle never said that all such Old Testament ceremonies are "weak and beggarly element" and a "shadow of things to come" (Gal. 4; Col. 2)?

Must we go up to earthly Jerusalem to worship the King at peril of not receiving rain, as though Jesus never said, "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father" (John 4:21)?

And shall men again do earthly sacrifice in a carnal temple of brick and mortar, as though the book of Hebrews did not teach that Christ has offered the one and only sacri-

fice that abolished all earthly sacrificing of animals?

"National Israel" is not "still around." "National Israel" disappeared in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 even as it had had the kingdom of God taken from it on a Friday afternoon outside Jerusalem when one Jesus was hanging on a cross. The kingdom of God then took a new, far more glorious form in the church out of all nations on the day of Pentecost. What is "still around" is the race of Jews. God has two main purposes with it. One is dreadful, as history demonstrates: to show in it His awful wrath against an unbelieving, rebellious people. This is a warning to us believing Gentiles. Behold, the severity of God. The other purpose of God with the race of Jews is lovely: to gather out of the physical descendants of Abraham still today, and to the very end, elect children, so that in the end "all Israel" shall be saved. Behold, the goodness of God.

— Ed. 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. James Laning

The Preaching of the Gospel: A Serious Call or a Well-meant Offer

**Part II:
Faith: God's Gift
from Beginning to End**

Those who hold to the well-meant offer, as it was set forth in my previous article (*Standard Bearer*, May 1, 2002), have a wrong view of what

it means that faith is a gift of God. That faith is, in fact, a gift of God many are willing to admit, since Scripture explicitly teaches this. Philippians 1:29, for example, says that "unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him...." But many have found a way to make it look like they believe this truth, when in reality they do not. They speak of the act of faith as a condition that man must fulfill to be saved. But if faith is a condition that man must ful-

fill, then it cannot truly be a gift of God. It cannot be something that God produces from beginning to end.

The first part of this article will set forth what it means that faith is a gift of God, while taking a look at false views concerning this that are condemned by our Reformed creeds. The second part will consider how different views on the gift of faith are related to different views on the preaching of the gospel.

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Faith: Not Offered but Breathed Into

As with all the doctrines of Scripture, we must confess *distinctively* what it means that faith is a gift of God. To confess something distinctively is to do it in such detail that we clearly distinguish ourselves from those who claim to maintain the truth but who really do not. For example, the statement that God gives the gift of faith to His people is a true statement, but it does not set forth the truth distinctively, since many who deny the truth will say the same. If we say, "God gives faith *only* to the elect, and does so in such a way that He not only gives to them the desire and power to believe, but also efficaciously produces in them the act of believing," then we are confessing the truth distinctively, and we clearly distinguish ourselves from those who really do not confess the truth on this matter.

Our fathers understood the importance of confessing our faith distinctively. The fourteenth article of Heads III/IV of the Canons of Dordt sets forth very clearly and distinctively what it means that faith is a gift of God. It sets forth the error that is being rejected in two different ways. We begin with the first distinction:

Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure, but because it is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him....

The error rejected here is precisely what many today maintain. When they say that God gives people faith, they mean that He *offers* to them the gift of faith, giving them the option of either accepting or rejecting the gift. But this would mean that if someone has faith, he has it partly because of an act of God, and partly because of his own act of accepting what God has offered. If such were the case,

a man's salvation would be based, at least in part, on something that he has done.

Our fathers rightly rejected this error and confessed that when Scripture says that faith is a gift that God gives to His people, it means not that He offers them the gift, but that He *actually bestows* on them the gift. He does not offer them faith; He breathes faith into them, and thus causes them to believe.

A Gift Not Only of the Will to Believe, But Also of the Act of Believing

The article then goes on to give another distinction, and says that faith is to be considered as the gift of God not

because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will consent to the terms of that salvation and actually believe in Christ, but because he who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.

Here the same error is set forth a bit differently. Some will admit that when Scripture says that God gives some people the gift of faith, it does not mean that He merely offers it to them. They will grant that it means that God does, indeed, do something inside the person to whom He gives faith. Yet they still deny that faith is entirely a gift of God, for they maintain that God gives people the power and ability to believe, but that the actual act of believing is still left for the man himself to perform. This error, which may appear to be a bit closer to the truth, in actuality is the very same error. It is the very same lie, but perhaps a bit more deceptive. It is still the lie that man's salvation is, at least in part, based on an activity he has performed.

One who is truly a Reformed believer rejects this lie and con-

fesses the statement found at the end of this article. He clearly and distinctively maintains that God gives to His elect people not only the will to believe, and not only the power and ability to believe, but also the very act of believing.

To know this, and from the heart to confess this, is to understand what it means that salvation is all of God's grace.

How One's View on This Is Related to One's View on the Nature of Gospel Preaching

The unbiblical position that the preaching of the gospel is a well-meant offer of grace to all who hear it is a position that goes with what our creeds condemn as a wrong view of what it means that faith is a gift of God. One who holds to the well-meant offer of the gospel maintains that God gives to those who hear the preaching sufficient grace to accept that which is offered, but that the person who hears the preaching must make use of this grace and do the actual accepting of what God is holding out before Him. This is precisely the wrong view of what it means that faith is a gift of God. It is another way of saying that God gives people the power and ability to believe what is set forth, but that it is left up to each person to do the actual believing.

The churches that hold to the well-meant offer, with the accompanying denial that faith is entirely a gift of God, will have preaching that will sound much different from that found in soundly Reformed churches.

First of all, there will be a difference in the doctrine that is preached. This, of course, is obvious, since the well-meant offer is really a denial of the whole of the Reformed faith.


Secondly, the preaching in churches that deny that faith is entirely a gift of grace will make God sound like a powerless beggar, who is pleading with the people to grant His desire and accept what

He sets before them. The preaching will not be a proclamation of a certain and efficacious promise of God, with emphasis upon the glorious work of our Savior. Rather, it will be the setting forth of a powerless wish of God, with the emphasis placed on the work of man.

A third difference has to do with who will be addressed in the preaching. Churches that hold that God gives only part of faith often end up addressing unbelievers as individuals, pleading with them to accept the offered salvation. Just as in other Arminian churches, the preaching will more and more sound as though it is really for those who are impenitently walking in sin. The preaching in sound,

Reformed churches, although it does indeed set forth seriously the calling of each and every human being, is addressed to God's people as a body. The exhortations in such churches will sound just as they do in the New Testament epistles of Paul. They will be exhortations to God's people, not to become what they are not, but to be what they are. God's people will be told that God has efficaciously given them faith, and that they are exhorted to grow in that faith. They will be told that God has caused them to love one another, and yet that they must increase and grow in this love for one another (I Thess. 4:9, 10). The elect will be told that God has

already made them to be holy, and promises to make them perfectly free from sin, and yet they will be exhorted more and more to walk in holiness before the face of the God who has saved them by His grace (I Pet. 1:15, 16; 2:9).

What one believes about faith is inseparably connected to what one believes about the preaching of the gospel. Where the truth that faith is entirely a gift of God is loved and confessed, there you will find the proclamation of the efficacious promise of God addressed to God's chosen people, the proclamation that works more of this faith in their hearts, and causes them, out of thankfulness, to walk in newness of life. 

