

THE *March 15, 2003* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

In This Issue:

MEDITATION

Rev. James Slopsema

Assyria's Offer Refused 266

EDITORIAL

Prof. David J. Engelsma

**The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary Debate —
and the Protestant Reformed Seminary (6)** 268

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

Abraham Kuyper

The Winter, Which Thou Hast Made 270

MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS

Rev. Barry L. Gritters

Taking Heed to ... the Minister (2) 272

MARKING THE BULWARKS OF ZION

Prof. Herman C. Hanko

Michael Servetus and the Denial of the Trinity (1) 274

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

Rev. James A. Laning

The Full Assurance of Faith (concl.) 277

GRACE LIFE

Rev. Mitchell C. Dick

**Dating and the Deep Blue Sea ...
and the Way of Christ (6)** 279

THINGS WHICH MUST SHORTLY COME TO PASS

Prof. David J. Engelsma

The End of All Things (concl.) 283

BOOK REVIEWS

285

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

286

Assyria's Offer Refused

Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern:

Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and of honey, that ye may live, and not die: and hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth you, saying, The LORD will deliver us.

II Kings 18:31, 32

When Hezekiah assumed the throne of Judah, he refused to pay tribute to Assyria as his father had done. This was a great act of faith. This also brought the Assyrian army from the north to besiege Jerusalem.

Rabshakeh, the spokesman for the Assyrian army, appealed to the men of Judah gathered on the walls

of Jerusalem. To resist Assyria was useless. If they would surrender, they would be treated well and be given another land as good as Canaan. In obedience to Jehovah, the citizens of Jerusalem refused this offer. God rewarded their faithfulness by slaying the Assyrian army and delivering Jerusalem from its threat.

This incident in Judah's history is very important. The "deal" that Assyria proposed to Judah is the same "deal" that the powers of darkness have proposed to the church throughout the ages. You are hopelessly outnumbered. Give up your inheritance and we will reward you sufficiently. We must, with Judah, stand fast. And placing our trust in Jehovah we too will overcome.



It was a tempting offer that Assyria proposed.

Judah was advised to surrender to Assyria. This would bring an immediate end to the siege of Jerusalem. The people could return to their homes and farms temporarily. Then they would be

transplanted to another country, as lush as Canaan. What made this such a tempting offer was the alternative. The only alternative was to die by the sword. Assyria made this very clear. Rabshakeh, the spokesman for Assyria, reminded the citizens of Jerusalem how Assyria had swept down from the north and had overcome all the nations that stood in their path. They had even brought the ten tribes of Israel into captivity. None of the gods of these nations were able to deliver them from the mighty hand of Assyria. Nor would Jehovah be able to deliver Judah from their hand. Do not listen to Hezekiah, who urges you to trust Jehovah. If you will live, you must surrender now. And if you surrender we will give you another land as good as Canaan.

There was only one problem with this "generous" offer. Canaan was the land of promise that God had given Israel as an inheritance. As such, it was a picture of the heavenly Canaan. For that reason, God had forbidden them to leave the land. They would find God's blessings only in Canaan, around

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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

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

REPRINT POLICY

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

EDITORIAL POLICY

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

EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

BUSINESS OFFICE

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

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

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

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

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

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: sean67@cprbookstore.fsnet.co.uk)

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

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

ADVERTISING POLICY

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

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

Website for RPPA: www.rppa.org
Website for PRC: www.prc.org

the temple on Mt. Zion. To accept Assyria's offer would be to forfeit their inheritance, both their earthly and their heavenly inheritance.

The world has made this offer to the church repeatedly. Give up the land of promise that God has reserved for you as an inheritance in Jesus Christ. We will more than compensate you for it. If you do not accept our offer, you will die.

This is the way the world confronts the church today. The world constantly pressures us to sacrifice our Christian principles and faith. These compromises would lead us away from Jesus Christ and eventually result in the loss of our inheritance. To compel us to give up our eternal inheritance the world promises to reward us handsomely, and threatens to make us suffer if we do not comply.

This is happening to the Christian worker. He is being pressured to work on the Sabbath day in violation of the fourth commandment. This would eventually bring disaster to one's faith and his relationship to God. As an enticement, the world promises great rewards of advancement and good living. It also threatens with unemployment and poverty those who will not agree.

Young people are being pressured to conform to the world's goals, life-style, and values. This pressure is exerted especially in the secular universities of our land. To give in to this pressure would be to lose one's inheritance. But the world has many wonderful things to give to the young person that is willing to do so.

The church also faces the same pressure. Conform to the world in its teachings and practices. Teach the innate goodness of mankind. Endorse homosexuality and divorce. Embrace evolution. Many churches have done this and lost their inheritance. In exchange they have been embraced by the world and are recognized with approval.

What are you doing with the world's offers?



Judah refused the offer of Assyria.

Both Hezekiah and the people stood together in this rejection. The people on the walls held their peace and did not answer Rabshakeh, as he waxed eloquent with Assyria's offer. You might have expected questions concerning the nature of the land into which Judah would be transplanted, or assurances that this would, in fact, happen. This would have indicated that Judah was giving serious consideration to Assyria's proposal. But the people held their peace. They did not even entertain this wretched offer. The people were following Hezekiah's leadership. Anticipating Assyria's offer, Hezekiah had charged the people not to answer Assyria, and thus show their rejection.

There are two things that explain this firm rejection.

First, Judah saw that to take up the offer of Assyria was to sacrifice something greater for something lesser. Assyria had much to offer. She offered Judah her life and a good land elsewhere. From a purely human, earthly point of view, this looked like about the best deal a nation could make under the circumstances. But Judah had the eyes of faith. By faith she saw that the riches of God's blessings in Canaan were much greater than any pleasures she could find in another land given to her by Assyria. In fact, the riches of God's blessings in Canaan were too much to give up.

Secondly, Judah trusted that Jehovah could and would deliver her. Assyria assumed that Jehovah was just one god among many, and that Jehovah could be overcome as had the gods of the other conquered nations. But Judah had faith. And by faith she knew that Jehovah is God alone. And this Jehovah, who was her covenant God, would certainly preserve and de-

fend Judah, if she in faithfulness refused Assyria's offer.

In that same faith we must also reject every offer the world presents.

The same two truths to which Judah clung by faith are also valid today.

There is nothing the world can offer us that can even begin to compensate for the loss of our eternal inheritance. Will riches and pleasures be adequate compensation? Will power and influence? What about recognition and acceptance? What about your very life? None of these is worth the loss of your eternal inheritance. The world wants us to give up that which is everything for that which is really nothing. What are you profited should you gain the whole world and in the process lose your soul in hell?

Besides, we are safe in the care of Jehovah. No matter how the world threatens, they can neither overcome nor destroy us. Jehovah God will preserve His church as she walks faithfully in the world.

This we know by faith. And when we walk by faith, we make the same refusal that Judah did.



The trust that Judah placed in Jehovah was well founded.


Judah trusted Jehovah to preserve her against the Assyrian hordes. And preserve Judah Jehovah did. That night Jehovah sent the angel of death into the camp of Assyria to slay 185,000 soldiers. What a staggering number. Never in modern warfare have we seen so many killed in so short a time. This was the deathblow to Assyria. She withdrew from Jerusalem, never to return. Judah trusted in Jehovah to deliver her out of the hand of her enemy and preserve her in the land of promise. And He did!

So also is our trust in Jehovah well founded.

The world will perish, even as the Assyrian army did. They will

perish in the day of Jesus Christ. And perishing with the world will be all those who forsook the inheritance of God to receive the promised blessings of the world.

But those who by faith refuse the offers of this world will be preserved by God. They will not be overcome in this life, but enjoy the

blessings of God on their earthly pilgrimage. And at life's end they will inherit the heavenly Canaan, there to live with and enjoy Jehovah God forever. 

Editorial

The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary Debate—and the Protestant Reformed Seminary* (6)

What is truly significant about the movement we have been considering in these editorials in the past few issues of the *Standard Bearer* is not that there is widespread denial of justification by faith alone in reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Neither is it that those denying justification by faith alone openly align themselves with the Roman Catholic Church. Such apostasy from the faith, gross as it is, has occurred before.

The significance of the movement presently corrupting the gospel of grace in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, in an open, deliberate manner, is that it presents itself as a consistent development of the doctrine of a conditional covenant. The movement attacks the system of doctrine con-

tained in the Canons of Dordt and in the Westminster Standards—Calvinism—on the basis of a conditional covenant.

A New Emphasis on the Covenant

The movement emphasizes the biblical covenant. The men who spearhead the movement charge both Rome and evangelicalism with ignoring the covenant in their theology. But Presbyterian and Reformed churches, they allege, have also failed to do justice to the covenant in their doctrine of salvation and in their work of evangelism. This emphasis on the covenant makes the movement attractive to Reformed and Presbyterian church members, who are generally aware of the importance of the covenant in Reformed thinking.

The sub-title of Norman Shepherd's defense of justification by faith and works, and assault on all the doctrines of grace, *The Call of Grace, is How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (Eerdmans, 2000). The content of the book is a reexamination of the entire way of salvation and of the message and method of evangelism in light of the biblical doctrine of the covenant. Shepherd exhorts the Reformed community, "We need to learn to think covenantally" (p. 63).

There very definitely is relation between the movement now devastating the gospel of grace in conservative Reformed circles and the "new perspective on Paul" associated with E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright. For Wright at any rate, who is the most influential of these men on evangelical and Reformed theologians, covenant is the basic truth. Wright justifies his rejection of the Reformation's understanding of righteousness in Paul and his own new understanding of righteousness by appeal to the doctrine of the covenant: "Though it is unfashionable to use covenantal categories in interpreting Paul, I believe ... that they are actually central" (*The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, Fortress, 1992, p. 203).

Development of a Conditional Covenant

But the doctrine of the covenant that spawns the teaching of justification by faith and works in reputedly conservative Reformed churches today is that of a *conditional* covenant. According to Norman Shepherd the biblical covenant, which is fundamental to the entire way of salvation and to the message and method of evange-

* This is the text of the speech given at the convocation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Seminary on September 4, 2002. The first five installments appeared in the issues of the *Standard Bearer* immediately preceding this one. The speech has been revised and expanded for publication by naming theologians, books, and articles and by giving full citations.

lism, is conditional. It was conditional in the form it had as the covenant with Abraham.

We ought to ask whether the covenant that God made with Abraham really was, in fact, unconditional. Would the promises be fulfilled irrespective of any response on the part of Abraham and his children? The biblical record shows that conditions were, indeed, attached to the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham.

