

# THE *May 1, 2003* STANDARD BEARER

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# A Home in Father's House

*In my Father's house are many mansions.... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

John 14:2, 3

**O**ur Lord assures His disciples, "I will come again!"

The church of the old dispensation lived in the expectation of but one coming of the Lord. Then all God's types and promises would be realized. The believers looked eagerly for the day when the Messiah would come to make all things new. To them it was one great, glorious event, even the dawning of a new day.

We as church of the new dispensation, the dispensation of the fulfillment of all God's promises, stand in the midst of that coming of the Lord, a part of which has been fulfilled, a part is being fulfilled, and a part is awaiting the final arrival of the Lord and the

renewal of all things, a new heaven and a new earth. Therefore the New Testament Scriptures now speak of various comings of the Lord.

Jesus was partaking of the Last Supper with His disciples. It was only a matter of hours before His crucifixion. Jesus assures His sorrowing disciples that He would not leave them comfortless, like orphans, but He would come again to dwell within them in His Spirit — a promise that was realized ten days after Christ's ascension, when He, as exalted Lord over all, poured forth the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ upon His church.

Along with that continued coming is also Christ's sovereign reign over all as He carries the counsel of God unto the culmination of the ages. Christ rules over His church in love, and for the sake of His church He also rules over the entire universe. At the same time He rules over the wicked in judgment with a rod of iron. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all the workers of iniquity already in this present time.

This continuous coming of the Lord also includes the coming spo-

ken of in the text at the head of this meditation. Christ promises His disciples and us that He will come again to take His own unto Himself, that we may be where He is, sharing His glory.

The occasion for this promise is well known to all of us. Our Lord had warned His disciples that the Shepherd would be slain and the sheep would be scattered. A deep sorrow fell upon all the eleven as these words penetrated into their souls. They were sorely troubled. They loved Him dearly. He was their dear Friend, who meant more to them than life itself. He was their Lord, who had taught them with divine authority. Moreover, they were convinced that He was the promised Messiah who would establish the throne of David forever, so that all their hopes of everlasting salvation centered in Him. Where was He going? What would happen to all God's promises and all the hopes that they had placed in Him as the promised Messiah? Was this the end of their fellowship?

Jesus assures them: "Let not your hearts be troubled. In My Father's house are many mansions,

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and I go to prepare a place for you in those heavenly mansions. It is even so very necessary for Me to go that I may carry out My work as your Savior and your Lord. A part of that work, one of My many duties as exalted Lord over heaven and earth, is to bring you into glory with Me forever."



"I go to prepare a place for you."

Jesus prepares a place for all those given to Him by the Father, all those whom He redeems by His death on the cross, in whose heart He prepares a place for Himself, and will someday take to Himself in glory to abide with Him forever.

A place, a mansion, or a dwelling is being prepared in Father's house for each of us. The battle-weary soldier, as well as the worn-out pilgrim, enters heaven with tear-stained eyes and finds there a place that is ready for him. It fits him perfectly, as a place of eternal rest, prepared just for him with Christ in Father's house.

Paul reminds us that when our earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (II Cor. 5:1).

We now have a house made with hands, a weak, temporary abode. That does not refer merely to our earthly bodies, but it rather includes all our earthy relationships, our life task, the place we occupy in our family, in the church, and in the community. This all falls away at death. Our place soon knows us no more. Soon we are completely forgotten.

Scripture assures us that all that pertains to our earthly house is exchanged for a house that is not made with hands, but is eternal in the heavens. At death we immediately enter into the place which Christ has prepared for us. We will fit right in. Heaven is ready and waiting to receive us at the very moment of our arrival.

As stones are placed in their

proper order in an earthly temple, so also we each have our own assigned spot, marked out for us as jewels in the temple of our God that is being built in heaven. When that spot is ready, Christ sends His angels to take us to Himself, to take our place at the wedding feast of the Lamb. We join our heavenly family in Father's glorious house, never to part again.

God is using this present existence to prepare us for our full and eternal life with Him in His heavenly home. In the final judgment every man will be judged according to the deeds done in the body, whether good or evil. Our eternal reward of grace is in keeping with the degree of our faithfulness as stewards laboring with the talents that God has entrusted to us. Christ as our Judge appoints us to our place, which He has prepared for us.

A place. To take up once more the figure that Jesus uses, we will have a mansion, a home, made to order for each of us. No one else can take that place, nor can it be left vacant. We are placed in our new, heavenly environment, relationships, and fellowship, which are all our very own, as decreed for us in the sovereign love and wisdom of our God from all eternity! We will fit there perfectly, for it is prepared exactly for us in divine wisdom. Here on earth we may not always harmonize perfectly. We may rub one another the wrong way, have different habits, goals, and ambitions, but there all disharmony falls away, we live in perfect harmony and fellowship one with another and, more particularly, with God and His Christ.

In heaven we will not be idle, but will be continually occupied with all our faculties and talents, living to the glory of our God. Do we possibly have hidden talents that were never developed in this life but become useful in our fu-

ture life? We can only surmise. This we know, we shall live and reign with Christ over all the works of God's hands to the glory of the Father.

The Spirit of Christ will pervade all, creating perfect harmony and unity. Even as the members of our earthly bodies are necessary to serve the other members, so also in that Body of Christ every member serves for the well-being of all the others. There can be no dissatisfaction or jealousy, for all will be filled to capacity with the Spirit of Christ. All the saints will be joined together in perfect harmony and unity to serve one another, but also to serve to the glory of Father's matchless name over the entire universe.

On this side of the grave we often become so involved in our daily activities, our duties, our cares, our families and friends, our activities in the church, that we live as if that is all that counts. Time and again we must be forcefully reminded that we have here no abiding city, we are only passing through on our way to eternity. God's purpose

with us is not solely limited to this life, our place in the world, in the church, or in our family, but far rather in preparing us for our place in Father's house with its many mansions. After all, what do these few years of our earthly existence amount to in comparison to an eternity that knows no end?

Let me hasten to add that in the new creation every creature, including all the millions of saints in their glorified bodies, will reflect and be devoted to the glory of God. No one seeks his own interest, but each one exists and lives to be devoted to our God. The purpose of every creature, as well as the desire of every glorified saint, will be to live incessantly engaged in praising and glorifying our Creator, our Savior and Lord, the ever blessed and adorable God.

