

THE *October 15, 2002* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Special Reformation Issue:

The Reformation and a Holy Life

"We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. Therefore it is so far from being true that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that, on the contrary, without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man; for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture a faith that worketh by love, which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word.

"These works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by His grace; howbeit they are of no account towards our justification. For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works; otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good. ...

"Moreover, though we do good works, we do not found our salvation upon them; for we do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable; and although we could perform such works, still the remembrance of one sin is sufficient to make God reject them. Thus, then, we would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences continually vexed, if they relied not on the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior."

Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 24



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Editorially speaking...

A look at past issues of the *Standard Bearer* will show that at least since 1990 without fail every October 15 issue has been a special issue devoted to some aspect of the reformation of the church. Most of the issues have treated in depth some aspect of the sixteenth century Reformation. Subjects include "The Reformed Conflict with Rome"; "The Anabaptist Controversy"; "The Reformation and Freedom"; "Reformation and Scripture"; "The Reformation and Worship"; "The Reformation of 1924"; "The Reformation of 1953"; "The Synod of Dordt"; "Abraham Kuyper and the

Reformation of 1886"; "The Reformation and the Last Things"; "John Knox"; and "Martin Luther."

Obviously, these subjects examine, explain, and apply to the Reformed church today many of the most important aspects of the Spirit's great work of reformation. Some organization might consider publishing these special Reformation issues as a separate volume to be a worthwhile venture.

We add the present issue to the list. The subject of this issue is "The Reformation and a Holy Life." In the issue, we take up the charge that justification by faith

alone is a threat to good works, set forth the Reformation's positive interest in good works, and point out several specific areas in which the Reformation restored holiness.

The *Standard Bearer's* interest in the Reformation indicates our conviction, not merely that a "Reformed church is always reforming," but that the sixteenth century Reformation was the work of Christ by the unchanging gospel and that Reformed churches in the twenty-first century have the calling to maintain and promote that work of Christ.

To do this, we must know it.

— DJE 

Sermon on Soberness and Moderation

1539

Sermon on Soberness and Moderation against Gluttony and Drunkenness,
I Pet. 4:7-11, May 18, 1539

This part of [the first] Epistle [of Peter] is an exhortation to good conduct. Those who are Christians are to see to it that they are grateful for grace and redemption and conduct themselves modestly, moderately, and soberly, so that one does not go on living the swinish life that goes on in the filthy world. For this Epistle was written to the Greeks, who were great high livers. In those regions there was gluttony just as in Germany today.

Where one can find sermons which will stop the Germans from swilling I do not know. We might just as well have kept silent altogether. Christ says that the coming last day will come upon men unawares and snatch them away (Luke 21[:35]), and Paul says the same thing in I Thess. 5[:2], and also the prophets likewise. The Italians call us gluttonous, drunken Germans and pigs because they live decently and do not drink until they are drunk. Like the Spaniards, they have escaped this vice. Among the Turks it is really the worst sin for a man to be drunk.

So temperate are they that they do not even drink anything which inebriates. This is why they can make war and win; while we drunken sows sleep they keep awake, and thus can consider their strategy and then attack and conquer. When the time comes for us to defend ourselves and be prepared, we get drunk. This has become so widespread that there is no help for it; it has become a settled custom.

At first it was the peasants who drank to excess, then it spread to the citizens. In my time it was considered a great shame among the nobility. Now they are worse than the citizens and peasants; now those who are the greatest and best are beginning to fall, indeed, even the princes; and among those who are the ablest it has become a noble and princely virtue. Now the ten-year-old milksops, and the students, too, are beginning, and ruining themselves in their flower; when the corn should be growing and flourishing it is beaten down by a storm. We preach, but who stops it? Those who should stop it do it themselves; the princes even more. Therefore Germany is a land of hogs and a filthy people which debauches its body and its life. If you were going to paint it, you would have to paint a pig.

Some spark of sobriety may remain among young children, virgins, and women, though underneath one finds pigs among them too. However, there remains some bit of decency, for it is still said

that it is especially shameful for a woman to be drunken. The Turks have this teaching, which is a fine thing, and the Italians too. Among us it is considered most shameful. But if it ill becomes the children and young women, so that we say that such should be trampled under foot, how much more should not this be so of married women and particularly men, who should be wiser and more virtuous, since the woman is the weaker vessel [I Pet. 3:7] and the man has more strength and reason? Therefore they should do this even less, and therefore, according to reason, it is a far more shameful thing for men to drink to excess than for women. It might be said in defense of woman that she is foolish and has not such a strong body, and therefore drink affects her more quickly. But this is not so of the man, who is stronger than the woman.

This gluttony and swilling is inundating us like an ocean and among the Spaniards, Italians, and English it is reprehended. We are the laughingstock of all other countries, who look upon us as filthy pigs; and not only upon private persons, but upon nobles and princes also, as if that were the reason why they bear the coat of arms. We would not forbid this; it is possible to tolerate a little elevation, when a man takes a drink or two too much after working hard and when he is feeling low. This must be called a frolic. But to sit day and night, pouring it in and pouring it out again, is piggish. This is

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not a human way of living, not to say Christian, but rather a pig's life.

What, therefore, shall we do? The secular government does not forbid it, the princes do nothing about it, and the rulers in the cities do nothing at all but wink at it and do the same themselves. We preach and the Holy Scriptures teach us otherwise; but you want to evade what is taught. Eating and drinking are not forbidden, but rather all food is a matter of freedom, even a modest drink for one's pleasure. If you do not wish to conduct yourself this way, if you are going to go beyond this and be a born pig and guzzle beer and wine, then, if this cannot be stopped by the rulers, you must know that you cannot be saved. For God will not admit such pig-gish drinkers into the kingdom of heaven [cf. Gal. 5:19-21]. It is no wonder that all of you are beggars. How much money might not be saved!¹ Twenty years ago this was considered among the princes to be a shameful vice. If we do not watch out, it will become common among virgins and women. Therefore I am utterly terrified by that word of the Lord concerning gluttony: ["Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare" (Luke 21:34)].

Listen to the Word of God, which says, "Keep sane and sober," that it may not be said to you in vain. You must not be pigs; neither do such belong among Christians. So also in I Corinthians 6[:9, 10]: No drunkard, whoremonger, or adulterer can be saved. Do not think that you are saved if you are a drunken pig day and night. This is a great sin, and everybody should know that this is such a great iniquity, that it makes you guilty and excludes you from eternal life. Everybody should know that such a sin is contrary to his baptism and hinders his faith and his salvation.

Therefore, if you wish to be a Christian, take care that you control yourself. If you do not wish to be saved, go ahead and steal, rob, profiteer as long as you can, but fear Jack Ketch² and the magistrates. But if you do want to be saved, then listen to this: just as adultery and idolatry close up heaven, so does gluttony; for Christ says very clearly: Take heed "lest your hearts be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly" [Luke 21:34], "as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west" [Matt. 24:27]. Therefore be watchful and sober. That is what is preached to us, who want to be Christians.

You parents must help to see to it that your children do not begin too early to fall into this vice. Reason, which God gives to princes and nobles [as an instrument by which to rule, will not accomplish this]; it leads a person downwards; it is a pig. A drunkard is not dissuaded from his drinking by reason any more than a murderer, an adulterer, whoremonger, or usurer; therefore you will not be moved by the reasons that excessive drinking weakens the constitution, consumes money and goods, and causes the Italians, Turks, and the English to spit upon us. What should move you is that God forbids it on pain of damnation and loss of the kingdom of heaven. A ruler cannot punish a greedy-gut, so the whole world is greedy and thus is entangled in the cares of this life [Luke 8:14; 12:34], simply because it goes unpunished; in fact, is even praised. People say it should not be called a sin because it is not punished; they say it is like greed, usury,³ etc. Very well, go ahead and drink yourself full as a hog, nobody will punish you. If I were not so ill I would like to write a treatise on this mat-

ter; perhaps it would move a few people anyhow.⁴

We ought to give thanks to God for providing us with food and drink and then besides, liberating us from the papacy, and feeding us with food and drink. If you are tired and downhearted, take a drink; but this does not mean being a pig and doing nothing but gorging and swilling. It is now becoming a custom even in evangelical cities to establish taprooms;⁵ a donkey goes in, pays a penny [Groschen], and drinks the whole day long; and the government does nothing about it. These taverns are necessary, of

If you are tired and downhearted, take a drink; but this does not mean being a pig and doing nothing but gorging and swilling.

course, even a pious custom.⁶ They might better have built money changers' shops. Just because the magistrates and princes do not denounce and punish these vices, we shall not fail to perform our office and remind each one of his office. If we are aware of what is going on we know that such persons should be excluded from all the sacraments and will make it public, just as we would in the case of a murderer. You should be moderate and sober; this means that we should not be drunken, though we may be exhilarated.

Further on in chapter five, Peter states the reason why it is necessary for us to be sober. Why? In order to be able to pray; and this is necessary because we have an adversary, the devil, "who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" [I Pet. 5:8]. He seeks, but how does he do so? He is like a wolf circling a sheepfold. What Peter is saying is this: because you are a people who have been called to the post in which you must be on the watch against sin and against the devil and his messengers, who are seeking our souls more greedily than that wolf, therefore you must defend yourself with the Word and with prayer, not only for yourselves but the whole

world. You are priests, etc.⁷ But when a man is drunk his reason is buried, his tongue and all his members are incapable of praying; he is a drunken pig and the devil has devoured him. Then the devil is occupying his members.

The early Christians went almost too far in this matter of prayer. In the time after the apostles the bishops with great diligence instituted the morning and evening prayers which are called matins and compline. They practiced this custom steadily and rigorously, some of them so strenuously as Augustine says, that they did not eat for three or four days. They were overdoing it. Nevertheless, they went to prayer morning and evening. But later, abuse corrupted this custom; later came the monks, who do not pray but only babble prayers. But we have established the schools in order that morning and evening prayers may be held morning and evening. This we are obliged to do.

God does not forbid you to drink, as do the Turks; he permits you to drink wine and beer; he does not make a law of it. But do not make a pig of yourself; remain a human being. If you are a human being, then keep your human self-control. Even though we do not have a command of God, we should nevertheless be ashamed that we are thus spit upon by other peoples. If you want to be a Christian, do not argue in this way: nobody reproaches me, therefore God does not reproach me. So it has been from the time of Noah [Gen. 9:21]. And so it was with the Sodomites, who wanted to rape the angels; they were all so drunk they could not find the door [Gen. 19:11]. Sodom and Gomorrah perished because of a flood of drunkenness; this vice was punished. God does not tolerate such confusion and inordinate use of his creatures [i.e., food and drink].

The mind will tolerate a certain degree of elevation, but this must be moderate, not indecent.

Here sobriety signifies not merely abstaining from drunkenness, but also moderation in all things, respectability in dress, ornamentation, gait, and conduct in the whole of life in general.