These conditions included Abraham's act of circumcising himself and his children, Abraham's believing, and Abraham's obedience of life. It is Shepherd's teaching that "the promises made to Abraham were fulfilled only as the conditions of the covenant were met" (*Call of Grace*, pp. 13-20).

Also as the new covenant, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the covenant is conditional. Although in the new covenant God graciously promises many blessings, "at the same time, faith, repentance, obedience, and perseverance are indispensable to the enjoyment of these blessings. They are conditions..." (*Call of Grace*, p. 50).

In view of the fundamental importance of a conditional covenant for the new Calvinistic doctrine of justification by faith and works, Presbyterian and Reformed theologians are laboring mightily to prove that John Calvin and other Reformed fathers taught a conditional covenant. Noble Reformed scholarship is now forced into the ignoble service of the lie of self-salvation. This enslaved scholarship discovers that John Calvin, as a conditional theologian, differed from Martin Luther in the essential Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. Wonderful to relate, Calvin was open to, if he did not teach, justification by faith and the works of faith (see Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, Baker, 2001).

Logical Development of a Conditional Covenant

The prominent, powerful movement in reputedly conservative Reformed churches today rejecting justification by faith alone and with this doctrine all the doctrines of grace is a movement of "covenant consciousness." It advertises itself as a development of the doctrine of a conditional covenant. And, in fact, it is a genuine, logical, necessary development of the doctrine of a conditional covenant. For the first time in the history of Reformed Christianity, defenders of a conditional covenant are themselves acknowledging, indeed proclaiming, that a universal, conditional (breakable) covenant implies universal, conditional (losable) justification; universal, conditional (losable) election; universal, conditional (losable) atonement; universal, conditional (losable) regeneration; and universal, conditional (losable) preservation. In a word, the doctrine of a universal, conditional covenant implies universal, conditional (resistible) grace.

It does so in at least three ways.

First, the doctrine of a conditional covenant maintains that faith is a condition. By "condition," it does not mean what some of the earlier Reformed theologians meant by "condition": a necessary means by which God bestows His salvation upon the elect sinner, without which God does not save the elect sinner, and which God Himself works within the heart of the elect sinner. But the conditional covenant means by "condition" an act of the sinner himself upon which the covenant promise, the covenant itself as regards its continuance and final perfection, if not its establishment, all the covenant blessings, and the covenant God Himself depend.

In what must be the rankest statement of faith as a condition ever by a Reformed theologian, Norman Shepherd has written:

Thus, the promises made to

Abraham had to be believed if they were to be fulfilled. We must not discount faith as a condition to be met for the fulfillment of promise. In fact, Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham's faith was so significant that it was credited to him as righteousness! If so, then righteousness was a condition to be met, and faith met that condition (*Call of Grace*, p. 15).

According to Shepherd, faith is the act of the sinner. Upon it depends the promise of God. As such, the act of believing is itself the sinner's righteousness. Not the obedience of Jesus Christ for Abraham is Abraham's righteousness by imputation. But Abraham's own believing is his righteousness.

The conditional covenant regards faith as a condition in precisely the sense the Canons of Dordt have in mind when they reject the error of making faith a condition, not only of election but also of salvation (I, Rejection of Errors/3, 5; I/10). The conditional covenant refuses to view faith, with the Belgic Confession, as "only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness . . . an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits" (Art. 22).

The defenders of a conditional covenant are always speaking of our being and remaining in the covenant, our being justified, and our being saved, "because of faith," or "on the basis of faith." In his explanation of Romans 3:24-26, N. T. Wright says, "Present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future justification will affirm publicly . . . on the basis of the entire life (What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity? Eerdmans, 1997, p. 129; emphasis added). Scripture, however, only speaks of our being justified "through," that is, "by means of," faith, or "out of faith," as instrument, or source (Rom. 3:28; 5:1).

If faith is a condition of the


covenant and all its blessings, including justification, faith is a human work. It is a human work upon which God's gracious work depends, regardless of the denial that this work is meritorious. Faith is a human work that contributes to one's salvation, contributes *greatly* to one's salvation. Justification, which like the covenant depends upon the sinner's faith as a condition, is by human work — the human work of believing. But if faith itself is a human work, upon which righteousness with God de-

pends, all of the good works that flow from faith should also be viewed as conditions of righteousness and salvation, indeed as part of the sinner's righteousness with God. Thus, the contemporary heresy of justification by faith and the works of faith is really only the natural development of the doctrine dear to a conditional covenant, namely, that faith is a condition.

In keeping with their view of faith as a condition, defenders of a conditional covenant are averse to acknowledging faith as the gra-

cious gift of God—fruit and effect of election (Canons, I/9); purchased by the death of Christ (Canons, II/7); and actually “conferred, breathed, and infused into” the elect, both as regards “the will to believe and the act of believing also” (Canons, III, IV/14). Norman Shepherd repeatedly insists that the covenant *demands* faith. He refuses to say that the covenant *gives* faith, as indeed it also gives obedience (Jer. 31:31-34).


— DJE

(to be concluded) 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

The Winter, Which Thou Hast Made

f Nova Zembla Tollens sings: “Here the *Prince of Winter* has erected his throne.”

Yet at heart this is ungodly and fundamentally heathen speech, as though there were a Prince of winter, who brings ice and snow and hoarfrost. A language that contrasts strongly with what in Israel a David and an Asaph sang: *Our God* gives snow like wool, *he* scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes, *he* casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before *his* cold?” (Ps. 147:16, 17).

This is the language of piety.

Winter also is nothing but a wondrous creation of the almightiness of the Lord.

In cold also, which changeth the face of the earth, our God is made great.

More briefly still, with Asaph confessed in Psalm 74: “The winter also, which thou hast made.”

Neither is winter accidental; what it brings with it is no mere play or whim. In winter also there is *formation*. One great thought expresses itself in it, which temporarily puts its fetters about all of life, and penetrates even smallest particles.

The same God who created Paradise without seasons, presently has broken up the one vast paradise-wealth into four seasons, and as by magic imparted unto each of them a glory of its own, as well as a shadow-side.

And in that succession of the seasons, God gives you instruction, every year again the same instruction of His majesty and might, and of the turn from life to death and from death unto life again; an instruction in images as rich in meaning as compelling to action; for you yourself go on with the seasons and undergo the stimulus of the same.

In Israel *our* winter was not known. Only from Hermon glistened the never melting snow; but for the rest, cold was never so biting, and the Jordan was never so solidly floored as ice builds it upon our rivers.

And yet, Scripture brings us, children of the north, in many ways a richly varied interpretation of what winter provides.

Snow that covers the earth, however beautiful, is an image of death, and the first that Scripture tells you of it is in the white of leprosy: “leprous, white as snow” (Ex. 4:6).

And yet, because from death is life, that same snow is likewise the image of purging from sin. “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than newly fallen snow” (Ps. 51:7). So in anguish of soul David prayed, and Isaiah brought us the word of divine promise: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as *white as snow*” (Is. 1:18).

So the snow-garment became the image of heavenly spotlessness. There are *treasure chambers*, from

Reprinted from *When Thou Sittest In Thine House*, by Abraham Kuyper, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1929. Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.



whence that heavenly whiteness descends. He who knows God will for "no rock of the field leave the snow of Lebanon" (Jer. 18:14). When the majesty of the Lord appears, "His garment is *white as snow*" (Dan. 7:9). That gleaming white glistens on the angels of God when they appear at the opened grave of Jesus. Of the Savior Himself on Tabor it is said: "His raiment became shining, exceeding *white as snow*" (Mark 9:3). And John on Patmos saw Him once more in that *snow-white raiment*.

But snow is not merely the image of death and the image of spotless heavenly purity, there is also a working in it comparable with the working of God's Word.

You know the passage in Isaiah (55:10) that oracles of this: "For as *the snow* cometh down from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goeth out of my mouth."

This is what we said above, that in winter there is a formation, a creation, an action on the part of God.

Winter is not merely there. No, God Himself has formed it.



"Who can stand before His cold?" asks the psalmist, and the cold wherewith God can cause all life to freeze apart is terrible. At the North- and South-Pole the cold is so dreadful, at its worst, that no human breast can draw breath. And by thermometers put down on tops of highest mountains, such cold has been observed that renders all life impossible.

But what is this compared with that cold which in the uttermost parts of His creation God has weaned of all glow and glitter?

So there is grace in the moderation wherewith God, here on earth, changes for you heat and cold.¹² At one time He could scorch you,¹¹ at another He could freeze

you. That He sends you cold thus tempered, is protecting, preserving grace.

But without serious warning no winter ever goes by. There are always aged among us, or weak-lunged, or susceptible natures, who cannot stand even that tempered cold, and for whom winter is a messenger of death from God.

"If they might reach spring, there would be hope; but winter is bad" — so runs the discouraging word, and every year through snow and frozen ground, grave after grave must be dug, to lay away those who have succumbed before God's cold.



Entering so deeply into life, all unobservedly that "cold of God" changes the whole character, the whole manner, of our life.

In summer we are as birds that fly about. Almost no one stays at home, everyone goes out to enjoy the air and the sun. But in winter, all remain indoors, to escape the inhospitable out-of-doors. This enriches the home life. At the fire-side one finds again that happy quiet world, which in the busy outside world had been so largely lost.

The mood which makes one turn indoors, instead of out-of-doors, affects our personal life.

The seriousness of life impresses itself more deeply upon the soul. There is more time for serious literature. Conversation is more restful, and thereby less superficial. Even church life in winter assumes richer proportions.

There is more housework done. It even may be said that a life with continuous summer makes us spiritually poorer, while winter every time again deepens our life.

Herein also winter is a servant of God, going forth to consummate His work in us, and blessed is the

heart, the home, the people, where each coming winter may realize this end.

From without to within.

And the more the cold increases round about us, the better is the soul warmed to the seriousness of life.



Yet these gains of life in winter should not make you cruel and indifferent to the suffering of winter.

When the skate is clasped to the foot, and merrily young and old glide along the ice-floor, there is something refreshing in the humor wherewith our human heart defies the terrors of the cold.

What suffering winter brings is therefore not less striking. When work grows less and presently is at a standstill. When cold limbs ask for double covering, and, to satisfy hunger, the last blanket had to be taken to the pawnshop. Because of the cold, there is more food required, and yet, how many there are with whom wages in winter are least. Oh, the woes of winter for the poor, who have nothing laid by, are so bitterly hard!

"Who can stand before God's cold?" asks the psalmist, and you may be thankful when God gives you a good house and a warm garment and comfortable covering, to be able to stand before His cold.

But bear in mind, there are those who will succumb, unless pity comes in to help.