*Heaven  
is ready  
and waiting  
to receive us  
at the  
very moment  
of our arrival.*



The ultimate goal and purpose of the entire creation and all history will be realized. As the loud voice from heaven proclaims: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God."

God will be exalted in all His glorious majesty, world without end. God's name will be hallowed, set apart, and praised above every other name in the new creation. The whole creation will burst forth in the powerful refrain: "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne forever and ever!"



Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled."

When the heart is troubled, the soul is tossed about in doubt and anxious concern, like a derelict upon a stormy sea. How true that


was of the disciples. Their Master had just informed them of His impending death. Upon Him they had built all their hope and expectation of complete and blessed salvation. Now they are informed that their Shepherd will be slain and the sheep scattered. Their future looked utterly hopeless.

But now Jesus appeals to their faith. Ye believe in God, believe also in Me. What now appears to be a hopeless end is actually a glorious beginning. I go to the Father in heaven. But that does not mean that My work as your Lord is finished. I will continue that work by preparing a place for you, that you may be with Me in My glory forever. When that place is ready, I will come to take you to Myself, that ye may be where I am. What could be more blessed than that?!




Now we have a foretaste of the life that awaits us in the world to come. We have the assurance that

we belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, in whom we are assured of all God's blessings. We experience a peace with God and the hope of being eternally with Him in His glory. When doubts and fears arise, we have our refuge in prayer, for the Spirit of God prays for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. In our darkest moments and deepest sorrows we find our comfort in the assurance that our heavenly Father knows and understands every need far better than we can tell Him.

And always we cherish the hope that when our place is ready, we also will be ready to fill that place and thereby join the family of God in glory. There we will always be with Father in Father's house. There we will be joined with the family of God, all our brothers and sisters of all the ages. And we will be one of them, with the saints of all ages. Yes, then we will be home. Home at last. 

## Editorial

# Remembering the Schism of 1953 Invaluable and Gripping CDs

ne way in which every member of the Protestant Reformed Churches can profitably remember the schism of 1953 is by listening to a newly available set of CDs. The CDs consist of sermons and lectures on the history and issues of the schism, delivered at the time of the schism. The preachers and lecturers are two of the chief protagonists, the Rev. Herman Hoeksema and the Rev. Hubert DeWolf.

The sermons and lectures were of crucial importance to the struggle at the time. They were

part of the history. They helped to make the history.

The recorded messages shed light on the schism, especially the doctrinal issue at the heart of the schism. They also radiate, across the span of fifty years, the white-hot heat of the controversy as it was raging.

This set of CDs is simply invaluable. The content is often gripping.

### Vintage Hoeksema

Rev. Herman Hoeksema is the main preacher and lecturer, as is

to be expected. Although at the beginning of the controversy in his own congregation he deliberately stayed in the background, when the storm broke, it broke over his head. Then that indomitable fighter for the gospel of sovereign grace fought his last battle. He fought with zeal. He fought by means of his editorials in the *Standard Bearer*. He fought by means of informative and hortatory lectures. He fought by means of sermons.

Two of Hoeksema's sermons are included. Both are significant in the history of the schism of 1953.

Both are vintage Hoeksema—expository, doctrinal, antithetical, Christ-centered, God-glorifying, clear, powerful, moving.

The first is the sermon he preached on Sunday morning, June 28, 1953. This was the first Sunday after the schism in First Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan had become reality. The faction that caused the schism had seized the church building. For the second time in his ministry, as Hoeksema noted in the introduction, he had been put out of his church building.

He chose as his text John 6:67-69, "Christ as the Sure Choice of Faith." He had preached the same text in 1925, when the Christian Reformed Church, having deposed him, stripped him and the congregation of the church building.

The question Christ put to His disciples on the occasion of the abandonment of Him by the multitudes, Hoeksema put to the remnant of his congregation: "Will ye also go away?" The issue during Christ's ministry, Hoeksema declared, was the same as that in the present controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The multitudes were offended at Christ's teaching of God's sovereignty and man's total inability. Hoeksema had reference to John 6:44, 65: "No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father."

The second sermon is on Acts 16:30, 31, "The Calling of the Philippian Jailor." Hoeksema preached this sermon in July 1953 in Doon, Iowa. Earlier that week, at an informational meeting that Hoeksema conducted in Hull, Iowa, someone in the audience had appealed to this text in defense of one of the statements Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches had condemned as heretical. The statement was that God promises salvation to all on condition of faith. In his response to the appeal of his argumentative questioner to Acts 16, Hoeksema

promised to preach the text the following Sunday.

The sermon explained that the promise, "You shall be saved," is given to the believer. It is particular. Noteworthy in the sermon is Hoeksema's insistence that the call to believe is effective unto one's salvation only when Christ Himself utters the call. Hoeksema described the work of grace in the Philippian jailor as a divine earthquake in his soul.

### **A Doctrinal Issue**

Several CDs contain three, separate, public presentations by Hoeksema of the doctrinal issue, as well as of some of the history, of the schism of 1953. Hoeksema gave these speeches at the height of the controversy.

The first of these presentations was a public lecture in Hull, Iowa in July 1953. The split of First Church, Grand Rapids had just occurred, in late June. Hoeksema insisted that the controversy was doctrinal. He demonstrated that the two statements that caused the schism were, in fact, heretical, as the consistory of First Church and Classis East had judged. These were the statement that God promises salvation to all on the condition of faith and the statement that our act of conversion is a prerequisite to entering the kingdom of God.

In the course of this lecture, Hoeksema said there had been harbingers in First Church of disaffection with the Protestant Reformed Churches for some time prior to the schism. He referred to an eagerness of some societies to have outside speakers, rather than Protestant Reformed men, and to the hostility of many to Protestant Reformed Christian schools.

This lecture was followed by a hard-hitting question and answer session. The audience was hostile. It must have been evident to Hoeksema that night that much of the West would be lost to the Protestant Reformed Churches. There

were many questions. The questions were pointed. Some were loaded. Hoeksema responded calmly, even graciously, but firmly. At one point, when a question plainly expressed its author's sympathy with the conditional theology condemned by the Protestant Reformed Churches, Hoeksema urged those who did not want Protestant Reformed doctrine to leave the churches. "We are not interested to be big. The church is not measured by the pound. It is not a fish hatchery. I am not here to gain converts and followers. I am convinced that many followed me out of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 who never should have done so. We want to maintain the gospel of sovereign grace. We want to maintain the truth. If this is your desire, you belong with us. If not, you ought to leave."