Understanding the Times

Mr. Cal Kalsbeek

Western Ideas (2) Secular Humanism

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

I Chronicles 12:32

Death is dead!
Well, at least *almost* dead!

If you question the veracity of that statement because scripture and experience have conditioned you to think otherwise, be enlightened by secular humanist S. Matthew D'Agostino:

I believe that death is neither necessary nor "sacred." It's only the path that evolution appears to have taken to date. Human intelligence may be able to force evolution into a different direction. Eventually, I am convinced, science will overcome death.

What's perhaps a more annoying possibility—these remarks may surprise you—is that death would probably already have been overcome, long ago, had we not endured two thousand years of myths and mumbling priests. Christianity turned its back on "the glory that was Greece." The early church father Tertullian (c. 155-220) explained that turn succinctly: "If you have Jerusalem, you don't need Athens." Having turned its back on rationality and loosed twenty centuries of anti-science hysteria and persecutions,

which continue even today, Christianity will deserve the "credit" for putting at least our grandparent's generation, and our parent's—and our own—in their graves. How many more will be lost before the conquest of death?¹

Although some may place these ideas of D'Agostino on the fringe of secular humanism, closer examination of their worldview would suggest that he is very much in the mainstream. (For our purposes in this and future articles, we will use the following definition for the term worldview: "A worldview is a set of presuppositions [or

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1. S. Matthew D'Agostino, "A Challenge for Naturalism," *Free Inquiry*, Volume 22, Number 1.

assumptions] which we hold [consciously or subconsciously] about the basic makeup of our world."²)

As present-day children of Issachar, we and our children are assaulted with the current Caananitish thinking of our Western society every day. A brief reminder of what this assault entails and how we should react to it will be the burden of the rest of this article.

The Secular Humanist Worldview

At the outset we ought to understand that it will be impossible in this brief article to describe completely the Secular Humanist Worldview. We ought also to understand that all Secular Humanists will not agree on every point. Nevertheless, for the most part they do agree on the main tenets of the *Humanist Manifesto*. This manifesto is an evolutionary document. That is clearly expressed in the preamble to the latest edition of their manifesto, in which they write: "Although we who endorse this document share common principles and values, we are prepared to modify our views in light of new knowledge, altered circumstances, and unforeseen problems that may arise. It is not possible to create a permanent Manifesto, but it is useful and wise to devise a working document, open to revision."³ Further evidence of the evolutionary nature of the *Manifesto* is the fact that this is the third one they have produced since 1933, and when these manifestos are compared, it becomes clear that they have changed and expanded their beliefs over the years.

What are those beliefs? The following quotes from their godless *Manifesto* will allow them to speak for themselves:

— Many current visions of the future are pessimistic, even apocalyptic. But we object for we believe that it is possible to create a better world. The results of the global society are such that only a

new Planetary Humanism can provide meaningful directions for the future.

— Darwin's nineteenth-century theory of natural selection has enabled us to understand how life evolved. The discoveries of DNA and molecular biology continue to reveal the mechanisms of evolution and of life itself.

— ... if our problems are to be solved, it will be only by marshaling reason, science, and human endeavor.

— Scientific naturalism enables human beings to construct a coherent worldview disentangled from metaphysics or theology and based on the sciences.

— Humanists maintain that we need to extend the methods of science to other fields of human endeavor and that there should be no restrictions on scientific research, unless the research infringes on the rights of persons.

— Neither the standard modern cosmology nor evolutionary process provides sufficient evidence for intelligent design, which is a leap in faith beyond empirical evidence. We think it time for humanity to embrace its own adulthood—to leave behind the magical thinking and myth making that are substitutes for tested knowledge of nature.

— ... humanists recommend that we use reason in framing our ethical judgments.

— There is a growing need for an explicit Planetary Bill of Rights and Responsibilities that applies to all members of the human species.

— Although parental moral guidance is vital, parents should not simply impose their own religious outlook or moral values on their children or indoctrinate them.

— We need to develop a new human identity—membership in the planetary community. This identity must have priority over all others and can serve as the basis for eradicating discrimination.

— Adults should be allowed to marry whomever they wish.... Same-sex couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples.

— There is need to support

measures that will directly benefit the health and well being of the poorest, and especially of women and girls. This must include some efforts to stabilize and then decrease population-growth rates.

— We urge all industrialized nations to accept as a first step the guidelines set out by the United Nations for overseas development assistance, namely to contribute (or be taxed) 0.7% of their GDP each year....

— ... we must develop an effective World Court and an International Judiciary with sufficient power to enforce its rulings. It is essential that those states that do not as yet recognize its authority be persuaded to do so.

— The planetary community is our own, and each of us can help make it flourish. The future is open. The choices are for us to make. Together we can realize the noblest ends and ideals of mankind.⁴

Sons of Issachar, beware! The list of dignitaries from around the world that have signed this document make it clear that this is not the thinking of a lunatic fringe-group, but rather the convictions of a large consensus of world "movers and shakers."

An Intolerant Worldview

As seen in their godless manifesto, from Secular Humanism's theology of atheism to its ethics of moral relativism, their worldview is completely antithetical to that of the Scriptures.

And while their manifesto speaks of tolerance, *coercion* is the controlling spirit. Yes, their manifesto says, "Individuals should have the right to join voluntary organizations in order to share common interests and activities," but this is followed immediately by,

2. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1997) 17.

3. Paul Kurtz, "Humanist Manifesto 2000," *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1999: 4.

4. Kurtz 4-18.

"The right of free association, so long as it is peaceful and nonviolent, must be respected." Note the qualifier, "so long as it is peaceful and nonviolent." Who decides what is peaceful and nonviolent? Also, reread the above quotes from the *Humanist Manifesto* and notice that coercion is implied or explicitly stated in at least four instances (not to mention all the other examples in their manifesto which are not quoted here).

Examples of Secular Humanism's intolerance of Christianity abound. Listen to a few apologists of this worldview:

— The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new—the rotting corpse of Christianity, together with its adjacent evils and misery, and the new faith of Humanism, resplendent in its promise of a world in which the never realized Christian idea of "Love thy Neighbor" will finally be achieved.⁵

— ... if Heaven is filled with the same pious nincompoops we are familiar with from the present day, it might not be such an appealing venue. They have a point; I'm not at all sure that spending eternity with Pat Robertson, the pope, Tim LaHaye, et al., is truly preferable to obliteration.⁶

— You are free to preserve or create any religious creed you wish, so long as it does not become a public nuisance.... Those who will not accommodate, who will not temper, who insist on keeping only the purest and wildest strains of their heritage alive, we shall be obliged, reluctantly, to cage or disarm.⁷

Those words of Darwinist David Dennett and similar expressions of many others leave no doubt that the disciples of Secular Humanism have not departed from the thinking of one of their spiritual fathers, Friedrich Nietzsche, who wrote in 1888 under the title *The Antichrist*: "I call Christianity the one great curse, the one enormous and innermost perversion,

the one great instinct of revenge, for which no means are too venomous, too underhand, too underground and too petty. I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind."