For He formed the winter for this end, that the suffering of the impoverished should rouse those who are warmed and fed, and that the love of God should beam forth cherishingly from the hearts of men to shield against His cold.



So then, according to the covenant sworn to Noah, and in him

*The more
the cold
increases round
about us,
the better is the
soul warmed
to the
seriousness
of life.*

to us all, this change of seasons shall not cease, until our Lord's return, and every time after heat the cold, after summer the winter shall come to you "from the Father-hand of God."

Not summer from God, and winter from the Evil One, but summer and winter formed by Him.

Formed, to show you, how as with one turn of magic He can change the whole face of the earth and make it glisten with a beauty all its own; prelude of what it once


shall be, when the old fashion of the world shall have passed away for good, and there shall be a new earth and new heavens.

Formed, to concentrate your life more upon yourself, to deepen it in you and to tune it to higher seriousness.

Formed, in all sorts of images, to make you understand eternal things.

Formed to quicken pity in your soul and generously to open the

hand for the brother who would succumb.

But formed also, to be to you a *memento mori*, i.e., to place before your eyes in great and mighty outlines the withering and dying of what was once flourishing and beautiful, and to say to you, that the winter of life already came or presently shall come upon you, and that from that winter-sleep there dawns no other spring, than in the eternal morning, for such as are in Christ Jesus. 

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Barry Gritters

Taking Heed to... the Minister (2)

"It will rarely occur that judicious hints, kindly given by an elder of experience, will not be welcomed by the minister.... Such hints, being the results of experience, will be valued by the minister. There should, indeed, be in all matters connected with the spiritual interests of the flock a constant, confidential, and affectionate intercourse between the minister and the elders" (David Dickson, in *The Elder and His Work*).

The elders' office is to observe and supervise the doctrine and conduct of the minister.

Last time (SB, Nov. 15, 2002) I pointed out that the minister's *life* must be an object of scrutiny, and that, for the sake of the *doctrine*. The Form for Installation of Elders, the Church Order, and the Questions for Church Visitation all enjoin the elders to "have regard to the doctrine and conversation of the minister of the word." Reformed and Presbyterian churches have always recognized the importance of elder-supervision of the preacher. For the sake of the gos-

pel he bears, elders have regard to the bearer of it.

This oversight has two perspectives. The elders observe the minister's *conduct* — his personal life, family life, and public conduct — so that he becomes an offense to the congregation in nothing. With temptations hotter than ever, the evil "Sifter" working harder than ever, and the consequences of falling as severe as ever, elders must, like never before, have appropriate regard to their minister's conduct. By godly life, the pastor's conduct will "adorn" the doctrine (Titus 2:10). By ungodly life, the minister will make the doctrine repulsive.

Second, the elders observe the minister's *doctrine* — his public preaching, teaching, and writing — so that he offends in nothing and edifies always. The devil has more

than one way to devastate a congregation through the pastor. If he cannot get the pastor to slip up in conduct, he will work on his doctrine.

Calling

As he oversees the minister in his position as prophet and teacher, the elder serves the church of Christ, and therefore Christ Himself. Nothing must be taught that contradicts the truth which is in Christ. All teaching takes place for edification. False doctrine does not edify. Truth justifies the people of God, setting the people free. Truth sanctifies their spirits, souls, bodies. Truth sends them on the path to eternal life.

When the elder takes his seat in the elders' bench on a Lord's Day, therefore, more is required of him than of the other members.

Rev. Gritters is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

His calling is to see to it that the Word of Christ is being heard by the congregation. If the people must be instructed to receive the preaching "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (I Thess. 2:13), the elders must be sure that the preaching is indeed the Word of God. If the elders pray that the preaching in their congregation may be described as that "which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (I Thess. 2:13), they must be sure that the sermons are faithful expositions of the Word of God.

Anything less than that is unacceptable.

Briefly, because lengthy exposition of the elements of a good sermon is for another place, we should mention the following:

Elders must be sure that the Word preached (or brought in catechism, or written for publication) is a faithful exposition of the particular Scripture passage preached, in light of the whole of God's Word and the body of Reformed confessions. Are the sermons *biblical* (exegetical)? In that connection, most healthy for the congregation and pastor is a systematic exposition of a book or a section of the Bible. This way of preaching is the best way for the pastor to remain biblical rather than topical, to maintain a scriptural approach and method rather than his own approach and method. Sermons on individual texts or topics are certainly legitimate (why, the Heidelberg Catechism is a topical approach to preaching), but my judgment is that prudence leads us to preach through sections of Scripture as much as possible.

Then, because we are Reformed churches, the sermons must be *confessional*. Specific references to the confessions in sermons will help the minister and the congregation grow in the knowledge of the Reformed faith. But nothing may contradict these confessions. A way to accomplish this was related to me once by one of our older pastors, who

said that when he was finished writing his sermons, he consciously ran through in his mind both the confessions and the major points of the sermon to assure himself that what he was preaching did not contradict our heritage of the Reformed faith. Reformed ministers have taken a vow to do so.

Since Christ and His apostles are our example, whose sermons exposed error as they instructed the people, sermons are required to be *antithetical*. Explanation of the truth is accompanied by unmasking of lies. God's people are assaulted by a multitude of errors, many of which are subtle and deadly. The most deadly error, now and always, regards how the child of God is justified. Today, even in Reformed churches, there is a move to teach the people of God that their standing before God and approval by Him is based on more than the work and worth of Jesus Christ, that is, is based partly on their own works. The Heidelberg Catechism gives us a good lead when it teaches justification both in its positive truth and its negative warnings (see Lord's Days 23, 24). But there are errors at every level of faith and life.

Finally, a good sermon is *pastoral*, addressing the congregation in Christ's love for them. It is possible for sermons to be faithful expositions of Scripture, but lacking in an important dimension of a personal, heartfelt address. For this to be present, Paul's instruction to Timothy must apply: "The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits" (II Tim. 2:6). Coming to the pulpit without having first eaten of that bread of life will be disastrous. For this to be present, Paul's own heartfelt love for the church, as he expressed it in II Corinthians 11, must be in the heart of the pas-

tor: "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

If the elders judge it necessary to respond to the sermons, so that there may be improvement or correction, there are two levels of response.

If heresy is preached — doctrine that contradicts the Scripture as explained by the Reformed confessions — the elders must be swift, decisive, and as careful as possible. The Church Order commentators explain this process. Serious as this is, and necessary as it is to act if this occurs, the elders do not often face this problem. However infrequent, though, this is the primary calling of the elder in the oversight of the minister's doctrine.

Of more frequent concern is that, although there may not be heresy, there is *weakness* in the preaching. Here, the elders not only have the right, but the calling to speak to the pastor, so that he grows and the people of God are led to praise God in the best possible way.

Cautions

At this point, greatest wisdom is required. Since the devil works on elders as well as ministers, a caution should be mentioned about over-zealousness. An enthusiastic elder can do more harm than good, in the end injuring the congregation he thought he was trying to aid. If a wise elder, with grace and patience and love, can lead a man to see where improvements can be made, he will be miles ahead of the injudicious zealot.

Second, wise elders recognize that every minister has his own gifts and style. Not everyone will preach like the elder's favorite minister or

*If a wise elder,
with grace
and patience
and love,
can lead a man
to see where
improvements
can be made,
he will be
miles ahead
of the
injudicious
zealot.*

professor. Many congregations have learned over the years to love a man whose style they did not originally like. But the Lord uses each one, some whose speech may be “contemptible” and whose “bodily presence (is) weak.” (You don’t need to read II Corinthians 10 to see whose preaching that described). Not only styles, but gifts differ. Some will be judged great, as a Calvin or Luther; others, as most ministers feel, hardly worthy of the office — the most important calling in the world.

Third, the elders also must sit under the instruction of the minister to worship the Lord Jesus and gather their own daily supply of the bread of heaven. To live in the mode of critics would be dangerous. If a man finds himself in this mode, he will not likely extricate himself, as some have found to their great dismay or hurt. I would think that the elder would pray earnestly that he would primarily be able to worship and be edified, and almost subconsciously be aware of ways the pastor could improve.

Here, too, we patiently bear with weaknesses and infirmities, because it pleases God to govern us by their hand.

Taking the big picture of the elders’ work to oversee the minister’s doctrine (teaching), not all help will be hands on and face to face.

Give him time to study (so that the sermons are biblical and exegetical). Call him to be a man of prayer, so that the sermons are heartfelt explanations of a Word that has come to his heart. Require him to teach the confessions to the older catechism students or an adult doctrine class, so that his sermons breathe with a sense of our Reformed roots. Encourage him (or allow, as the case may be) to do pastoral work, so that he understands and sees the needs of the people who must be addressed. A pastor who sits alone and apart from the flock will be preaching to walls — lacking passion and missing the people. (More on all this, God willing, in the next article.)

In wisdom, then, let the elders filter out objections from the con-

gregation. The minister hears enough and bears enough that the elders don’t want him to hear everything. Don’t tell him of all objections or criticisms (confer with the other elders to make this judgment). If you do bring him corrective instruction, make sure it is the elders’ judgment. It’s no help, and in fact cheap, to say, “So and so said this and that about your sermons.” Or, “I heard from two different people that....” Let him know the mind and will, the collective judgment, of the elders.

Then, if a visit or contact is to be made about the preaching, let it be done in love. If you do not love the man, let someone else do the work. No more may you go to the minister without love than you may visit any member of the congregation without love. When love fuels the visit, any defensive spirit the minister may have should (God willing) soon be dropped, so that an open heart can learn and reflect on God’s will for the preaching. To the upbuilding of the church God loves.

(... to be continued) 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Michael Servetus and the Denial of the Trinity (1)

Introduction

Calvin and Servetus — what a contrast! The most abused men of the sixteenth century, and yet direct antipodes of each other in spirit, doctrine, and aim: the reformer and the deformer; the

champion of orthodoxy and the arch heretic; the master architect of construction and the master architect of ruin, brought together in deadly conflict for rule or ruin. Both were men of brilliant genius and learning; both deadly foes of the Roman Antichrist; both enthusiasts for restoration of primitive Christianity, but with opposite views of what Christianity is.

They were of the same age, equally precocious, equally bold

and independent, and relied on purely intellectual and spiritual forces. The one, while a youth of twenty-seven, wrote one of the best systems of theology and vindication of the Christian faith; the other, when scarcely above the age of twenty, ventured on the attempt to uproot the fundamental doctrine of orthodox Christendom. Both died in the prime of manhood, the one a natural, the other a violent, death.