A number of the questions concerned the history of the events leading to the schism in First Church. Other questions had to do with the church polity that resulted in the suspension of Hubert De Wolf and the deposition of some elders. Hoeksema's account of the history and explanation of the church polity are of interest and importance to the contemporary student of the schism.

### **Standing on the Truth of Predestination**

The next two presentations included on the CDs were given in Fourth Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan in April 1954 and in Doon, Iowa sometime in 1954. Although they were not exactly the same lecture, they were similar. Both were on "Our Present Controversy in the Light of the History of the Church."

Hoeksema traced the confession of the doctrine of predestination in the history of the church from Augustine to the present time. Contending that sovereign predestination is not only a fundamental truth but also fundamental to all truth, he pointed out that churches

do not long maintain the truth of predestination. Enemies of sovereign grace within the church always oppose predestination. Their arguments are always the same. They have the same few texts, for example, Ezekiel 33:11, Matthew 23:37, and I Timothy 2:4. Their philosophical arguments are also always the same, whether Pelagius opposing Augustine, or the Remonstrants contending with the fathers at Dordt, or the Christian Reformed Church attacking the Protestant Reformed Churches: those who preach predestination are fatalists, deny man's responsibility, and make man a stock and a block.

In a penetrating observation, Hoeksema noted that another way ministers who are foes of predestination work at destroying the church's confession of the doctrine is by remaining silent about it. They never mention it. This, said Hoeksema, may be the worst opposition of all.

Standing as they do on the doctrine of sovereign predestination according to Scripture and the confessions, the Protestant Reformed Churches reveal themselves to all as true churches of Jesus Christ and as the faithful continuation of the Reformed church in history. No one, said Hoeksema, can deny it, and no one dares to deny it. Remembering at this point the common grace synod of Kalamazoo in 1924, Hoeksema remarked, "They never called us heretics. They never did. In fact, they said that it could not be denied that we were Reformed according to the confessions. It is true they went on to say that we had a tendency toward one-sidedness." Pausing, Hoeksema then growled, "but this was in the right direction." He meant, of course, that his alleged one-sidedness was in the direction of God and His glory.

### **The "Other Side"**

Included on the CDs are two sermons and a lengthy presentation of the schism by Rev. Hubert De

Wolf. De Wolf was Hoeksema's younger colleague in First Church. It was De Wolf's heretical teaching and refusal to submit to the authority both of his consistory and of Classis East that caused the schism in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The first sermon of De Wolf is on Romans 1:16, "The Gospel: The Power of God unto Salvation." He preached it on Sunday, June 21, 1953. This was the Sunday before the split of the First Protestant Reformed Church. It was the last Sunday of the union of the denomination.

The importance of this sermon is that in it De Wolf claimed to comply with the instruction of both his consistory and Classis East that he apologize for two heretical statements. Now the world can hear that De Wolf did not apologize. Rather, toward the end of the sermon, he assured the congregation (one can imagine the silence and tension of the congregation of some fifteen hundred members as he launched his purported apology) that if he was not clear in those statements or if there were those who misunderstood the statements he was sorry.

The second sermon, on Psalm 37:5, De Wolf preached in March 1956 on the occasion of the civil court's awarding the property of First Church to the congregation whose pastors were Rev. Herman Hoeksema and Rev. Cornelius Hanko.

De Wolf gave his full analysis of the schism at a public meeting in Hull, Iowa in August 1953. This meeting followed hard on the heels of Hoeksema's similar meeting in Hull in July 1953. De Wolf intended to counter Hoeksema's presentation of the schism. This meeting too concluded with a question and answer session. A member of the Protestant Reformed Churches "planted" a list of questions intended to put De Wolf on the spot. Although he knew this, De Wolf dutifully answered all the ques-

tions. The CDs containing this address and question and answer session give the "other side" of the controversy from the mouth of a leading spokesman.

De Wolf was an able preacher and speaker. What strikes the listener in De Wolf's presentation of the schism is his denial that the issue was doctrinal. In addition, De Wolf made personal attacks on Hoeksema. In none of his speeches, on the other hand, does Hoeksema ever make any personal attack on De Wolf or on any other of his pupils now turned adversaries. He stuck doggedly to the doctrinal and church political issues.

What strikes the Protestant Reformed listener in De Wolf's speeches, in the light of subsequent history, is De Wolf's insistence that his faction is the legitimate continuation of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Within fewer than ten years, that faction went back into the Christian Reformed Church. Within a few months of De Wolf's speech in Hull in August 1953, ministers allied with him were engaging in secret meetings with leading Christian Reformed ministers, discussing the three points of common grace. Already in those meetings very early in 1954, the faction represented by Hubert De Wolf was negotiating, be it unofficially, their return to the Christian Reformed Church.

Hoeksema's judgment in his speeches on the schism that the conditional theology of those who had recently left the Protestant Reformed Churches was essentially the same as the theology of the well-meant offer of the Christian Reformed Church was proved right. And it was proved right in a very short time.

### **"Al, Come in! Al, Come In!"**

In his speeches on the schism, Hoeksema drops some delightful, revealing anecdotes from his own experience. I mention two. In his first charge as a Christian Reformed minister, Fourteenth Street,



Holland, Michigan, Hoeksema encountered strong opposition to his preaching of sovereign grace. Family visitation the first year of his pastorate was misery for the young pastor as family after family expressed their dislike for his preaching. One evening, Hoeksema tells us on one of the CDs, he came to the home of a man whom he knew to be strongly opposed to his preaching. "I knew what his answer would be," Hoeksema says, "but I had to ask him. 'Al, do you like my preaching? Are you edified by it?' 'No,' said Al, 'I don't like your preaching at all.' 'You don't like my preaching?' 'Why not?' Al replied, 'I like the good, old invitation.' 'You like the good, old invitation?' responded Hoeksema. 'Al, suppose that next Sunday evening after church I had you over to visit. After you sat down in my living room and I gave you a cup of coffee and a cigar, I would say to you, 'Al, come in! Al, come in! Al, come in!' What would you think?' 'I would think you were crazy,' said Al. 'I would think so too,' said Hoeksema. 'But this is what you want me to do when you insist that I give the good, old invitation. You are in the kingdom, by your own confession, and you want me to keep saying to you, 'Al, come in.''"