Issachar Be Warned

Present-day children of Issachar must realize that these are not mere idle, Canaanitish threats. Rather, even as we write, these vile ideas and tactics are being promoted by the Secular Humanists of our day, some of whom exercise considerable power in very high places. Since 1981 the United Nations General Assembly has had in place its "Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief." As this declaration is implemented in our world, the family of God will more and more experience what it means to be the prodigal son of the family of nations.

No doubt the prodigal church will be welcomed back into the family of nations, but only on the terms of the world's definition of tolerance. It will not be enough for God's people

to assert another person's right to believe or say what he thinks is right. It is not enough to allow another person to disagree with what you believe or do.


In order to be truly tolerant (according to new tolerance), you must agree that another person's position is *just as valid as your own*. In order to be tolerant (they say), you must give your approval, your endorsement, your sincere support to their beliefs and behaviors.⁸

There will come a day when the world will try to *force* its beliefs and behaviors on the church. Currently, however (in the West, at least), Satan is rapidly achieving his goals by other means. Issachar be warned, he's after your children! He's making war with the remnant of your seed (Rev. 12:17)!

This is nothing new, of course. Satan has always known that if he can seduce the children of the church, he can cut the church off in her generations. He also knows that the young are especially vulnerable to the flesh-attracting music and dramas of the day, which are the primary *means* he uses to lead them to adopt the world's beliefs and behaviors. Space constraints make it impossible for us to expand on this at this time. For now the words of rock star David Crosby will suffice to give Issachar warning. In the following quote, a devilish Mr. Crosby brazenly informs us what he seeks to accomplish with his rock music:

I figured the only thing to do was to swipe their kids. I still think it's the only thing to do. By saying that, I'm not talking about kidnapping them, I'm just talking about changing their value systems, which removes them from their parent's world very effectively.⁹

Issachar be warned! The inspired apostle was not exaggerating when he wrote: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5:8).

Sons of Issachar, understand the times and live! 

5. John J. Dunphy, "A Religion for a New Age," *The Humanist*, January/February 1983, 26.

6. D'Agostino 1.

7. Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Death of the West* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St Martin's Press, 2002) 64.

8. Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *The New Tolerance* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 1998) 22.

9. Ray Allen, *They're Out to Steal Your Children* (Rancho Palos Verdes, CA: American Research Press, 1979) 1.

The Character and Work of the Reformed Minister: All Glory to God! (2)*

The minister is called to preach. This is his stated work. Writes Paul, "We preach not ourselves." The word translated "preach," is literally "to herald," that is, to proclaim as an official messenger or as a herald of a king. A herald is one chosen by the king to proclaim the king's word. He is officially set in office. He is given a specific announcement and commanded to proclaim the king's message to all people.

A preacher is the herald of the King of kings, namely, Christ Jesus. Christ calls him to the office by His Holy Spirit, using the church to give the official appointment. Christ commands the preacher to proclaim the will and the message of the King, just as God commanded Jonah, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, ... and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" (Jon. 3:2).

That is all the preacher may ever bring. He is not to preach his own word, or express his opinion on the King's word. Never may he change so much as the tenor of the message. The content of the King's message is, therefore, taken from the Bible. Nonetheless, the preacher does this announcing as

a thinking, willing messenger. He comes to explain accurately the king's will. He must be certain that he has that message straight.

"We preach not ourselves," Paul insists. Some preachers do! They have as their purpose and motive to promote themselves. Such men may attempt to impress people by their learning — perhaps their knowledge of philosophy, or that they are widely read; perhaps even with their knowledge of the Bible or of doctrine. Some desire to impress their hearers with their oratorical skills or sparkling logic. Some try to impress people with their ability to exegete the Scriptures.

Such men promote their own advantage by gaining a large personal following. They desire influence in the congregation or in the denomination, perhaps even influence in the church world at large. Still others promote themselves for the sake of riches.

You graduates do not know it yet from experience, but every preacher of the gospel faces the temptation to make himself look good, rather than simply to extol the glory of God.

Paul makes a point of it — We do not preach ourselves. How could Paul have promoted himself? His heart was filled with the light of the glory of God! God had shined in his heart. In fact, God had lifted Paul up into the third heaven and given him special revelations so glorious that Paul could

scarcely speak about them (II Cor. 12:1-5). With such a glorious knowledge of God filling his soul, how could Paul then preach himself!

The minister also works with a revelation — the Bible. That revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ is complete, infallible, perspicuous, and glorious! The minister studies that Bible day after day. He is continually filled with the knowledge of God's glory in His being and works.

How could a minister, filled with that glorious knowledge, preach himself? How could he promote himself? How could he draw attention to himself and seek his own glory? Any preacher who does that shows that the light of the glory of God is not shining brightly in his heart, if it is shining there at all.

"We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." As is always the case, the particular names used are significant. Jesus means Jehovah salvation. We preach that salvation is in Jesus alone. We preach Christ, the One anointed by God to fill the office of Mediator. Christ is the One who fully accomplished our salvation as prophet, priest, and king!

We preach Him as Lord. This is not merely another name for the Savior, but it means that the preaching declares that Jesus Christ is Lord! He is Lord of all as the Son of God. He is declared Lord because of His perfect obedience to

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* Seminary Commencement Address, June 17, 2002, Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, Michigan.

His Father's will. Obediently He humbled Himself by taking on our flesh and living among sinful men. He took our guilt and the punishment our sins deserved, even unto death. Therefore, God exalted His Son. He is Lord over all the world, and Head of His church. In this preaching of Jesus Christ as Lord, the glory of God is set forth! For the glory of God radiates most brilliantly in the face of Jesus Christ.

Paul's constant refrain was, "We preach Christ Jesus." This was his claim already in the first letter that he wrote to the Corinthians (2:1): "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Where, then, does the minister fit? Almost as a footnote: *Our-selves your servants for Jesus' sake.*

What does that mean? It means that the minister is called to serve God's people. Notice that this does not mean that the minister is a slave of the people of God so that he takes his orders from them. A minister is ever the slave of Jesus Christ. He looks to Christ for his orders.

This, then, is the position of the minister. Christ is his Lord and Master. Christ calls a man and commands him to preach. Christ gives him the message. And Christ commands him, "Go serve my people with the Word." And the minister does serve the people for Jesus' sake. That he serves "for Jesus' sake" means that the minister labors for the salvation of God's people. Because Jesus came in the flesh, suffered, died, and arose again, the minister serves the people of Christ. Because Jesus gathers, defends, and preserves His church, the minister gladly serves that church.

It means more, however. The words "your servant for Jesus' sake" mean also that he labors in

the spirit of Jesus, that is, not for his own advantage. Jesus "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give himself a ransom for many" (Mark 10:24). The minister likewise gives of himself.

In all the preacher's work, God must be glorified! This must be the character of the minister and his work. He insists emphatically, "I preach not myself! I preach Jesus Christ crucified and risen again." He must preach, "Repent and believe in Jesus." And the wonder of it is that God uses such preaching to cause the light of the glorious knowledge of God to shine in the hearts of His people.