If you have been a pig, then stop being one. Augustine said: I have known many who were drunkards and then ceased being drunkards. But you are today just as you were yesterday and you go on thinking that it is not a sin.

"Sane" means that we should be alert and sensible, in order that we may be enlightened by the Word of God and not be drunken pigs, in order that we may be ready for prayer. "Sober" means that we should not overload the body, and it applies to excess in outward gestures, clothing, ornament, or whatever kind of pomp it may be, such as we have at baptisms and the churching of women. There is no moderation in these things. When there is a wedding or a dance you always have to go to excess. Christmas and Pentecost mean nothing but beer. Christians should not walk around so bedizened that one hardly knows whether one is looking at a man or a beast. We Christians ought to be examples. We Germans are especially swamped in this vice. The Italians and the Turks far surpass us in moderation. The Turk should be put to shame by us and he should be the one to say: They do not overeat, overdrink, and overdress. But actually the tables are turned; they are the ones who give us an example of clothing, etc. They have their peculiar vices, too, of course; and they are really abominable; but in this they are far more temperate than we are. We are a shame to heaven and earth; we do harm to both body and mind.

"Above all." This could well be a sermon in itself. You have been called to love one another. People today, peasants, citizens, and nobles, go on living in hatred and envy, so that none will give another even a piece of bread; they will commit any kind of rascality

so long as they can deny it. If you want to be saved, you must possess the red dress which is here described. You have put on the vestment. You are white as snow [Isa. 1:18]. Pure from all sins. But you must wear this red dress and color now, and remember to love your neighbor. Moreover, it should be a fervent love, not a pale-red love, not the love which is easily provoked to revenge [I Cor. 13:5]. It should be a strong color, a brown-red love, which is capable not only of doing good toward your neighbor but is also able to bear all malice from him [I Cor. 13:4, 7]. For this is the way sins are covered, even a multitude, a heap, a sea, a forest of sins. How does it do this? It does not mean my sin in the way the pope interprets this, i.e., whenever I love God and my neighbor then I blot out my sins.⁸ No. It is another's love, namely, Christ's love, which has covered my sins, as Peter says in chapter two: He bore them in his body on the cross and erased them completely [I Pet. 2:24]. This is said with regard to your sins, the sins you commit against me and I against you....

1. I.e., if excessive drinking were stopped.

2. Cf. p. 140 n. 4. [Meister Hans, the hangman.]

3. Luther preached on usury in the preceding month, April 13, 1539. WA 47, 721-730.

4. This may indicate that it was Luther's own prompting which caused the later publication of this sermon.

5. Luther is referring particularly to Torgau. Cf. Julius Köstlin and Gustav Kawerau, *Martin Luther* (2 vols.; Berlin, 1903), II, 473. WA 47, 766 n. 1.

6. Irony.

7. Therefore you must pray; cf. I Pet. 2:5, 9. This sentence and the one following may be susceptible to another interpretation.

8. The Stoltz version reads: "Not, however, as the pope expounds the understanding of our sins, which is that my love is that garment; rather Christ erased our sin by his death."

Piety and the Reformation (or, The Reformation's Awed Love of God)

If we were to understand Christian piety merely as decent behavior, we would have to say that the sixteenth century Reformation of the church did not have piety as its purpose. This is startling because the conduct of the members of the church was scandalous. Both laity and clergy were worldly and immoral. The holiness the church boasted of was foolish and worthless: pilgrimages, crusades, worship of relics, celibacy (rejection of marriage for fornication and concubinage), and indulgences.

The Reformation was not a reformation of morals. The Reformers themselves made this clear. In his early work, *The Freedom of a Christian*, Martin Luther wrote:

I have, to be sure, sharply attacked ungodly doctrines in general, and I have snapped at my opponents, not because of their bad morals, but because of their ungodliness.... I have no quarrel with any man concerning his morals but only concerning the word of truth.

John Calvin agreed. Writing to the Roman Catholic cardinal, Sadolet, Calvin stated:

It is scarcely possible that the minds of the common people should not be greatly alienated from you by the many examples of cruelty, avarice, intemperance, arrogance, lust, insolence, and all sorts of wickedness, which are

openly manifested by men of your order, but none of those things would have driven us to the attempt which we made under a much stronger necessity. That necessity was, that the light of divine truth had been extinguished, the word of God buried, the virtue of Christ left in profound oblivion, and the pastoral office subverted (*Reply by John Calvin to Cardinal Sadolet's Letter*).

Rome understands well that the purpose of the Reformation was not improvement of morals. In his history of the Reformation, Roman Catholic historian Henri Daniel-Rops correctly declares concerning Luther:

Nor did he make his protest in order to reform ecclesiastical morals. Luther himself roundly asserted that such had never been his aim.... The problem of reform, in the sense understood by so many men of the age, was of secondary importance to Luther.... The revolution he desired to effect was neither social, nor political, nor ecclesiastical, but theological (*The Protestant Reformation*, vol. 2).

This is not to say that the Reformers had no concern for the lives of Christians and for the reformation of life. Certainly they did. But their concern was deeper. It went to the root of the immorality. The Reformation was radical. Its radical purpose was a restoration of the right worship and service of God by man and thus the glory of God in His church. The right worship and service of God is the activity of the man who

knows and reverences God. This reverential knowledge of God is Christian piety. It issues in a holy life. And this *was* the purpose of the Reformation.

Although the word *piety* occurs only once in the King James Bible—in I Timothy 5:4—it would be a mistake to conclude that the Bible does not teach piety, that Reformed Christians need not be pious, and that piety is a characteristic of odd cults, fundamentalists, and little old ladies of both sexes. The Bible teaches piety in other words. The fear of Jehovah in the Old Testament is piety. The Israelite's fear of Jehovah was his reverence for and love of God as the one who redeemed him from Egypt. This fear of Jehovah motivated the Israelite to keep Jehovah's commandments. Everyone who has read the book of Proverbs knows how practical the fear of Jehovah was, and is.

In the New Testament, piety is called "godliness." I Timothy 4:7 calls every Christian to "exercise thyself unto godliness." Verse 8 makes the astounding claim for godliness, or piety, that it is "profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." This is powerful incentive for vigorous exercise of oneself unto godliness. In I Timothy 3:16, the apostle refers to the central confession of the Christian faith, and the very foundation of the church, as the "mystery of godliness." The coming of the eternal Son of God into human flesh had to do with godliness, or piety. It had piety as its goal.

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Biblically, piety is loving reverence for, or, as I should prefer to say, awed love of, the triune God, the Father of Jesus Christ. Piety is such an adoration of this God as grips and possesses a man. Piety is not one part of the Christian's life, which he puts on, and then puts off, with his Sunday suit. Piety is not even the most important part of his life. Piety is his life. The pious man is simply the man who lives *coram Deo*, 'in the presence of God.'

Piety is a matter of the heart. It is, therefore, willing, free, unconstrained, unforced. The pious man delights in God. Ask him why, and he will answer: "Because God is delightful." The pious man enjoys God, because God is enjoyable.

Piety necessarily works itself out and manifests itself in all of everyday life in the world—in every aspect of the earthly life of the pious, in every human activity and relationship, and in every sphere. Piety cannot be "awed love" of God without any change in one's life. Piety is always active.

To be pious is Reformed, unless the Reformed faith and life are not biblical Christianity. It is an error to suppose that piety is un-Reformed, as though piety were the possession of fundamentalists and mystics. It is a bad sign that we are embarrassed to appear, or be thought, pious. It is ominous that we use the word *pious* only in a bad sense, to describe one who hypocritically affects piety by trivial, external acts and by an outward appearance of black suit and somber countenance. We should call such appearance and such actions "pietistic."

It is the need of the hour for Reformed churches and Reformed church members that we exercise ourselves unto piety. Impiety abounds, the same impiety that disfigured the pre-Reformation church: corruption of the public worship of God as regards preaching, administration of the sacraments, discipline, and liturgy; for-

malism in worship; refusal to worship, as is evident in the poor attendance at the services of worship; disinterest in the things of God, as manifested by the forgetting of the Sabbath Day, to profane it; worldliness; the love of money; the love of pleasures rather than the love of God; wicked unfaithfulness to God's marriage ordinance by divorce and remarriage; drunkenness and debauched partying; the amusing of themselves by professing Reformed Christians with vile songs, corrupt movies, depraved books, and rotten television programs; and living, year after year, in hatred of and enmity with a neighbor.

Even for the congregation, believer, and child of believers who are living piously, being pious is a constant battle.

It is important, therefore, to know that piety comes from the Spirit of Christ. We cannot produce it in ourselves. To think so is disbelief of the Reformation's message that salvation is by grace alone. As we use the Spirit's means—preaching and sacraments—we must beseech God for the presence and power of the Spirit with and by these means.

Although piety is a gift of the Spirit, true piety is not a "piety of the Spirit," that is, mystical experiences, ecstatic feelings, and strange behavior supposedly due to the direct influence of the Spirit. The Reformation condemned this false spirituality as another form of un-Christian impiety (read Luther's diatribe, "Against the Heavenly Prophets").

Genuine piety is a "piety of the Word." If a man is to love and reverence God, he must *know* God as the great, good, glorious God of his salvation in Jesus Christ. God gives this knowledge of Himself only in the doctrine of Scripture. This doctrine is the gospel of grace, at the heart of which is the promise of the forgiveness of sins, in the mercy of God, on the basis only of the cross, for every sinner who be-

lieves for righteousness, and believes only.

By the preaching of this gospel, the Spirit works piety. The preaching of sound doctrine—this is what we need, if we are to be pious. This is not the same as dry, abstract, theoretical discourses on doctrine. There is a preaching of doctrine which, although orthodox, or at least not heterodox, is of no real use to God's people: arid discussion of dogma; bitter, endlessly sustained polemics against errors that are no danger to the congregation; and brilliant speculation about points of theology far removed from the people. Such preaching is invariably the occasion for *pietism*.

The Reformation wanted nothing of this kind of theology and preaching. Luther wrote: "True theology is practical, and its foundation is Christ whose death is appropriated to us through faith.... Accordingly speculative theology belongs to the devil in hell" (which Luther promptly applied to Zwingli) ("Table Talk").

Calvin was one with Luther in insisting on edifying preaching. In his commentary on I Timothy 6:3, particularly the phrase "the doctrine which is according to godliness," Calvin blistered preaching "that is hypocritical and altogether framed for the purposes of ostentation and of idle display." He added:

Doctrine will not be consistent with godliness, if it do not instruct us in the fear and worship of God, if it do not edify our faith, if it do not train us to patience, humility, and all the duties of that love which we owe to our fellowmen. Whoever, therefore, does not strive to teach *usefully*, does not teach as he ought to do; and not only so, but that doctrine is neither godly nor sound, whatever may be the brilliancy of its display, that does not tend to the profit of the hearers (emphasis added).