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Thus writes Schaff as he introduces a long section in his *History of the Christian Church* on the struggle between John Calvin and Michael Servetus.

But Schaff also writes, as he introduces his subject:

The burning of Servetus and the *decretum horribile* are sufficient in the judgment of the large part of the Christian world to condemn him [Calvin] and his theology, but cannot destroy the rocky foundation of his rare virtues and lasting merits.... Human greatness and purity are spotted by marks of infirmity, which forbid idolatry. Large bodies cast large shadows, and great virtues are often coupled with great vices.

Schaff is referring here to Calvin's doctrine of reprobation and Calvin's participation in the burning of the heretic Servetus. He is sadly mistaken in his analysis of Calvin's theology; but his verdict on the burning of Servetus is worth examining.

In Calvin's time there were others who, while claiming to be a part of the Reformation, denied the truth of the Trinity, as Servetus did. They sometimes attempted to engage Calvin in a debate over these questions, and sometimes used the platform of the Reformation to disseminate their views. With most of them Calvin did battle. Servetus was one of them. Servetus lived the most colorful life of them all and came in closest contact with Calvin. To Servetus we turn to discuss this particular heresy as one with which the Reformation had to deal.

Servetus' Early Life

Servetus was born in either 1509 or 1511 in Spain. That made him a contemporary of Calvin and about the same age. He, by his own claim, was born from nobility. Although his first inclination was to enter the ranks of the clergy in the Roman Catholic Church, his interests soon turned to law, till

at least 1528, when he was about 18 years old. He was an extremely intelligent young man, with mental powers bordering on the genius. At fourteen he became the secretary of the royal chaplain, a position that gave him opportunity to travel. Although all his travels are not clearly outlined (when speaking of the details of his own life, Servetus was accustomed to change his story to meet the circumstances under which he found himself), he was in Germany with his patron, the chaplain, and may have met Luther. He may also have seen other reformers, notably Bucer and Capito in Strassburg.

Servetus' Attempt at Theology

It was when he was still in his teens that he began to dabble in theology, a venture which was in time to be his undoing. Although he continued to study law, he began to read and study the Bible and the writings of some of the reformers, especially Melancthon. This study, particularly, attracted the interest of Servetus, and it gradually took the place of his preparation for a career in law.

It is never a bad thing, of course, to study the Bible. Nor is it a bad thing to study the Bible on one's own and learn for oneself what the Bible teaches. But one must be very careful, and Servetus was not careful. He was not careful because he was a very proud man, proud to the point where it was his damnation. In studying the Scriptures, one ought, surely, to recognize the fact that, at 18 or 19 years old, he is but a novice in biblical interpretation, no matter how much intellectual ability God has given him.

But, more importantly, one ought to recognize that the Bible is God's Word to His *whole church*, and that countless thousands of saints, of equal or greater ability, and frequently with greater spirituality, have also made the Bible the object of their most intent scru-

tiny and meditation. The fact is that we may never come to Scripture *alone*, but must always come as a part of the church, to which we belong with a great throng of other saints. We study Scripture in the context of the church, which has had for hundreds of years, since Pentecost, the Spirit of Christ, who leads the church into all truth. We benefit from their studies, learn at their feet, find treasures in Scripture discovered earlier by them, and thus experience in a very real way the communion of saints with those who have now joined the company of just men made perfect. Further, in our studies we subject ourselves to the preaching of the gospel, and we test our ideas with fellow saints with whom we share our faith. All this requires an attitude towards Scripture of humility and willingness to hear what God says to us.

When we go to Scripture "on our own," we reveal a towering arrogance that will lead to heresy and ultimately hell. We despise our fellow saints, pull up our noses at people of God of earlier years, and slap the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ in the face. Who can ever learn what Scripture says while doing that? That is, however, what Servetus did. He believed he could ignore all that anyone else had ever said about Scripture, learn on his own the truth of the matter, and produce that discovery as the last word on God's revelation. That is a pride that makes any child of God cringe.

This does not mean that Servetus did not read anything else that had been written. As a matter of fact, he became a sort of expert on the ancient church fathers and on the declarations of the councils of Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon, all of which had addressed themselves to the doctrine of God. And it was precisely at that fundamental point of the Christian faith that Servetus launched his attack. He attacked the doctrine of the Trinity and of

the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He criticized the church fathers and the councils that laid down the early creeds. He claimed to be the sole spokesman of original and primitive Christianity of the apostolic age. He claimed to be *the* reformer, rejecting by this claim all the work of the many reformers who were his contemporaries.

It was not enough that Servetus took exception to these doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ; he also had to write a book about it, a book that he entitled, *Errors of the Trinity*. And in this book he not only attacked the doctrines that were his main concern, but he mocked them in such blasphemous language that one shrinks from reproducing his blasphemies in print.

Servetus' Career in Medicine

The book was read by many, including some of the reformers. Without exception, they not only criticized the book, but deplored it as the ravings of a religious fanatic. In fact, there was no one, either Protestant or Roman Catholic, who could be found to agree with Servetus' writings. This seems to have sobered him a bit, and he decided, at least temporarily, to embark on another career. He took up the study of medicine. Because Servetus was a man of unusual abilities, he was successful also in this field — uncommonly so. The record of this period in his life seems to indicate, however, that his main motive was fear for his life. It was an age when both Protestants and Roman Catholics killed men for heresy. When the storm of objections against his book seemed to threaten him, he abandoned his theological aspirations to take up the work of a physician; and, as if to ensure his safety, he went under a new name: Michel de Villeneuve.

Servetus' accomplishments were many, as he moved about France, living in different places.

He became a geographer of note and wrote books on the subject; he was a scientist and astrologer; and as one skilled in medicine, he discovered the circulatory system of the human body, explaining how blood passed between the heart and the lungs and to the extremities of the body. His reputation as a physician and scientist spread throughout France.

Servetus' Return to Theology

Finally settling in Vienne, south and a bit east of Paris, he went back to his first interest: theology. Some of the events of importance are quickly described.

He challenged Calvin, who was still in France shortly after his conversion to Protestantism, to a public debate in Paris. When Calvin showed up at the designated meeting place, prepared for the debate, Servetus failed to appear.

Soon afterwards he began a long period of correspondence with Calvin, in which Servetus not only attempted to defend his views on the Trinity and the doctrine of Christ, but also began to question other articles of the Christian faith, such as justification by faith alone, the baptism of infants (showing strong leanings towards Anabaptism), and other doctrines concerning God's work of salvation. All this was done under his new name. Apparently he hoped to evade detection. But Calvin soon guessed who was the real man.

At first Calvin answered his letters and attempted to refute his errors and persuade him of the truth, but finally the Genevan reformer wearied of it all. Servetus would consider nothing Calvin wrote. He went his own way, railing against, openly mocking, and arrogantly blaspheming all the sacred doctrines of the church that the faithful had believed since the Council of Nicea had drawn up the Nicene Creed. In disgust and with a sense of futility Calvin refused to answer any more letters, even though he continued to be bom-

barded with them. Calvin did write Farel, his colleague, that if ever Servetus should show himself in Geneva, Calvin personally would see to it that he did not leave alive.

Servetus wrote another book, though anonymously, called *Restitutio*. It was an attempt to demonstrate that the primitive apostolic church's views had been corrupted by the councils, and that he, Servetus, had been especially called by God to return the church to its true doctrine.

One more important event took place at this time. Servetus was arrested and imprisoned by the Roman Catholic inquisition while he was in Vienne. Servetus first of all denied that he was Servetus, claiming to be an innocent physician, Michel de Villeneuve by name. When that lie failed, he offered to retract what he had written, for he feared for his life. Some scholars claim that this trial took place at the instigation of Calvin himself, who knew that Servetus was in Vienne and knew that the Romish Church considered him as much a heretic as Protestants did. There is little evidence for this, however. Servetus' views were as much a criticism of Roman Catholic orthodoxy as they were of Protestant teachings, but Calvin never showed any interest in letting others do what he thought ought to be done, especially not the Romish Church.

Servetus escaped from prison in Vienne, after his trial had gone on for some time. After his escape, Servetus was tried and condemned *in absentia*, and an effigy of him was burned, along with his books.

Servetus, after escaping, decided to flee to Italy. For some strange reason, he chose to pass through Geneva on his way to Italy. That was a decision which sealed his doom. ☹

The Full Assurance of Faith

Or

Warning Against the Doubts of the Papist (Conclusion)

Our fathers at Dordt said that those who teach that the believer in this life normally does not arrive at the complete assurance that he is a child of God are guilty of introducing into the churches "the doubts of the papist."¹ This is a strong condemnation of what our fathers saw to be a very serious false teaching. Since faith is the bond that joins us to Christ, our spiritual foes would lead us to deny the truth concerning the nature of faith. The devil knows that we are joined to Christ by means of faith, and that that faith is not only knowledge but also confidence. He strives to strip us of this confidence, to break our faith, so that we will fall into sin.

The first article on this subject (*SB*, Nov. 15, 2002) set forth proof that the child of God, in this life, normally arrives at the certain conviction that he is and forever shall remain a child of God. The second article dealt with how this assurance is obtained. This final article will consider the fruit of this certainty of perseverance, and then apply this truth to the subject of the preaching of the gospel.

The Certainty of Perseverance: the Source of Humility and Piety

There are many who warn us not to assure the members of our churches that they are children of

God. If they hear one of our ministers address the congregation as "beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ," and if they then hear him tell the people that their sins are forgiven, they object. They do not object if the minister merely says that all the sins of God's people have been forgiven. But they do object if the minister addresses the congregation personally, and tells them that *their* sins are washed away. "The minister may not say that," they say. "He cannot know that all those to whom he speaks are really forgiven." They then go on to add that if the minister continues to do this, it will lead the people in the congregation to walk in sin. If you assure the people that they will certainly persevere unto the end, so the argument goes, then the people will conclude that they might as well give in to the lusts of the flesh, seeing as they have nothing to fear.

This is not the teaching of our Reformed creeds. The certainty of perseverance does not make believers proud and carnally secure. The certainty of perseverance is the certainty of faith. Just as humility, reverence for God, and obedience are all fruits of faith, so they are all fruits of this certainty of perseverance. This is the way our fathers put it in the Fifth Head of the Canons of Dordt, Article 12:

This certainty of perseverance, however, is so far from exciting in believers a spirit of pride, or of rendering them carnally secure,

that, on the contrary, it is the real source of humility, filial reverence, true piety, patience in every tribulation, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering and in confessing the truth, and of solid rejoicing in God, so that the consideration of this benefit should serve as an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works, as appears from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.