Later in Eastern Avenue, Hoeksema ran into the same oppo-

sition. One of the members of the congregation, a minister, had an unbelieving son. The member asked Hoeksema to visit the son and exhort him to pray. "Tell him to pray?" responded Hoeksema. "If he is an unbeliever, he cannot pray. If he can pray, he is a Christian." "Oh," exclaimed the member, "You are different from Dr. Beets [a prominent minister in the Christian Reformed Church in the 1920s]. Dr. Beets visited my son last week and told him that if my son would pray every day for a week he would give him a box of Dutch Master cigars."

#### Now Available to All

All of this and much more can be heard on this extraordinary set of CDs. Every Protestant Reformed officebearer ought to listen to them. I intend to find a way to require all the seminarians to hear them, although they will need little prompting. All members of the Protestant Reformed Churches can learn a vitally important part of our history from them.

There will be those outside the Protestant Reformed Churches who will want to listen to the CDs. From the sermons and speeches on these CDs, they will be able to know the real Herman Hoeksema. He was radically different from the caricature painted by his enemies. Even though he was past his prime—in 1953 he was sixty-seven

years old, and had suffered a severe stroke—he was still a great and gifted preacher of the Word and a powerful orator. He was also committed, heart and soul, indeed was very really a slave, to the God of sovereign grace. He was the worthy successor in modern times of Augustine, Gottschalk, Calvin, the Synod of Dordt, De Cock, and the early Kuyper as defenders of the sovereignty of God in predestination. The controversy that culminated in the schism of 1953 roused the old lion once more. He roared. And we can hear the echo of that roar on these CDs.

More importantly, anyone outside the Protestant Reformed Churches who cares to know what these Churches really stand for, and what they are about, could do worse than listen to these CDs.

There are fourteen CDs in the set. The cost, which merely covers expenses, is \$70 for the set. The CDs are available from Heritage Recordings, c/o Earl Kamps, 17231 Kimbark Ave., South Holland, IL 60473. Telephone: (708) 596-8629. E-mail: [ewkamps@att.net](mailto:ewkamps@att.net)

To Mr. Kamps and Heritage Recordings, a hearty thanks for an invaluable, often gripping account of the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches as it was being made, by those who, in the providence of God, were making it.

— DJE 

## All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

### ■ The War Against the Family—and the Covenant

**C**learly, the devil and his allies, the unbelieving world, are mounting a powerful assault

against God's law (almost successful, it would seem). Now follows the "mopping up" operations. The biggest battle focuses upon the family. If families can be destroyed, ultimately the church itself must be affected.

Families are not simply wiped out—the foundation for proper family life is being dismantled piece by piece.

Only about one or two genera-

tions ago, the attack began in earnest. Less than 60 years ago, the only ground upon which divorce would be granted was proven adultery of one of the marriage partners. Though adultery might be suspected, it was difficult to prove this in a court that would decide on the issue of divorce. Needless to say, divorce seemed beyond the reach of most disturbed couples. There were obviously

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many problems in multitudes of marriages years ago. Many would simply separate without the benefit of divorce. Remarriage, however, in such cases would be impossible — for one could be charged with the crime of bigamy. Within the churches divorce was a major scandal, for it was a rare occurrence. Though the churches allowed for the remarriage of the “innocent” party, that too seldom occurred because of the rarity of divorce itself.

But things rapidly changed. Many argued that it was far better that arguing, bickering parties divorce for their sakes and for the sake of their children — than to remain together with the consequent sad effects on the marriage partners and their children. So the laws preventing divorce were relaxed until the common “no fault” divorce was made legal.

The next major and apparently successful attack on the family involved the question of headship. Though Scripture is plain that the husband is the head of the household and exercises then also the authority, and though Scripture emphasizes that as Christ is Head of the church so the husband is head of his wife, that instruction was considered out-of-date. Increasingly, women entered the work force. Headship of the male was discarded in favor of a kind of “partnership.” Though any animal with two heads cannot function, the family was presented as a two-headed entity. Now women must be able to occupy any or all positions of headship: in government, in the churches, as also within the home. The resultant effect upon family life is obvious to all who would see.

The attack against the family is far from over. Television and the movie present adultery and fornication as perfectly acceptable. Columnists who write in answer to questions present these adulterous relationships as simply normal and acceptable. “Single parent homes”

are mentioned so frequently that one almost comes to believe that this is acceptable and normal. (“Single parents” can be a result of the death of one of the partners— but that is an entirely different matter.) Many become “single parents” as a result of fornication. Others become so through artificial insemination. Husbands are, for many, an undesirable appendage to their “family.”

The “family” increasingly is broadened to include the union of homosexuals. What was considered a violation of the law of the land is now said to be acceptable. It is an “alternate life-style” that we are required to acknowledge and accept. To oppose these relationships is to place oneself in the category of those practicing “hate crimes.”

Abetting all of these changes has been the largely successful effort to remove any references to the law of God, specifically the Ten Commandments, from society. It is not legal to place the Commandments on the walls of public schools. The effort is made even to remove all references to God in public society (as in the pledge of allegiance). Without the unchangeable and perfect standard of God’s law, man has decided to take the law into his own hands, so as to determine what is “normal.”

Cal Thomas, that usually astute columnist, writes of this in the *Grand Rapids Press*, March 30, 2003:

While the war overseas continues, so does another war at home.

The latest battle in the culture war was fought last week on Supreme Court turf. At issue is a Texas “homosexual conduct law” that forbids sodomy.

Before the Supreme Court rules that the Founders had the

right to practice sodomy in mind when they wrote the Constitution, we should ask where the chipping away at law and morality is leading us.

Thomas argues persuasively that if “sodomy” is made legal, there would be no more legal right to declare polygamy to be wrong. Soon one could “marry” multiple partners. Next would fall the laws against pedophilia. It would no longer be regarded as “deviant” behavior (as some already argue), but would be acceptable between consenting persons.

Thomas concludes:

Former Republican Sen. Alan Simpson of Wyoming wrote a column for the *Wall Street Journal* last Wednesday in which he argued in favor of the “gay rights” position opposing the Texas law. Simpson said “the proper Republican vision of equality” is “live and let live.” Simpson thinks that laws against homosexual practice “are contrary to American values protecting personal liberty....”

What Simpson argues for is not liberty but license. There is a profound difference between traditional understanding and definition of liberty and that of license. Liberty is presumed to depend on personal responsibility. I like one of the Webster definitions of liberty: “permission to go freely within specified limits.” In contrast, “license” can mean “disregard for rules of personal conduct: licentiousness.”