What the church needs is lively, profitable, practical doctrine, doctrine that aims at the godliness of the congregation.

The Spirit gives piety by means of doctrine in the way of the congregation's embracing this doctrine by faith.

Piety is born and nourished by faith.

Piety is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit in a man or a woman is a *pious* Spirit. We receive the Spirit *by faith*, as the apostle teaches by his question in Galatians 3:2: "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

Piety is the awed love of God that arises from the knowledge of God in His Word. It is *faith* that knows the Word, and the God revealed in the Word.

Out of the faith that knows and trusts God as one's own gracious heavenly Father in Jesus Christ, one is pious. Just as one is righteous by faith only, so one is pious by faith only. No one is pious by works, by the law, or by dreadful threats and slavish fear.

In his *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther asked: "What man is there whose heart, upon hearing

these things, will not rejoice to its depths, and when receiving such comfort will not grow tender so that he will love Christ as he never could by means of any law or works?"

Let us apply this to ourselves. Am I disturbed by my own impiety, my formal Christianity, my worldliness, and my lack of spirituality? Do I desire piety? I must hear and believe the Word of the cross. I must pray that the Spirit will increase faith in me, apply the gospel to my heart and life, and thus Himself dwell in me more intimately.

As ministers and elders, are we desirous that our congregations be pious? Let us preach Christ crucified, the gospel of sovereign grace, in season and out of season. We are not to preach the law, good works, social reform, or the latest liberal or evangelical fad, but Christ crucified. We are not to proclaim a godliness attained by the people's strenuous efforts as they read, and exert themselves to carry out, as many "how to" religious manuals as possible. Nor are we to teach a godliness achieved by the people's preparing themselves scrupulously for a wonderful second blessing of the Spirit. But we

are to preach and teach the godliness that is received by *believing*, and by *believing only*.

We must be bold and searching in our preaching. We must bring the gospel home to believers, especially fearful, faint believers, with careful, personal application. In the interests of doing this, we must dare to attack impiety, not only out there in the world and in other churches (which is quite safe), but also in our own congregation (which can become quite dangerous). Preaching grace does not imply that there is never any admonition, never a "sharp sermon." Luther, who abhorred legalism, preached "sharp sermons," as his 1539 sermon "Soberness and Moderation," illustrates.

Aiming at godliness, the Word that we bring is the sworn foe of all ungodliness. It destroys impiety, in order to create piety.

For this kind of preaching, we ourselves must be pious men, not only of unblamable conduct outwardly, but also living and working in the presence of God, with awed love of Him.

"Take heed," the apostle commands, "unto thyself" (I Tim. 4:16).



Rev. James Slopsema

The Normal Experience of Reformed Christians

The life of the Reformed Christian is a life full of rich experience. The person whose faith is void of experience has a dead faith. He is neither Reformed nor Christian.

The experience of the Reformed Christian is described especially in the creeds of the Reformation. The creeds of the Reformation describe the experience of true faith as taught by Holy Scripture. This rich

experience of faith was the experience of the Reformers themselves, as their faith was controlled and directed by Scripture.

The experience of the Reformed Christian is especially described in the Heidelberg Catechism. The Heidelberg Catechism is perhaps the most personal and practical confession of the Reformation. As is evident from the opening Lord's Day, its theme is the Christian's

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comfort. The Catechism beautifully develops the main teachings of Scripture to show how they provide true comfort for the believer in the daily struggles of his life. Already in the opening Lord's Day the Catechism speaks of the believer's experience. It asks in Question 2, "How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?" In response the Catechism points us to three things. To enjoy true comfort it is necessary to know our sins and misery, our deliverance from sin, and our gratitude to God for this deliverance.

The knowledge of which the Catechism speaks here is not just intellectual knowledge but also the experiential knowledge of faith. When someone has just lost a loved one and he speaks of the pain and despair he has come to know, then we all understand that this is not just an intellectual knowledge but also the knowledge of experience. He has come to experience pain and despair. So also does the Catechism speak of an experiential knowledge. If we will enjoy the Christian's comfort we must come to know and experience our sin and misery, our deliverance in Christ, and gratitude for such deliverance. This threefold knowledge the Catechism proceeds to develop. The personal knowledge of our sin, deliverance, and gratitude become the threefold division under which all the main truths of Scripture are developed. And this is the normal experience of the Reformed Christian.

Let's look at this threefold experience of the Reformed Christian as described in the Heidelberg Catechism.

First, the Reformed Christian experiences misery on account of his sin.

In Q. 3 the Catechism asks, "Whence knowest thou thy misery?" It understands that the believer knows or experiences misery. It inquires as to the source. That source is the law of God.

From what follows, it is apparent that the law is the source of the Christian's misery, in that it shows him his sin. This knowledge of sin becomes the source of great misery in his life. He has sinned against the God whom he has come to love. He has offended His God. What misery this causes.

The same experience of misery is set forth by the Catechism in Lord's Day 33, which speaks of true conversion. True conversion is described as the mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new man. The mortification of the old man consists in "a sincere sorrow of heart that we have provoked God by our sins and more and more to hate and flee from them" (Q&A 89).

The experience of the Reformed Christian begins with misery and sorrow over sin.

However, this is not the totality of his experience. By faith, he also knows deliverance in Jesus Christ. There is good news for the grief stricken sinner. God has provided for him a Mediator in His Son, Jesus Christ, who not only satisfies the justice of God for him (Lord's Days 5&6) but also provides him with all things necessary for his salvation (L.D. 11). This salvation the believer also comes to know. Through the preaching of the law he comes more and more to learn about his sinful nature, and thus becomes more earnest in seeking remission of sin (Q&A 115). This salvation he finds in Jesus Christ. Even though he is a sinner, He comes to know that he is righteous before God in Christ and an heir of eternal life (Q 59). He comes to know true conversion, in which the old man of sin dies and he becomes a new man in Jesus Christ (L.D. 33).

With this knowledge of deliverance comes a wonderful and glad assurance. The Catechism teaches that assurance of salvation is part of faith. In addition to being a certain knowledge, faith is "an assured confidence, which the Holy

Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits" (Q&A 21). That assurance is the normal experience of the Christian is also emphasized in the Canons of Dordt. "The elect in due time, though in various degrees and in different measures, attain the assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election" (I, A, 12). In connection with the preservation of the saints, the Canons teach: "Of this preservation of the elect to salvation, and of their perseverance in the faith, true believers for themselves may and ought to obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith, whereby they arrive at the certain persuasion that they ever will continue true and living members of the church, and that they experience forgiveness of sins, and will at last inherit eternal life" (V, A, 9).

Having come to know his deliverance from sin in Jesus Christ, the Reformed believer experiences gratitude. How great are the works of God to save him, a worthless sinner! The knowledge of his sin and deliverance produces gratitude. The believer expresses his gratitude in a life of good works and prayer. This life the Catechism explains in detail in the third section of its instruction.

This life of gratitude, however, is far from perfect. The Catechism points out that "even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live not only according to some, but all the commandments of God" (Q&A 114). And so the life of the Reformed Christian is one of constant struggle. Being converted to God, he has a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ. He delights to live according to the will of God in all good works (Q&A 90). Yet he constantly falls into sin, so that he also

grieves for sin. Consequently, the Reformed Christian constantly endeavors and prays to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that he may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till he arrives at the perfection proposed to him, in a life to come (Q&A 115).

This knowledge of sin, deliverance, and gratitude is the experience of the Reformed believer — because the Reformation has brought him back to the Bible.

The Roman Catholic Church had over the years taken the Bible away from the people. It had done this in two ways. First, the Roman Catholic Church denied the authority of Scripture as the sole rule of faith and life. To the Bible it added the decrees of the pope, the decisions of the church councils, and the traditions of the church fathers as being of equal value to (in fact greater than) the Bible. Besides, the Roman Catholic Church denied the office of believer, so that the Bible was considered unintelligible to the laity. The results were devastating. The preaching of the Word and the true knowledge of God receded into the background and were virtually lost. Neither did the church consider the knowledge of God important. What were important were the sacraments, which the church corrupted terribly. The church multiplied them and made them outward rituals which, if observed regularly, would hold back an angry, vengeful God. This did not produce godly sorrow for sin, assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ, and a life of gratitude to God. It produced fear, as the people stood before a vengeful God. Martin Luther is a case in point. He did all that the church required; yet he lived in dread fear of God.

A key emphasis of the Protes-

tant Reformation was the true knowledge of God in Scripture. It held up the Scriptures as the only revelation of God for salvation, and thus the sole rule of doctrine and life. It understood also that the Scriptures belong to the people and that the people not only can but must know the Word of God. To that end, the preaching was restored as the heart of the worship. And the sacraments,

which serve to declare the gospel in picture form, were given their proper place in the church. The Reformation also emphasized that the true knowledge of God that leads to salvation is not just an intellectual knowledge, but also a spiritual knowledge of the born-again heart that embraces the God and Christ of Scripture. This led the believer to experience the misery of his

sin, the joy of deliverance, and deep gratitude to God.

This true experience of faith was threatened by a mysticism that developed in the Roman Catholic Church before the Reformation. It was found among some of the radical elements of the Reformation and continues even to the present.


Mysticism is the error of seeking the true knowledge of God from within oneself, rather than from the Word of God in Scripture. Some mystics claimed special revelations of God through dreams and visions. Others spoke of an inner voice of God. Most emphasized experiences through which God speaks. These experiences were often ill defined and extremely vague in nature, difficult to articulate even by those who claimed to have these experiences. The more radical mystics spoke of a mystical union with God in which they came to a unique and special knowledge of God. Some even moved in the direction of pantheism, claiming that they eventually would become God. Others denied the reality of sin as well as the

need for atonement. This was because the inner voice that spoke to them did not speak of sin or of atonement. It spoke only of union with God.

Not all mysticism was of this radical form. Some mystics turned their attention to Scripture, yet relied also on the inner voice of God for the true knowledge of God. The effect was that in many ways the true revelation of God in Scripture was devalued and the inner voice of God through experience took its place.

We find this kind of thing in the charismatic movement of our own day. Lip service is given the Scriptures, but what really matters is the inner leading of the Spirit and the special gifts that the Spirit gives. Here God speaks and is to be known. This has resulted in a shallow view of sin, the error of perfectionism, and a virtual loss of the atonement of the cross. In the process the true experience of faith is lost.

There are also those who have become very mystical in the area of conversion. A conversion experience is elevated to the all-important element in the Christian's life. Again, this conversion experience is ill defined. But when one has it, he will know it, and he will live the rest of his life out of it. Because such a conversion is completely subjective and not directed by the Scriptures, doubts always arise as to the genuineness of the conversion. In fact, doubt becomes the norm, even the mark of piety. This leaves the Christian inescapably in the misery of sin.