Earthen Vessels

How wise God is to use the weak and sinful means of ministers to bring this glorious knowledge. The situation demands it. You graduates do not yet know how prone the minister is to think highly of himself, and to take some of the glory to himself. From a human point of view, that is quite understandable. The minister has this knowledge of the glory. You graduates have stored up a great amount of knowledge. You were examined publicly at synod and demonstrated that you have much knowledge. People came up to you perhaps and told you how impressed they were by your knowledge. You will be ordained into the ministry, the Lord willing, and people will look up to you. Men and women older than your parents will come to *you* for advice. The congregation will ask you to tell them the meaning of various Bible passages. They will say to you, "Good sermon, Reverend." And you will realize that the welfare of the flock depends on the preaching that you bring week by week.

At the same time, the congregation tends to elevate the pastor. This is particularly true of those whom the minister has helped the most — the youth who, if they are treated with the love of Christ, will

love their pastor; those converted under the preaching of the minister; those who are comforted by the minister in times of great sorrow or affliction. The minister is conscious of their near adoration. And every day, pride sits like a devil in the chair across the minister's desk. Does he not bring the glorious mysteries of the kingdom of heaven? He brings treasures beyond anything this world has to offer.

God, in His wisdom, gave these treasures to ministers who are nothing more than *earthen vessels*. Ministers are merely the container. The Holy Spirit uses a figure of speech well known to us. On this earth are many vessels of different value and varied usefulness. There are golden vials fit for a king. Solomon drank from gold vessels. There are silver vases that are given as precious gifts to friends at their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. There are beautiful china dishes, set out for special company. There are vessels of wood — beautifully polished oak or mahogany, set out on the coffee table to be admired.

And there are earthen vessels. Literally, these are vessels of clay. That is the figure used to describe a minister. We might be inclined to say, "What? Can that be right?" But there is no mistake here.

God is a deliberate Creator. He makes the reprobate vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction. God makes His elect vessels of mercy, to be filled with His glory.

He makes the minister a clay pot.

We notice several pertinent characteristics of a clay pot. First of all, there is nothing glorious about a clay pot. It is not valuable. Not only that, but a clay pot can chip and even shatter easily. It is useful, but certainly not a vessel that one would set on an end table in order to admire the vessel! Really, the only beauty about clay pots is the flowers that they may contain!

A minister is like an earthen

vessel in many ways. He is weak and sinful. There is nothing special about him. A minister is not particularly brilliant or powerful. Ordinarily he is neither rich nor of the class of nobility. He is a creature of the dust. This is manifested in that he tires and requires food and drink. The minister makes mistakes. He also grows old and feeble as the earthly house of his tabernacle is dissolved. In short, he is just like any other member of the body of Christ. Not only that, but his preaching is far from perfect in style, depth, and delivery. It can always be criticized.

This is God's wise plan. For the purpose of God, writes Paul, is "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (v. 7).

Any Reformed man knows that all power belongs to God. His is the power not only to create all things, but also to uphold and govern the universe and every creature in it. God's power alone saves from death and hell, and that sovereignly. God gives life and preserves it. God sovereignly brings His own to glory, but judges and condemns the evildoer.

Paul writes not merely of God's power, but of the excellency of that power. The word "excellency" literally means "that which flows

over, an abundance." The point is that all must take notice of the fact that the power is God's alone.

Certainly, God could determine to send angels to preach the gospel. But what would happen? First of all, the immediate reaction of the people would be terror. Remember the reaction of the shepherds outside of Bethlehem when an angel appeared to them? They saw the glory of the Lord and were sore afraid.

Consider also that the angel could tell the people to set their minds on heavenly things and keep themselves unspotted from the world. And the people would quickly respond that it was an easy thing for the angel to say — he lives in the glory of heaven, and he has no sinful nature to battle.

It is also likely that no one would bother to read or study the Bible any longer. Why read that when you have an angel's word every Sunday. Besides, people might well swarm to church in droves — not for the truth's sake, but due to the novelty of an angel preaching.

No, God in His wisdom determined that the preacher must be an earthen vessel. In so determining, God's testimony is this: Let there be no mistake about the power. I, the Lord, save. These men are only vessels in whose heart I have shined. They are my

servants. Indeed, they have treasures — glorious treasures! But the saving power is not from them, nor does it depend on them.


The excellency of the power belongs to God. He will share His glory with no one.



Is that the way you view the ministry of the word, graduates? I know that you do. The faculty is confident that you do. If there were reason to believe that you were seeking the ministry in order to promote yourself, we would not recommend you to the churches. But we are confident because we have seen the light of the glory of God shining from you.

The minister is called to preach Jesus Christ the Lord, and himself a servant for the benefit of the people. Do that, graduates, when the Lord Himself, as we trust, will presently call you officially and give you a place to labor. Unfold the riches of the glory of God. Preach the Reformed faith, even the unique heritage of the truth that God has given to the Protestant Reformed Churches. Such preaching gives all glory to God alone.

That is the character and work of the Reformed preacher.

We will pray for you, that God keep you faithful. 

In His Fear

Rev. Richard Smit

He Suffered

Who can fathom the words, "He suffered"? These words concerning our suffering Savior are briefly explained in Lord's Day 15 of the

Heidelberg Catechism on the basis of the Scriptures. Having read and studied this exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism, can you understand that the Son of God, who possesses all glory and power, and who is the righteous and holy One, suffered in the flesh? The God of all comfort, the Resurrection and

the Life, the Light, suffered as though He were the unrighteous one under the curse of death in which He would be cast into outer darkness?

Surely, Scripture foretold that this suffering would come to pass. The Old Testament, and in particular passages like Isaiah 53, showed

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the nature and the extent of Christ's suffering as determined by Jehovah. Yet, even reading it over and over a hundred times, who can fathom the words, "He suffered"? And then, having fathomed those words, what believer can also fathom the words, "He suffered for me"?

As we are humbled under the mighty hand of our heavenly Father, we do well to meditate on our Savior's sufferings and how this truth affects our own sufferings.



The Scriptures declare that the man Jesus Christ suffered in our human nature. He suffered hunger, thirst, exhaustion, pain, and death in His body. In His body He suffered the reality of the weight of God's wrath in His agony upon the cross. Christ also suffered in His soul. In Isaiah 53 we read that His soul was poured out like water upon the ground. His soul was gripped by the sorrows and miseries of this life. Just as we would grip a sponge with our hand and squeeze out all the water, so the sufferings of this life squeezed out of His soul all His life until His soul was completely dry, like the parched wilderness, in complete agony and absolute loneliness.

Except for a few breaks, like His transfiguration, Christ suffered in body and soul His entire earthly life. He was born into the suffering of poverty and the rejection of men. He suffered at His baptism because it signified the depths of suffering to which He would have to go. The water with which He was baptized signified that His own blood would have to be poured out as an atonement. Immediately after His baptism, Christ suffered because of the temptations of the Devil. Christ suffered rejection by many. In addition to that, Christ suffered even when He performed miracles. All His miracles constantly reminded Him more and more clearly of the absolute

necessity of *the* miracle He had to accomplish on the cross. His touching of lepers and His fellowship with sinners reminded Him that He had taken upon Himself our spiritual sickness and disease in order to remove it through His atoning sacrifice. Finally, at the end of His life, Christ suffered betrayal, reproach, rejection, and the inexpressible anguish and torments of the cross.