What is the source of humility? What is the source of reverence for God and true piety? What is the source of patience and joy? What is the source of fervent prayers and a bold confession of the truth? The answer to all of these questions is the same — the certainty of perseverance. That stresses to us how important this assurance is, and how deadly is that enemy that would strive to take this assurance from us.

Application to the Preaching

How does this apply to us who desire to see ourselves and the other members of the congregation grow in reverence for God, love for the truth, and obedience to God's commandments? Since we know that these things flow out of faith, which includes not only a certain knowledge of the truth, but also the certainty of perseverance in that truth, we should make use of the

1. A papist is one who adheres to the Roman Catholic Church and the authority of the pope.

Rev. Laning is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

means and the method that God has set forth for us in His Word.

This means that the gospel must be distinctively preached, sharply over against all of the false gospels that would introduce man's activity as at least a partial basis for his salvation. It is the preaching of the gospel of grace, preaching that sets forth clearly what God has done and is continuing to do in and through Jesus Christ, that works more of this faith in our hearts.

It is easy for a church to lose sight of this. As worldliness more and more enters the church, there are often those who put pressure on the pulpit to start preaching less about doctrine and more about man's responsibility.² Their argument often sounds something like this: "We already know the doctrine. The problem is that we are not living out this doctrine. The more God's people are assured that they will certainly persevere, the more they will run with the world. When we keep hearing the truth of unconditional election and irresistible grace, this leads the young people to conclude that it really matters not if they walk in this sin or in that sin. What we really need to hear emphasized is the truth of man's responsibility. Furthermore, the people must perpetually be told to examine themselves to see if they truly are children of God."

Now it is true that the law must be strictly preached as the rule for our life of thankfulness (Lord's Day 44), and that the people must be told that not all those who are raised in the sphere of the covenant are truly children of God. But this does not mean that the calling of man is central in the preaching; nor that the people in the congregation must constantly be told to examine whether or not they are truly believers.

First of all, the emphasis in the preaching must be on the work of God, not the calling of man. Only this can truly be said to be gospel preaching. Although some texts

may require the setting forth of man's calling in more detail than others, this calling must always be set forth as an efficacious calling. If we say that we believe in the efficacious call of the gospel, this conviction must be evident when we apply this truth to our calling to keep God's law. When God commands us to do this or that, the efficacious call of the gospel works faith in us, causing us to do that which He commands. It is true that a believer sometimes does not hear-ken to the command of God for a time. But when this happens, our heavenly Father chastens him, applying the rod of correction to keep him in the sheepfold of Christ.

All of our salvation, including our act of believing in Christ and keeping the commandments of God, must be set forth as God's work from beginning to end. The more God's people hear this, the more they will be certain that they will truly persevere. They will see more clearly that their salvation really does not depend upon them in any way. Then, instead of desiring to run back into the bondage of sin, they will be filled with gratitude to the God who has unconditionally saved them. They will grow in their reverence for God, and will, with joy in their heart, delight to show forth this thankfulness in a walk of obedience.

Secondly, that the people might experience more the blessings that arise out of the certainty of perseverance, it is important that they be addressed as people of God. In some churches the preaching begins by addressing the people as "beloved people of God," but then changes during the course of the sermon, and the people are repeatedly asked, "Are you one of God's people? Are you one of those who really believe this truth?" Questioning like this, repeated again and again, sermon after sermon, tends to promote, not the certainty of perseverance, but carnal doubts.

Scripture and the creeds set

forth the importance of God's people being addressed organically as true believers, even though there are unbelievers present in the true churches of Jesus Christ. The preaching does set forth "to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God" (Lord's Day 31), but the preaching is still addressed to the people of God organically as believers. That this is proper is evident from our Heidelberg Catechism, which teaches the people of the congregation, not constantly to question whether they have the only comfort in life and death, but to confess that they do have the only comfort of knowing that they belong to Christ. They are not asked whether they fear the coming final judgment. They are asked how they are comforted by the fact that Christ is coming again to judge the quick and the dead.

This is also what we see in the New Testament epistles. The inspired apostle Paul, though writing to congregations where unbelievers were certainly present, addressed them as believers. We see this at the beginning of his letters:

To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints (Rom. 1:7)

Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints (I Cor. 1:2)

To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:1)


Nor did the address change during the course of the letter. Note the way he speaks to the Thessalonians. First he warns about the fact that there will be those who will be caught by surprise when Christ comes. But then, instead of asking the people, "Are you one of those who will be caught unprepared?" he proclaims to the congregation the comforting gospel truth:

But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness (1 Thess. 5:4, 5).

He writes a letter to a congregation where unbelievers were certainly present, and yet he says to them, "Ye are all children of light."

This is addressing God's people organically, as a body. This preaching does not bless the unbe-

liever. Rather, such a person becomes more convinced that the promise of the gospel is not addressed to him. But this preaching is a great comfort to the child of God. This is the kind of preaching that causes God's people to experience more the blessings that arise out of the certainty of perseverance. It comforts them and builds them up in the faith. And what will be the result of this? The result will be that, more and more,

there will be evident in the congregation "humility, filial reverence, true piety, patience in every tribulation, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering, and in confessing the truth" and "solid rejoicing in God." 

2. This is not meant to deny that the truth concerning man's responsibility is itself one of the doctrines of Scripture.

Grace Life

Rev. Mitchell Dick

Dating and the Deep Blue Sea ... and the Way of Christ (6)

Dating must die. And Grace Life, you will recall, has been all for its swift demise. There have been several articles (cf. SB, Dec. 15, 2001; March 1, 2002; April 15, 2002; June, 2002; August, 2002; September 15, 2002). In them we have written just what convicts and condemns dating; it is everything she is about. For this is she:

*The unbiblical coupling and cavorting of two who are not yet ready for marrying,
The pairing off of those who confess Fun, but who have not yet confessed their Faith,
The Thing of the Youth Subculture done in the name of Rights and Liberty, Defiant of
Covenant authorities, namely Parents and Church,
The dating which is unsupervised trysts in the night,
That Monstrous of Worldly Sensuality which delights devouring, nibble*

by nibble, especially all those who are baptized in the Name of a Holy God,

The trial and error "playing of the field"...

The Evolutionist, Idolator, Feminist, Unruly, Voracious, and whatnot ... Dating!

This Dating, all too common even among Christians, is, we must realize, a terrible, if subtle, evil. It is a hellion hurting young and not-so-young people, disturbing covenant families, assaulting sacred marriage, weakening the church in her confession of Christ, and her calling to learn and to teach not the way of heathen, but His way. To the dateless, Dating is a cruel respecter of athletes and cheerleaders. Around the intertwined bodies, pulsing passions, and racing emotions of those dating, Dating is a spiritual tourniquet. To the dated, Dating is a shameful memory.

Grace Life, out for the blood of a thing, has at the same time been concerned, positively, for the life of something else. That is: the life of the covenant way of a man with a

maid. And so from the Word of God, the very Word of life, we have been examining and discussing the great principles of covenant, namely family, and fatherhood — principles given of God to direct and encourage the godly marrying of the covenant seed.

With this article I would now attempt to address somewhat at length the subject of the practical application of the principles of what might be called "covenant marrying" or "covenanting." This is done by the presentation of theses. These theses set forth responsibilities humbly and gladly to be shouldered and pursued for biblical, covenantal marrying. These theses are not exhaustive. The explanations I give of them are just a beginning. They all are for discussion and debate. They are to bring us back to the Word. To promote responsible parenting. Holy youth. Sacred relationships. Church of the antithesis. Covenant blessedness. God-honoring, lifelong marriage. A godly witness. Praise! *And Grace Life all around!*

For Dating's death, and for the

Rev. Dick is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.

Life of the Covenant Way ... may God write His Truth on the chapel of our hearts, and may the way of our men with maids be ... *His!*

Ninety-Five (or so) Theses of the Covenant Way of a Man with a Maid

1. The father of the Christian home must earnestly endeavor to know who his children are to marry.

Explanation: A main question marriageable young and not-so-young adults have is "*How do I know whom I am to marry?*" A fair enough question, but not the first one, not even the most important one!

The first and most important question is "*How does father know?*" This follows from all we know of the biblical truth that the father of the home, who is lord of the home (I Pet. 3:6), is lord also of the children, and, therefore, of their marrying, in order to establish other godly homes (Gen. 24). The father sends off his covenant sons to pursue the godly wife, having warned them of the "strange" woman (Prov. 5), having instructed them in godliness, and having considered it a large part of his fatherhood, and indeed its culmination and goal, to guide them to particular godly families and godly women in these families. The same father either keeps, or gives away, his covenant daughters (I Cor. 7:37, 38), *solemnly superintending Sally, suitors, roses, rings, and romance.*

This "send off" of the son to marry, this "keeping" or "giving away" of the virgin daughter is father fulfilling his calling, his part of the covenant of grace. The State may not do this for the father. Nor may the Pope (cf. John Calvin's exposition of I Cor. 7:37ff!). Nor may the children themselves. Nor may the schools. Nor may ministers and chaperones at the Young People's Conventions. Indeed, father is sovereign here, sole author-

ity here, reflecting his position as representative of God Himself.

To fulfill this calling of being, under God, *lord of covenant marrying*, and not merely to presume upon the mercies of God in this matter, the father of the home must do everything he can to *know* just who is Miss Just Right for his son, and who is Mr. Just Right for his daughter. And we are not talking generalities here (for very few people marry generals, and no one marries generalities!), but *names of people whose characters and whose families are known.*

Solemn calling! As elders must *know* that the *specific men* they nominate for officers in the church *must be truly qualified* (I Tim. 3) *before they are even nominated*, and do not merely presume that membership in the church means qualification for office, so must fathers *know, and that, sometimes, from a list of a whole bunch of Christians*, just who is a potential mate for his children, and who *would be the best* for his children.

2. Father's knowledge of God is crucial for the father's superintending the marriage of his children.

Explanation: We fathers must know God. This is our life, men — knowing God, and praising Him and enjoying Him for ever. Beginning *now!* Above all things precious is the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. This knowledge of God is not barely creedal, nor creedally bare ... but is the sweet communion knowledge of God that delights in both the doctrine of the Bible and in the Deity of the doctrine.

When by the grace of God there is a man-father who actually abides and thrives in communion with God, certain things (called *blessings!*) do happen which are crucial for the furtherance of the godly way of father's men and maids. These things that "happen" are indeed manifestations of the family blessing of God, which blessings

He gives as we seek the knowledge and glory of Him above all.

