

THE *January 1, 2003* STANDARD BEARER

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God's Thoughts of Peace Toward Us

Assurance for the New Year

I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Jeremiah 29:11

What will the new year bring? What will happen in the world? Will there be war? Will there be more terrorist activity? What will happen in our congregations and in our families?

When Jeremiah was inspired to write the words of our text, the kingdom of Judah was in captivity in Babylon. To them Jeremiah is commanded by God to write. He must first correct a hope of a quick deliverance from captivity — a false hope sown by false prophets (vv. 8, 9). But whereas Jeremiah must dash this earthly hope, he

keeps God's people from falling into discouragement by encouraging them with right hopes and expectations. He gave them another reason to hope. Their — and our — hope is to be built on the simple but tremendously comforting truth that God thinks about us and toward us.

We humans find joy and comfort in knowing that someone is thinking about us. Among greeting cards there is a category that has the title "Thinking of You." When we receive such a card or note, we experience joy and are heartened.

If we are encouraged by the thoughts of another *human*, then the fact that our *God* thinks of us is the source of tremendous encouragement. The thoughts of a human can be well-meaning and sympathetic, but they are usually unable to accomplish anything. God's thoughts, however, have the ability to do something — and not a little. God's thoughts are powerful and effective. God does what He thinks. Divine thoughts always

become divine actions. And so His thoughts of us have a goal or end toward which they are able to bring us.

God's people in the Babylonian captivity, and we, when burdened with difficult trials, can easily become troubled and confused. We can be fearful as we look ahead into the new year. This text directs us to a source of great comfort, namely, the fact that God is thinking thoughts of peace toward us!



God has thoughts which He thinks. God's thoughts are always perfect, never evil. His thoughts are always before Him — He never forgets them. And His thoughts are always effective, powerfully performing whatever He thinks — never stagnant or abstract or ineffective.

God has thoughts concerning His people. As Jeremiah writes these words, he is informing the people in captivity that God has thoughts concerning them, even though they are in Babylon. They

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may think He has forgotten them. But never was there a time when the unchangeable God did not think about His people. Nor will there ever be such a time. At every second of every day God thinks of every one of His children. Not for one split second does God not think of His children. David writes, "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me" (Ps. 40:17). The mind of God, whose thoughts are infinitely above ours (Is. 55:9), continuously exercises itself about His people. Never does He forget them and then have to remember them. He never has to recall any thoughts.

The God who determined all things in His eternal counsel still thinks. He is ever conscious of the thoughts of His counsel, of His eternal plan. Therefore, He is always aware of the thoughts He has concerning us. We are not to think of God's sovereign, determinative plan as something He conceived, wrote down, then filed away, later to retrieve the necessary files when He needs them. Rather His plan is ever before His mind's eye.

Notice that the text pictures the relationship between God's thoughts and His people in a uniquely powerful way. God's thoughts are not only *about* us, but they are *toward* us. This means that God's thoughts are always leaning toward us, filled with care and love for us. Although God rules the entire universe, He never turns His thoughts away from His beloved children. They have a primacy in His thoughts. The captives who were banished in the distant land of Babylon must not think that God has forgotten them. Nor must they think that God's thoughts are *against* them. God's thoughts are *toward* them. While our circumstances can at times lead us to feel as if God has forgotten us or "forgotten to be gracious" (Ps. 77:7-9), our text declares the truth. And

*At every second
of every day
God thinks
of every one
of His children.*

the truth is contrary to what we think or feel. God's thoughts are always toward His people.

This implies that everything God did and is doing towards His people was and is done thoughtfully. (Remember that God's actions are always controlled by His thoughts.) The captivity was no accident or mistake, but a determined intent and deliberate act of God. Every cross we are given to take up is perfectly planned, timed, and measured. Also every comfort is sent with loving thoughtfulness. Not fate, but wisdom and love ordered all of our life and each and every circumstance in it.



A most interesting aspect of our text is the fact that we are told that God's thoughts are known to Himself. We don't know God's thoughts toward us, but He knows them. God's thoughts are too high for us (recall the familiar words of Isaiah 55:8, 9). His thoughts are too deep for our understanding (Ps. 77:19). It can seem to us that God's ways for us are so complicated that they cannot be disentangled, or so difficult that they crush and destroy us. Then we are to remember that God knows His thoughts of peace toward us. We must not judge the all-knowing God in light of our ignorance and forgetfulness. Despite our ignorance, nothing can go wrong while the omniscient God rules over all. In the middle of difficult times we easily and quickly misinterpret God's thoughts and His ways. We jump to the hasty conclusion that God does not know how hard we have it. We must learn that our worries and our fears about what God is doing in our life are based on our limited knowledge and on the folly and ineffectiveness of our thoughts. God's ways are directed by an understanding that is infinite and perfectly wise. We ought not let our

hearts be troubled concerning things that are too great for us.

Remember, too, that God's thoughts toward us are always settled and definite. He has no questions. His purpose is settled and sure. He remembers His covenant. He knows them that are His. He is faithful to them and to His promises made to them. Because God constantly has complete knowledge of us and toward us, the psalmist writes, "Many, O LORD, my God are ... thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered" (Ps. 40:5). "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them" (Ps. 139:17)!



God's thoughts toward His people are always "thoughts of peace."

That God would have peace with any child of Adam can only be through the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 5:1; 8:1). God chose unto Himself a people in Christ. He redeemed them in Christ. And He always sees them in Christ. It is because of Jesus (and only because of Jesus) that God never thinks anything other than peace (such as thoughts of wrath or retribution) toward those in Christ. They are always thoughts of peace because in Christ God delights in them. He always seeks and sustains their peace.

To enforce the idea that God's thoughts are those of peace, Jeremiah is inspired to add: "not evil." It is the Evil One himself who always sows the thought into our minds that God is against us and that being in the Babylons of life is evil for us. However, the truth is that God's thoughts toward us are always of peace and not evil because God justified us in Christ. Christ died, rose from the dead, ascended to God's right hand, and now intercedes specifically for our

justification (Rom. 8:33, 34). Therefore God's thoughts cannot be evil toward us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the middle of difficult trials, we must remember that God has sent them our way. We must remember to tell ourselves often that God does not send the heavy trials upon us in anger. We may *feel* that God is punishing us, but the gospel of justification in the blood of Christ assures us that behind our trials are only thoughts of peace. The way we walk may seem rough, but we may be assured that it is not evil.

To allay our fears even further, the prophet declares that God's thoughts are "to give you an expected end." This language is a little unusual for us. It means that God's thoughts include a future and an expectation, i.e., a hoped-for ending. This is a wonderful assurance. Whereas *we* see only the moment, *God* sees the end toward which He is directing all things. God knows "the end from the beginning," and He declares "from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. 46:10). When Adam was created and then fell, God saw the end. When Christ was crucified, God knew the end. When God's people were taken into captivity, not only had God's thoughts determined that event, but His thoughts had also encompassed a great purpose for and a wonderful end to that event. When God brings afflictions, persecutions, or death into our lives, He knows the end.

God's end for His people is that they altogether will stand before Him, washed in the Lamb's blood, gathered as the body of His Son and as a glorious temple. God uses each and every event in the lives of His children to prepare them for this wonderful ending.

God's motive in thinking toward us and in working on us is for our good (Rom. 8:28). He uses

our light and momentary affliction to work for us an eternal reward (II Cor. 4:17). God sees not only the pain and grief we experience at the moment, but He also sees our future and how the present pain and sorrow will serve our future.

While we know only the weight of His rod (and it can be grievous), God knows the peaceable fruit of righteousness in those who are exercised by the rod (Heb. 12:11). Consider, when afflicted and tried, that God strips us so we can be clothed. He empties us so we can be full. He gives us sorrow for sin, so we can know Christ's righteousness.



When saints, either in the middle of the Babylonian captivity or under the burden of a heavy cross, realize that God's thoughts toward them are not evil but of peace, then what should be their attitude toward the trials which burden them?

First, we must strive to bow in patient submission. In the midst of our trials, let us bow before Him who does all things in perfect wisdom and infinite love for His own. Bow before what He sends because He is leading us through it to spiritual health and strength, to spiritual wealth, and to endless joy.


Second, let us strive to have good hope and great expectation.

The death of our Savior means the end of all evil to God's children. We need never fear when we look at present trials or at the future coming of Antichrist. Our attitude ought to be not only one of enduring the will of God for us, but also of high expectation (and corresponding joy). God promises a good end, so we have reason to expect good to come to us from God.

Also, let us strive to see that we have reason to rejoice. We know that the One in control of absolutely everything in our life is our Father! He loves us! It is by abiding in God's love that we have joy and peace!

And we must strive to realize that there is a wonderful future for us — a heavenly home being prepared for us. There we will know perfect happiness. Our "expectation is from him" (Ps. 62:5). While the unbeliever has reason to fear his future, we can long for it. We can even pray, "Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!"



When troubled by the hard trials of life, we must look up. Look up and consider God's thoughts. His thoughts are toward us. They are not evil. They are thoughts of peace. And He always knows the thoughts that He thinks about us and toward us. Don't fret about the possible events of 2003. Rest in His thoughts and rejoice! 

*O Lord, with joy my heart expands
Before the wonders of Thy hands;
Great works, Jehovah, Thou hast wrought,
Exceeding deep Thy ev'ry thought;
A foolish man knows not their worth,
Nor he whose mind is of the earth.*

Psalter #250, stanza 2

The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary Debate— and the Protestant Reformed Seminary*

For many years and from much of conservative Reformed Christianity, the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) have heard that the issue whether God's covenant with the church is conditional or unconditional is of no fundamental importance. The issue is not fundamental for the truth of the covenant itself. It is not fundamental to the confessional Reformed faith. It is certainly not fundamental to the gospel of salvation by grace alone.