How important it is to retain the Reformation principle of Scripture alone. God speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. Through the Word He works faith in His people and confirms it. By that Word He also guides the believer in his experience. And that experience is one of misery over sin, joyful deliverance in Jesus Christ, and deep gratitude, which leads to a life of service to God. 

This knowledge of sin, deliverance, and gratitude is the experience of the Reformed believer — because the Reformation has brought him back to the Bible.

The Reformation Gospel: Justified by a Living, Working Faith

The gospel that the great Reformation of the sixteenth century recovered and proclaimed included the gospel of *sanctification*. That is, the Reformation restored to the church the great doctrine and practice of holiness as a work of sovereign, divine grace worked in the hearts of God's elect people and brought to manifestation in their lives. No doubt you are familiar with the fact that God used this mighty movement in His church at that time to recover the biblical truth of *justification* by faith alone. This is often referred to as the *material principle* of the Reformation (the doctrine of "Scripture alone" being the formal principle). But we must understand that the Reformation was a return to the Scriptures also as far as the truth of sanctification is concerned. The Reformers to a man found and taught from God's Word that God not only saved His own by the gracious work of declaring them righteous in Christ (justification), but also by the gracious work of making them holy in Christ, able to walk in godliness and good works (sanctification).

What is striking about this fact is that the Reformers recovered the truth of sanctification *in connection with* the truth of justification. Strik-

ing this is, because the enemies of the Reformation (especially Rome) said this was impossible! They charged that the doctrine of justification by faith alone destroyed the principle and practice of holiness in the life of the believer. They said that if sinners are justified by faith alone apart from the merit of their good works, then every reason and incentive for good works on their part is destroyed. In fact, they contended that this doctrine of free justification only leads sinners to further and greater sinning. This contention is reflected in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 64, where it asks from the viewpoint of these enemies, "But doth not this doctrine (justification by faith alone and not by works) make men careless and profane?" The charge of antinomianism has always been leveled against the truth of justification by faith alone.

But the Reformers said, "Not so!" Over against this charge they posited the exact opposite – that justification is inseparably tied to God's work of sanctification. Distinct from it, yet never separated from it. Justification is in fact the foundation for sanctification, they taught. For if God frees the sinner from the guilt and punishment of sin, then He also frees him from the power and corruption of sin. If God changes the sinner's legal status before Him, He also changes his moral condition before Him. That must be, for God is not only just but also holy. One of God's

purposes in salvation is to make the sinner like Himself.

John Calvin at the very outset of the section of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* treating justification by faith alone tied it to sanctification. He wrote,

Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life (McNeill edition, v. 2, Bk. III, xi, 1).

Later in the same book he deals with the attacks of Rome against justification by faith alone. He begins with the charge that it does away with good works. In answer to this he writes,

Why then are we justified by faith? Because by faith we grasp Christ's righteousness, by which alone we are reconciled to God. Yet you could not grasp this without at the same time grasping sanctification also. For he "is given unto us for righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption" (I Cor.1:30). Therefore Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify. These benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond, so that those whom he illumines by his wisdom, he redeems; those whom he re-

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deems, he justifies; those whom he justifies, he sanctifies (III, xvi, 1).

In the same manner he treats the other two Romish objections, that gracious justification stifles good works and even incites the sinful to further sin. In each case the appeal is to God's further work of grace in the sinner making him holy, zealous of godliness and good works.

And Martin Luther was no different in making this inseparable tie between justification and sanctification. Early in his labors Luther was accused of promoting licentiousness and immorality by his teaching on justification by faith alone. M. Reu, in his introduction to Luther's "Treatise on Good Works," points out that "before 1517 the rumor had already spread that Luther intended to do away with good works" (*Works of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia ed., v. 1, p. 178). But in his treatise Luther states that this is emphatically not the case. He writes, "When I exalt faith and reject such works done without faith, they accuse me of forbidding good works, when in truth I am trying hard to teach real good works of faith" (p. 188). Contrasting the "good works" which the church of Rome promoted in his day (fastings, pilgrimages, etc.), he goes on to show that the root of all good works is faith, and that without faith all other deeds are "nothing and altogether dead" (p. 188). But to please God with a godly life "is possible only for a Christian who is enlightened and strengthened by grace" (p. 189). Luther, too, taught that good works were to be done by the believer because of God's work of sanctification in him. This is further evident from these words of Luther in his commentary on Galatians:

We conclude therefore with Paul, "that we are justified by faith only in Christ, without the law." Now after that a man is once justified, and possesseth Christ by faith, and knoweth that

he is his righteousness and life, doubtless he will not be idle, but as a good tree he will bring forth good fruits. For the believing man hath the Holy Ghost, and where the Holy Ghost dwelleth, he will not suffer a man to be idle, but stirreth him up to all exercises of piety and godliness, and of true religion, to the love of God, to the patient suffering of afflictions, to prayer, to thanksgiving, to the exercise of charity towards all men (quoted in *A Compend of Luther's Theology*, ed. by H.T.Kerr. Westminster, 1943, p. 104).

As is evident from these quotes, the Reformers believed that good works were the fruit of justification and sanctification because this was what Scripture taught. Appeal was made to the clear and powerful testimony of the apostle Paul in the book of Romans. The very epistle in which justification by faith alone is set forth also goes on to set forth God's work of holiness in elect sinners. In fact, in chapter 6:1 the apostle deals with the very objection the enemies have always brought against free justification: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" That is, because God forgives sinners freely, shall we live in more sin than we may experience more of God's grace of forgiveness? And the resounding answer is, "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (v. 2). The rest of the chapter demonstrates the grace of sanctification that makes the believer dead to sin and alive to God, such that he is no longer a servant of sin but a servant of righteousness (vv. 17, 18). And on the basis of these mercies of God the saints are exhorted to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God (12:1).

Another key passage for the Reformers was James 2. This is the passage where the Scriptures seem to contradict what they say about justification in Romans. For here in James the apostle states that

Abraham was justified by his works (v. 21). But Romans 4 emphatically states that Abraham was not justified by his works but solely by faith in Christ. No wonder the enemies of sovereign grace ran with these words of James and used them to bolster their position! And no wonder Luther was prepared to reject James as a "strawy epistle"! But through careful study the Reformers came to see that James was not speaking against Paul, but was in perfect harmony with his teaching. James' perspective and purpose were different, and thus he used the word "justified" in a different sense than Paul (cf. Calvin's *Institutes*, vol. 2, Bk. III, xvii, 11). James' point is to show that Abraham's faith was not a dead, fruitless faith, but a living, fruitful faith. He was "justified by his works" in the sense that his good work of obeying God with regard to Isaac proved that his faith was a true faith. Far from supplying ammunition for Rome's attack on justification by faith alone, this passage actually lent support to the Reformers' position that justification and sanctification always go together. It was a favorite expression of theirs that while God's people are justified by faith alone, that faith is never alone as far as good works are concerned. For true faith joins one to Christ, his living Savior, through whom the believer becomes a living plant, fruitful in all good works. The nature of saving faith was crucial to the battle for free justification on the one hand and for holiness and good works on the other hand. And the Reformers saw the proper connection so as to preserve both truths.

It is also important to mention at this point that this was not a mere doctrinal matter for the Reformers. A life of godliness was the passion of their hearts, the aim of their own lives, and the subject of all their preaching and teaching. On the basis of these twin truths the Reformers called the people of God to a holy life of good works. They brought to them the calls of Scripture to sancti-

fication of heart and life. They preached the law as God's guide for a life of thankful good works. They called for discipline of the ungodly in their churches. The truth of sanctification was also intensely practical for them.


This vital tie between justification and sanctification also came to be set forth in the confessions that the Reformation produced. In answer to the question whether justification by faith alone makes men "careless and profane," the Heidelberg Catechism (A.D. 1563) answers in accordance with Scripture, "By no means: for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness" (64). Following its article on justification, the Belgic Confession (A.D. 1561) sets forth the truth of sanctification and ties it to the justifying faith of the believer:

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man..., doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life.... Therefore it is so far from being true that this justifying faith

makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that, on the contrary, without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man....

The Second Helvetic Confession (A.D. 1566) has an entire section devoted to faith and good works (chap. XVI). It summarizes it in this way: "Therefore, although we teach with the apostle that a man is justified by grace through faith in Christ and not through any good works, yet we do not think good works are of little value and condemn them. We know that man was not created or regenerated through faith in order to be idle, but rather that without ceasing he should do those things which are good and useful." The Westminster Confession, though a bit later in history (A.D. 1647), nevertheless likewise stated the Reformation doctrine clearly on this matter. In Chapter XI, treating "Of Justification," it includes this point about the relation between justifi-

cation and good works: "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love."

Because they saw this true relation between justification and sanctification, the Reformers were not even afraid to teach that the believer's godly life and good works are rewarded by God. They did not let Rome take away the element of reward. Nor did they let her rob them of the idea that this reward is an incentive for the believer to do good works. They held before the saints all the promises of God concerning rewards for faithful service and godly living. Only they maintained over against Rome that this reward was ever of divine grace, not of human merit. Borrowing from Augustine, they taught that God graciously crowns His own gracious work. In this way too they preserved the truth of sovereign grace. 

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

The Third Use of the Law

Is the law of any use in the life of the child of God today? Now that Christ has come and fulfilled the law, has not the New Testament church entered into the age of grace without law? In other words, does not Christ through faith now reign in us so that there is no real and substantial need for the law? By the law, of course, is meant God's moral

law, the law of the Ten Commandments. The outward ceremony of the laws of Moses which ruled over the Old Testament church are no longer in effect today (Eph. 2:14, 15). These do not enter into the argument. But certainly the debate continues today: do those who are under grace need the moral law today, other than as simple instruction in the will of God?

To this question the Reformed church has always answered yes. There is a threefold use of the moral law for the church of Jesus Christ today. The first use of the law is

that of a mirror into which a person looks to know his sin and misery (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 2). When he studies God's law for himself, that person in whom God works by His grace comes to the knowledge that by the deeds of the law no man is justified. Man cannot keep the law of God perfectly. Even his best works are tainted with sin. Out of the law of God is the knowledge of sin. The law therefore forces God's people to look for salvation, not in the least sense in themselves, but always in the cross of Christ. Christ alone has

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accomplished in totality our righteousness before God.

The second use of the law is that it serves to "curb those who, unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice."¹ God uses it in society in general and in the church, too, to hold the unregenerate in check that they might not run in their sin. It exerts a restraining influence on society in order that men in their external acts might not give full course to the corruption within. The work of the law is written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness (Rom. 2:14, 15).