Several conservative groups filed amicus briefs supporting the law. The one by the Family Research Council sums up the major arguments in favor:

“(1) The law has historically respected and protected the marital union and has distinguished it from acts outside that union, such as fornication, adultery and sod-

*“Before the Supreme Court rules that the Founders had the right to practice sodomy in mind when they wrote the Constitution, we should ask where the chipping away at law and morality is leading us.”*



omy. To extend to homosexual sodomy the same protections given to the marital union would undermine the definition of marriage and could lead to homosexual marriage; (2) In order to recognize a non-textual constitutional right to sodomy, the court must find sodomy to be deeply rooted in the nation's history and tradition. In fact, laws banning sodomy are deeply rooted in our nation's history and tradition; (3) Protecting marriage, upholding morality and seeking to ensure public health is more than enough for Texas to prove it has a 'rational basis' behind its law...."

The law is supposed to set parameters for a society. In the past, the law has been viewed as something that flowed from a Law-giver, outside of the reach of humankind to create or manipulate. But since humanity now sees itself as the law-maker (the breaking of that ancient Law is now celebrated in personal behavior and encouraged in film, in magazines and on TV), who is to say whose morality, if any morality, should prevail?

Having made "choice" the ultimate determiner for abortion, it would not surprise me if the Supreme court cites the so-called "right to privacy" in this case and replays its mistake in *Roe vs. Wade*, which struck down another Texas law.

Adoption laws in some states now give children to same-sex couples. If the Texas sodomy law falls, "marriage" will be re-defined and the demise of the human family will be complete.

Thomas is correct. Sadly, what has increasingly been accepted in our secular (though nominally Christian) society, has become the norm within many churches as well. Divorce and remarriage is said to be as prevalent in the churches as in society in general. The matter of headship has been altered in the churches to conform to the practice of society at large. Many churches have come to accept homosexuality as legitimate. There is but little of the antithesis existing anymore between church

and world. And if families in the "churches" are destroyed, what happens to the truth of the covenant that continues in the line of our generations?

## ■ Signs of the Times

**W**e hear much in our day of the "signs of the times." To the child of God these signs are such that they remind of the nearness of the coming day of the Lord. We believe the word of Christ that the "day and the hour knoweth no man." At the same time Christ gives clearly the signs that point to the end of the age.

One recalls the word of Christ in Matthew 24:7-8: "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."

The "pestilences" have become increasingly evident. For some time now we have heard of the terrible consequences of the AIDS epidemic. Many countries in Africa and Asia are devastated by it. We hear of the possibility of resurgence of this disease in our own land.

Now a new disease has appeared on the horizon. It is causing doubt and dread in many parts of the land. The disease has been called SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome). The cause of the disease is uncertain. It spreads, evidently, easily. There are many fatalities among those who contract it. There is presently no cure. Some have compared it to the flu epidemic after the First World War when at least 20 million people died because of this disease. The *Grand Rapids Press* has this report from Hong Kong:


Fear gripped Hong Kong as the number of people suffering from a deadly flu-like disease increased sharply Saturday. Thousands of people donned surgical masks but many more refused to venture out and activity in the usually bustling city ground to a halt.

Also, the first doctor to realize the world was dealing with an unfamiliar disease died of the illness in Thailand on Saturday. Italian Dr. Carlo Urbani, 46, a World Health Organization expert on communicable diseases, became infected while working in Vietnam, where he diagnosed an American businessman hospitalized in Hanoi, the U.N. agency said. The businessman later died.

Since then severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, has claimed more than 50 lives around the world and sickened almost 1,500 people, mostly in Asia. There were 59 cases of SARS in the United States and at least 35 in Canada, where three people have died.

Is this (and AIDS) part of the pestilences which shortly precede Christ's return?

We constantly hear of the war with Iraq. But is this only a war with Iraq? Many have pointed out that the "radical" Muslim advocates a "jihad" or holy war against the United States and allied nations. But is it only the "radical" Muslim? It appears as though the nations of Islam increasingly are arraying themselves against the "Christian" nations. Many appear ready to follow the teachings of the Koran against the "infidel." This could well be the prelude to, or the beginning of, the final battle with "Gog and Magog" as recorded in Revelation 20:7-8: "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea...."

We live indeed in interesting times. One wonders if some of us, possibly most of us, will be living when Christ returns. In the meanwhile we labor faithfully in every area of work while we do pray, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus, quickly." 



## The Real Saint Patrick (3)

# Patrick's Message (Part 1)

**B**ut what was the message that Patrick preached to the Irish? Patrick leaves us in no doubt here, giving us a simple Rule of Faith near the beginning of his *Confession*:

There is no other God nor was there ever in the past nor will there be in the future except God the Father ingenerate, without beginning, from whom all beginning flows, who controls all things, *as our formula runs*: and his Son Jesus Christ whom we profess to have always existed with the Father, begotten spiritually before the origin of the world in an inexpressible way by the Father before all beginning, and through him were made things both visible and invisible; he was made man; when death had been overcome he was received into Heaven by the Father, and he gave to him all power above every name of things heavenly and earthly and subterranean and that every tongue should confess to him that Jesus Christ is Lord and God; and we believe in him and await his Advent which will happen soon, as judge of the living and the dead, and he will deal with everybody according to their deeds and he poured out upon us richly the Holy Spirit the gift and pledge of immortality, who makes those who believe and obey to be sons of God and co-heirs with Christ and we confess and adore him, one God in the Trinity of sacred name (*Conf 4*).

Several things must be emphasized from this confession. First, Patrick was not a Unitarian; he was a full-blooded Trinitarian. His creed is structured according to the three persons of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Later he refers to the above creed as "the rule of faith of the Trinity" (*Conf 14*). Near the end of his *Confession*, Patrick writes, "We believe in and adore ... Christ who reigns with God the Father Almighty and with the Holy Spirit before ages and now and for all ages of ages. Amen" (*Conf 60*; cf. *Conf 40*; *Letter 21*). It is this great God "who controls all things" (*Conf 4*), as Patrick was to learn time and time again (e.g., *Conf 17, 37*).

Second, and in keeping with this, Patrick was not an Arian. The great confession of every tongue on the great Judgment Day is "Jesus Christ is Lord and God" (*Conf 4*). Notably, however, the creed shows no awareness of the controversy concerning the person and natures of Christ. It betrays no knowledge of the *Creed of Chalcedon* (451).