The Reformed and Presbyterian churches criticize the PRC for declaring the unconditionality of the covenant a confessional matter. The PRC did this in 1951 by adopting a document known as the "Declaration of Principles." For making this declaration, the PRC are charged with the fault of "extra-confessional binding."

There is something odd about the posture of the Reformed churches regarding the conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant. At the same time that many Reformed churches insist that the issue of the conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant is of no fundamental importance, they themselves put up the most vigorous defense of the doctrine of a

conditional covenant. They accuse the doctrine of an unconditional covenant of grave weaknesses, bordering on heresy.

Nevertheless, the position of the Reformed churches has been that there is room for both views. Nothing serious is at stake in the difference.

At present, this position is used to put pressure on the PRC in ecumenical contacts. Among some of the reputedly more conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches there is a strong urge to unite. The PRC come up for consideration. And when it becomes evident that the PRC are committed to the truth of the unconditional covenant of grace *as a doctrine required by the creeds*, the other churches lament that the PRC raise illegitimate obstacles to the unity of the church. The churches profess sadness, not because the doctrine of an unconditional covenant is wrong, but because the issue, unconditional or conditional, is not fundamental.

Alarming Development of Covenant Doctrine

At the present time, there is a development of covenant doctrine that gives the lie to the notion that the issue of conditional or unconditional covenant is not fundamental. Reformed theologians are working out the implications of the doctrine of a conditional covenant. This development of the doctrine

of a conditional covenant is widespread in conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

Such is the development of the doctrine of a conditional covenant in our day that it overthrows the entire theological system of salvation by sovereign grace as confessed by the Reformed faith in the Canons of Dordt and in the Westminster Standards. The doctrine of a conditional covenant is explained by its advocates as denying the heart of the gospel of grace, namely, justification by faith alone on the basis only of the lifelong obedience and atoning death of Jesus Christ.

These are perilous times for Reformed saints.

These are demanding, but also exciting, times for the PRC, particularly the professors and students in the seminary. Today, the old Arminianism is developing into a denial that God knows beforehand what people will decide. God may not know beforehand what humans will decide because this foreknowledge would impinge on men's freedom. An ignorant God must react to human decisions as best He can, rolling with the punches and scrambling to salvage from human history what He can. God does not know the future, much less decide it. Men decide the future. This is the "openness of God" movement. The "openness of God" movement simply carries out to its logical conclusion the basic Arminian teach-

* This is the text of the speech given at the convocation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Seminary on September 4, 2002.

ing, that God is dependent on the will of the sinner in the matter of salvation.

This development of the old Arminianism exposes Arminian theology for what it is: the proclamation of a god dependent on man, another god than the God of the Bible and of the Christian religion. In light of this development, the PRC must renew their resolve faithfully to proclaim the sovereign God of the Reformed faith. Our God knows the future because He ordained it. In the crucial matter of salvation, the wills of sinners are dependent upon the predestinating will of God.

The times are demanding and exciting for the PRC also on account of the ongoing development of the doctrine of a conditional covenant. This development exposes the grievous error that is inherent in that covenant doctrine. The response of the PRC must be an even more zealous confession, defense, explanation, and development of the truth of the unconditional covenant of grace.

Unconditionality

The significant contemporary development of covenant doctrine to which I refer concerns the issue whether the covenant of God with His people in Jesus Christ is unconditional or conditional. The new teaching that troubles the Reformed churches, and threatens to carry them away, is the natural, indeed inevitable, development of the doctrine that the covenant is conditional. It is necessary, therefore, that we have the issue of the conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant clearly in mind. In considering the controversy, we must remember that the covenant of God with His people is central to the revelation of God in Scripture and to the redemption that is at the heart of biblical revelation. No one in the debate questions the importance of the covenant.

That the covenant is unconditional means that the establishing,

maintaining, and perfecting of that blessed relationship of love and communion between God and a man do not depend on the sinful man; that the blessings which the covenant brings to the man do not depend upon him; and that the final, everlasting salvation enjoyed by one with whom God makes His covenant does not depend upon that man.

There is no work of the sinner that is a condition he must fulfill in order to have the covenant, or to enjoy its blessings.

Unconditionality rules out merit, or earning. It also rules out all effort by the sinner, even though not meritorious, upon which the covenant and its blessings are supposed to depend, or which cooperates with God in establishing and maintaining the covenant and in bestowing the benefits of the covenant. Unconditionality certainly rules out merit. We do not earn, and thus deserve, the covenant. But unconditionality also rules out all works that distinguish one man from another, or that are the reason why the covenant is given to one and not to another, or that obtain the covenant, which God merely makes available to one. The reason why all such works are excluded, along with meritorious works, is that these works, as much as meritorious works, would make the sinner his own savior and rob God of the glory of salvation.

What difference is there between a rich man's paying someone a large sum of money for work he did and a rich man's giving someone money because that person somehow pleased and benefited the rich man? In both cases, the reason for the "gift" of money is in the one to whom the money is "given."

Similarly, what difference is there between God's making His covenant with me because I worked to earn it and God's making His covenant with me because

there is something in me that appealed to Him, or because I did something that distinguishes me from others?

Neither do we earn the covenant, nor do we get it, or its blessings, because of anything we are or do, even though what we are or do does not earn the covenant or the blessings of the covenant.

According to Hebrews 9:15ff., the making of the new covenant with us is like a man's willing his estate to someone as an inheritance: reception depends only on the testator, only on the covenant-making God. And the divine testator appoints the covenant, its blessings, and salvation to a person according to His own good pleasure, not because of anything in the one to whom the will is made out.

Faith as a Gift

The teaching that the covenant is unconditional does not overlook, or minimize, faith. The doctrine of the unconditional covenant recognizes full well that faith is necessary for the covenant and its enjoyment. But the doctrine of the unconditional covenant views faith as the means by which God establishes His covenant with the elect sinner and the means by which the elect sinner enjoys the covenant and its blessings, not as a condition. And the doctrine of the unconditional covenant confesses that faith is a gift of God to the sinner, like the covenant itself. By His death on the cross, Christ not only confirmed the new covenant with His elect people, but also purchased faith for them. His Holy Spirit then confers faith upon all the elect.

It was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should *confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy*

Spirit, He purchased for them by His death ... (Canons II/8; emphasis added).

Good Works as Fruits of the Covenant

Likewise, the doctrine of the unconditional covenant teaches that good works are necessary in the covenant. But they are fruits of the covenant in the life of the friend and servant of God, not conditions unto the establishing or maintaining of the covenant. The power in the child of God to produce good works is not any natural goodness of his own, but the sanctifying Spirit of Jesus Christ. The motive of the child of God in performing good works is not to earn or to obtain a salvation that he does not have, nor to keep a salvation he might lose. But his motive is thankfulness to God for a salvation graciously given.

Therefore we do good works, but not to merit by them (for what can we merit?), nay, we are beholden to God for the good works we do, and not He to us, since it is He that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Let us therefore attend to what is written: When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do.... 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.

Genuinely good works are not done "out of self-love or fear of damnation," but "out of love to God" (Belgic Confession, Art. 24, "Man's Sanctification and Good Works").

A Gracious Covenant

"Unconditional" is negative. The positive truth about the covenant confessed by means of the word "unconditional" is that the covenant is gracious. An unconditional covenant is a gracious covenant. This is how the Reformed confessions describe the covenant. The Canons of Dordt, II, Rejection of Errors/2 calls the covenant "the new covenant of grace." The Reformed form for the administration of the Lord's Supper speaks of our firmly believing that we "belong to this covenant of grace." The form continues: "Christ confirmed with His death and shedding of His blood the new and eternal testament, that *covenant of grace and reconciliation*."

The covenant is a covenant of grace, or a gracious covenant, inasmuch as God gives the blessings of the covenant to His covenant friends out of His own free favor, and only out of free favor. Also, God establishes and maintains the covenant with a man by His own saving power — the Holy Spirit — and only by His saving power. The covenant is not, and cannot be, a covenant of grace if, although it freely bestows the blessings of salvation, the establishment or maintenance of the covenant with a man

is due to the man's own worthiness, or is partially the man's own accomplishment.

The doctrine of the unconditional, gracious covenant defends the biblical gospel of unconditional, gracious salvation, which salvation has its source in unconditional, gracious election. No one can deny, or does deny, that the covenant aims at the salvation—the spiritual, everlasting salvation — of men and women and that its blessings are the forgiveness of sins, holiness, and eternal life. As salvation is gracious, so is the covenant gracious.

With specific reference to salvation, Ephesians 2:8, 9 teaches: "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast."

With specific reference to the promise of the covenant and, therefore, to the covenant itself, Romans 4:13-16 teaches that the promise is not through the law, that is, the works of men, but "of faith, that it might be by grace."

Opposed to this doctrine of the unconditional covenant is the teaching that the covenant of God is conditional. This teaching now prevails in Reformed churches. It is this teaching that Reformed theologians are currently developing so as to repudiate justification by faith alone and, thus, the gospel of grace.

— DJE
(to be continued) 

Letters

■ IVF and an Absolutely Sovereign God

I read with interest Mr. Lanning's article (Nov. 1 and 15, 2002) and must admit subjects like these prompt questions. The answers in some cases will not be available.

We are not God, and when the vessels of dishonor point a bony finger at the vessels of honor to explain why *in vitro* fertilization is wrong, it once again comes down to faith and unbelief. Can IVF be classified as unbelieving science? I would say without a shadow of a doubt that it is! Man's depraved

moral decisions and dilemmas impatiently *try* to sidestep a sovereign God! God lays the foundation of being fruitful and multiplying. God also lays out how this is done. What happens when man takes a different direction from that which God has implemented? Sin and the fruits of sin, death. Sarah

could not wait for God, and Ishmael was the fruit. Hannah did wait on the Lord, and the fruit was Samuel. Lot's two daughters tried to sidestep God through incest, and the fruits were Moab and Ben-ammi. What was Jacob's response to Rachel's "Give me children, or else I die"? It was, "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" This was not good enough, enter Bilhah, the maid, and the fruits, Dan and Naphtali. God's purposes in all these events should verify the truth of Romans 9.