It is the third use of the law, however, that concerns us here. Ursinus, in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 115, states this use in this way: "Another use of the moral law is, that it may be a *rule of divine worship and of a Christian life*."² This use of the law deals with the believer's life of gratitude before God. The law in no way contributes to the salvation of God's people. They are justified before God solely on the grounds of the work of Christ on the cross. It is His righteousness that is imputed to them by God. Yet, the law remains for the believing child of God as a rule that governs him in his life of thankfulness to God for his salvation. The law instructs him in what the will of God is. It is a teacher and a guide to him in his life. But that law is also a rule. The law still governs him in his life as well.

This is implied already in the fact that these are *commands*. God does not simply give to His people a set of guidelines for their lives. The Commandments express the will of God. They set forth what He deems is necessary to live a life of holiness. They are, therefore, authoritative in the life of God's children. Christ tells His disciples in John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." He explains this a little later in John 15:10, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments,

and abide in his love." Neither does this mean that the child of God can decide for himself whether these commandments apply in a certain instance or not. The Bible is filled with specifics on how God will have His people carry out His commandments in their lives. The Ten Commandments are written in short, concise form, nevertheless, the Bible explains them for us in detail. The seventh command may say, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," but the Bible as a whole explains in detail what constitutes adultery. Before all of this the child of God *must* bow. Not because it will contribute in some way to his salvation, not because in the keeping of God's law there is merit, but simply because the child of God knows the law to be God's divine will for him in his life. And because he loves God and Jesus Christ it is his desire to do the will of God.

That the Decalogue is a rule for the life of the Christian today is evident also from the viewpoint of our citizenship in the kingdom of Christ. Christ has through His death and resurrection delivered us from the reign of sin and Satan. We are made to enjoy the freedom given to us as citizens of the kingdom of Christ (Eph. 2:19; Col. 1:13). But does this freedom mean that we need no law? On the contrary, freedom is protected by law. The citizens of Christ's kingdom are under the rule of God's law. We are not free to do our own will. This would result in spiritual anarchy. We would begin to do what is right in our own eyes, as during the time of the Judges in Israel. We recognize, however, that Christ is our Lord and King, and we bow humbly beneath His rule through obedience to the divine will of God expressed in His commandments.

Yet, we must not think that this rule of Christ over us is a forced rule. It is not as if we chafe under

these commandments. On the contrary, these commandments are written upon the fleshy tables of our hearts (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10). For that reason, we are willing subjects of Christ. We *want* to keep the laws of God. This is true of us because Christ has sanctified us. Through His work on the cross Christ destroyed the power of sin in our lives. Through His resurrection Christ has worked in us a new life. The Spirit of Christ cleanses our hearts from their filth and corruption. We have been set free from the dominion of sin and Satan. As a result of this saving work of Christ in us, we delight to do the will of God! We say of God's commandments, "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97). Or, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Ps. 119:103). The believer desires to walk in God's commandments because of the work of God's grace in Him. He walks in humble gratitude for the salvation God has wrought in Him and for Him in Christ. He knows from what he has been delivered. He knows the rebellion against God's commands that once consumed him. Now, he sees those commandments of God as something that God has given him for his own spiritual

good. And he runs in the way of God's commands.

But if the child of God has the power of grace working in him, does he really need the law as a rule in his life? Is it not sufficient that the law serve only as a guide and teacher and nothing else? Through the Spirit of Christ, God's people will naturally walk in the way of God's commandments without being told to do so. To say that the law is a rule actually denies the work of grace in our hearts, does it not? Ah! Those who argue this way do not know the powerful pull that the sinful flesh, the old man of sin,

The Law acts as a whip to the flesh, urging it on as men do a lazy sluggish ass. (Calvin)

still has on a child of God! How often, when confronted with the law of God, our sinful flesh seeks to find loopholes in that law. How often we wish to rationalize our sin so as to make it fit with the commandments of God. Paul describes it this way in Romans 7:22, 23: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

Concerning this use of the law, John Calvin in his *Institutes* comments:

Then, because we need not doctrine merely, but exhortation also, the servant of God will derive this further advantage of the Law: by frequently meditating upon it, he will be excited to obedience, and confirmed in it, and so drawn away from the slippery paths of sin. In this way must the saints press onward, since, however great the alacrity with which, under the Spirit, they hasten toward righteousness, they are retarded by the sluggishness of the flesh, and make less progress than they ought. The Law acts as a whip to the flesh, urging it on as men do a lazy sluggish ass. Even in the case of a spiritual man, inasmuch as he is still burdened with the weight of the flesh, the Law is a constant stimulus, pricking him forward when he would indulge in sloth.³

It is for this reason that the Scriptures are filled with exhortations too. Though we have within us the Spirit of our risen Lord, though we have a new life of grace flowing through our spiritual veins, nevertheless we need the exhortations of the Scriptures always and ever guiding us into the way of God's commandments. And, though our sinful natures rebel against these, we are governed by the Spirit of Christ. As Christ dwells in us we take delight in the law of God, and God uses exhortation to work in us that life of sanctification.

There is, however, one other aspect to this third use of the law of God which needs careful attention. Luther points that out in his "Treatise on Christian Liberty." He writes, "... for the commands show us what we ought to do, but do not give us the power to do them."⁴ It must well be remembered that the mere outward keeping of the law does not give us life. We can go through all the outward motions of the law but fail in our obedience and gratitude to God. We can look exemplary on the outside and yet not be characterized by true thankfulness on the inside. It is by grace alone that we are able to keep the rule of God's commandments in a proper way. Only when we are actuated by the Spirit of Christ are we truly going to walk in gratitude before God. All else is outward show.

Walking in God's commandments, therefore, means walking in faith. If we do not know and trust God, then outward obedience means nothing. This also must be the focus of the preaching of God's law: it must be directed toward faith. When a minister of the gospel preaches exhortation, as he must do, he needs to lead his flock to the doctrine(s) out of which such an exhortation proceeds. Surely, what you and I believe concerning God, Christ, man, and his salvation will influence the way we live as God's people. God's people must be well instructed in the doctrines of Scripture. They must be convicted of those great truths concerning God's sovereignty in creation, in providence, and in salvation. They must know God as the faithful God who keeps covenant with His people for Christ's sake. They must know the sinfulness, the total depravity of man apart from salvation. They must then know Christ as the only ground and foundation of salvation. But then, having learned these, God's people must also hear how all of these great truths bear upon the way they live in this world, and how these truths govern marriage, fam-

ily, recreation, one's world and life view, etc.

Certainly, all of life is rooted in what we believe! Only when I bow before the sovereign authority of God, for example, will I be able to keep the command to honor father and mother. Only when I know and experience the inseparable bond that unites Christ and His bride, the church, in covenant fellowship will I be able to honor the institution of marriage and thus obey the seventh commandment. Always both the doctrine and its application must be understood in order that God's people might know the importance of keeping the law as a rule of gratitude.

Before us is stretched out even to the distant horizon the highway of God's law as a ribbon of the narrow way that leads to life. Along the way the devil points out to us appealing exits that lead to destruction. The world sets up her sign posts of her lusts and pleasures. Our own flesh rebels against the narrow confines of the law, seeking the license of sin. Often we go astray. Like foolish sheep we wander off, each in his own way. Yet by the power of His law God draws us back in sorrow and repentance. That law always remains the lamp before our feet. In the darkness of our present night it shines as a light upon our pathway. It is our sure Guide to eternity!

It is the perfect rule for a thankful life in obedience and prayer!⁵

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter VII, Paragraph 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 307.

2. Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1852), 614.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book II, Chapter VII, Paragraph 12, 309.


4. Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. II, "Treatise on Christian Liberty" (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982), 317.

5. Cornelius Hanko, "The Law of Liberty," *Standard Bearer*, vol. 61:388.

So important is this third use of the law in the life of God's children that to neglect it will result in the worldly mindedness of the church. To neglect it will undermine the discipline of the church.

To neglect it will result in God's cutting His people off in their generations. For that reason, the church must preach those commands strictly (Heidelberg Cat-

echism, Question and Answer 115), and God's people must meditate on that law day and night (Ps. 1:1, 2).

Obedience to God's commands and prayer: the sure way of gratitude! 

Rev. Kenneth Koole

Celibacy and the Clergy

O for godly pastors. It was the apostle Peter, no less (are you listening, Rome?), who wrote,

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, ... not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being *examples to the flock* (1 Pet. 5:2, 3).

How the church needs godly pastors who can function as examples to the flock, especially to its youth (John 21:15), and in particular in the area of sexual purity and faithfulness in marriage.

Today, headlines are awash with scandal that involves leaders of the church — gross, sexual scandal. In particular it is Rome that finds itself in the spotlight (or should we say 'the headlights') once again, due to the fornicating, defiled behavior of her priests. This is not to say that Protestant clergy are free from such scandal. Not only is fornication not unknown amongst such, but consider the prevalence of divorce and remarriage even amongst the clergy. Almost as common as with the parishioners. An example indeed. But of what kind!

Scandalous though the recent revelations of Rome's priests' vile sexual abuses have proved to be, both in the prevalence of the cases, and in the systematic cover-up practiced for years, what Rome has permitted her priests to engage in is nothing new. This widespread sexual immorality among Rome's clergy, so well known and documented in the Middle Ages, was one of the factors that contributed greatly to the Reformation and the call to a wholesale reform. Monasteries were notorious for their sexual immorality. Parents often feared sending their sons and daughters unattended to make confession to many a priest alone. The question arose amongst the pious, "How can such pastors teach us holiness, when they are the worst of the lot! Lord, deliver us from Rome."

What the present-day scandal has brought under close scrutiny, of course, is Rome's doctrine of celibacy. For the last millennium Rome has imposed the vow of celibacy, namely, a vow to abstain from marriage, on its priests (as well as on its monks and nuns). For Rome's priests, celibacy is not an option, but a matter of Canon Law. This is part of what Rome considers to be their special vocation before God.

However, as the late Loraine Boettner astutely points out in his book *Roman Catholicism*,

[Celibacy] is not to be confused with the vow of chastity, which is also taken by the members of these groups, and which means abstention from sexual relations.

According to Canon Law the vow of celibacy is broken if the priest marries, but not if he engages in sexual relations. Pardon for sexual relations can be had easily (sic!) at any time by confession to any fellow-priest. But absolution for any priest who marries can be obtained only from the pope, with accompanying severe penalties. And to obtain such pardon it is required that he forsake his wife (p. 298).

This is the face of Rome. Rome is more troubled and 'scandalized' by clergy who are married than by those who *only* have to confess to sexual immoralities again and again.

The Reformers were well aware of the realities of human nature, especially what in its fallen condition it is susceptible to, and to what enormities imposed-celibacy would and does lead. Calvin in his *Institutes*, in the section dealing with church discipline, and then with Rome's lamentable laxity when it came to her licentious clergy, writes,

In one thing they (i.e., the papists) are more than rigid and inexorable — in not permitting priests to marry. It is scarcely necessary to remark with what impunity

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whoredom prevails among them, and how, trusting to their vile celibacy, they have become callous to all kinds of iniquity. The prohibition, however, clearly shows how pestiferous all traditions are, since this one has not only deprived the Church of fit and honest pastors, but has introduced a fearful sink [swamp] of iniquity, and plunged many souls into the gulf of despair. Certainly, when marriage was interdicted [forbidden with threats] to priests, it was done with impious tyranny, not only contrary to the word of God, but contrary to all justice (*Institutes*, IV, xii, 23).