The Christocentric character of the Rule of Faith is reflected in Patrick's writing. Patrick sees Christ as the true sun (*Conf 20, 59-60*). He speaks of his whole life as nothing other than a "sacrifice ... to Christ my Lord" (*Conf 34*), for Christ was the One who gave His life for him (*Conf 24*). Nowhere does Patrick mention the Virgin Mary. Patrick preached a message of "Christ alone," not "Christ and Mary."

Third, Patrick was a confes-

sional Christian. Hanson observes that the Latin style of the creed in *Confession 4* is "markedly different from the rest of the *Confession*."<sup>1</sup> It was not his own production. Given that Patrick was a British Christian, and that his *Confession* was written for a British audience, and that he introduces his creed with the phrase "*as our formula runs*," it is highly likely that we have in *Confession 4* the Rule of Faith of the British Church in the fifth century. Patrick was not some theological lone-ranger. As a member of the British branch of the universal church of Christ, he confessed his faith in the creed of his church. Like the *Belgic Confession*, the Rule of Faith is intensely personal: "we profess," "we believe ... and await," and "we confess and adore" (*Conf 4*).

The arch-heretic Pelagius (c.360—c.420), like Patrick, was probably born in Britain. Moreover, they both lived around the same time, with Pelagius being the earlier figure. This has drawn forth comparisons. M. Forthomme Nicholson, in a contribution to a recent work on Celtic Christianity, has written that "Pelagius and Patrick share a similar concept of grace."<sup>2</sup> This is a very serious charge against Patrick.

Nicholson produces, for her assertion, only two pieces of evidence that even merit consideration. First, she states, "Neither [Pelagius nor Patrick] believes in a confrontation between God's grace and human freedom." This is strange language and indicates that she does

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not properly understand the doctrines of grace. Augustine and all advocates of sovereign grace deny that grace “confronts” human freedom, as if grace reduced man’s freedom of choice to some shadowy power of acquiescence or made him a mere automaton. The *Canons of Dordt* declare that the Lord

opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, he quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable (III/IV:11).

Nicholson’s second argument is that, “There does not seem to be any clear concept of created grace in [Patrick’s] *Confession*. All is gift, but there is no special gift that can be called ‘grace’ in the Augustinian sense.” But ought we to expect Patrick to use words in their “Augustinian sense”? Especially is this not to be expected if Patrick, as appears most likely, never read Augustine. And if Patrick does not use words in an “Augustinian sense,” does this mean that his view of grace is Pelagian?

Nicholson does not bother to quote even so much as one line from the *Confession* or from the *Letter* to the effect that Patrick was weak in his understanding of the grace of God. Nowhere in either of his writings does Patrick praise man’s native powers or ascribe any goodness to man. Nowhere does he glory in man’s free will or present salvation as the result of our not resisting God’s grace. Nowhere does he speak of the possibility of sinless perfection or of the Fall of Adam as a bad example. Admittedly, he does speak highly of monasticism (e.g., *Conf* 42ff.), but this does not make him Pelagian either. Practically all the church leaders of Patrick’s day advocated the monastic life in one form or another, including Augustine, the champion of sovereign grace.

Patrick’s *Confession* is a declaration of the mercy and faithfulness of God to him in Jesus Christ. Always and throughout his writings Patrick speaks of himself as only a lowly sinner who was pitied of the Lord. We see his humility in the immortal first line of his *Confession*: “I am Patrick, a sinner, most uncultivated and least of all the faithful and despised in the eyes of many” (*Conf* 1). He speaks of the sins of his youth and he presents them as being committed *against God*. He knew that “We shall all certainly render an account *even for the smallest sins* before the judgment seat of the Lord Christ” (*Conf* 8). In his waywardness, he had deserted the God of his fathers and disobeyed His commandments and neglected the church’s message of salvation, but the Lord was gracious to him (*Conf* 1).

And it was [in Ireland] that the Lord opened the understanding of my unbelieving heart, so that I should recall my sins even though it was late and I should turn with all my heart to the Lord my God, and he took notice of my humble state and pitied my youth and my ignorance and protected me before I knew him and before I had sense or could distinguish between good and bad and strengthened me and comforted me as a father comforts his son (*Conf* 2).

Note that in Patrick’s salvation the Lord is active. The Lord “opened” Patrick’s heart. The Lord “noticed,” “pitied,” “protected,” “strengthened,” and “comforted” Patrick. It is true that Patrick tells us that he “recalled” his sins and “turned” with all his heart to the Lord, but this was the *result* of the Lord’s work upon his heart. “The Lord opened the understanding of my unbelieving heart, so that I should recall my sins ... [and] turn with all my heart to the Lord my God,” he writes (cf. Acts 16:14).

“So that is why I cannot keep silent,” he begins his next sentence. He thanks the Lord for His “great

acts of kindness” and His “great grace” and speaks of his desire to “praise and confess his wonderful works among every nation that is under the sky” (*Conf* 3). Many years later Patrick still marvels at the grace of the God who saved him:

Consequently I am strictly bound to cry out so as to make some repayment to the Lord for those benefits of his which were so great here and in eternity which the mind of man cannot calculate (*Conf* 12).

Such fulsome praise issues only from a heart that knows the great mercy of the Lord.

Perhaps the clearest — and the most earthy — presentation of the sovereignty of God in Patrick’s salvation is found in his simile of the stone in deep mud.<sup>3</sup>

Before I was humiliated I was like a stone that lies in deep mud, and he who is mighty came and in his compassion raised me up and exalted me very high and placed me on the top of the wall (*Conf* 12).

It is hard to conceive of imagery which more sharply conceives of the passivity of the sinner and the glorious saving power of the Almighty. It is also significant that this language came from Patrick’s heart and experience. Elsewhere, his writing indicates his great dependence on scriptural language, but here he tells us what his salvation was to him in his own words. “I was like a stone in deep mud,” he tells us, “but the mighty God reached down and lifted me up.”

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1. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Life and Writings of the Historical Saint Patrick* [New York: The Seabury Press, 1983], p. 81.


2. M. Forthomme Nicholson, “Celtic Theology: Pelagius,” in James P. Mackey (ed.), *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), p. 404.