Whenever topics like this come up, it is indeed excellent to debate them. Iron sharpens iron. But wisdom comes from the Lord, and Job

38, 39, and 40 is a comfort to Christians when we run out of answers for the questions. This same sovereign, triune God is sidestepped, even in so-called churches, regarding the conception of Christ, via the virgin birth through Mary. Can unbelieving science answer that question of conception? Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

Thank you for writing on an interesting topic, Mr. Lanning.

Ray Kikkert,
Wingham, Ontario
Canada

■ Lucid Defense

I write briefly to thank and congratulate you for the series in the *Standard Bearer* concerning common grace, in "He Shines In All That's Fair."

This is by far the clearest, most manageable and lucid defense of the Protestant Reformed Churches' position I have read. Some down here who were only vaguely aware of the issue (or have found it too difficult) are now taking a real interest. How the Lord might be using Mouw's book for the opposite purpose to what he intended!

Rob Burford
Frankston, Victoria
Australia

All Around Us

Rev. Kenneth Koole

■ The Church Under the Cross

While we in the West have been enjoying our 'Christmas pudding' and reveling in the abundance of good things, there are those who are bearing the weight of persecution and the cost of confessing Christ Jesus as Lord. The animosity toward the Christian faith (with its resulting suffering) is intensifying especially in the Far East, notably in China and India, but in Indo-China as well. We, in the midst of our affluence and ease, must not forget the very real suffering so many of our own generation are undergoing for Christ's sake at this present time.

I have in my files a number of news articles lifted from various sources this past year. The first was printed a year ago in early January 2002 in connection with China's admission into the WTO

(World Trade Organization) with the United States' approval. China had been under severe trade restriction with the West due to China's abysmal record in regard to its well documented violation of human rights (with Christians in particular bearing the brunt of the brutal treatment). Supposedly, China had 'cleaned up its act,' had become more tolerant toward dissidents, and was allowing religious freedom. It is becoming apparent that this 'freedom of religion' is a facade.

Nina Shea, director of Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom, was quoted as saying:

We were told that giving China WTO status, granting it Permanent Normal Trade Relations status, awarding it the 2008 Olympic games, would all have moderating effects on China. Instead what we're seeing is the most draconian measures against Christian leaders since the anti-cult law was adopted three years ago. China continues to arrogate to itself the rights to determine religious doctrine, determine what is Christian heterodoxy, and designate reli-

gious leaders in direct violation of the international human rights covenant that it has signed.

As Janet Chismar, a Crosswalk senior editor, reports,

Chinese Christians continue to suffer harassment, arrest, beatings and even torture for practicing their faith outside the official TSPM (Three-Self Patriotic Movement) church, according to VOM (the Voice of the Martyrs organization — KK).

What China has given is an official recognition to the TSPM, which is a closely monitored 'State Church' and operates under strict state guidelines. Any Christian gathering outside these closely watched confines is considered to be a cult, and, by definition, dangerous to the State.

Back in January of last year a report concerning the arrest of a certain Pastor Gong, one of China's most influential underground Christian leaders, was filed.

Pastor Gong, 46, was reportedly sentenced to death on Dec. 5, 2001,

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after the Intermediate People's Court of Jingmen, a city in Hubei Province, found him guilty of using a cult to undermine the enforcement of law and of malicious assault and rape.

He and 16 other church leaders were arrested sometime after Aug. 9, 2001, after the church was classified as an 'evil cult' by government authorities and an arrest directive was issued in a 'top-secret' document.

In addition to Gong, four other leaders were sentenced to death, but their sentences were suspended, possibly indicating that they will be commuted to life terms. Gong's deputy and 37-year old niece, Li Ying, who is responsible for evangelization and publishing, was given one of the suspended death sentences. Relatives state that Chinese authorities severely tortured her in prison. The rest were given prison sentences ranging from two years to life....

Those who know Gong say he is facing trumped up charges of assault and rape. Pastor Gong was apparently set up by local Hubei police who forced women members of the congregation on Aug. 18, 2001, to strip off their clothes and then kicked and physically abused them until they were bruised and bleeding to make it appear they had been raped.

Two of the women have since repudiated the rape charges, ... in which they say they made the allegations after being tortured by electricity in police custody. It has not been unusual for Chinese authorities to charge religious leaders with rape in an attempt to discredit them and reduce their stature among their followers.

In another related report, Janet Chismar informs us of the following:

According to the most recent State Department report, religious persecution in China worsened. In some areas, underground Protestant house churches were subject to more-frequent raids and persecution. Authorities cracked down on unregistered churches, and threatened extortion, deten-

tion and demolition of property. The Chinese government tends to perceive unregulated religious gatherings or groups as 'a potential challenge to its authority,' said the State Department. During the period covered by this report, China also moved against houses of worship outside its control that grew 'too large' or 'espoused beliefs that it considered threatening to state security.'...

"One misconception about the Chinese house church movement is that this is just a small fanatical group of troublemakers who only meet in a neighborhood house," said Lane (of Voice of the Martyrs). "The truth is, the house church is a network of believers numbering in the millions — many of these 'illegal' networks are larger than most American denominations."

The Wenzhou daily reported last December that during the period from mid-November to Dec. 5, 256 churches were destroyed, 153 banned and 19 confiscated in Ou Hai District. Another 527 churches were destroyed, 35 banned, and 74 confiscated in Changnan County. And 9 churches were banned in Taishun County.

"Some world leaders may have forgotten the persecuted in China," said Lane. "We at VOM and millions of committed Christians in America have not and will continue to speak out on behalf of these Chinese champions for Christ."

But it is not only in China that the sufferings for the Christian faith continue and intensify. Conditions for Christians in several areas of India also continue to worsen. What follows is a letter sent by an ARTS student (a student of the Asian Reformed Theological School in Singapore who has returned to India with his wife) to the churches in Singapore, and relayed to several in the States by Ishu Mahtani, who is also a member of the Contact Committee of the ERCS.

Here I wish to share with you

an important prayer request that you may share in our churches. Presently the Christians in Tamilnadu, our state, are in big turmoil and distress because the Chief Minister of our state has introduced an ordinance that Christians must not do any Religious activities in Public in expectation of any conversions. This law will restrict both the people that preach other religions and the people that love to embrace other religions. This law is actually against the Constitution of the Indian Government. The central Govt. Constitution professes that every one can exercise the freedom to profess, confess, and propagate any religion. In contradiction to this law the state government ruler Miss J. Jeyalalith, the Chief Minister, has issued this ordinance two weeks ago. Hence all Christians are fasting and praying, and also organizing protest rallies against the new rule issued by the state government. She has introduced this ordinance in order to please the central government rulers, that are of a Hindu Religious Party. Now a lot of unrest prevails in the hearts of Christians here. We used to call our state, Tamilnadu, as a Peaceful-State. Now it is changing, and there are a lot of strikes and rallies. Kindly [inform and urge] our churches to pray for Indian Christians that the faithful Christian may continue to proclaim the gospel freely and peacefully. With Love, Paul and Kisthuri.

We do well to remember our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who are 'under the cross.'

■ The Power of Radio in Missions

In an informative article entitled "Radio Brings Christ to Eager Ears in the Far East," Janet Chismar gives some information not only about where Christian Broadcasting is able to penetrate, bamboo and iron curtains or not, but also information about the suffering various groups are experiencing

due to their interest in the Christian faith, and, last but not least, interesting insight into what many on foreign fields want emphasized in contrast to contemporary, western Christianity.

Airwaves often reach where other means of communication are impossible, a fact Christian broadcasters well know. Radio travels around the globe, to remote regions, to areas otherwise closed to the message of Jesus.

Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC) is one ministry that utilizes radio's portability. Founded in 1945, FEBC has spent decades "smuggling" the gospel into living rooms of China, the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam and other Asian nations....

More recently, FEBC established the first Christian FM radio station in Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia. Despite missionary activity that dates back several hundred years, this predominantly Tibetan Buddhist country did not have any churches until around 1990....

Radio can also touch empty lives. Some listeners who tune in aren't even Christian. A commercial marketing survey from China shows that 85 percent of FEBC's listeners claim to have "no religion at all." The survey further said, "A spiritual vacuum created by nearly five decades of atheistic teaching, draws people toward the questions of existence, mortality and spiritual life. Millions of Chinese tune into FEBC for insight into the meaning of things...."

FEBC president Jim Bowman recently shared with Crosswalk.com the challenges and rewards of running a broadcast ministry....

"How you present the gospel varies from place to place in the Far East," says Bowman. "It really depends on the audience."

"In Indonesia, for example, you have to present the gospel very carefully and respectfully. In China," Bowman says, "people are very receptive and hungry for instruction. The Chinese Christians tell us all the time that they don't even want to hear music. They want to be instructed in the Bible and in the meaning of the

gospel. They don't even want us to fool around with anything but straight teaching."

Muslims think that Christians "are very flippant in the way we talk about God," says Bowman.

"We talk about Him being our friend, and some of our hymns almost make it sound like a love affair. They don't want to hear that sort of thing. They want to hear a lot of respect."

Yet, in spite of the most careful, culturally sensitive presentation, hostility can erupt. The most dramatic episode in FEBC history happened in 1992, when two broadcasters were shot to death right in the studio by Muslim extremists....

Signal jamming and interference are more common than outright murder. For example, the Hmong — the hill people of Southeast Asia who live in the highlands of Laos and Vietnam — have been so responsive to the gospel that the governments now have huge campaigns, trying to get them to stop listening.

"We have our signals jammed every day of the week up there," says Bowman.

He estimates that between 200,000 and 300,000 of the Hmong have made professions of faith over the last 10 years. And the government sees this as a big threat.