What Calvin charges Rome with here as a consequence of her unbiblical law of celibacy is not mean-spirited and unfounded. Former priests, converted out of Catholicism, verify these very things. L. H. Lehmann wrote,

Had it (i.e., celibacy) not been imposed to serve the ends of the papal power, but left to free, voluntary choice, priestly celibacy might have been a real service. Instead it has been made the cause of scandal and shame to the Christian church. Forced as it is by human and not divine law, it has perverted any good that otherwise might come from it....

But the real evil consequent upon forced clerical celibacy is its enervating effect upon the bodily and mental faculties. It saps all the vigor of manhood from those who must employ the continual force of mind and will against the natural bodily urge. Its victims have to confess that, far from freeing them from the sexual urge, it actually breeds a very ferment of impurity in the mind....

It is almost impossible for the laity to understand to what extent Roman Catholic priests fail to live up to the celibate state imposed upon them... (*The Soul of a Priest*, pp. 120-4).

Well, maybe it once was, but no more. Emmett McLoughlin, another converted priest, having described the loneliness that imposed

celibacy inflicts upon the priest, adds this condemning testimony:

No priest who has heard priests' confessions and has any respect for the truth will deny that sexual affairs are extremely common among the clergy. The principle concern of the hierarchy seems to be that priests should keep such cases quiet (sic!) and refrain from marriage....

The number who rebel against the frustration and unnaturalness of this form of life is far greater than anyone realizes (*People's Padre*, pp. 93, 94).

God's wisdom spoken in the very beginning, and then repeated more than once in the New Testament, rings so true. "It is not good that man should be alone...."

It is worth noting in this connection that although Rome argues that celibacy for the clergy is in accordance with the ancient fathers, the fact is that throughout the entire first millennium of New Testament church history the clergy (which is to say, the priests) were for the most part free to marry and raise families. It was not until A.D. 1079, under the heavy hand of Pope Gregory VII, that the celibacy of the priesthood was made a matter of church law, and was imposed with rigor.

Rome claimed celibacy was necessary in the interests of true holiness, thereby enabling a man to be wholly committed to one bride and one bride only, namely, Christ's church. In fact, coming as no surprise, Rome was motivated by something far less ideal, namely, by the twin devils of power and greed (i.e., in the interests of retaining property that would otherwise have gone to the priest's family). Writes Boettner,

It is easy to see why the pope and the hierarchy are so insistent on enforcing the law of celibacy against the priests, monks, and nuns.... In the first place it gives the pope and his prelates a higher

degree of control over the priests and nuns, so that, not having wives or husbands or families which must be consulted in making their plans, they are more responsive to the orders of the hierarchy and can be transferred more readily from one parish to another or to different points around the world. And secondly, property owned by the priest, which in some cases is quite considerable, and which if they were married would go to their families, either automatically falls to the church or likely will be left to it by choice in much larger proportion. Thus the pope has secured for himself an army readily available to carry out his commands (*Roman Catholicism*, p. 308).

In addition, the Reformers were well aware that Rome's insistence on celibacy for its clergy sprang from an ancient heresy from which Rome never properly freed itself, the heresy of Manichaeism, which posits a dualism in the whole of life, an unbridgeable gulf between things spiritual and things material and physical. The things spiritual are inherently holy, but the things physical are "carnal," and hence of a lower order and inherently corrupt. It is under this latter category that marriage, and sex, fall.

Rome, to be sure, has categorized marriage as a sacrament. Conveniently so! Being a sacrament means that marriage in all its facets and with all its intimate secrets and details is under the strict control of Rome's clergy. But it is virginity that is to be exalted and venerated. Holiness of the genuine and highest order was to be found only in celibacy and, hence, the denial of one's sexual desires in every regard. What does this imply about marriage? It is reserved for those of a lower order of spirituality, for those who cannot master and contain their "burnings," which is to say, their lust. Sacrament or not, in Rome's scheme of things marriage is but a necessary evil permitted those who cannot "contain."

With this two-tiered system of holiness the Reformers would have nothing to do. Essentially their answer to Rome was the same as that of the Lord Jesus to Simon Peter on the rooftop in Joppa in the vision of the unclean animals, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common (i.e., vulgar! — KK)" (Acts 10:15).

The Reformers' perspective is captured nicely by Calvin in his Institutes in the same section mentioned above (Book IV, xii), where he writes,

They (i.e., the papists) object that there ought to be some distinguishing mark between the clergy and the people; as if the Lord had not provided the ornaments (i.e., pastoral virtues) in which priests ought to excel.... Paul enumerates marriage among the qualities of a bishop; [whereas] those men declare that, in the ecclesiastical order, marriage is an intolerable vice; and, indeed, not content with this general vituperation, they term it, in their canons, the uncleanness and pollution of the flesh.... Let every one consider with himself from what forge these things have come. Christ deigns so to honor marriage as to make it an image of his sacred union with the Church. What greater eulogy could be pronounced on the dignity of marriage? How, then, dare they the effrontery to give the name of unclean and polluted to that which furnishes a bright representation of the spiritual grace of Christ? (sect. 24).

Over against Rome's flimsy assertion that Simon Peter and the apostles never married, seeing it is evident from scripture that Paul did not, the Reformers could marshal a host of scriptures. For instance Luke 4:38 (which speaks of Christ healing Simon's mother-in-law), and I Corinthians 9:5 (where Paul speaks of having the freedom to lead about "...a wife, as well as other apostles [do]").

Of special weight in this whole

matter is Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." Commenting on this passage Calvin writes:


By saying 'among all,' I understand him to mean that there is no order of men prohibited from marriage.... It was necessary to express this distinctly to meet the superstition, the seeds of which Satan was already [back then] secretly sowing, that marriage is a profane thing, or certainly far removed from Christian perfection. Those false spirits, of which Paul prophesied, soon made their appearance and prohibited marriage. Therefore in case anyone foolishly imagines that marriage is allowed to the commonalty of men *but that those who are prominent in the Church ought to abstain from it* (emphasis mine — kk), the apostle removes every exception, and ... he asserts that it is worthy of honour. It is more than remarkable that those who introduced into the world the prohibition of marriage were not frightened by this express declaration except that it was necessary to give rein to Satan in order to punish the ingratitude of those who refused to hear God (Torrance edition, p. 206).

It would not be improper on this subject to let the good Doctor, Martin Luther, have the last word, as was his custom in most matters anyway. In his treatise *An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, commenting on I Timothy 3 and Titus 1, both of which list the qualifications of bishops (those who are to rule the church), requiring that they should be "...blameless, the husband of one wife," Luther writes:

So then we clearly learn from the Apostle that it should be the custom for every town to choose out of the congregation a learned and pious citizen, entrust to him the office of the ministry, and support him at the expense of the community, leaving him free

choice to marry or not. He should have with him several priests or deacons, who might also be married or not, as they chose, to help him rule the people of the community by means of preaching and the sacraments, as is still the practice in the Greek Church.... [The] Roman See interfered, out of sheer wantonness, and made a universal commandment forbidding priests to marry. This was done at the bidding of the devil, as St. Paul declares in I Timothy 4, "There shall come teachers who bring doctrines of devils, and forbid to marry." From this has arisen so much untold misery, occasion was given for the withdrawal of the Greek Church, and division, sin, shame, and scandal were increased without end — things which are the result of everything the devil does.

...I would speak only of the ministry which God has instituted and which is to rule a congregation by means of preaching and sacraments, whose incumbents are to live and be at home among the people. Such ministers should be granted liberty by a Christian council to marry, for the avoidance of temptation and sin. For since God has not bound them, no one else ought to bind them or can bind them, even though he were an angel from heaven, still less if he be only a pope: and everything that the canon law decrees to the contrary is mere fable and idle talk (II, 14, pp. 66, 67).

Notice, ministers marry not only to avoid temptation and sin, but also that they might "live and be at home among the people." To be sure, Paul never married. But neither did he settle down in a congregation. How important for an exemplary home, a well ordered home, a home wherein is a warm welcome to the whole congregation, is a pastor's wife, and a happily married man. To rephrase the Scottish poet, "She would frae mony a blunder free us." Just ask Luther what his Kate meant to him and his work. Good friend, how much time do you have! 

Calvin on Eldership and Discipline (1)

Introduction

It is one of the great sorrows of our age that apostasy has seized the churches of our land as well as those of foreign countries. We need not catalogue the lengthy list of departures from the rule of the sacred Scriptures. They are present in doctrine and confession, liturgy and worship, and the rule and discipline of the church. The sad fact is that such departures characterize those very churches that claim the sixteenth century Reformation in general and the Calvin Reformation in particular as the spiritual origin of their church or denomination.

It is not an exaggeration to say (Calvin himself would agree) that the apostasy and unfaithfulness characterizing so much of today's church world is to be traced to a loss of the office of elder. Note, I did not say minister or pastor; I said elder. Reformed church government, which follows the teachings of Calvin, is commonly called "presbyterian church government" to emphasize that at the heart and soul of such government is the office of elder. Reformed church government and a Reformed church cannot exist without the office of elder.

It is the decline of the office that is the cause of the decline of the churches.

In many post-Reformation churches the office has simply disappeared altogether. In other churches, a certain "Board of Trustees" has taken the place of the of-

fice. In yet other churches, where some men are still called "elders," the office is non-functioning in any true sense of the word, for ministers rule as little dictators in the congregation, and elders have meekly and spinelessly abrogated their responsibilities to the point where they become mere "yes-men" to the pronouncements of a pastor-tyrant who dictates policy.

Calvin would tell such churches that they have effectively written the recipe for the destruction of their congregations.

Calvin's View of Church Government in General

Calvin is sometimes charged by detractors with creating in Geneva a system of church government which would enable him to rule with iron-fisted control and total authority in the church and state. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is a slander.

Calvin points out and proves beyond doubt that the system of church government which he instituted in Geneva was the same system as was present in the early church, but which the papacy ruthlessly destroyed.¹ And, more importantly, Calvin is at great pains to prove that the teachings of the early church, as well as his own teachings, are biblical. Every rule he proposed in the church of Geneva was grounded on Scripture.

It was important that this be done. Luther had not done much in the line of church government, and what he had done was not helpful. Luther had pretty much given the rule of the church to the civil magistrate and was of the opinion that only the magistrate, along with the preaching of the Word, could control the dissolute

morals of the people. This proved unsuccessful, and Luther even considered from time to time leaving Wittenburg because he was so disillusioned with the moral degeneracy of the populace.