In all of His suffering, the Righteous One in the flesh was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. From the viewpoint of His Father, Christ did enjoy blessedness in His earthly life. It was His joy to do the Father's business. Nevertheless, the earthly life of the only begotten Son of God in the flesh was one of sorrow and grief. He had for lifelong companions: sorrow, misery, and grief.

Why did Christ suffer all of this? He suffered because He was accursed. He was declared to be guilty by God through Pilate. That meant that Christ as our Mediator became the object of God's wrath. That meant that Christ had to dwell with that curse all the days of His earthly life. The result was that Christ's earthly life was a hellish sojourn of punishment. It was a life which led and prepared Him for the accursed death of the cross.

Christ was cursed by God because of our sin. We sinned, not Christ. We went astray; Christ was always righteous and holy. We trespassed and transgressed completely. We are the sinners. All of our horrible sin, God laid upon Christ as our Scapegoat. As a result, Christ for only His people sojourned through a wilderness of being constantly prepared for the moment when He would suffer the full weight and force of God's eternal wrath against our sin.

Christ suffered that willingly in order to free us from God's wrath. He removed from you and me the curse that lay upon us; and, under that curse, He suffered all of it for us.

The knowledge of the curse is something with which we wrestle. As our sins rise up against us in our consciousness, we understand that our sin puts us on the wrong side of God's righteous law. We understand that our sin justly deserves the penalty and punishment of God. The weight of the knowledge of that sin and the curse lay upon His soul. It often squeezes our soul like a crimping fist on a wet sponge.

Christ came into our flesh and walked a hellish sojourn in order to remove that curse which lay upon us. He took our place under that curse of God. In our place, He became the one upon whom God declared the eternal death sentence. Christ took our place in that spiritual spot where all of God's wrath would be aimed and unleashed. Although our sin does merit the penalty and punishment of God's wrath, Christ took that upon Himself and suffered the complete penalty and punishment for our sin.

In so doing, He freed us from that "severe judgment of God" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 15, A. 38). That simply means that Christ freed us from going to hell. Because of Christ, there is no coming wrath upon the righteous in Christ. The curse is gone. The wrath has been removed completely from us.

In His suffering, Christ freely obtained for us the favor of God, righteousness with God, and eternal life. Once we were aliens of the Father's House. But God, who is rich in mercy, made His only begotten Son an alien and an outcast of His own house in order that we might be called the sons of God and in that sonship inherit righteousness and everlasting life with the Father and enjoy His blessings in Christ Jesus.



For the suffering saint, this truth of Christ's redemptive suffering assures him of the forgiveness

of his sin. Certainly, we may suffer the consequences of our sin. That way of the chastising hand of the Father may be very difficult indeed. Nevertheless, the Father affirms that our sin is forgiven because Christ suffered for us. Because of Christ, our innocence before the Father remains unchangeable. This forgiveness the Lord freely gives, freely bestows, and freely establishes in us by His sovereign and almighty grace in our Lord Jesus Christ. Even when the Lord chastises us and so teaches us the blessedness of obedience, He does so in His love and favor.

Furthermore, the truth of Christ's suffering assures the suffering saint that his earthly sufferings and afflictions have been changed by Christ.

Who of us has not wrestled, or does not wrestle, with the afflictions and sufferings of this life? It is especially in the midst of our suffering that we are prone to ask: Is the Father angry with me? Is His mercy gone? Is He punishing me with this affliction?

What are the answers to those questions?

Certainly, in those questionings, we are worthy of the Lord's rebuke: "O ye of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" With that the Lord in His mercy also answers that, be-

cause of Him and His redemptive suffering, our suffering is a blessing for us!

How can being blind, childless, deaf, noticeably disfigured, unable to walk, full of cancer, in the darkness of depression, in the valley of the shadow of death, lonely, confined to waste away on a deathbed be a blessing? All our suffering from our afflictions and the battles with our sin... a blessing?


We cannot comprehend how all of our suffering is a blessing and works for our good.

But we do know this because Christ tells us so: our suffering is a blessing from the hand of our heavenly Father. Because Christ suffered punishment His whole life long for you and thereby removed the curse from you, the Father sends, and will send suffering upon you as a blessing. Yes, the Father for Christ's sake sends every one of them to you in His favor.

In His favor, the Father's purpose of all our suffering is our present and everlasting good. The Father does not sovereignly send you suffering in this life to defeat and destroy you into everlasting misery. His purpose in leading you through suffering is victory, heavenly glory, and everlasting joy with our Lord Jesus Christ!

In that confident expectation of faith, we may then be assured that our present suffering is only temporary. In our impatience and in the weakness of our faith, not only do we easily lose sight of the truth that our suffering is a blessing, but we also lose sight of the promise that our suffering will cease very soon. Yes, cease soon it will — even that specific affliction which you must bear now to your grave at the appointed moment.

That moment has been established in Christ. Remember, Christ came to the end of His suffering. That moment came when on the cross He finished His suffering and when in body and soul He arose triumphantly in life and immortality. Because Christ finished His suffering for us and thereby redeemed us fully in body and soul, so there shall certainly come the moment when our suffering shall be finished, and we shall be delivered by our merciful and faithful Father to everlasting comfort and peace.

Suffering saint, there is certain hope under that pressing weight of your suffering! Because Christ suffered for you, your light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for you a far more exceeding weight of eternal glory! (II Cor. 4:17) 

Dating and the Deep Blue Sea... and the Way of Christ (4)

If modern American dating is so bad, as yours truly has contended, what then is the alternative? How, just how, ought our covenant men and maids go about getting married?

In the June issue of the *Stan-*

dard Bearer I mentioned that we must think theologically (and therefore biblically) in our approach to this. And, I suggested, when we do that, think theologically that is, we will be thinking along the lines of what could be

called "the Family principle" when it comes to the marrying of the covenant seed.

Clearly revealed in Holy Writ is the truth that God is a family God. He is Father dwelling with Son in the love-communion of the Holy Spirit. This God has ordained a people to be taken into His own family life and love. For this the Son is sent. Through His blood a sinful people is given the *right* to be taken into the divine family. By His Spirit, Father and Son make the heart of this people His home. The chosen ones become sons, and daughters, who are at the same time all together a bride. The friends of God's love now are *relation*, enjoying all the blessings of dwelling with God under one roof.

Now God has so made us, His people, to be bright lights, shining the truth of His own family. Each of us is saved by grace to be an image bearer of God. Families are saved together to image or reflect God's family. This is the clear teaching and implication of passages such as Ephesians 5:22-33, and Ephesians 6:1-4. Fathers are as God in the home, representing Him. Covenant sons and daughters are as the Son of God in human flesh, delighting in the love of their father and seeking to do his will, even as the Lord Jesus delights in the love of His Father and seeks to do His will.

The revelation of the First-Family, the triune God Himself, is and ought to be seen as well in the *extension* of our families. God "extends" His family from heaven to earth in the salvation of His people. He does this in a certain way, and for certain purposes. We extend our families, and it is a picture of the divine salvation being carried on. We beget children, and nurture them. This mirrors Holy Spirit work to save our young through a spiritual begetting and holy nurture. So when our families are extended and the children pursue marriage, something is and ought to be revealed of Christ pursuing

His bride, and the bride waiting for the Christ, and of the holy wooing, the virtuous marrying, the blessed coupling in the Spirit....