"The governments that are still Communist are very threatened by Christians," says Bowman. "But their reason is not as pure as we'd like to hope. We'd like to think they are rejecting Christ, but they see it as a political threat. They really see Christianity as an extension of foreign aggression."

Accordingly, the government is brutal to Hmong Christians, says Bowman. He has copies of documents that Christians are forced to sign, denouncing their faith, and many believers are being thrown into jail and beaten.


In fact, the arrests have become such a serious problem that the central Evangelical Church of Laos has sent a notice out to most Hmong churches that believers should stop listening to Far East Broadcasting to avoid arrest.

"Since there is a large number

of Hmong people becoming Christians by listening to our broadcasts, the Communist government is afraid that they may not be able to control this minority in Vietnam," explained FEBC's Hmong broadcaster, who wants to remain anonymous. "Even though they know that people who become Christians are better citizens, they still fear that without jamming our daily broadcasts they might lose their power and control someday."

According to the September 2000 edition of the U.S. Report on International Religious Freedom, the update on minorities in Vietnam reveals "house churches in ethnic minority areas have been growing rapidly in recent years, sparked in part by radio broadcasts in ethnic minority languages from the Philippines."

In addition, the report states that there has been an increase in crackdowns on Protestant house church leaders, particularly among the Hmong in northwest Vietnam. Radio listeners have confirmed these instances of persecution through their letters and have expressed the difficulties they face.

We do well to pray for the saints of the church universal who suffer for Christ's sake. The time is coming when all governments will claim that Christians who maintain there is no Lord but Christ Jesus are a threat to their national security, and the wrath of the Dragon will focus on us of the West as well. 

"Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

John 15:20

Justification — Righteous Before God

The truth that we now consider is the very bedrock of true Christianity. Justification is that truth that proclaims the glory of the sovereign God and the wonder of sovereign, particular grace in Christ Jesus. It sets before us the value of our religion. That God's people are righteous before Him in Christ — that is the bedrock of true Christianity.

Any so-called Christianity established on anything other than the perfect and imputed righteousness of Christ is a sham. It is nothing more than a sham. For without the perfect and imputed righteousness of Christ which is our justification, we have no right to any of the blessings of salvation. "The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just" (Prov. 3:33).

God blesses the righteous. He blesses *only* the righteous. He hates the wicked (Ps. 5:5; 11:5, etc.). How critically important, therefore, it is to be righteous!

Standing Before the Righteous Judge

There is hardly a concept more tremendous, more blessed for us and the church of Jesus Christ, than this truth as the Spirit applies it to our consciousness.

Righteousness is a legal concept that has to do with our legal status before God. The idea of righteousness calls us to stand be-

fore the truth that God is Judge. He is Judge of all. Moreover, God is the Holy One who Himself is perfectly righteous and who demands perfect conformity to His will.

When we speak, therefore, of our righteousness or justification, implied is the fact that we stand before God's perfect justice. And according to His perfect judgment we stand before Him either as *innocent* or as *guilty*. That is true always.

It is not so that God postpones His judgment until the end of time. It is not true that God renders no verdict now, but is gracious and merciful to all, that He will judge the wicked and unbelieving only at the end of time. That is impossible. That is impossible because God is holy. He continually seeks Himself and His own glory, and always maintains His name and holiness over against the creature.

Although at the end of the history of this world there shall be a day of judgment, that judgment will only be the public pronouncement and execution of the perfect judgment that God is making throughout the ages, and the judgment He continually enforces and executes. So we read in Psalm 7:11, to mention just one example, "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day."

You and I stand before the Judge of all the earth, the Judge who scrutinizes us, who makes no mistakes. He searches our hearts and uncovers the very thoughts that flow through our minds. He strips away the pious veneer that

covers our lusts, and pierces even to the motives that govern all our actions.

The standard of His judgment is His perfect law, the law that also reveals His own glory. That law requires that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. That is God's law. At every moment and in every place we stand before that inescapable calling.

To be righteous is to be in perfect conformity with God's law. It is to be exactly what God has declared that we must be, those who stand in perfect submission of love to Him. Are you able to make that claim? Are you able to say, "All my words, all my deeds, all my thoughts, even the inner recesses of my heart and all my motives are in perfect conformity to the law of God"? Is that true of you?

This Judge does not corrupt justice. He does not declare guilty those who are innocent. Nor does He declare innocent those who are guilty.

We may not confuse righteousness with some kind of divine amnesty program. There have been times when governments have offered amnesty to those who are guilty of tax evasion. Those who have not paid their taxes according to law are then told, "All you have to do is come forward now and pay those past taxes, and there will be no charges against you; you will be viewed as completely innocent." That is not righteousness. God does not simply pardon the

sinner, give him an exemption from guilt and punishment, and let him go free. When the righteous Lord justifies the sinner, He does not violate justice and ignore the wrong. But the Lord declares with perfect justice that we are free from all guilt, that we are innocent, and that no charge can be leveled against us.

If we are righteous, we are free from any liability of punishment and death. If we are righteous, we are heirs of eternal life and glory. To be righteous means that as far as the law is concerned, we are completely untouchable. The law cannot condemn us.

But guilt marks us as condemned and liable to everlasting punishment.

The Pressing Question

The pressing question for you and for me, therefore, is this: What is God's judgment of me? What does God think of me? As we are brought before the divine judgment seat and Him who sits upon the throne as Judge of all, what does He declare us to be — righteous or unrighteous? Guilty or not guilty?

If the question concerns the things that we have done, then the judgment is damning. Listen to Romans 3:10-18: "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes."

The Heidelberg Catechism puts the confession upon my lips, "that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept

none of them, and am still inclined to all evil" (Q. & A. 60). That is the way we stand before the sovereign Judge, Almighty God. In that consciousness we must stand, before we shall ever understand the wonder of our justification.

That is what the apostle Paul had to see, as we learn in Philippians 3:9. For all his religion, he had to see that "his own righteousness, which is of the law" was *worthless!* He had to see what Jesus meant when He said "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

If we are going to set forth a theory of righteousness by works, or by faith *and* works, we shall perish with the Pharisees!

We stand before God as law-breakers. And even standing before His face we are still inclined to all evil. That's the way we stand before the Judge. Even conscious of the pressing question of our legal standing before God, we daily increase our guilt. By thought, word, and deed, with the sins that we commit as well as those sins of omission in failing to perform the will of God in all good works, we add to the mountain of evidence against us.

Do you know these things of yourself? Do you see the sinfulness of your own sin, the burden of your own guilt? Then you may know what a wonder is the biblical doctrine of justification.

An Amazing Declaration

Justification is the most amazing declaration that God could ever make. The righteous Judge of heaven and earth announces His righteous verdict. The court is called to order, and the sinner is made to stand before the divine Judge and to hear the proclamation.

"I, the Judge of all, declare this person *not guilty.*"

Can it be? Do we hear that correctly?

Not guilty!

Our ears ring with amazement. God justifies the *ungodly!*

God does not justify anyone who says, "I am good." He does not — because such a person is a liar. All are corrupt. You are corrupt. I am too, to my shame. But God is glorified in saving sinners. Blessed be His name.

So we read in Romans 4:5, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." God justifies the *ungodly!* We are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

In Romans 5, the inspired apostle develops this beautiful truth of justification, accomplished by the atoning death of Jesus Christ. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died" — for whom? For those whom God chose from eternity? True enough, but that is not the emphasis. The emphasis is on the experience of those for whom He died. For whom did Christ die? For the righteous? No.

"In due time Christ died *for the ungodly....* God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5:6, 8, 9).

Justification means that the supreme Judge, who is perfectly righteous, and from whom there is no appeal, declares that we are in perfect harmony with His law. He declares us *innocent*. It is as if I never had sin in my nature, nor had committed any sin! Indeed, it is as if I had fully accomplished perfect obedience to God's law. God says — and it almost sounds contradictory to Scripture; but it isn't, when you understand the ground of this amazing declaration — but God says, "In My judgment you have

so much to your credit, that you are not only worthy of this declaration of not guilty, but you are worthy of a tremendous reward, that of everlasting life!"


Do you see why I speak in terms of an amazing declaration? That is justification.

This imputed righteousness can never be repealed. The Lord is not

a man that He should lie, nor the son of a man, that He should ever repent or change His verdict. He who is faithful to His own Word and name shall never fail in the thing which He has spoken. When He declares you righteous, the verdict is final.

It is in the consciousness of that

blessed truth that Paul writes in Romans 8:33ff.: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?"

It is important now that we go on to see how God can impute righteousness to those who are ungodly. What can possibly be the ground for such a verdict? 

When Thou Sittest In Thine House

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

God's Command to Fathers

For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

Psalm 78:5-7

Who is responsible for the training of children in the home? There is much talk concerning the mother's calling in this regard. She is called by God in Scripture to be a "keeper at home" (Titus 2:5). Sometimes there is so much debate that swirls around this question that we can forget about the role and function of father in the training of his children in the home. The Bible does not relieve father of this all important task. It may be true that father is called by God to provide for his family and that this requires of him to be gone to work, but this does not alleviate his

active role in training his children in the fear of the Lord.

In many places in the Bible we read of the calling of fathers in this regard. Paul writes of this calling to fathers in Ephesians 6:4: "ye fathers, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Or again he exhorts in Colossians 3:21, "fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." This same calling likewise belonged to the fathers of the Old Testament church, as is evident from the passage quoted at the beginning of this article. There is an obvious duty of fathers in the training of their children, which, if ignored, will have devastating results on their children in the generations that follow.