Zwingli, the reformer of Zurich, had seen that elders were important and had even created the office; but he never saw the total importance of the office and never gave to the office the authority which Scripture gives it. This fell to Calvin. Church polity was a necessary part of the organization of the church. It can be compared to a person, with the church itself being analogous to the body, and sound doctrine and piety analogous to the soul.

Many charge Calvin with being a dictator in the city of Geneva and claim that he exercised absolute control over the lives of the citizens. This also is a slander of Calvin's good name. Three points have to be made in refutation of this charge.

The first is that Calvin himself insisted on the separation of the civil rule of the magistrates and the spiritual rule of the elders. One can read his position in his *Institutes*,² where he sharply distinguishes between the rule of magistrates and the rule of elders.

Secondly, Calvin's insistence on a separation of the rule of church and state is proved by the fact that there are important differences between the "Ordinances" adopted by the civil government in

1. Calvin's own discussion of church government is found in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV.

2. Especially in IV, xi. Paragraph 3 of this chapter has the title: "Civil and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction."

Geneva and Calvin's position outlined in his *Institutes*. I cannot go into them in this article, nor trace the history of these differences. But the simple fact of the matter is that, when the civil government adopted its "Ordinances" for the city of Geneva, while it sought Calvin's advice, Calvin's advice was not decisive. The final rules differed in important respects from Calvin's own position.³

Thirdly, Calvin's whole struggle in Geneva, for most of his life there, was involved in a struggle with the civil magistracy over the rule of the church. For his views he was banished once, and it was only through the most bitter struggle that Calvin finally succeeded in getting the magistracy out of the affairs and government of the church and confining the magistracy to its own proper sphere.⁴

Specific Principles

A few general principles which Calvin laid down serve as the foundation for his view of the eldership and discipline. They are so much a part of our own thinking and so firmly imbedded in our polity that we can appreciate only with difficulty the radical change they brought about in the days of the Reformation.

The first was the absolute rule of Christ over the church. Christ, Calvin insisted, is the Head of the church — not the pope or any earthly prelate. This headship of Christ means that Christ exercises complete authority in the church to accomplish the eternal purpose of God in the church's salvation.

Secondly, each congregation is autonomous. That is, each congregation is a complete manifestation of the body of Christ; each congregation has its own rule; and each congregation is directly under the authority of Christ through the offices in the church.⁵ This autonomy of the congregation is quite contrary to Romish hierarchy, which finds the sole autonomy of the church in the pope.

Thirdly, because Christ rules in

the congregation, He rules through officebearers whom He calls and appoints, who in their work are answerable to Christ alone, and by whose work Christ Himself is present in the church. This, too, contradicted the radical, proud, and damning claims of the Romish papacy.

Fourthly, the office of elder is the office of rule in the church, and thus reflects in the highest way the rule of Christ. It is the decisive office. By it the church stands or falls. In its hands, under Christ, is the welfare of the church. He writes:

Christ alone, ought to rule and reign in the Church, and to have all pre-eminence in it, and this government ought to be exercised and administered solely by his word; yet as he dwells not among us by a visible presence, so as to make an audible declaration of his will to us, he uses for this purpose the ministry of men whom he employs as his delegates, not to transfer his right and honor to them, but only that he may himself do his work by their lips; just as an artificer makes use of an instrument in the performance of his work.⁶

Calvin did not mean to say that the office of the ministry is thereby given lesser importance. Far from it. Calvin understood correctly that ministers of the Word are also elders. He did this on the basis of I Timothy 5:17. Nevertheless, the two are to be distinguished according to task. This distinction is reflected in the two names given them: teaching elders and ruling elders.

In keeping with this distinction, Calvin established two bodies of men in the church of Geneva. The one was called the "Venerable Company of Pastors" and was limited to the pastors in the city, who met once a week to discuss matters of mutual concern. The other was the Eldership (which went by different names) and was composed of the five pastors and twelve seniors or, as they were sometimes called, presbyters or


lay-elders. The Scriptures appealed to in support of this office were: Titus 1:7; I Timothy 3:1; Philippians 1:1; Romans 12:7, 8; I Corinthians 12:28. Calvin's views were solidly biblical.

The Specific Calling of Ruling Elders

Calvin was of the opinion that the Word of God had not only to be brought to the congregation through the official ministry of the Word in worship services, but also from house to house. This latter was the work of elders.

By bringing from house to house the Word which had been delivered on the Lord's Day, the elders were in a position to apply the Word preached to the specific circumstances, problems, sorrows, and sins of the members of the congregation.

It is obvious, therefore, that the work of elders was far broader than "discipline calls." Their work included bringing God's Word to bear on life's problems, showing God's people how the Word directed them in the life of biblical piety they were called to walk, teaching them how sound doctrine was determinative for their life of piety, and enabling them to apply God's Word to the circumstances in which God placed them.

Such a calling is certainly in keeping with sacred Scripture and ought still to be the guiding light for the work of elders today in the church. ... to be continued 

3. T. M. Lindsay, *The Reformation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1882).

4. See also Philip Hughes, ed. *Register of the Venerable Company of Pastors in Geneva*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966. I refer especially to the Introduction.

5. Calvin did not mean to deny that congregations have the calling to establish unity in broader assemblies. He sought earnestly the union of all the churches of the Reformation, and was willing to go to great lengths to accomplish this. But that is another story.

6. *Institutes*, IV, iii, 1.

The Christian Life As Calling

Among the many monumental tasks confronting the church of the Reformation was that of restoring godly living to the members of the church. The people had learned immorality in the Romish church from the clergy. The Semi-Pelagian error of works righteousness taught that man's works could merit with God. That naturally led to a stress on extraordinary, "holy" works, to the neglect of true godliness.

Gradually a whole system grew up with church sanction. It was said that although all God's people must keep the commandments of God, there were other admonitions, or counsels, of Scripture that were only for some, for those believers to whom special gifts were given. Taking vows of celibacy or of poverty, disbursing all one's possessions and money to the poor, entering a monastery – all such works earned special merit.

Over time, the list of church-endorsed works grew. Pilgrimages to holy places, collecting relics, or fighting in a crusade earned high praise from the church, and the promise of meriting righteousness, if not eternal life itself.

In such a religious climate, the daily life of obedience enjoined by God's Word upon every believer was not only neglected, it was often despised. Mothers forsook the responsibilities, hardships, and cares of their families to set off on a pilgrimage to Rome – with the church's approval. Fathers abandoned their families to a life of poverty in favor of the excitement of

marching in a crusade – and the church blessed them. Monks gave themselves to indolence and immorality, and yet the church claimed that the monks were in a state of perfection, that is, in a life that was more likely to attain perfection than the life of the common believer.

These evil practices and wrong attitudes confronted the church of the Reformation. The Reformation was a return to Scripture also in the matter of the Christian life. Most if not all of these abominable practices sanctioned by Rome would be swept away with a correct (biblical) understanding of the believer's calling.

Both Luther and Calvin taught emphatically that the proper Christian life requires faithfulness to the specific calling that God gives each believer. Although it would take many years of patient instruction and Christian discipline to bring practice into line with Scripture, the teaching on calling would effect a monumental change in the attitudes and lives of believers. The idea of calling remains a significant element in the thinking of Reformed Christians even to the present day.

The Reformers insisted that God gives to each believer a unique calling that is distinct but not separate from the call of God unto salvation. God, by His Spirit and Word, sovereignly calls His people. He gives them life and faith, and He fills them with His love. God demands that His people live out of that salvation. Calvin repeatedly refers to the Christian life as one's *duty*. The obedience of man does not merit with God, since, on the one hand, perfect obedience is the duty of the Christian, and, on the other, God works salvation in the man who then only lives out of God's work.

God also calls each believer to a particular *station*, even (Luther) an *office*. Writes Calvin,

[L]est all things should be thrown into confusion by our folly and rashness, [God] has assigned distinct duties to each in the different modes of life. And that no one may presume to overstep his proper limits, he has distinguished the different modes of life by the name of *callings*. Every man's mode of life, therefore, is a kind of station assigned him by the Lord (*Institutes*, III, x, 6).¹

Both Reformers took pains to emphasize that God is pleased with faithfulness in a man's calling. Luther writes,

Therefore if we want to practice godliness, let us not do so by means of unfruitful works but by means of fruitful ones. That is, let us first receive the Word of God, and let us believe in Christ. Then let us walk in our simple calling: Let the husband support his family; let the maid obey her mistress; let the mother wash, dress, and teach the children.

Because these works are done in one's calling and in faith in the Son of God, they shine in the sight of God, of the angels, and of the entire church of God. For they are clothed in the heavenly light, the Word of God, even though in the sight of the pope's church they are despised for being ordinary and common (Lecture on Gen. 13:16, *Works*, II).²

1. All quotations from Calvin's *Institutes* are from the Beveridge translation.

2. All quotations from Luther, unless otherwise noted, are from *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House), J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.

Calvin and Luther alike recognized that the call of the minister of the gospel is unique in that it has an internal aspect (by the Spirit) and an external aspect (through the church). Yet, it is not essentially different, as is evident from Luther's comments below.

Thus the Lord wanted me to be a preacher, that is, He wanted me to bear the envy and the hatred of the world for the sake of the Word. To others He assigns manual labor. When I look at them, they seem to me to be happy; for labor gives them pleasure, they live without worry and without any rather burdensome annoyance, and they would dislike a life of inactivity. Moreover, by labor bodies are made strong and health is preserved. While another person, like a boy seven years old, does his work as though he were at play, I am severely plagued by perils and trials. Yet that workman is saved just as I am.

What now? Shall I become impatient or refuse to follow my calling? No. I shall rather reflect that God has manifold graces or forms of activity and allots them in accordance with His will. But it is our duty to obey God when He calls (Rom. 12:6; 1 Pet. 4:10) (Lectures on Gen. 17:10, *Works*, III).

The Reformers railed against Rome's emphasis that mighty and notable works are preferable to faithfulness in one's God-given calling. Writes Luther,

How is it possible that you are not called? Are you not either a husband or a wife, a son or a daughter, a servant or a maid? Take, for example, the most humble of estates. As a married man, do you not have enough to do in governing your wife, child, household, and property so that everything is done justly and in obedience to God's will? In fact, if you had four heads and ten hands, it would not be enough to meet all your responsibilities without having time to run off to pilgrimages or to perform other "holy" works (Quoted in *Luther on the Christian Home* by William H. Lazereth, p. 137).

Calvin agrees. Commenting on I

Timothy 2:15, he writes,

[W]hatever hypocrites or wise men of the world may think of it, when a woman, considering to what she has been called, submits to the condition which God has assigned to her, and does not refuse to endure the pains, or rather the fearful anguish, of parturition, or anxiety about her offspring, or anything else that belongs to her duty, God values this obedience more highly than if, in some other manner, she made a great display of heroic virtues, while she refused to obey the calling of God.