The Father Principle

A most important way in which things divine are reflected in the marrying of the covenant seed is in the involvement of the father of covenant homes.

Fatherhood in our homes reflects, as we have said, the truth and presence of God the Father. He is as God in the home. He is the head of the home in the place of God. He is ruler, under the sovereign God and on behalf of God, of his domain and the wife and family given to him. He is lover, to show by his rule, his wisdom, his righteousness, his power, his provision, the God who cares, who leads, who establishes and blesses with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus.

In the marrying of the covenant seed, fathers in the home are and ought to be as God the Father Himself with regard to the marriage of His own Son in human flesh to the church His bride. The earthly father, therefore, is the leader of the godly way of man with woman. And the godly way of man with woman will, therefore, be the way of the father, presided over by him, revealing his own virtues, and in complete accord with his will. In fact, beloved, the fundamental of the fundamental "family principle" in the marrying of our children is what could be called "the Father principle." Father, according to Scripture, is the cornerstone of the family foundation of the godly way of men with maids.

We are talking *sacred, loving presence, and superintending involvement*. Earthly fathers are to be "involved" in the way of the marrying of their children in such a significant way as to reveal, without a doubt, the involvement of God the Father in the marriage of His Son. How is God the Father involved in *that* marriage? Completely. Always. With delight. At

great sacrifice. With this goal: the glory of His own name. How ought earthly fathers be involved in the way of the marrying of the covenant children? Same way as God. Now, of course, earthly fathers, not being God, cannot be *as* completely involved as God, for we have other work to do, other things to think about, and God, though He has other work to do and other things to think about, can be completely involved in everything at once! Nor are we to try to be omnipresent when our children are marrying. Nor do we shed atoning blood. Nor is our delight divine. But nevertheless, fathers are *as* God the Father, and must be, though very human, but equipped with grace and the Holy Spirit, *completely, always, at great sacrifice, with delight, and for the glory of God's great name* involved in the way of the extension of the covenant homes in the marrying of the seed.

This is the Holy Scriptures. Godly fathers in the Bible are always very much and very sacredly involved in the way of men with maids. According to Scripture, when there is a way of a good man with a holy maid three is good company, two is very often hellish. According to Scripture, the first party of the good way of a man with a maid is father. The other two (the man and the maid) join his party. Father, according to Scripture, is the Parent-Friend guide for the son. He is the hedge, the Wall of Protection for the daughter. He is the security for godly and blessed acquaintances, friendships, and the godly way for covenant sons and daughters. He is more, far more, than the one who hands sonny the keys to the Chevy and tells him to be back by midnight or thereabouts. He is more, far more, than one who learns about slick Willy (or even nice, Christian Willy) only after daughter Sally has consented to Willy's wooing. He is the hands-on overseer, and the Most Desired (human) Help along the way of his

men and maids. In fact, if we continue remembering the analogy of God the Father and the marrying of His Son, and our fatherhood and the marrying of our children, then we can only conclude that in the marrying of our children, in the extension of father's covenant family, father's will is *determinative*. If father says yes, the way of a man with maid is good and may proceed. If he says no, there is no way. The focus is on father. All eyes look to father. The will which counts is not *first of all* the will of the child of the father, but father's will. As the Father chooses a Bride and a way for His Son to procure the Bride, so covenant fathers' godly desires must be done in the marrying of their children....

Two Things I Want You to Know I Know So That You Don't Leave Me Now

You must know, dear readers, that I know we live in a fallen world. Fathers on earth are sinful. Fathers by nature are prone to be tyrannical. Sometimes father's will for a mate for his son or daughter is not just weird, but wrong. Sometimes there *are* no fathers in a covenant family. Sometimes fathers are a thousand miles away. Sometimes there are unbelieving fathers. You may be keenly aware of that. I know that. We are just talking principles here. We are just aiming at setting forth the *normal* way of fathers' involvement in the marrying of the covenant seed. Practical things, details, exceptions, your situation, and mine, must wait and be discussed only in light of principles.

And another thing, when setting forth this "father principle," no one is denying that the fathers have an awesome responsibility to *act* as the representatives of God they are. The father must be a holy man, a holy husband, and a holy father with regard to all aspects of the raising of his children. And he must, as well, strive to *be* as holy as God in considering the way of marrying for his children, and as loving as

God in *winning over* the will of the children so that they, like the Son of God's love, come to marry not to do their own will and *to delight* to do father's will. To the degree that father is not holy, and to the degree that he brings misery upon the family because of his slothfulness, unrighteousness, and profanity, to that degree he will, if he is still so inclined to get involved in the marrying of his children, make the way of a man with a maid a truly miserable thing. Discussion of responsibilities of fathers, men, and maids—that too must wait until another article.

So don't leave me now....

An Example of the Father Principle in Action

Further to ground us in the "father principle" of the marrying of the covenant seed, consider with me this example in Scripture. It is the example of the first marriage on earth. That is the marriage of Adam and Eve recorded in the book of Genesis. The Lord Jesus called the disciples and calls us to go back to the very first marriage when sorting through all the societal and religious opinions about divorce (Matt. 19). So we can profit, I think, in our understanding of the way of a man with a maid by going back not merely to the roaring 1920s or to the gay 1890s (when strange things began to develop concerning the way of men with maids!), but to the beginning, and to the Word of God.

To be sure, things were different back then. No one of us gets a bride from his rib. No one of us has no choice in the matter as Adam had no choice. Then there was no sin. Now there is only the small beginning of righteousness. But Genesis two being Scripture, though it be "old" Scripture, is part of the "whatsoever things" which were "written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

A main principle, an abiding Christ-truth, that we learn from the

first marriage on earth is ... *Father!* The Father of Adam was God. Now here was a Father really involved in the way of His man with his maid. He left Adam no option. He did surgery. He made two one flesh. Father's will was done. It was a Father's will that His first human son, Adam, have just the right mate, and just one. It was Father who did not create a hundred women and let Adam pick by himself, date one, then another, break a heart here, then finally find one there. It was Father who, when Adam was ready to marry, did not tell Adam to date Eve until he was finished with his schooling and then with his internship, and then finally, after three years and four thousand malteds pop the question. It was Father who made it so that the way of Adam and Eve would be for family, *right away*, and not for some strange isolationist-two's company-but three's-a-crowd-youth-subculture funny business of "going steady" but going nowhere fast....

Adam was satisfied with that. He never had misgivings because he did not date around before he met Eve. He never regretted never falling in love. He did not feel left out and tyrannized that Father did not consider what Adam had read in *Glamour* magazine about what a wife ought to be. He was, in fact, elated when God brought Eve to him, so elated that he praised the union: "this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh...!"

Yes!

The eternal Son, glad to marry only according to Father's will.

Adam, exulting in Father's one mother of all living, Eve.


So holy sons and daughters in our covenant homes: glad!

Father's will.

That's what marrying is doing.

That is the way of a godly man with a godly maid.

Revelation of the gospel of the family way, the father way of a man with a maid.