A Testimony in Jacob

We learn from Psalm 78:5 that God has "established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel." It is not the intent of this article to prove that these words must be applied to the New Testament church even though they were spoken to the Old Testament nation of Israel. The New Testament proves conclusively that today the church is made up of the believing children of Abraham (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:29). That means

that the New Testament church can also be called Jacob or Israel in a true spiritual sense. Today, right now, in these last times, God has appointed a law in Israel. That law may no longer be made up of all the ceremonies of the civil, ceremonial, and even moral laws of the Old Testament, since Christ has fulfilled the law and brought it to its perfect end. But there is surely a law established in the church of Jesus Christ today too. That law of the church consists not only of the ten commandments, which are still in effect today, but it consists of the Word of God as a whole. The Scriptures are the law appointed in Israel.

Fathers are to make the Word of God known to their children. These may not hide from their children the glorious truths of God's Word. This entails teaching, as well as enforcing in the life of his children, the exhortations and the laws commanded us in God's Word. Fathers are called to make known to their children that they may not serve any other God beside Jehovah God. Fathers must teach their children that they may not take God's name in vain and that they must keep the Sabbath day holy. Fathers must impress upon the hearts of their children

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their duty toward their neighbor, that they may not kill, commit adultery with, steal from, or lie about their neighbor. The emphasis of this passage of God's Word is, of course, that *fathers* apply themselves diligently to make known the law that God has appointed in the midst of His church and covenant.

But obviously the content of this instruction includes more than just an outward code of ethics or morals. This law must also be a testimony. The word "testimony" in Psalm 78 literally means "revelation." The idea of the passage therefore is that God's law is a revelation — it reveals something to us. What is the revelation of God's Word and commandments to His people? They together are a revelation of who and what we are as compared to the holy and just God of heaven and earth. When we examine ourselves according to God's Word, that Word testifies to us that we are sinners. Out of the law of God is the knowledge of sin. By the deeds of the law no man is justified in God's sight. The commands of God in His Word "testify" or "reveal" that to you and me. This is what, in turn, must be taught to our children as well: they with us are sinners who fail miserably to keep God's law.

In that way the law must serve as a testimony, not merely of our sinfulness, but of the fact that we cannot be saved other than in the precious blood of Jesus Christ. That ultimately is what God's Word and commandments testify or reveal to us: the cross of Jesus Christ. Law and gospel do not contradict each other. Fathers impart to their children a knowledge of God's Word and what God demands of them in His Word. But in that connection, fathers also teach them that Christ alone is the only way into heaven and God's favor. That is the law and testimony established in Jacob.

The Duty of Fathers

The law and testimony appointed in Israel are to be taught by fathers. According to Psalm 78:5, *fathers* are commanded to make these known to their children. Specific mention is made of fathers — not mothers or parents — but fathers. And though there is no doubt that mother is included in this command of God, nevertheless the emphasis falls on the father of a covenant home and family. There are two truths that lie at the heart of this command that fathers receive in God's Word.

The first is this: God sets the father as the head of his household. In our day and society this is a truth of God's Word that is questioned or even denied. Feminism in our land has served to rob society of this important truth of God's Word. So obscure has this truth become, it seems, that many in the church itself believe that father and mother are equal in authority and rule in the house. That is not true! God has ordained the father as the head of his home and family! That follows from the truth that, already in the marriage, before children are born, God has ordained the husband as head of his wife. The wife is always called by Scripture to submit to the rule of her husband over her (Eph. 5:25-33; I Pet. 3:1-6). When God gives to this man and his wife children, then the role that belongs to the man remains the same: he rules his household. This is one of the qualifications listed in I Timothy 3:4, 5, and 12 for one who is to be called as an elder or deacon in the church: he must rule his household well.

This is how God establishes good order in the home. There cannot be two heads! There cannot be two who are equal in command. Though both parents are, no doubt, in authority over their children, that authority is not equal. Neither ought we to overlook the practical significance of this truth. If there are two within the household who think themselves of equal author-

ity, the result will be bitterness and strife. Neither will give in. When such strife takes place in a home, then children witness this and they begin to question the legitimate authority of both father and mother. Children who grow up in a home where a wife constantly rebels against her husband, and tells her children to do or not to do something that father has commanded, most often will also rebel when they become teenagers. That, because mother has undermined the authority of father in the home.

This does not mean that there are never going to be differences of opinion concerning their children that arise between a father and mother. But when these differences arise, the wife must always remain submissive to his authority in the home. These differences can be discussed quietly and away from the presence of the children. And if there is not agreement as to how to deal with a child, then mother bows humbly before her husband's rule. The father has been given the command by God to make known and teach his family in the precepts of God's Word. The father must therefore take the leading role in his family.

This authority ought not to be abused by fathers, of course. The husband is not without his wife. God gives the work of training children to the husband and the wife to perform jointly. The father may not be a tyrant or dictator in his home, ignoring the opinion and wise counsel of his wife. God has given a man his wife in order that the two of them as one flesh might raise their children in the fear of God. Husbands who do not recognize the role of their wives as mothers in Zion are foolish. Fathers who do not back up the authority of mother over her children by means of discipline also teach their children to be rebellious. Fathers and mothers must always present a united and harmonious authority before which children must bow. Our text teaches therefore the au-

thority of father in making known the laws and testimonies to his children — but not without the wife.

A second truth that reveals itself in Psalm 78:5 is that the father must take an active role in this instruction of his children. He is not simply a figurehead. He is not simply the one who doles out duties that others must perform but as for himself personally he does not become involved in the actual carrying out of those duties. The father himself must be active in his home and family. He must be there for his children! He must be busy in his home giving instruction and encouragement and meting out discipline. I can still remember when I was young having to take my catechism book to father before going to class, in order that he might make sure I knew my lesson. Father must lead his family in family worship. He must set aside each day to read the Bible and discuss it with his family. It is a good tradition we do well to keep that each day, while the family fellowships around the table together, father sees to it that the Word of God is read and discussed. My father always referred to our meal times together as “the family altar.”

Father must be at home in order to set the spiritual atmosphere or tone of his family. He must raise his children in such a way that they feel comfortable and free at any time to discuss their problems. They must feel free to seek the spiritual advice of father in these matters. In this way it is father who serves to establish the spiritual tone of the family in the home. If this is lacking, it is father's fault. And father will be held responsible before God in the day of judgment since he is the head of his home. This also implies that father must be home as much as possible. When he is finished with work, then his place is with his wife and children, not pursuing his own pleasures and desires, leaving the care of his children solely up to his wife. In our busy world, fathers, it seems, are away from home far, far too much. This surely will have its effect on the generation that arises in the church — and not a good one, either!

When a father takes seriously the command of God to make known the testimonies of God's Word to his children, then his children will grow to do that with their children too. When this happens,

we see God's covenant carried on in our generations. God uses the means of a godly father who trains his children in the fear of God in the home to carry on His covenant fellowship with children and children's children. Notice what the psalmist writes in verse 7 of Psalm 78, “that they (children, WB) might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.” When fathers fail to be a part of the training of their children, then in our generations our children forget God. When that happens they no longer hope in God.

The incentive covenant fathers have, therefore, in teaching their children is that they will see with their own eyes their children and grandchildren, and possibly even their great grandchildren, hoping in God. How beautiful to behold our generations desiring the fellowship of the ever blessed God! How glorious to see our families confessing the name of God and His Son! How it makes our hearts thrill to see our children taking the banner of Christ from our hands and holding it high in their generation too!

How important are fathers to their children! 

All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee

Mr. Joel Minderhoud

The Handiwork of God: Neurons

But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

I Corinthians 12:18

The human body is an unfathomable, marvelous work of God.

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It is made up of a multitude of members — each of which has been created for a unique purpose that contributes to the complex, yet harmonious, workings of the body. These members can be categorized into ten major systems — the respiratory, circulatory, immune, muscular, skeletal, digestive, excretory, reproductive, endocrine, and nervous systems. Each system is governed by the ever-present hand of God to perform specific tasks for

the well-being of the body. Each system demonstrates marvelous complexity, intricacy, and unity, both within itself and in its dependence on the other systems in accomplishing these tasks. When studying any particular system we are amazed at God's work, especially when we consider that our bodies serve as a picture — a picture of the body of believers, united in Christ in the one goal of serving the Father and bringing Him all

glory and honor. Hence, we see it can only be the work of an all-wise and omnipotent, sovereign Lord who created, governs, and sustains all things, uniting them for the specific purpose that His name be glorified in all its beauty and goodness. Let us keep that before us as we focus on a particular system within the body, the nervous system, and marvel at the handiwork of our God.

The nervous system consists of the brain, spinal cord, and nerve cells (neurons) that bring information to and from the brain. The basic function or role of the neuron as a whole is to transmit an electrical signal to the other cells in the body. These electrical signals are the means by which information is communicated throughout the body. For example, in order to move your arm, an electrical signal is sent to the bicep muscle with the command to contract. An electrical signal may be sent to the pancreas to stimulate it to secrete insulin, in order to decrease the sugar levels in your blood. Another electrical signal is sent to a particular group of cells in the brain, and the brain will interpret that signal as an image observed by the eye.

Regardless of where the electrical signal goes, the entire process of transmitting these signals to other places in the body is fascinating to God's people, for it clearly demonstrates God's sovereign hand that guides and directs *all* things. Furthermore, the transmission of electrical signals in the body demonstrates to us vividly how the human body functions in an orderly way with the goal of uniting individual parts of the body. Without this unity, particularly the unity brought about by the nervous system that communicates to all the cells, the body would be a collection of individual and disjointed parts that would accomplish nothing. To help us understand the transmitting of the electrical signals in the body and to see

how they demonstrate God's sovereign hand and unity within the body, let us consider a "building block" of the nervous system, the nerve cell or neuron, and three of its basic parts: dendrite (receiver of electrical messages), axon (conductor of electrical messages), and synaptic knobs (sender of electrical messages).