Especially pointed is Luther's criticism of the monks. Writes Luther,

[L]et a monk demonstrate the office and calling by virtue of which he may wear the cowl, call upon the Blessed Virgin, pray the rosary, and do similar things; and we shall praise his life. But because there is no such calling, because no word gives the direction, and because the office is lacking, both the life and all the works of all monks deserve to be condemned (Lectures on Gen. 8:18, *Works*, II).

Luther is at pains to warn the youth in this connection:

I have considered it necessary to add these things in order that young people may learn to shun self-chosen works and may devote themselves with the utmost zeal to those tasks which their calling brings with it and demands. For these works have been commanded by God, and for this reason they are truly divine works, whether you are a pupil and learn letters, a maid and sweep the house with brooms, or a servant and tend horses or do other things. A monk, of course, leads a more burdensome life and wears more sordid garments; but that he serves God—this he will nevermore be able to say truthfully, as can those who serve the household, the state, or the church (Lectures on Gen 18:16, *Works*, III).

Calvin insists that the monks of his day were very different from the monks of Augustine's age.

Even so, he is not altogether approving of those in the ancient church who resorted to the monastery. "It was a fine thing to cast away their substance, and free themselves from all worldly cares; but God sets more value on the pious management of a household, when the head of it, discarding all avarice, ambition, and other lusts of the flesh, makes it his purpose to serve God in some particular vocation" (*Inst.*, IV, xiii, 16).

All have a calling from God, from the little child to the minister of the gospel to the housewife. Luther writes,

Age, sex, and callings differ greatly in this life. One teaches the church; another serves the government; still another instructs the youth; a mother busies herself with the care and upbringing of children; and the husband is concerned with providing an honest living. In the opinion of the world these are not very grand and impressive works. But ... these are not bare works; they are adorned with the Word of God, since they have been enjoined on you by God (Lectures on Gen. 13:16, *Works*, II).

The Reformers set forth clearly what is required of each in his particular calling. First, each is to look to his own calling (Calvin's *Inst.*, III, x, 6). Both men warned against a sinful ambition that would result in a failure to accomplish one's own calling properly. They also warned against a man casually changing his vocation.

Secondly, for both Reformers, faithfulness in one's calling demands hard work. Accordingly, in a sermon on II Sam. 11:5-13, Calvin warns:

This should teach us to think of our calling, and the charge that God has committed to us.... [H]e who is called into the judicial system must not want to remain at his ease, as if to say: "I only want to do as much as this person," and thereby neglect his duty. Instead, he ought to think: "God has given me the honour of employing me in such a capacity; I must carry it out." It is just as true of a prince in his high position as

of all others. And when a minister of the Word of God brings up this problem and that problem as a shield to excuse his indolence, will it do him any good? Hence, Uriah teaches all of us, in this passage, to consider to what task God calls us, so that we may faithfully carry out our duty in our particular situation.

Thirdly, they taught that the believer could know his calling partly by examining his abilities. In the end, God would make it plain to each what is his calling. Luther warned the people not to imagine that they must imitate some saint or other. Rather each "Christian should wait and see what is specifically commanded of him and then remain true to his calling." Christ admonishes, "Wait until I command your responsibilities; you will find out soon enough what they are. I desire many servants and they will not all have the same work to do" (Quoted in *Luther on the Christian Home*, p. 136).

Finally, both Luther and Calvin emphasize the blessedness of faithfully attending to one's calling. Calvin points out that this will re-

sult in good order both in the church and in society. In addition, the value of attending to the God-given calling is that

in all our cares, toils, annoyances, and other burdens, it will be no small alleviation to know that all these are under the superintendence of God. The magistrate will more willingly perform his office, and the father of a family confine himself to his proper sphere. Every one in his particular mode of life will, without repining, suffer its inconveniences, cares, uneasiness, and anxiety, persuaded that God has laid on the burden. This, too, will afford admirable consolation, that in following your proper calling, no work will be so mean and sordid as not to have a splendor and value in the eye of God (*Inst.*, III, x, 6).

That is a common theme in Luther as well. "Let those," he instructs, "who want to live in a godly manner fear God and trust in Him, and then let them attend to their calling" (Lectures on Gen. 44:18, *Works*, VII). Elsewhere he adds,

Our life ... must be arranged, so

that we are found in the rank and station which is pleasing to God according to His Word. Above all, you should believe in the Word, confess it, and be prepared to suffer and die for the Word. Later, whether you are a magistrate or the head of a household, you should serve your calling in your place. Such a life pleases God and is honored by God with many great rewards and successes (Lectures on Gen. 29:4, *Works*, V).

In his inimitable, earthy style, Luther drives the point home. The lowliest task imaginable that belongs to a man's calling, when done in faith, is pleasing to God.

For when a man washes the swaddling-clothes or does some other menial task for the benefit of a baby, someone will undoubtedly make fun of him and take him for a fool or at least henpecked. But if he does these tasks out of faith, who really has the last laugh? Certainly God also laughs with all the angels and creatures, not because of the swaddling-clothes but because of faith ("On Married Life," quoted in *Christian Home*, p. 219).



News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Denomination Activities

The Convocation of the Theological School of our churches took place on Wednesday, September 4, in the auditorium of the Grandville, MI PRC. Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on the theme, "The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary Debate — and the Protestant Reformed Seminary." We hope that plans are in the works to include the text of that timely and interesting speech in the pages of this magazine at some future date. I believe the majority of those there that night would agree that the topic needs the greater exposure that this

magazine could provide. The Hope Herald's also provided special music by joyfully singing two numbers: "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven," and "The Lord Is My Light." This fall there are seven students in our seminary. In their first year: Mr. Andrew Lanning and Mr. Clayton Spronk; in their second year: Mr. Bruce Koole, Mr. Dennis Lee, and Mr. John Marcus; and in their fourth year (there are no third year students): Mr. Paul Goh and Mr. William Langerak.

Rev. S. Key, pastor of the Hull, IA PRC, was asked to participate in a public forum with Dr. Richard Mouw and Dr. John Kok at Dordt College on September 9. Dr. Richard Mouw, former professor at Calvin College, current president of Fuller Theological Seminary, and au-

thor of *He Shines in All That's Fair* currently being reviewed in the editorials of this magazine, presented his views in favor of common grace. Rev. Key was given the opportunity to defend the biblical teaching of sovereign particular grace.

The Hope Herald's presented their annual late summer concert at the Grandville, MI PRC on Sunday evening, September 8.

Evangelism Activities

Again this fall the Evangelism Committee of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI, in conjunction with students from our west Michigan churches attending Grand Valley State University in Allendale, MI, is helping to sponsor "Christianity on Campus," a weekly meeting of students who discuss topics of special interest to them. Prof. H. Hanko

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

led their first meeting on September 11, which was entitled, appropriately, "God's Role in 9/11."

The council of the First PRC in Holland, MI approved a proposal from their church's Evangelism Committee to seek volunteers from their congregation to assist in their Spanish ministry. Specifically, the committee was looking for anyone who knows Spanish or is willing to learn it and would be interested in helping with correspondence and/or translating our literature into Spanish.

The consistory of the Hudsonville, MI PRC gave approval to their Evangelism Committee to go ahead with plans to pay for the publication of the book *Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and the Church*, by Prof. D. Engelsma, in the Slovak language. The Reformed Free Publishing Association had approved the translation of this book into the Slovak language by Mr. Jon Sichula, a teaching elder in an independent Bible Baptist Church in the Slovak Republic, and asked one of our churches' evangelism committees to provide the financial support.

Congregation Activities

Some members of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI have organized themselves into a discussion group, which began meeting September 8 in their church basement at 4:30 P.M. before their evening service to discuss their morning sermon, which would be one of the 52 Lord's Days from the Heidelberg Catechism.

Everyone from our Edgerton, MN PRC was invited to Rock River Park Tuesday night, September 3, for a time of fellowship with all the visiting delegates of classis who were in town for classis the next


day. This was an opportunity to get to know other ministers and elders from our denomination on an informal basis. Plans called for snacks, a bonfire, and volleyball.

Mission Activities

On behalf of the Domestic Mission Committee of our churches, Revs. W. Bruinsma and C. Terpstra traveled to the mission field in Spokane, WA the first weekend in September to visit with our

missionary and the consistory of the Sovereign Grace Reformed Church.

Minister Activities

Rev. C. Terpstra has declined the call to the Byron Center, MI PRC. The Grandville, MI PRC made a trio consisting of Revs. R. Cammenga, D. Kleyn, and K. Koole. The Hull, IA PRC called Rev. W. Bruinsma to serve as a second missionary to Ghana. Rev. D. Kleyn and Rev. K. Koole were also on that trio. 

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness and praise to our covenant God, we join our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents,

EDWARD and ADRIANA OPHOFF,

in celebrating 50 years of marriage on October 30, 2002. We are thankful for the many blessings He has given to them, and to us through them. We are blessed through the covenantal instruction they have given us and for their continued support through prayers and example. We wish them the Lord's blessing and all our love as they continue their lives together. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1a).

- ❖ Eric and Marilyn Ophoff
George and Lisa Ophoff
James and Melissa Ophoff
Eric, Jr. and Annette Ophoff
- ❖ Ed, Jr. and Libby Ophoff
Brent and Alisa Snippe
Ed III and Amanda Ophoff
Erin, Joseph, Tyler
- ❖ Mark and Cindy Ophoff
David, Kristin, Bradley, Daniel
- ❖ James and Faith Noorman
Alison, Elizabeth, Benjamin, Lydia
- ❖ Ray and Joy Schwarz
Sarah, Jacob, Ruth, Mary
6 great-grandchildren
Byron Center, Michigan

REFORMATION DAY LECTURE

Grandville PRC

Evangelism Committee

Friday, October 25, at 7:30 P.M.

at Grandville PRC

Prof. David Engelsma

"The Reformation's Influence on the Family: Blessing and Bane."

Come, and bring a friend; refreshments will be served.

REMINDER:

Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, IL is now in its second year of operation, teaching freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. As we plan for the addition of a senior class for 2003-2004, we ask qualified Protestant Reformed teachers to consider our need of two additional staff members. Interested individuals, please contact our Administrator, Ralph Medema, at (708) 339-1733 [rmedema@earthlink.net] or Education Committee Chairman, Bill De Jong, at (708) 946-6126 [bill@dejongequipment.com]."

2002 FALL REFORMATION LECTURE

Sola Scriptura

Principles of the Reformation: #1 —
"Scripture Alone!"

Friday, November 1, 2002

7:30 P.M.

Rev. Charles Terpstra

Sponsored by Holland PRC

Evangelism Committee

First Protestant Reformed Church
3641 104th Ave., Zeeland, MI 49464