First, what happens is that this man-father will in all things show He is a man of God's Word, who leads His home biblically, and to whom, thus, to listen, is to listen to God. Second, the father who loves God loves his wife. This relationship of husband-wife and this love that father nurtures in the marriage is and will be the pattern for children to follow, and the hope, too, that is planted, for their own homes of love. Next, what happens is that the children entrusted to the care of the man whose life is to know God will see God in their father, and submit to him, and trust him, therefore, to provide, and to guide, in all matters, also when it comes to finding a mate. Fourth, father, in knowing God, will be given to know and truly empathize with his children — their needs, talents, desires, weaknesses, maturity, or lack, and he also will be leading them, constantly, in the knowledge of God. In addition, the father who knows God will also know others, other families, other children of those families in whom dwells the Spirit, and who might be and ought to be mates for his own children.

3. The godly father will seek to know God's will for a mate for his children through his knowledge of families.

Explanation: It is biblical wisdom for one to discern the nature of fruit by understanding and examination of the tree from which the fruit has come. Hence fathers will know families, and parents of families (the tree), if he will successfully and responsibly know the children (the fruit) of those families, and, therefore, who ought to marry his own children. Communion of the saints (which we believe!) is about many things. It is vitally about relationships among families with a view to relationships among children of the families with a view to the marriage of

those children in those relationships among those families.

This pursuit of mates through relationships with and knowledge of believing families is because we know that God works mercy, and calls the godly seed through families, and through their instruction of their children, His promise being unto us and our children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:39).

Concerning this knowledge of families, fathers will truly seek to know families and the young of those families in order to know personalities, their strengths, weaknesses, work habits, how they get along with each other, if they are a thankful people, or grumpy, seeking to be as holy as they can be, or if theirs is a "marginal" Christianity (whatever that may be!). Yes, especially must we look for the fruit of the Holy Spirit of Christ in families. And the fruit should be abundant. We should not have to call in the FBI.

Thus godly fathers will communicate to the families with whom they have contact that one of the main purposes of the family friendships is precisely this: for the children and their future mates. The parents of the families will talk about this, pray about this, and nurture the godly relationships of their children with one another. They will not just "let it happen," or "let nature take its course," or first of all "see what the children think." Family relationships, cultivated by fathers, will be for the covenant in the next generation.

4. Mates will be pursued in the church.

Explanation: We want a Christian mate. God provides them in providing Christian churches. Worship is there. Means of grace are there. Communion is there. Single godly men and women are there—in church. And so are you. So fathers, and marriageable folk too for that matter, will not scope

out things at parties, or look in the bowling alley, or McDonalds, combing the lanes and the booths for mating material. They will look, by faith, *in the church!*

Nor will mates be sought in any old church (and certainly not in just any new church!). In fact, if denominations mean anything, if you are convicted that you and your children must worship and *are* worshiping where there is the pure teaching of the gospel, then you must believe your mate is there, somewhere in your denomination, in sister churches, or in such churches as are one with yours in spirit and in truth.

But the "field" of our looking for love can be narrowed even further. Covenant trust, covenant faithfulness, means we consider *first* the possibility that God may well have provided mates for our own in our own *local* church home. True, this would not apply if everyone in our local church home were cousins. And, to be sure, some local churches are united in truth with one another, and the members of these churches are very well known to each other, and so "looking down the road" is not looking far. As well, some churches are small and the marriageable ones are few. But think of this: if God, in covenant mercy, has established us as a local church, and by this, we believe, He has provided *there* so many things necessary for life and fulfillment and blessing, might not also our heavenly Father provide (generally, and more often than we might think!) right in our covenant church home, for *everything, even including our mates?!*

Consider also this, in this age where travel and long-range communication are so easy, temptations are great to avoid the realities of our own shortcomings, and our past fumbling in relationships with those who go to school and church with us, i.e., with those with whom we may have grown up. So, in the realm of relationships our

temptation is that we *begin* looking elsewhere. We might even *move* elsewhere. Or parents, whose child has had a rather difficult time of things in his youth and perhaps with relationships in her youth might with gladness ship Sally or Sam east, west, north, or south, so she or he can, on her own, get a new life, and get hitched. There is, indeed, a powerful temptation born of frustration, or immaturity, or discontent, and even wanderlust which whispers: *the guys and girls are always hunkier, or friendlier, and life is always rosier on the other side (of the Mississippi)!*

Let us remember, dear readers, that "starting over," from a biblical point of view, does not equate to "moving," or "giving up" on ever relating to (let alone marrying!) those to whom in youth you were a bully, a flirt, or nothing but a basketball hero. Starting over is God working repentance for sins of youth. God cleansing us. God remembering no more, and we too. This is grace — grace in the morning of our mature and believing realization that Christ has made us new! Now moving on ... *and up*, thankful for the relationships and families of our youth. And believing that the person of God's choice for our marriage, the best one for us, already known of God, is probably already known by us.

5. The church will be actively involved in the marrying of the children of the church.

Explanation: Ministers should not be the last ones to know, nor the elders, about two in the church who are seeking marriage. Fathers should communicate this sacred thing, the covenant marrying of their children, to the men appointed to watch over the soul-life of the congregation. And those seeking marriage should be very much concerned *right from the beginning, and even before*, to have the approval of the church in their pursuit. When covenant Girl-X walks arm-in-arm into the church with Guy-Y, and no-

body knows the Guy, or if we know the Guy and do not approve, this is not good. We coddle this anti-covenant, church-ignoring cuddling to our shame.

This all, this church-involve-ment, makes for a formality, a solemnity, a publicity, an orderliness, and wisdom which becomes the path of marriage, and honors the God of covenant. Such (formality, solemnity, etc.) must not wait till a certain wedding day, but should be characteristic of the way. To be sure, one would not expect the covenanting man and maid to wear a tux and a bridal dress when they have just started pursuing marriage with one another. But just as on the day of marriage it is important, as the Marriage Form tells us, that N. and N. be concerned to make their vows before "this Christian assembly," and "this his holy Church" (whether in an official church worship service, or whether the church is with the couple "in spirit"), so grace and truth and God's church should mark the way the Lord leads two to become one. For good counsel, for godly encouragement, for prayers, that the couple may be an example for other godly couples to follow, and for honor ... let our way with men and maids be the way of the church family!

6. There are things covenant men must know and be first if they will know God's will for marriage.

Explanation: Single men of the covenant must know God. They must know Him personally, delight in Him always, love His Word, long for the sweet hours of prayer-conversation with their heavenly Father, and seek His kingdom first. They must follow hard after righteousness (Is. 51:1) and flee all manner of unrighteousness. In this way they show the image of the Son, as all members of the body of Christ must, and also as those men who will, in their marriage, be called to be as Christ in relation to the wife.

In the faith-cultivation of this primary relationship with God, the covenant man is blessed with the knowledge of God's will for him concerning marriage. For godly men will know, in their knowing God, if they should marry. Marriage is not for all men. Marriage is not good for all men. This is precisely what the inspired apostle means in I Corinthians 7:7, 8ff. *Should I live single for the Lord? Do I have the gift of self-control? Does the present situation of the world and in the church call for my being single to serve Christ* (I Cor. 7:26, 27)? These questions a godly man asks — his concern being to be in the position, married or single, which is spiritually necessary for himself, and most profitable for the service of the kingdom of heaven.

As well, the godliness of the man who is walking in communion with God, the godliness which is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come (I Tim. 4: 7, 8), is profitable unto, and has promise of, attracting godly women. Godliness is the best "scent," men. It is the sweet smell of the divine. Put it on! Many will not come. That is good. One will. And that is really good.

And finally, men who would know God, and know God's will for them for marriage, must know their godly father's godly will — and make it their own. One, even our Lord Jesus, came to do not His own will, but Father's. You come too, though it be the road not taken by many. You! You, dear reader! You who are born and born again to come from your youth to adulthood, from your family, to seek the good beginnings of another family. You, as Christ, come now to please your father in serving your God in whose stead your father stands, also and especially in your seeking the bride of his good pleasure.

7. Godly men will reflect Christ in their preparation for marriage and pursuit of a maid.

Explanation: Godly men will, as Christ, pursue their lover only when ready to marry, and then ready to provide for their wife — for body (physically and economically), and for soul (spiritually). It will be the fullness of the time of their life. All will have been readied by God. The men will know it. They will know to do the will of God and take a bride.

This means a man will certainly not say, "Honey, let's date — but we can't even think of marrying till I pay off my snowmobile, SUV, and Uncle Sam." Nor will he be ready to party with a woman, and never ready to pray.

Christ's men, when ready, will pursue, courageously and confidently and ardently, and will not be pursued (by some feminist feline who calls them up to go to the party).

They pursue, as pictures of Christ (and His relation to His Father), knowing their godly father's will, and that they are on father's mission, which they make their own for father's honor and Father's glory.

The godly man who would pursue a mate must show by his participation and leadership in spiritual and edifying activities in the home and church that the life of a disciple of Christ, the life of seeking to have the Word of Christ dwell in him richly, the life of service, giving, and fellowship in the body of Christ ... is not a part of his life, but is his whole life!


The godly man pursues, knowing the one he pursues, and that hers is a covenant home, and that she is confessedly and decidedly godly, and that it is the time of her love (that is, she is not twelve, and she is ready to forego, if necessary, her quest of a double doctorate).

He pursues, heading straight to the father of the maid, seeking his permission to pursue further his course, honoring him who must give her if she is to be given.

He pursues, solemnly and seriously, ready to commit to a rela-

tionship and to walking a path which, it is hoped, will lead to marriage.

His pursuit. A Christ-like, honorable, virtuous-through-and-through covenanting of a man with

a maid in the covenant of grace! ... to be continued and concluded in the next *Grace Life*. 

Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass

Prof. David Engelsma

Chapter One The End of All Things (concl.)

Erroneous Views of the End: Common Grace

A third eschatological error exposed by the truth that Jesus Christ is the end, or goal, of all things is the theory of common grace. As propounded especially by the Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper, the theory of common grace teaches that, alongside His purpose of redeeming the church, God has a purpose of developing a good, God-glorifying culture. The fall of Adam made the fulfillment of this purpose impossible. But God realizes this purpose in unregenerated men and godless nations by the operation of His "common grace." God pursues, and achieves, two goals in history: the salvation of an elect church by His special grace and the development of culture by His common grace.