Neurons: The Dendrites

The first part of the neuron is composed of branched, tentacle-like extensions called dendrites. Picture an oak tree's twisting and reaching mass of branches as a picture of the dendrites, for the word dendrite itself is derived from the Greek word for tree. The dendrites' role is twofold. One role is to receive stimuli from within and without the body. Dendrites can recognize a variety of different external stimuli. These stimuli include the sensations of heat and pressure, as well as the complex sensations that produce vision, hearing, smelling, and taste. For example, when you place your hand on a hot element, it is the dendrites that are stimulated by the heat to send an electrical message to the brain. Dendrites can also recognize different internal conditions, including chemical imbalances within the body, changes in heartbeat and blood pressure, abnormal oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, and so on, triggering responses to these conditions. For example, when you work vigorously it is the dendrites of special neurons in the body that recognize that the oxygen levels in the blood stream are too low to provide the muscles with the oxygen they need in order to do the work, and these dendrites, therefore, send a message to the brain to rectify the problem. You either breathe more heavily or you quit the activity.

The second role of the dendrites is to receive electrical signals from neighboring nerve cells. When one nerve cell sends an electrical message to another nerve cell,

it is the role of the dendrites to receive that electrical signal so that it may continue on to its proper destination.

Thus, we see the importance of dendrites in our body. Dendrites that do not work properly will disrupt our body's ability to receive stimuli and hinder our ability to respond to them. One example is sufficient to demonstrate this. Leprosy is a disease that produces miserable skin lesions that often damage the dendrites in the nerve cells of the extremities. These neurons can be destroyed to such an extent that the leper cannot receive external stimuli in the affected areas. So, for example, a leprous hand cannot detect pain and will be easily damaged or misused to the point of deformity. The dendrites must do their work, and do so in cooperation with the other parts of the body, in order for things to work properly for the health of the body. May we learn to appreciate the unity that exists in our human bodies, and the contribution of each of its little members! May this also remind us of the value and importance of all the members in the Body of Christ! No one should be considered invaluable, for all of God's people are *members* of Christ's body and contribute to the whole and to the unity of that body.

Neurons: The Axon

The second part of the neuron is the axon. If the dendrites conjure in your mind a picture of the branches of a tree, then the axon would correspond to the tree trunk. The axon is like a long insulated wire that conducts the electrical impulse along the neuron. The transmission of the electrical impulse along this "wire" is very complex and demonstrates the handiwork of our God in its great intricacy, beauty, and unity.

Often people think that electrical impulses move through the nerve cells of the body like electricity runs through an electric

wire. This, however, is not quite accurate. There is no mass of particles that bump into each other, like a long series of falling dominoes, and that transmit the message within the nerve cell. Rather the message is transmitted by a series of events that happen at one place in the neuron, and, in turn, trigger similar events elsewhere in the neuron. Think of the axon as a long corridor of classrooms. Each classroom has a door. Outside each classroom are eager students who crowd the door, trying to get into their respective classrooms. The teacher in the first classroom gets a phone call from the principal to begin class. This teacher opens his door, and into his classroom rush the eager students. The second teacher sees the students entering the first classroom and, recognizing this as the signal to begin her class, opens her door to her eager students. The message to start class is quickly passed down the corridor of classrooms in this way.

This analogy perhaps demonstrates the complex transmission of an electrical signal along the axon. Explained from a chemical standpoint, we need to recognize that each neuron is surrounded by a fluid containing sodium ions (ions are charged atoms — either positively charged or negatively charged). When no electrical impulse is being transmitted in the neuron, there are more sodium ions outside the neuron than inside it. God ordained this imbalance so that an electrical impulse could be transmitted. When a neuron is stimulated, it opens a gate in the walls of the axon and lets sodium ions rush inside. After a specific amount of sodium ions have rushed in, another gate farther down the axon opens and lets more sodium ions enter the neuron. This in turn stimulates the next gate to open, and so the process continues down the axon. This successive “opening of gates” — allowing sodium ions to rush into the neuron — constitutes the electrical im-

pulse. Electricity is not literally moving “through” the neuron, but sodium ions simply move successively into the nerve cell. The electrical impulse has thus traveled from one end of the nerve cell to the other. From there the impulse is passed on to the synaptic knobs, which transmit the impulse to another cell. This too is an amazingly complex process, worthy of our attention in a future article.


Once transmission of the impulse has been completed within the nerve cell, the sodium ions within that cell must be pushed back out of the cell so that there are again more sodium ions outside the cell than within it. This imbalance is necessary in order for the neuron to be able to receive another stimulus that it may open its gates, let the sodium back in, and once more begin the entire electrical impulse process. This is accomplished by the use of a “pump,” which pushes sodium ions back out of the nerve cell, so that it is ready to conduct another impulse.

As a side note, one is amazed at the amount of energy used each day simply in pushing sodium ions out of the nerve cell. Remarkably, *one third* of all the calories one consumes in a day is used to pump sodium ions out of the nerve cells. This is amazing and makes us consider some of our lifestyles. How well will the nervous system function when there is not sufficient energy available to transmit the electrical signal? Is it any surprise that students do not do well academically when they arrive at school and have not had breakfast? Is a cup of coffee or a can of Mountain Dew sufficient in the morning? Can one work to his potential when he has not received proper nourishment for the past few hours? Do we send our children to school without breakfast, without the proper physical nourishment they need? Or, worse yet, do we send them off to school without family devotions, without the proper spiritual nourishment they need to

battle sin and to live the life of covenant friendship with God? Without proper nourishment, systems within the body cannot function properly, and the body suffers. How necessary is the daily physical nourishment! The same is so true of spiritual nourishment. Without regular spiritual nourishment we slowly weaken and die. May God cause us to see the need for daily spiritual nourishment!

The Wondrous Works of God

“I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands” (Ps. 143:5).

We take up our daily routines oblivious to the fact that every moment of the day multitudes of tiny electrical signals are being issued and received by the brain and sent throughout the body in order for us to do the simplest of tasks. It is God who continues to maintain and guide every aspect of the workings of our body. God governs the very movement of the chemicals involved in the electrical signals that are issued and received by the cells of our bodies. No single cell, no single molecule, moves or has its being apart from the will and word of God. God is sovereign. He governs and directs these things, uniting them in a God-ordained purpose to contribute to the whole of the body. When we consider all the many parts working together and the intricate detail in which the body is woven together, we are awed by the clear evidence of our Creator and what a wondrous work He has fashioned. What a marvel our bodies are! May we be reminded of another Body, a multitude of members, sovereignly united in Christ its Head to give glory, honor, and adoration to the triune God. Our bodies are a true gift, both in their earthly intricacy and complexity, and for the spiritual picture they afford us! What wondrous things God has done. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! 

Must

There are several words in the Hebrew Old Testament, the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint), and the Greek New Testament that are variously translated must, must needs, necessary, necessity, need, and ought or ought not. We want to take a careful look at the most common of these words (*dei* in the Greek), noticing first of all that it is derived from a verb that means to bind or to be in bonds. The idea is that two things are bound together in such a way that one makes the other necessary or needful, in the sense that it must come to pass! These two things are a historical event and the eternal will of God. There are many things in the history of this world, in fact, all things that take place in the history of this world, which do so because they are grounded in the will of God. We may call this the must of God's counsel. Did God decree that something should happen? Then it must happen. It is necessary that it take place. God's will and each event is bound together in that way.

There are 102 occurrences of this word in the New Testament, 41 of them found in the Gospel of Luke and Acts — a favorite term of Luke, then. Greek scholars such as Thayer and Grundmann have arranged these usages into six categories, some of far more importance than others, but every event in each category grounded in the will of God. We find the most im-

portant and fascinating category to be the one in which the counsel of God established the necessity of the sufferings of Christ. And as Christ stands at the very heart of the eternal counsel of God, so all the other categories find their meaning in this central category of Christ's suffering.

There are things that are necessary and must come to pass because God commands them in His law. The Pharisees ought to have done acts of justice and love rather than worry about excessive tithing (Luke 11:42). There are six days in which men ought to work (Luke 13:4). Under the old covenant, circumcision (Acts 15:5) and the Passover (Luke 22:7) were necessary observations. "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:20).

The will of God lays certain duties upon us as belonging to the Christian's life of gratitude. "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had compassion on thee?" (Matt. 18:33). "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). "So ought men to love their own wives..." (Eph. 5:28). The gospel must be proclaimed with boldness; that is how a preacher ought to speak (Eph. 6:20).

The coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ by every elect individual is necessary according to God's will! Jesus instructs Nicodemus that he must be born again (John 3:7). According to John 4:4, Jesus must needs go through Samaria on His way to Galilee because a Samaritan woman and others there were ordained unto sal-

vation. Jesus informed Zacchaeus that He must abide at his house, in order that salvation might come to his house that day (Luke 19:5, 9). Since faith is by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, Paul says in I Corinthians 9:16, "... For necessity is laid upon me: yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel."


As we said, at the very heart of necessity, giving meaning to all those things that must come to pass, and causing the child of God to rejoice in the sharing of God's secrets, is the work that Christ did, the mission that He fulfilled, the battle that He fought all alone! Jesus explained to the dejected travelers on the way to Emmaus, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). Literally we read, "Was it not necessary that Christ suffer these things?" "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14). Necessary to fulfill prophecy. Necessary to fulfill the type. But above all, it was necessary for Christ to be lifted up on the cross, and then lifted up to heaven, to meet the demands of the counsel of God! And the heavens must receive Him until the time of the restitution of all things (Acts 3:21). "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The end of the world and all things that serve to bring the end of the world are necessary accord-

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ing to the will of God. The great eschatological events bring the goal of God in history. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that the thoughts he had upon his bed were of those things that should come to pass hereafter (Dan. 2:29). The signs of

the times should not trouble the church of Christ, "... for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (Matt. 24:6). The entire Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ gives to us, His servants, the record of those things which must come to pass shortly

(1:1; 4:1; 22:6). When all things are finished according to God's exquisite salvation plan, the church will be taken to glory. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (I Cor. 15:53). 