Let us be glad! 



Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation, Michael Horton, ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992. 240pp. (Paper) (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

Seven different authors have cooperated, under the editorship of Michael Horton, to write a book that deals with an extremely pressing problem in our day. The problem is defined in the subtitle as the question of "Lordship salvation." At first glance this seemingly innocuous title refers to nothing else than the fact that Christ is the sovereign Lord of the life of believers. It would seem that all people of God would readily agree with that proposition.

However, when one gets a bit further into the question, one discovers that some believe this and some do not; and that even those who believe this sometimes have an altogether wrong conception of it. The book is particularly interested in two extremes, both of which, in the opinion of the authors, deny fundamental truths of the Protestant Reformation.

On the one side is a group of theologians, under the leadership of Zane C. Hodges, who take what the book calls an Arminian-antinomian position with regard to the question of Christ's lordship. An Arminian-antinomian is indeed a rare breed, the likes of which one does not often meet. He is, according to the authors, one who believes that a person is saved because of his own acceptance of Christ as Savior and willingness to cooperate with Christ in the work of salvation. He, with the Arminians, denies eternal election, total depravity, particular redemption, and irresistible grace.

But he does not stop there. His antinomianism comes out in his de-

nial that Christ is Lord of His life. He takes, instead, the position that once one has made the choice of faith he is guaranteed salvation no matter how he lives. He teaches a doctrine of "carnal Christians," that is, Christians who have accepted Christ but who live no differently from the world. So, one can be a Christian without being a follower of Christ. It is not wrong, of course, to recognize Christ as Savior, or to follow Him, but it is not necessary to salvation. Only in this way, says the Arminian-antinomian, is it possible to explain justification by faith alone.

On the other extreme is another group of evangelicals, represented in the book by John F. MacArthur, Jr. (a very popular radio speaker and author), who teaches that salvation indeed means that Christ is Lord of the believer's life. But in maintaining this, these people insist on the necessity of faith *and obedience*, or faith *and repentance in justification*; in short, they teach justification by faith *and works*.

MacArthur, so the book alleges, teaches that *perfect* obedience (to Christ as King) is not required, but a *willingness* to be obedient is necessary. Obedience and repentance, says MacArthur, belong to the faith that justifies. One has to receive Christ as Lord of his life and walk in service to Christ as King to be justified.

And so the two extremes stand as opposites. Hodges says that discipleship is optional; MacArthur says it is saving (p. 79). Hodges presents faith as intellectual; MacArthur includes obedience in faith (p. 81). MacArthur claims Hodges is antinomian; Hodges claims MacArthur is legalistic (p. 102). Hodges denies the "faith alone" principle of the Reformation; MacArthur compromises the

"faith alone" truth by adding obedience to faith.

The authors are convinced that this disagreement is the most important issue facing evangelicals today, and that it has, in fact, torn the evangelical community into fragments. They are right. There is no question about it that the doctrine of justification by faith *alone* is under fierce attack from many quarters. It is being attacked by post-millennial reconstructionists who want to carry the whole church back to the law. It is being attacked by many within the Reformed community who insist upon a conditional salvation and a conditional covenant. One wonders whether there is anyone left today who holds to the profound Reformational truth of justification by faith *alone*.

The writers in this book, however, come to a defense of this great truth. They argue convincingly that both camps stray dangerously from the Protestant Reformation and its emphasis on faith alone. They quote from Calvin and Luther to sustain their argument, and they point to the decrees of the Roman Catholic Council of Trent to demonstrate beyond doubt that to deny the great doctrine of justification by faith alone is not only to repudiate the Reformation, but to rush into the arms of Rome from which the Reformation delivered us. The book is a sober, sharp, convincing and sometimes powerful call to return to the doctrine of the Reformers who repudiated synergism, antinomianism, and salvation by faith and works, and whose word to a divided evangelical world today is, in effect, "A plague on both your houses."

Furthermore, the book contains some excellent discussions of related topics. In discussing the

question of justification by faith alone, the book rightly warns against making faith a work. Horton calls attention to Calvin's discussion of faith and offers some quotes from Calvin in which Calvin so emphasizes that faith is a gift of God that with regard to justification faith is "something merely passive" (p. 53).

Riddlebarger, in discussing what faith is, points out that Hodges makes faith the instrumental cause and condition of justification, and thus opens the door to the well-meant gospel offer.

Horton has an interesting and helpful discussion of assurance on pp. 142ff. And in chapter 7 Paul Schaefer describes a fascinating debate between B. B. Warfield and Lewis Sperry Chafer over the question of the possibility of a "carnal Christian," a debate that continues to the present.

Nevertheless, the entire discussion brings up other interesting questions which cry out for answers. The questions center in the relationship between the law and the gospel. The general position of the authors seems to be that the law and the gospel are disjunctive, that is, not related to each other.


The law, so it is said, has as its sole purpose to bring the hearer under the conviction of sin. The gospel reveals the grace of God in Christ. The law is works; the gospel, grace. Ritchie even goes so far as to suggest that the Sermon on the Mount is condemnatory, for it is about law (p. 71).

This question, in turn, involves other questions. What is the relation between faith and works? Does the faith that justifies include in it repentance and obedience? That is, is it not true that obedience and repentance are necessary for justification inasmuch as they are implicit in a justifying faith? This latter point is the point which those who deny justification by faith alone insist upon.

These questions are not new. Luther debated them and discussed them. So did Calvin. They were burning questions in the Marrow controversy of the early eighteenth century. They are questions on the first page of the church's agenda today.

Without entering into them in this review, I am troubled by the fact that the book, in its otherwise strong defense of justification by faith alone, makes a false disjunction between law and gospel so

that lost from sight is the obvious truth that Scripture considers the law, at least in some sense, to be gospel as well. The Sermon on the Mount is the "law" all right, but it is the royal law of the kingdom of heaven governing the lives of the citizens of that kingdom. Psalm 119 in many different ways exalts the law as the power to give innumerable spiritual blessings. Psalm 19 speaks of the law as having the ability to make wise and even to convert the soul. Jesus refers to the entire OT Scriptures as "the law and the prophets," pointing out that these Scriptures were "gospel." Even the ten commandments are cast in the form of gospel: "I am the Lord thy God which hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Without denying that Scripture speaks of law also as the opposite of grace when it speaks of work-righteousness, the fact is that Strimple is right when he tells us, in his discussion of Romans 6, that the believer must become more and more what he really is by grace (pp. 61-68). In this respect the law *as grace* plays a role, for it is the rule of gratitude.

But read the book! 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Minister Activities

The members of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ met in late June and extended a call to Rev. Daniel Kleyn, presently serving as pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC, to serve as their next undershepherd.

Seminarian Bill Langerak will soon begin his internship in the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI under Rev. Dale Kuiper; and Seminarian Paul Goh will begin his

internship in Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL under Rev. Carl Haak.

The synodical stated clerk was directed by synod "to inform all the congregations of the PRC and our sister churches that Candidates Rodney Kleyn and David Overway have sustained their synodical exams, are eligible for a call on or after July 13, 2002 and upon receipt of a call have six weeks to consider the call."