Therefore every view that would confine God's work to the small sector we might label "church life" must be set aside. There is beside the great work of God in *special* grace also that totally other work of God in the realm of *common* grace. That work encompasses the whole life of the world, the life of Kaffirs in Africa, of Mongols in

China and Japan, and of the Indians south of the Himalayas. In all previous centuries there was nothing among Egyptians and Greeks, in Babylon and Rome, nor is there anything today among the peoples of whatever continent that was or is not necessary. All of it was an indispensable part of the great work that God is doing to consummate the world's development. And though a great deal in all this *we* cannot connect with the Kingdom or the content of our faith, nevertheless it all has meaning. None of it can be spared because it pleases God, despite Satan's devices and human sin, to actualize everything he had put into this world at the time of creation, to insist on its realization, to develop it so completely that the full sum of its vital energies may enter the light of day at the consummation of the world.

According to Kuyper and other proponents of common grace, God's purpose regarding the development of culture is independent of His purpose regarding the redemption of the church.

The highly ramified development of humanity acquires a significance of its own, an independent goal, a reason for being aside from the issue of salvation.... "Common grace" will thereby achieve a purpose of its own. It will not only serve to bring about the emergence of the human race, to bring to birth the full number of the elect, and to arm us increasingly and more effectively against human suffering, but also inde-

pendently to bring about in all its dimensions and in defiance of Satanic opposition and human sin the full emergence of what God had in mind when he planted those nuclei of higher development in our race.... The fundamental creation ordinance given before the fall, that humans would achieve dominion over all of nature thanks to "common grace," is still realized *after* the fall. Only in this way, in the light of the Word of God, can the history of our race, the long unfolding of the centuries as well as the high significance of the world's development, make substantial sense to us (Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace," in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, pp. 176, 178, 179; for a recent defense and development of Kuyper's theory of a cultural purpose of God with history, see Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

Also the two purposes view of common grace sins against the apostolic teaching in Colossians 1:13-20 that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is the one purpose of God with all things. God created all things for Him. The one goal of God in history is to reconcile all things to Himself by the blood of the cross of Jesus Christ. Of a cultural purpose of God apart from Jesus Christ and the blood of His cross, Colossians 1 knows nothing. To posit, and then pursue, such a

Prof. Engelsma is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

purpose detracts from the preeminence of Jesus Christ, which is God's eternal purpose. Creation, providence, history, time, space, nations, angels, devils, and the falling of a sparrow from a housetop serve to bring about the purpose of God to exalt Jesus Christ as "firstborn of every creature" and "head of the body, the church."

It is Jesus Christ who brings humanity to its highest level, not pagan Greece, or equally pagan Western civilization at the present. "Behold, the man" (John 19:5). Christ raises humanity to the heights God always intended for it, not by educating unregenerated men and women so that they become more sophisticated and able sinners, or by erecting grand earthly empires that oppose God on a grand scale and that soon perish, but by dying for the sins of elect mankind and rising from the dead. By His resurrection, He made His own human nature incorruptible, glorious, powerful, spiritual, heavenly, and immortal (I Cor. 15:35-58). In Him, elect humanity also rises to these heights.

Nor is it reprobate men and women who liberate the groaning creation and develop its energies and powers by their cultural efforts. Jesus Christ will free the entire creation from the bondage of corruption and take it into the realm of His own glory at His coming (Rom. 8:19-22). Christ will raise and renew the creation. Thus, creation will attain the end for which it longs. God's purpose with the world when He created it in the beginning was that it become a grand and glorious city and civilization, not by the cultural efforts of an unfallen Adam, nor by the cultural work of totally depraved sinners, but by the cultural labors of Jesus Christ in dying for the world, rising from the dead, and recreating the world at His coming. Thus does the last Adam cultivate what the first Adam turned into a wilderness and make it the Paradise of God.

Endangering the Christian Hope

The practical effect of all three of these eschatological errors, evolution, premillennial dispensationalism, and common grace is the same. They take the hope of professing Christians off the coming of Christ. Evolution destroys hope entirely. Premillennial dispensationalism directs the hope of its followers to the rapture and to the earthly dominion of the Jews during the millennium. Common grace locates the hope of those who believe the theory—hope that corresponds to a main purpose of God with all things — within history and in this world. Those who hold the theory of common grace eagerly look for the "Christianizing" of this world in the future, before the coming of Christ.

As God has one end of all things, so the church must have one hope: the coming of Jesus Christ.

The End and the Promise

This end of all things will be the fulfillment of the promise. The end comes strictly by the unfailing power and faithfulness of the promise of God. Eschatology was revealed with the "mother promise" of Genesis 3:15: the crushing of the serpent's head by the victorious Seed of the woman. Romans 16:20 assures the church of the final destruction of Satan, yet in the future, in terms of that original promise: "And the God of peace shall bruise (Greek: 'tread under foot and crush') Satan under your feet shortly." The promise of the gospel was, and is, eschatological. Therefore, one who lives by faith in the promise lives, and must live, consciously, day and night, eschatologically, that is, in hope of the future—the future of the coming of Jesus Christ: "Come, Lord Jesus."

The Beginning of the End

That the end is the coming of Christ in the future must not, however, obscure the fact that already now there has been a breaking into

our age of the end of eschatology and that already now the church enjoys the beginning of that end. Already now, the church enjoys the beginning of the life, power, and glory that will be hers perfectly at the coming of Jesus Christ. Indeed, she already enjoys the presence of Jesus Christ with her, who in a real way has come to her already.

Eschatology is by no means a matter exclusively of the future; it is also a matter of the present. There is, of course, the intermediate state for every saint at death. There are also, already now, the coming of the kingdom (the gospels); life in the Spirit as the earnest of our inheritance (Paul); eternal life (John); and the enjoyment of "the powers of the coming age." This last is the literal translation of Hebrews 6:5 (KJV: "powers of the world to come"). The phrase expresses the gripping truth that the coming age is pressing in on our age, eager to take over. The force of the coming age is so mighty that the coming age breaks into the present age, so that even unregenerate hearers of the good Word of God, the instrument of the powers of the coming age, "taste" the advance powers of the coming age. Much more, of course, do the "beloved" of God not only taste but also savor and digest these powers.

The church's enjoyment of a beginning of the end already in this life is the confession of the Reformed believer in Question and Answer 58 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

What comfort hast thou from the article of the life everlasting?

That, inasmuch as I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, I shall after this life possess complete bliss, such as eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, therein to praise God forever (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877, p. 326).

Whereas the subject in the article of the Apostles' Creed, which the Catechism is explaining, is certainly the life that Christ will give the believer at His coming, when He raises his body, the Catechism affirms that the believer already feels in his heart the beginning of the eternal joy of this coming life. He feels it because he already has it.

The last days began at Pentecost (cp. Joel 2:28ff. and Acts 2:14ff.). For this reason, the prophecy of the outpouring of the Spirit includes prophecy of judgment and of the destruction of the present creation "before that great and notable day of the Lord come." Everything in the present age, from Pentecost on, drives on to the day of the Lord, that is, the coming of Christ. And the central reality of these last days is the name of the Lord—Jesus—and calling on this name.

In the Spirit and by the gospel, Jesus Himself is already present to us. Although we hope for His bodily coming, we have His spiritual coming. In the Spirit of truth, Jesus does not leave us comfortless, but comes to us (John 14:16-21). The more we live in the consciousness of His spiritual presence, the more we long for His bodily coming.

Help for Study The Biblical Doctrine of the End

A. Scripture: Ephesians 1:9, 10; Genesis 3:15; Matthew 24, 25; I Corinthians 15:21-28; II Peter 3.

B. Confessions: Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 48; Belgic Confession, Article 37.

C. Reading: H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (RFPA, 1966), pages 729-745.

D. Questions for study:

1. What does Scripture mean by "the end" of the world or "the end" of all things, e.g., Matthew 24:3, 14; I Corinthians 15:24; and I Peter 4:7 (Greek: *telos*, whence the English "telic")? Is it merely that time stops and history runs out?

2. What determines the end? Is the sovereignty of God fundamental to biblical eschatology?

3. What is the temptation to the church, as regards the end, from the scoffers in the last days, according to II Peter 3? What makes this temptation so serious? What lends credence to their challenge to the biblical promise of the end? How is their apparent evidence for their challenge to be answered? Who are these contemporary scoffers?


4. What is done to the biblical doctrine of the end by the theory of evolution?

5. How does the theory of common grace conflict with the truth of the end?

6. What actually is the goal that God purposed with the end? Prove from Scripture.

7. Explain that the apostles taught the nearness of the end some 2,000 years ago (see Rom. 16:20; James 5:8, 9; I Pet. 4:7). Were they mistaken?

8. Can the end come "at any moment"?

9. What practical effects, according to Scripture, must the truth of the end have in the life of the believer? In the life and work of the church? 

Book Reviews



Faith and Salvation, by Thomas Halyburton. Gwynedd, Wales: James Beggs Society, 2002. Pp. ix + 417. £15.60 (cloth). [Reviewed by the editor.]

The Rev. Thomas Halyburton was a Scottish Presbyterian preacher and one of Scotland's greatest theologians. Born in 1674, he died in 1712 at the young age of 38. One who reads *Faith and Salvation* will acquaint himself with

the theology of Scottish Presbyterianism in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and will learn something of Presbyterian preaching at that time.

The book is a series of sermons originally titled, "The Great Concern of Salvation." After an introductory sermon on Acts 10:29, which explains what a congregation expects of her minister, the content of the book divides into three sections corresponding to the three-

fold division of the Heidelberg Catechism. Halyburton teaches the entire biblical doctrine of salvation as misery, redemption, and the thankful life of holiness. Since he chooses to do this by expounding three texts, Romans 3:23, Acts 16:29-31, and Joshua 24:15, Halyburton imports his Reformed dogmatics into the text, contrary to the laws of exegesis. For example, he brings the whole of Christology into the explanation of Acts 16:29-31.

Scottish Presbyterian preaching at that time was thorough, sound, searching, doctrinal, and practical, as is characteristic of all good Reformed preaching. Halyburton is especially helpful in the third section on the holy life of the redeemed sinner.

It is especially urgent that Presbyterian readers in Great Britain, where infant baptism is despised and neglected and where a covenant conception is virtually unknown, attend to Halyburton's explanation of Paul's words to the Philippian jailer, "and thy house." The children of believers "are taken in within the covenant" (p. 182). One could wish, however, that the Scottish Presbyterian had expanded on his remark that "God has a particular respect to them [the children of believers]" (p. 183). It is a notable lack, that the otherwise excellent treatment of family worship and instruction fails to ground Presbyterian family life in the covenant of God with believing parents and their children.


The "offer" for Halyburton is the external call of the gospel by which the preacher sets forth Christ

to all who hear, passionately extols faith in Him as the only way of salvation, and urgently calls all hearers to believe on Him. Halyburton does not make the "offer" the expression of universal, resistible grace. He is traditionally Reformed. He is no crypto-Arminian.