That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Miss Agatha Lubbers

The Christian Story and the Christian School (2)

A Defense of the Narrative Approach in Reformed Christian Education

In the first article on this topic we made a start in attempting to understand the narrative approach to Reformed Christian education proposed by Dr. Bolt.

We identified the narrative approach as one in which the Christian school, through its teachers, must tell a story. The story is about God and His children — a story that includes the Christian school because the school serves the mission of God and His people. It is the story of the triune God's mission — commissioned by the Father, accomplished by Christ, applied by the Holy Spirit, and still in process until the end comes when God is "all in all."

The review and discussion of the specifics of the narrative approach in Reformed Christian education will be postponed till later articles. Dr. John Bolt, in the book

The Christian School and the Christian Story (Christian Schools International, 1993), begins by exploring some critical questions respecting contemporary education and some critical questions about our culture. He then turns to the rediscovery of narrative and to a specific treatment of the Christian story and the Christian school. We continue in this installment a review of the discussion of some of the critical questions affecting contemporary education.

Symptoms and Solutions

Dr. Bolt continues his review of critical issues by identifying school choice as one of the largest of the proposed reforms in the 1990s. Those of us who have watched the educational scene have observed that this was truly one of the greatest changes in educational programs.

School choice has become such a significant movement because the major ailments of public education are the stagnation and the unresponsiveness of the system. This

is true because public education is a self-protecting monopoly dedicated to its own self-perpetuation. Political control and a corrupt and self-serving bureaucracy have caused the public schools in many ways to fail to meet the present needs.

One of the important current issues concerns the very idea of public education. The public school system, controlled and financed by the government, is now being called into question. Bolt cites *Politics, Markets, and the American Schools* (the Brookings Institution, 1990), in which authors John Chubb and Terry Moe argue that the political institutions that govern America's schools "burden the schools with excessive bureaucracy, inhibit effective organization, and stifle student achievement." Promised discussions leading to educational reform have not occurred because these discussions were blocked by teachers' unions, associations of principals, school boards, superintendents, education schools, book publishers, testing

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services, and many others interested in the continuance of the institutional status quo.

The authors Chubb and Moe assert that the problems in public education are institutional. They propose a new system that relies on markets and choice and not on the current system in which schools are governed by a self-serving political bureaucracy.

Time magazine, "Tough Choice" (September 16, 1991), reported President George Bush to have said, "It's time parents were free to choose the schools that their children attend. This approach will create the competitive climate that stimulates excellence."

Bolt identifies a wide variety of specific proposals during the 1900s that can be included under the umbrella of school choice. They are the following:

1/ Permitting parents to opt out of sending children to neighborhood public schools, so the children can attend other schools in their district or outside their district. Parents would be given the opportunity to walk away from bad schools, and this would provide incentive for these schools to upgrade or go out of business.

2/ Creation of voucher plans that would enable parents to pay for tuition in private or parochial schools. Plans like this are under way or have been attempted in cities like Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Cleveland, Ohio.

3/ Commission charter schools to operate as for-profit business enterprises and/or extensions of public universities.

The debate between the proponents and the opponents of school choice in the 1990s will continue for some time. Those who are proponents see school choice as a way to empower the poor and disadvantaged. Those who oppose school choice are concerned about improper funding for church-related schools. Others predict that parental choice will further segregate children along social and class lines.

Bolt asks the question how this issue affects Christian education. He notes that at first glance the drive toward genuine school choice is a step in the right direction as far as many supporters of Christian education are concerned. It is one that proponents of Christian education would applaud for the following reasons:

1/ School choice makes it possible for parents to choose schools (perhaps Christian schools) that are consistent with the Christian commitment and belief of the parents.

2/ School choice is in keeping with one of the fundamentals of belief that education is a parental responsibility and not the responsibility of the state.

Bolt asserts, however, that there are aspects of the present debate that should be disquieting for Christians. He writes as follows:

Is the model of a marketplace where schools compete for support and clients are free to go where they want really an appropriate model for education? Should the schools be run as a for-profit business? And is the school's primary task one of equipping today's students with marketable skills for the demands of a high-tech, intensely competitive global economy? Should the needs of the changing world economy dictate the goals of contemporary education? (Bolt, pp. 28-29).

After quoting at length from the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education entitled "A Nation at Risk," Bolt argues that America's loss of economic and technological advantage became the real point of concern about education in general and about educational excellence in particular.

Citing the erosion of entrepreneurial creativity, Bolt argues that it is appropriate to consider proposals for excellence that include an

emphasis on a core curriculum that concentrates on English, history, mathematics, and science. The emphasis should be on raising academic standards and shifting from process to content and outcome.

In his pursuit of an answer to the question whether the marketability of skills is the most important goal of the school, Dr. Bolt quotes approvingly from an article by Arnold DeGraaf. DeGraaf writes as follows in "Return to Basics: Temptation and Challenge," *Christian Educators Journal*, 17, No. 4, March/April, 1978.

In the face of social upheaval and massive criticism, public education has responded with a reaffirmation of its trust in science, technology, and efficiency. Young people are indoctrinated in the belief that the good life consists of the production and consumption of more and more material goods, and that the road to greater economic progress is charted by science and technology in the service of business and industry (Bolt, p. 31).

Bolt also quotes from John VanDyk in *The Beginning of Wisdom: The Nature and Task of the Christian School*, Christian Schools International, 1985.

Wisdom is not merely collecting and amassing theoretical or factual knowledge; nor is it simply gaining technical skills. Wisdom is knowledge and understanding deepened into spiritual insight and expressed in loving service (James 1:13). Wisdom originates in the fear of the Lord and is enhanced by faith, hope, love, knowledge, spiritual insight, and active discipleship....

Thus a Christian school is a place where Christian educators refuse to be satisfied with providing only factual knowledge and marketable skills. Rather, teachers in a Christian school seek to transform all activities and studies into an expression of biblical wisdom, training the students to walk as disciples of Jesus Christ (Bolt, p. 31).

Bolt correctly concludes that the current emphasis on excellence and the marketplace falls short of the Christian expectation for educational reform. Bolt asserts that

the working assumption of much current thinking on education seems to be something like this: When market pressures make our schools competitive and efficient, standards will improve, SAT scores will rebound, our graduates will be literate and employable, American supremacy in the international economic order will return, and life — particularly the pursuit of happiness, wealth and success — can go on as usual. What's really wrong with the system is that it isn't working at peak levels of maximum efficiency (Bolt, pp. 31, 32).

Bolt ends by saying that there is little acknowledgment in this diagnosis that beyond the declared crisis of efficiency and excellence is perhaps the real crisis — the crisis of the soul. He asserts that Christians must realize that we need to dig deeper for the cause of the crisis, to matters of the heart.

What's Really Wrong with Public Education?

In a concluding discussion of the critical questions about contemporary education, Bolt borrows the title of the book by Ronald Nash, *The Closing of the American Heart: What's Really Wrong with America's Schools*, Probe Books, Word Publishing, 1990.

Bolt begins this section by noting that, although work is a very important aspect of our true humanity, our humanity is not exhausted by the mere fact that we are workers. Christians must aspire to a life of service in our community with our neighbors and in fellowship with God.

In the area of public education we encounter a knotty problem of sharply conflicting opinions concerning the community values that should be inculcated into students,

as well as the radically opposing strategies by which such goals can be met. Bolt compares two major, diametrically opposite approaches to the question of preparation for community service. He sees these approaches as being correctly summarized under the umbrella terms of "critical literacy" and "cultural literacy."

Those committed to critical literacy believe the socializing of the children for life in the community means that children should become able to be social critics and to implement social transformation. According to those committed to critical literacy, all educated citizens must possess the skills of protest and revolt. Advocates of critical literacy view the present order of things as beset by unjust structures such as sexism, racism, class exploitation, and militarism. They assert that society needs radical transformation and structural change. Public schools in the past have prevented this from happening. Now schools must equip students to become agents of social change.

To illustrate the point that he makes concerning the impact of critical literacy on curricular change, Bolt cites attempts at peace education that proliferated in the 1980s. Units of instruction were developed to evoke terror of a nuclear holocaust. The purpose of the unit was to create feelings of guilt in students by pointing out repeatedly that the U.S. invented and dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that could have destroyed the world. Critical literacy advocates claim that the U.S. continues to spend money on bombs that can destroy the world rather than helping economically disadvantaged people.

Those contending for cultural literacy claim that, even though perfect social and political institutions do not exist in the U.S., the country is a force for good and its institutions protect a relatively free and open society. Cultural literacy

proponents espouse the concept of preserving and transmitting an appreciation for our institutions. They claim there is an American mainstream culture. If children and adults are to thrive, they need to become literate in that culture. E.D. Hirsch insists that cultural literacy is neither reactionary nor closed. He observes that "conservatives who wish to preserve traditional values will find that these are necessarily inculcated by traditional education which can in fact be subversive of the status quo."

Bolt states that an emphasis on cultural literacy is another way of saying that the task of the school is to prepare students for citizenship in a specific community. Teachers are custodians of our civilization, and students are its heirs. The school is a specialized community where the larger community, the nation, preserves and passes on its cultural memory.

Neil Postman writes in *Teaching As a Conserving Activity*, pp. 26-27, as follows:

Our own culture is overdosing on change.... The plain fact is that too much change, too fast, for too long has the effect of making social institutions useless and individuals perpetually unfit to live amid the conditions of their own culture.... Without at least a reminiscence of continuity and tradition, without a place to stand from which to observe change, without a counter argument to the overwhelming theories of change, we can easily be swept away.... In a culture of high volatility and casual regard for its past such responsibility becomes the school's most essential service. The school stands as the only mass medium capable of putting forward the case for what is not happening in the culture (Bolt, p. 38).