Mission Activities

Rev. Richard Moore preached his farewell sermon June 23 at our churches' mission in Ghana, W. Africa. He chose as his parting

word to preach from II Timothy 1:8, 9 on the theme, "Being Not Ashamed." Rev. Moore has served our churches as a foreign missionary in Ghana since 1999. That morning, after the morning worship, the group in Ghana hosted a farewell program for Rev. Moore and his wife, Jannet. The Moores were expected to return home to Hull, IA sometime in late June. But lest you think they will simply slide into retirement, we have learned that that may not be the case. It appears that Rev. Moore has agreed to minister to the PR Fellowship of Fayetteville, NC from November

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

through February of next year. He will be going there, God willing, some time in late October. So it seems that he, like most of our retired pastors, will find himself busier in retirement than he may have been while actively serving a congregation.

Also with respect to Fayetteville, we can report that Rev. Mitchell Dick, his wife, GraceKay, and their family returned from their five-month stay there in late June. The last Sunday Rev. Dick preached for the Fellowship he chose two sermons from II Thessalonians 2. In the morning he preached on verse 15 under the theme, "Stand Fast"; and in the evening he looked at the next two verses, 16 and 17, under the topic, "A Thessalonian Benediction." Rev. Dick was tentatively scheduled to lead his congregation, the Grace PRC in Standale, MI, in worship at the evening service of June 23.

In early June, Rev. Garrett Eriks, pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, the calling church for our denomination's on-going work with the Sovereign Grace Reformed Church of Spokane, WA, in which Rev. Thomas Miersma is laboring as home missionary, along with two of his elders, Bob Brands, and Ray Ezinga, visited the mission field. They left June 6 and returned June 10. This trip was conducted as part of Loveland's oversight of Rev. Miersma and his work in Spokane, WA.

By the time you read this the Spriensma family will have, the Lord willing, left for their work in the Philippines. Their departure was rescheduled from late June to July 15th when their daughter Alicia broke a bone in one of her legs while playing soccer for Covenant Christian High School. Surgery was needed, and as a result, plans for departure were delayed. We certainly remember Rev. Audred Spriensma, his wife Alva, and their children as they take up their labors as for-

eign missionary and family on behalf of our churches.

Evangelism Activities

Members of the PR churches in Western Michigan, as well as others interested in hearing explanations of the truth we believe concerning "The Doctrine of Revelation," were invited to attend summer classes taught by Prof. Herman Hanko at the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. These four classes were scheduled for the evenings of June 18 and 25 and July 2 and 9 and were taken from Prof. Hanko's book "For Thy Truth's Sake." The subjects treated were (1) The Idea of Revelation, (2) Revelation and Particular Grace, (3) Revelation and Scripture, and (4) Revelation and Creation.

The Evangelism Society of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI welcomed their congregation to attend a mini-lecture by Jack and Judie Feenstra on "Life in Myanmar" on Sunday, June 23.


The Evangelism Society of the Byron Center, MI PRC hosted an adult Sunday School Class again this summer. This class was held during the children's Sunday School, and they continued their study of the biblical directions for witnessing, discussing practical

ways and methods one can use to witness.

Congregation Activities

This summer all the ladies of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI were invited to Hughes Park at 10:00 A.M. on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of June, July, and August for a time of fellowship, coffee, and playtime for their children.

The 8th grade girls and boys of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI were invited to attend a class this summer on the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Construction continues this summer on the sanctuary of the Byron Center, MI PRC. Of course, with construction come work bees, and Byron Center is no exception. On two different occasions members of Byron were invited to show up with gloves, brooms, and hand tools. Plans called for moving the contents of their library, nursery, and upstairs rooms and removing the walls and floors, etc.... They also moved tables and chairs to their parsonage for Sunday School use and cleaned up around the construction site. Having driven by Byron Center recently, we can safely say that there will be more work bees in the near future. 

Announcements

NOTICE:

The following reprints of booklets are available from Grandville PRC's Evangelism Committee:

*The Good Shepherd
and His Sheep,*
by Rev. Robert Harbach
Psalm Singing,
A Reformed Heritage,
by Rev. Jason Kortering

Send your request to Grandville's website: www.grandvilleprc.org or to Milo Meyerdirk, telephone 616-531-8783. The cost is \$1.50 each, postpaid.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hudsonville PRC expresses its sincere sympathy to fellow officebearers Don Van Overloop, Tom Beute, and Greg VanOverloop, for the Lord has called to his heavenly home

HAROLD VANOVERLOOP.

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

Rev. Barry Gritters, President
Ralph VanderVeen, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We are pleased to announce that our parents and grandparents, **ALVIN and BETTY BLEYENBERG**,

will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary on August 28, 2002. As children and grandchildren we are humbly thankful for the blessings that our heavenly Father has given to them during this time together. We give thanks for the covenantal instruction and guidance that they have shown to us in these years. Our prayer is that God will continue to bless them and guide them in the years to come.

"...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

- ✿ Nelson & Wanda Oostra
Brandon (in glory), Kari, Heidi, Katie, Vernon, Brandi, Kendra, Mariah, James (in glory), Brandon
- ✿ Alden & Twyla DeJong
Veryl (in glory), Erica, Jordanna, Dana, Seth
- ✿ Randy & Cheryl Corson
Jason, Steven, Rachel
- ✿ Herman & Ruth Boonstra
Renae, Stephan, Carmen, Dolan, Philip, Lenora
- ✿ Wayne & Brenda Bleyenberg
Titus
- ✿ Ryan & Laura Kats
Avery, Kenedie, Trayle
- ✿ Chad & Dawn Andringa
Jacie, Shayna, Mandi
- ✿ Daryl & Mindy Bleyenberg
- ✿ Jeff & Sara VanMeeteren
- ✿ Mark & Nancy Kooima
Connor
- ✿ Evan
- ✿ Myron
- ✿ Janna
- ✿ Jerry
- ✿ Derek

Hull, Iowa

NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted, the Lord willing, by the Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota on Wednesday, September 4, 2002 at 8:30 A.M. An officebearers' conference is being planned for Tuesday, September 3, on the topic: "Justification by Faith Alone! Was Luther Mistaken? Or Has Protestantism Despised Her Birthright?" All material for the agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, August 5, 2002, thirty days before classis convenes. Delegates or visitors in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Edgerton, Mr. Andrew Brummel, 801 Elizabeth St., Edgerton, MN 56128. Phone: (507) 442-5201. Email: abruml@dtgnet.com

Rev. Daniel Kleyn,
Stated Clerk of Classis West

NOTICE

The annual meeting of the RFPA will be held on September 26, 2002 at 7:30 P.M. in Southwest Church. Prof. Hanko will speak on the history associated with the book *Sin and Grace*.

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 11, 2002 at the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 11, 2002.

Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk

REMINDER

Young people in the PRC who live away from home while attending college may, on request, receive the *SB* free of charge at their college residence. Don't forget to notify the *SB* business office at the beginning of the school year.

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for August

Date	Topic	Text
August 4	"This Is Life Eternal"	John 17:3
August 11	"The Promise of Paradise"	Luke 23:32-43
August 18	"It Is Finished"	John 19:30
August 25	"The Blessing of Christian Education"	Deuteronomy 6:6, 7