3. Mud, of course, requires rain. Apparently the Irish climate has not changed much over the last 1,500 years.



Christine Mohrmann is nearer the mark than Nicholson in her assessment of Patrick: "The doctrines of grace are one of the few theological elements which are mentioned several times [in Patrick's writings], and there is a clear anti-Pelagian trend in his work."<sup>4</sup> However, this does not mean that Patrick consciously wrote against Pelagianism in either the *Confession* or the *Letter*. Nothing he says sup-

ports Pelagianism, and everything that he says is contrary to it. This is as far as we can go with regard to a possible influence of the Pelagian controversy on Patrick.<sup>5</sup> We can, however, affirm that Patrick's understanding of grace is much more biblical and forceful than the majority of the pre-Augustine church fathers (if not them all). Patrick had grasped clearly that salvation is a "gift of God" (*Conf*

14) and this is the message that this simple missionary to the Irish preached. 

4. Christine Mohrmann, *The Latin of Saint Patrick* (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 1961), p. 25.

5. Cf. Hanson: "Efforts to support the argument that Patrick was influenced either by Pelagianism or anti-Pelagianism do not seem to me to have been successful" (*op. cit.*, p. 43).

Grace Life

Rev. Mitchell Dick

## Dating and the Deep Blue Sea ...and the Way of Christ (8)

**T**he man and maid who have been led to one another covenantally, in the context of family and church, and hitherto trusting the guiding hand of God, can know for sure very simply if they are meant to be married. This is the ninth thesis of covenant marrying (cf. the April 1, 2003 issue of the *Standard Bearer*).

These two can have such certainty because their way toward marriage together has been principled. The couple has been graced to follow God's way of covenant marrying as revealed in Holy Writ. They have kept themselves, and their parents have kept them, from the wiles, the passions, and the pitfalls of the Dating Thing. Their wonderful way together has been the way of Christ and His beloved church.

One thing remains to be done. There needs to be *confirmation* of faith.

The couple at this point are confident. They do not doubt the good thing God has done in their lives to lead them together thus far. They would only now confirm their faith that God would have them married.

Basic to this "confirmation process" is the couple's reflection together on how God has led them thus far according to the truth of His covenant. Abraham's servant was given divine leading, and then a sign that Rebekah was the one for Isaac. He then, before Laban and Rebekah, related this leading of God, and they all were confirmed, in the telling of it, in God's will for Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 24). Joseph, betrothed to Mary, was told not to put away Mary, but confirmed by the angel of the Lord in his original intention to marry her.

We need neither signs nor angels. We have the Word of God. That Word directs the way of the covenant man and maid. According to the faith which comes by hearing that Word, the way proceeds, and men and maids proceed,

along that way. And the godly couple then will remember that Word, and that Way, and be directed in their conversation and activity with Truth and the faithfulness of God in mind and heart.

This cannot, seems to me, be stressed enough. The godly couple will be confirmed in their faith that God has led them together by continually reflecting, *now together*, upon God's covenant and promises, and upon how God's hand has led them hitherto. They will be focusing still and ever *on God!* They will in prayer and conversation express their *thanks* to God. They will show their commitment to yield to God's will. They will be, believingly, *not looking around anymore, but humbly receiving this one, as from the hand of God*. Their time together will be this *simple and joyful verifying* of what they have been led, clearly, to believe all along in the covenant, familial preparation for marrying. They believe that their heavenly Father is blessing their way, His way.

This believing couple continues

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to talk of other and many things in that light of the Word of their covenanting and covenant God. They talk to each other of God, and Christ, and salvation, and their views of marriage — views known already as believers who know each other in Christ, but now heard *from the horses' mouths, as it were*, and in the pursuit, *together*, of marriage with each other. They also talk of hunting, the weather, Iraq, terrorism, work, card playing, Sabbath keeping, money, children, the woman's place, and the man's responsibilities. Yes, they talk, and talk, and listen and listen, confirming with their mouths and by their hearing the will of their Father. Their talk, a prayer. Their time, a song. Their communion, the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. Their way, the way of God's man with maid. Who can know it? *They can!*

They can also go bowling, of course. And this, in order to be assured of what they have believed all along, and *now that they are thinking of a life of bowling together!*, *that indeed this man's theology reaches down to his bowling shoes (and his attitudes towards his or her scores!)*. Bowling, O.K. And they should do other things too....

But all of this—this talking, these activities, should be *in a family and/or church setting, and with parental supervision*. It will not be alone. Nor will it be in a group that just *has to* be without parents at the convention when the lights are out and curfew is on, or at the campfire when the moon is out, and the love songs are on. A godly couple will not balk at this, the parenting of their way, but they will be glad for this. Little will be, and little needs be, the time alone, or at least altogether alone. Certainly unnecessary are nights out till the wee hours of the morning, spring breaks together with a bunch of friends *sans mom and dad*, and having to see her, all by herself (or even with her parents, for that matter!), in her summer loin

cloth (aka bikini). Covenant is family. Covenant goes from family to family. It recognizes no independent, isolated duo which craves for time alone and needs it to figure out God's will. The great secrets of daters and Dating separate friends (e.g., especially children and their parents); the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him — to them, *together as family!*, He will show His covenant (Ps. 25:14). In all things, also in our marrying, we must focus on Jehovah's friendship-secrets. And these, who would want to hide?

To be sure, the man and woman are not marrying a family, but only into one. And, therefore, "space" and "time" ought to be granted for the two to talk in relative privacy. But *highly dubious* is what more a single man with maid who are *altogether and repeatedly alone* can and will find out about one another *with a view to marriage* than if they are supervised and even chaperoned by parents. Highly tempting is it, as well, when on your own and going nowhere fast, to dream up a silly and even dangerous conversation, or to want to know *more* about a person than one needs, or can know, before one is married to that person. Besides, a couple's trying to "get to know" one another independent of parental supervision is a great, no a GREAT threat to emotional and physical chastity.

Which leads me to this: biblical marrying knows of no "romantic" touching of a single godly man with a maid. This is the reading of I Corinthians 7:1, or I am blind. "Pecking" (and then some, always then some!) goodnight at the door, playing around in the car or in the basement or behind the barn (and par-

ents letting them), is not good. It is not just a bad idea; it is not good. It is sin. It is sin for what it is. It is sin for what it leads to. It is sin because such touching is meant for the sanctified love-relationship of marriage. Romantic touching (let us define it this way: all kissing of a man and a woman other than the "holy kiss" of believers, which kiss is not just for one "special" person, but for all in the body of Christ (2 Cor. 13:12); all touching which is more sensually suggestive and stimulating than the extension of the right hand of fellowship, or the embrace of those who are grieving or rejoicing in the Lord together...) is the prelude to Solomon's Song. That Song, you recall, is for two lovers who belong to each other (6:3a), and who not only kiss, but who feed between the lilies (6:3b). It is the Song, as well, which invariably and inexorably moves along from *adagio* to *allegro* (8:14). May married folk sing that Song, and often! May those who are not, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and no other.