Bolt concludes his comments on what's really wrong in public education by noting that there is a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the advocates of critical literacy and cultural lit-

eracy. There is no agreement about the past, the present, and the future. Therefore, a commitment to make public schools vehicles for inculcating community values inevitably leads to a cultural war between the two visions. Bolt maintains that what is really wrong with

public education is that it has lost its soul and there is no agreement concerning the public philosophy that ought to guide the public schools.

It has lost its soul. There is no longer a consensual and coherent

public philosophy to guide it. As a consequence education has become one of the most highly politicized institutions in North American life. In an increasingly politicized climate the prospects for improvement of education seem dim (Bolt, p. 30).

(To be continued) 

Book Reviews



The Purpose of God, An Exposition of Ephesians, by R. C. Sproul. Christian Focus Publications, 2002. 159pp. (Hardcover) [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.]


A commentary on Ephesians is always welcome, for Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is a crown jewel among the New Testament books. It has as its main theme, "The glory of the church as the body of Christ." It contains clear and unmistakable teachings on all the doctrines of sovereign and particular grace. Its emphasis on salvation by grace alone through faith permeates every part of it. Its practical section is a handbook on how the bride of Christ is to live during those years when she and her bridegroom are separated.

In many respects, this book is not a disappointment. When the doctrines of sovereign grace must be set down, Sproul does so in clear language. He has no truck with

election based on foreseen faith in his discussion of 1:3, 4. His treatment of total depravity in 2:1-3 is pointed and without compromise, with a clear rejection of Pelagianism. 2:8 ("For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God") fills the heart of the author with elation as he inveighs against any idea of merit in the work of salvation.

It is, however, a somewhat strange book. I say this, first of all, because it is really too short a commentary for this magnificent epistle. The whole book is 159 pages, and of these only slightly over 100 are actually devoted to commentary. The print is large and uncrowded; the exposition is very limited. But it is a strange book in another way. One wonders about the author's priorities when he reads the commentary. Let me explain. Properly, 2:8 receives a relatively lengthy treatment, but most

of it is a discussion of the Popish doctrine of merit and Aristotle's doctrine of cause. 2:10, a crucial text on the relation between salvation by grace and good works, receives one line. While the book discusses many Christian virtues and many sins which the church must avoid, most are only mentioned, while four pages are devoted to anger (4:26, 27). The author includes a long discussion on feminism in connection with the calling of wives to submit to their husbands, but no discussion of divorce and remarriage is to be found, much less a biblical doctrine of marriage. The balance seems so wrong.

The book will not be of much help in sermon preparation, but it can and ought to serve two good purposes in our homes: 1) It is an excellent and sound survey of a most important book; 2) It will be of great help in preparation for Bible discussions on Ephesians in a Bible study group. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Minister Activities

The Lord willing, Prof. and Mrs. H. Hanko were to depart for

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

Northern Ireland the first week in December. They planned on laboring among the saints there from December 7 to December 23. Plans called for Prof. Hanko to speak at a couple of special meetings, as well as to lead mid-week Bible studies and preach for the fellow-

ship on the three Sundays they were there.

Rev. B. Gritters declined the call he received to serve as pastor of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids.

The congregation of the Hull, IA PRC extended a call to Rev. M.

DeVries to serve as our churches' second missionary to Ghana.

The Byron Center, MI PRC has formed a trio from which they were to call a pastor on December 18. That trio consisted of Rev. R. Cammenga, Rev. M. DeVries, and Rev. M. Dick.

The recently vacated Faith PRC in Jenison, MI was to call a pastor from a trio consisting of the Revs. C. Haak, J. Slopesma, and C. Terpstra.

Rev. K. Koole wrote in a recent Grandville, MI PRC bulletin that he and his family planned to move into Grandville's parsonage the first week of December. Plans were also to have him preach his farewell at Faith Church Sunday evening, December 1, and then be installed in Grandville on December 15.

Denomination Activities

In our west-Michigan area churches there is a group that has grown to the point where they need and deserve an introduction to the readers of the "News." This group has become known as the PR Singles Fellowship. Presently there are three ladies who help drive and give direction to this older singles group. They are Helen Hop of Hope Church in Walker, and Jane Peterson and Jane Dykstra of Southeast in Grand Rapids. The program of each meeting is planned by a different church each month. If it's your church's turn, you are responsible to think of somebody in your own church, or perhaps some relative of yours, who can play an instrument, sing, show slides of a trip of theirs, or tell the group about a hobby or job they have, etc. Anywhere from 25-40 singles have shown up at past events, and for many of those attending the monthly dinners, it has become something they do not miss if they can help it. Any PR person who is a widow, widower, or single person for whatever reason, and is age 55 or older is eligible to at-

tend. Just watch your bulletins for announcements of events, which usually are the third Thursday evening of each month from March through November.

We say all that by way of introduction and to let you know that this group enjoyed their annual Christmas Social at Hope PR Christian School on November 21. In addition to a delicious meal served by the Ladies Circle of Hope, the group also enjoyed special music presented by the Trinity Men Singers — a male chorus from the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI, under the direction of Mr. Jerry VanderKolk. This chorus, you might be interested to know, takes its name from Ecclesiastes 2:8, "I gat me men singers and women singers." An offering was also taken for the school.

Not to be outdone by the older singles, the young adults of area PR churches in and around the Chicago, IL area were invited to a night of fun and fellowship at a get-together in Hammond, IN on November 22 at the Amerihost Inn. Activities revolved around a speech by Rev. R. VanOverloop.

Mission Activities

Rev. J. Kortering, one of our denomination's retired ministers, along with his wife, planned on assisting Rev. T. Miersma in our mission work in Spokane, WA for the months of November and December.

Rev. J. Mahtani was scheduled to preach for the congregation of Grace Presbyterian Church in Lanham, MD Sunday, December 1.

Evangelism Activities

This year the Evangelism Committee of the Loveland, CO PRC decided to focus more inwardly on their congregation itself, by emphasizing their calling to witness to those with whom they come in contact, instead of a Reformation Day Lecture to which they in-

vite others. With this in mind, the committee asked Rev. G. Eriks, their pastor, to give two lectures on personal witnessing. These lectures were on November 14 and 22. The consistory of Loveland also passed a proposal from their Evangelism Committee to air the Reformed Witness Hour on 670 AM in Denver, CO on Sunday afternoons, beginning soon.


The Evangelism Committee of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI has published a new pamphlet entitled "The Kingdom of God," by Prof. D. Engelsma. The seven chapters in this pamphlet appeared first as editorials in the *Standard Bearer*.

The Randolph, WI PRC has put together a tape set of Rev. S. Key's recent series, "The Church Unsettled — From Egypt to Canaan: An Overview of the Life of Moses." This set comes in an album with 14 tapes containing 28 sermons. Cost for the set is \$38. Those interested may contact Matt or Melissa Regnerus at (920) 326-1975 to order a set.

Congregation Activities

The congregation of the Lynden, WA PRC was invited to commemorate Reformation Day with a family night on November 22. Plans called for fellowship, singing praises to God, and Rev. R. Hanko giving a brief presentation on "The Reformation and the Invention of Printing."

The young women of the Young People's Society of the Byron Center, MI PRC invited all the women of their congregation to a "Ladies Night Out" on November 14, with proceeds going to support fellow saints in the Philippines, by providing necessary funds to send Christmas care-packages to children there.

The Choir of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL presented their annual Thanksgiving Choir Concert on November 24. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope PRC, Redlands expresses its Christian sympathy to family, relatives, and friends, in the passing away of

ARTHUR GRIESS;

and Pete Meulenberg's brother-in-law,

GERALD DE VRIES;

and Alvern Miersma's father,

HENRY MIERSMA.

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Jonathan denHartog, Secretary

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 DeJong, at (708) 946-6126 [bill@dejongequipment.com].

NOTICE

The Council of Faith Protestant Reformed Church express our thankfulness to God and our gratitude to

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

for his twenty-five years of faithful service in the ministry of God's Word in the Protestant Reformed Churches. "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God" (Isaiah 40:9).

Pete VanDer Schaaf, clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Doon PRC extend their deep Christian sympathy to Mrs. Ann Miersma, Mr. and Mrs. Gene VanBemmel and family, and Mr. and Mrs. Phil Kuiper and family in the passing of their husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. May they find a sure comfort and a rich assurance in the words: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13b).

Rev. Richard Smit, Pres.

Jeff Baker, Sec'y.

Reformed Witness Hour

Station Listings

Station	Location	Frequency	Time/day
KCCF	Ferndale, WA	1550AM	8:30 A.M./Sunday
KLOH	Pipestone, MN	1050AM	8:00 A.M./Sunday
KDCR	Sioux Center, IA	88.5FM	5:30 P.M./Sunday
KCWN	Pella, IA	99.9FM	3:30 P.M./Sunday
WMRH	Waupun, WI	1170AM	8:30 A.M./Sunday
WYLL	Chicago, IL	1160AM	3:30 P.M./Saturday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI	102.9FM	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI	1570AM	4:00 P.M./Sunday
WORD	Pittsburgh, PA	101.5FM	10:00 A.M./Sunday
WFNC	Fayetteville, NC	640AM	9:30 A.M./Sunday
WELP	Spartanburg, SC	1360AM	4:00 P.M./Sunday
WFAM	Augusta, GA	1050AM	4:00 P.M./Sunday
WBXR	Huntsville, AL	1140AM	9:00 A.M./Saturday
CJCA	Edmonton, AB	930AM	6:30 P.M./Sunday
KCNW	Kansas City, KS	1380AM	4:30 P.M./Sunday

Topics for January

Date	Topic	Text
January 5	"Take Time To Be Holy"	John 17:17
January 12	"The Light of a Holy Example"	Job 1:8
	Covenant Godly Living	
January 19	"The Great Good of Family Love"	Prov. 15:17
January 26	"One in a Thousand"	Ecclesiastes 7:27, 28