Halyburton obviously devoted large parts of his sermons to the warning of unbelievers. Each of the three main sections of the book, which originally were preached, contains long addresses to unbelievers. Halyburton terrorizes unbelievers at great length in his exposition of the holy life of the thankful child of God (pp. 346-363). Was his church full of unbelievers? What were they doing there? Surely it is a disservice to the worshiping church of believers and their children to be always and at length threatening and fulminating against unbelievers.

One grave doctrinal error is Halyburton's grossly mercantile conception of the covenant of God with His people in Christ. This was the weakness of many Presbyterians and Puritans around and after the time of the Westminster

Assembly. Halyburton speaks of the salvation of the sinner as "the closing of a bargain" with Christ on His terms (p. 12). Similarly, God's covenant with Adam was a "contract." If Adam did not exactly hammer out this "contract" with God, he had to agree with the contract for it to be binding. Such a view of the covenant, which brings the salvation of Christ, is destructive of the gospel of grace. If salvation is a bargain, it is not gracious. This conception of the covenant has weakened much of Presbyterianism through the years. At the present time, the fruits of it are nothing less than disastrous.

Reading this book of theology is enhanced by the vivid, affecting, and sometimes quaint language: "When God designs to erect trophies to his grace, he is not wont to single out the moral, the wise and polished sort of sinners, lest they should glory in themselves; but he pitches upon a Mary Magdalen that has seven devils dwelling in her, a persecuting Saul, a rude jailor, 'that no flesh may glory in his presence,' I Cor. 1:26-29" (p. 126). 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a concert on January 26 in their church. The concert featured cello and piano, organ and a brass quartet. A collection was taken for the 2003 Young People's Convention.

Members of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL were invited by their Young People's Society to a Valentine's Day Supper at their church on February 14. The evening featured a punch bowl, a

tasty barbecue steak dinner, a special program including a Young Men's Quartet, surprise activities, and much more.

Congregation Activities

Late last year the congregation of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI approved a proposal from their council to go ahead with an extensive remodeling project on their now vacant parsonage.

The congregation of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada was invited to go sledding at Government House Park on Monday, Family Day, February 17, along with the members of First PRC in Edmonton. A soup supper (what could be better after sledding?) fol-

lowed back at First. Proceeds went towards Edmonton's 2003 Family Conference this July, when sliding down a snow-covered hill will not be one of the activities.

The Byron Center, MI PRC had their share of winter fun on Saturday, February 15. Their congregation, at least the hardy members, met in the afternoon at the hill behind Byron Center Jr. High for a couple of hours of sliding. Dinner followed at Adams Christian School.

Two items in recent bulletins from the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville caught our eye. The first informed Georgetown that a group from Cornerstone PRC in Schererville, IN was looking for

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

10-14 people willing and able to go to the Ukraine in early May 2003 to help build a Christian school under the auspices of Worldwide Christian Schools. The second was an invitation to Georgetown's members to meet after their evening service on February 2 to consider going to Romania this summer. Anyone interested was encouraged to be present to hear what was involved, including explanations of costs and funding, as well as information about what types of work projects were being planned.

Mission Activities

At the request of the council of the Hull, IA PRC, the consistory of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada has agreed to release their pastor, Rev. Rodney Miersma, for seven weeks labor in Ghana while our denomination's missionary, Rev. Wayne Bekkering, is on furlough. This will be for the month of June and the first half of July, the Lord willing.

Rev. Audred Spriensma was in Bacolod City (on a different island than Manila) February 10 for a conference there on the 10th and 11th. About 25 men planned to attend, some from our group of contacts in Bacolod, and others who are officebearers from other churches

nearby. During the two-day conference, Rev. Spriensma was scheduled to give three speeches on the truth of the covenant of grace and five speeches on Reformed church government.

Staying with the Philippines for one more news item, we can tell you that Rev. Richard Smit and Elder Bob Mantel from the Doon, IA PRC, the calling church for the Philippines, were scheduled to make their annual visit to the field to oversee the work from February 18 through March 3.

About the same time that Rev. Smit and Elder Mantel were on their way to the Philippines, Rev. Charles Terpstra, on behalf of our churches' Contact Committee, along with his father, Mr. Gord Terpstra, a representative of Hope PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, the calling church, were traveling to Singapore to visit and encourage our sister churches there and Rev. Arie den Hartog, our minister-on-loan and his family.

Young Adult Activities


The Post High Young Adult Society of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI was able to visit the congregation and young adults of Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ the weekend of February 7 - 10. This was not merely a social visit. By

going, the young adults hoped to encourage the saints there. They also were eager to see the Christian labors in another part of our churches, and they looked forward to having good Christian fellowship with the members of Covenant. The group from Trinity, including their pastor, Rev. Rodney Kleyn, left Friday afternoon and returned Monday afternoon.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Holland, MI sponsored their fifth annual Winter Conference on three successive Thursday nights in February. The general theme was: "The Sovereign God and the Free Will of Man: Whose Will Is Truly Sovereign?" The first Thursday, February 13, Prof. Herman Hanko spoke on "Predestination and Free Will," followed, the Lord willing, the next week by Prof. Robert Decker speaking on "Sovereign Grace and Free Will," and concluded on February 27 with Rev. Carl Haak speaking on "God's Law and Free Will."

Minister Activities

Rev. Barry Gritters, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, declined the call extended to him by the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI to serve as their next pastor. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Randolph PRC grieve the loss of two members last year. We express our Christian sympathy to fellow members Ron and Kay Huizenga and Dave and Jennie Braaksma in the death of their mother and grandmother,

MARTHA HUIZENGA,

on March 12, 2002, and to Gary and Jeanne Buteyn, Brian and Becky Buteyn, Paul and Vanessa Buteyn, and Stephanie Buteyn in the loss of their brother and uncle,

JIM FISHER,

on November 8, 2002.

Though we grieve their loss, we

have the sure hope of the resurrection of the body, which hope is made sure by the resurrection of Christ. Therefore, we pray that our fellow members find comfort in the words of Christ, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25), and that they count all things but loss, that they might be found in Christ, to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, if by any means they might also attain unto the resurrection of the dead (Philippians 3:9-11).

The consistory of Randolph PRC
Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Pres
Eugene Braaksma, Clerk

NOTICE

The Protestant Reformed Special Ed Board is seeking applicants for a full-time teaching position in our Special Education program at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, Michigan. Applicants should have a desire to work with special-needs children and have some knowledge in areas of Special Education.

Interested persons may contact Kurt Kaptein, at kurt@spectrumweb.net or phone 1-616-669-1693. They may also contact Dave Moelker at 453-7077.

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2003, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

NOTICE!

FAITH CHRISTIAN SCHOOL, Randolph, WI, is seeking applicants for a middle room teacher (grades 3-5). Interested applicants may contact the administrator, Mr. John Huizenga, at school: (920) 326-6090, home (920) 326-6186, e-mail Huizenga@powercom.net, or contact the school board president, Mr. James Kooiker, at (920) 326-4434.

HELP!!!!

The Reformed Free Publishing Association needs your help. The Book and Publications subcommittee is collecting material with a view to the possible publication of a book on the prophecy of Isaiah based on the sermons of the late Prof. H. C. Hoeksema.

We have in hand the recordings of approximately 50% of the sermons that Prof. Hoeksema preached on Isaiah. We are seeking to obtain as many of the missing recordings as possible, as well as copies of tapes we already have, some of which are incomplete. The majority of these sermons were preached from about 1970 through 1988, primarily, though not exclusively, in the Grand Rapids area.

We are asking *all* consistories, tape committees, and individuals to check files and tape libraries for any sermons by HCH on the texts listed below. Even if you have other of HCH's Isaiah sermons not included in this list, please inform us. We ask that *everyone* who reads this notice take a moment to check tape collections or to contact someone who might have recordings of these sermons. *Nothing* is insignificant, and your help is crucial to this project.

Below is a list of the texts in Isaiah for which we are seeking recordings.

2:4, 2:5, 2:22, 3:10-11, 7:14, 8:18, 8:20, 9:6, 11:6-9, 12:1, 13:9-10 & 14:1, 17:12-14, 21:11-12, 22:22, 26:20-21, 28:16, 29:13-14, 30:26, 32:1-2, 33:22, 34:2-5 & 8-11, 33:29, 35:3-6 & 10, 37, 16-20, 38:1-8, 43:4, 48:20-22, 49:5, 49:8-9a, 49:21-23, 49:24-25, 50:10-11, 52:7, 52:14-15, 53:3, 53:10, 54:9-10, 55:11, 57:19-21, 58:5-9, 59:12-15, 59:21, 60:1-3, 62:4-5, 63:3-5, 63:8-9, 63:17, 64:4, 64:6, 64:8, 65:1, 65:2, 65:8-9, 66:1-2, 66:11.

If you have any of these Isaiah sermons of HCH on tape, please contact us immediately. If you can send us a duplicate tape, please do so. If you cannot, please send us your original tapes. We will duplicate them and return the original to you. Please contact:

Evelyn Langerak
% RFPA
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418-9709
(616) 224-1518
mail@rfpa.org

Mark Hoeksema
6727 Dale Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(616) 669-9358
hoeksema@iserv.net

Thank you for any help you can give us!

— RFPA
Book and Publications Committee

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Randolph PRC grieve the loss of two members in recent weeks. We express our Christian sympathy to fellow members Judy Abel, Jackie Hoekstra, Brian and Becky Buteyn, and Winnie Fisher, in the death of their mother, grandmother, and sister,

GERTRUDE ALSUM,

on January 30, 2003; and to Winnie Fisher, Barb Fisher, Eugene and Kathy Braaksma and children, and Al and Joyce Fischer and children, in the death of their husband, father, and grandfather,

PETE FISHER,

on February 10, 2003.

Though we grieve their loss, we are comforted by the knowledge that God does all things to His glory and for the salvation of His church. Therefore, we pray that our fellow members find comfort in the Word of God, and confess "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28), and "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

The consistory of Randolph PRC

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Pres
Eugene Braaksma, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With praise and thanks to our covenant God we announce the 50th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

JONATHAN and MARY SCHWARZ, on March 15, 2003. We are grateful to God for blessing their marriage these many years. We thank them for their godly example, guidance, and love, which is an inspiration to us all. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to bless them and keep them in His care. "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

- * Joanna Straayer
Brenda
- * Marvin and Esther Schwarz
Jennifer, Kayla, Jonathan, Karl
- * Ray and Joy Schwarz
Sarah, Jacob, Ruth, Mary

Loveland, Colorado