Romantic touching is not meant for the pleasure of two who have

no intentions of marrying. Nor is it meant to further the commitment of two who are on the way to marriage, or even engaged to be married. Such touching, in fact, is *always* the way of miserable emotional confusion, carnal lust, and unholy defilement and conception (cf. Heb. 13:4; James 1:13-15). Only "not touching," and therefore *not drawing lines as to how far one will go!* is what God says is "good" — for God's glory, for a person's purity, and for the honor of marriage.

To fornicate, step by step, down down down we go, a man will peck and pet and pervert his

*To flee fornication (I Cor. 6:18) and youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22), and to abstain from all appearance of evil (I Thess. 5:22), and for positively godly confirmation of God's will, couples must keep their hands at their sides, their feet on the floor, minds on the Word, parents close by.*



maid, and the maid will let him. To *avoid* fornication let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband (I Cor. 7:2)! To *flee* fornication (I Cor. 6:18) and youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22), and to *abstain* from all appearance of evil (I Thess. 5:22), and for *positively* godly confirmation of God's will, couples must keep their hands at their sides, their feet on the floor, minds on the Word, parents close by.

Finally this: believing marrying does not *drag its feet*— *either prior to engagement or afterwards*. In the biblical way of a man with a maid, so much of the ascertaining of God's will for a mate is done before there is the coupling of a man with a maid. And then, when the godly covenanting couple is seeking to confirm God's will, the conversations, the activities, the time together in family and church settings — *is all full of faith and singular of purpose!* In this way the will of God is surely known, *and in good time!* In the time of love Rebekah would not wait ten days! Isaac was waiting! Trusting God, we will be as wise and deliberate as we ought, and as delightfully quick as we can ... *to covenant!*

**10. Though we live in a fallen world, let us neither reject as impossible God's covenant way of marrying, nor despair if we have erred.**

Explanation: It is understood that what I have outlined and presented as the "covenant way" of a man with a maid is ideal. I believe it is *real*. But

nevertheless it is *the covenant highway, the way of Christ for sacred marrying*. It is impossible with men. It is only possible with God. Just like salvation. And blessedness. And marriage (Matt. 19:11).

Many in God's church cannot even begin, I realize, to proceed

strictly and literally to marry along this way. Many, for example, have no believing fathers or homes. And even Christian fathers are sinful — so terribly much so that children are loath to trust them. But godly fatherhood, as I have set forth, is *the key* for biblical marrying! Others, even of the Grace Life readers, may be in the middle of a relationship which has not at all proceeded covenantally, that is, biblically, and are thinking there is and can be no turning back and/or significant alteration of their "dating" without having to bear great and impossible pain. And others are crying bitter tears. They "dated" for fun. Things got "funnier." And now they know why their marriage is seriously hurting, their spiritual life together, a mirage, and their children gone astray....

Well, you know the first thing we should remind ourselves of is that God knows. He knows the hurt that might have been done by godless Dating. He will give grace and the strength of faith *even for you* to stop Dating dead in her tracks, and to pursue a more righteous Way. He will provide, as well, I believe, a "surrogate" father (maybe even a Pastor!) and home to all those from unbelieving homes who desire to marry honorably. God, after all, is our first Father! He will provide a church to support,

and good Christian "connections" with churches where families can pursue families, friends, and mates. He will surely provide — for all our needs, to take care of all the "exceptions," and the particular circumstances in which He has placed us, and to mop up, forgive,

and forget (so gracefully and graciously!) the messes we have made! Let us trust Him, as we walk now, and covenant now, *by the light of the Word!*

**11. The covenant way of God's men with maids is truly blessed!**

Explanation: Covenant marrying is true freedom for the men with maidens fair. We must reflect on that. Though it be not natural, though it go against the grain of an ungodly culture, though it require godly discipline and sacrifice, the good way of covenant marrying is the life in the Spirit, and according to the Truth which sets us free. It is also for family peace. It is the way of honor and

holiness. It is for church. It is for lifelong, lovely marriage. It makes for good men, faithful husbands, and noble, righteous, loving, and caring fathers. It is for true godliness in our young people, and for their timely confession of their faith, and marrying by faith. It is so the strong *godly* man wins. It is so the beautiful *godly* woman is prized. These blessings, these prizes, are, by the grace of God, for *all* who marry and give in marriage covenantally in the covenant of grace!

But best of all, such godly covenant marrying is for the picture we who will be married are here by grace and through faith to paint. It is the picture of God the Father, sending God the Son, in the communion of the Holy Ghost, pursuing a church chosen to everlasting life. It is the picture of the Bride prepared for her Groom by her Father to receive that Groom. It is the Son and the church communing with one another in blessed anticipation of the wedding day, the consummation, and the glory they will share together. The way of the godly man with the graceful maid. It is the way of Christ.

*But best of all, such godly covenant marrying is for the picture we who will be married are here by grace and through faith to paint.*

*Though it be not natural, though it go against the grain of an ungodly culture, though it require godly discipline and sacrifice, the good way of covenant marrying is the life in the Spirit, and according to the Truth which sets us free.*



## 12. We shall go forward!

Explanation: So here ends (methinks) what I have to say to you Grace Life readers about a certain ugly Thing, and an altogether lovely Way. The ugly Thing should be... drowned. The lovely Way should be followed. Grace Life requires it, and desires it. God's glory is bound up in it. At the cliff, and at the cross, and on the solid Rock I stand. And I would hope many would count it their privilege and pleasure to stand together in these matters.


That's it — let us live Grace Life *together* in our marrying, and in the marrying of our children! No doubt, there will be, and ought to be variations among us, differences of application. Acknowledged is that there are different kinds of fathers, gifted mothers, and "special needs" children and young people, special situations

also of isolated and/or tiny churches (Lacombe, do you hear me?!). And some single men or women are forty-nine, or seventy.... But midst the many variations there will be in our marrying, and in the marrying of our children, let these be variations *on a theme*, even on the theme of the covenant of grace with us and our children. Then the way of our men with maids will be our way together, and in faith-harmony, not cacophony. Then in our way of men and maids we shall be singing together beautifully, the covenant song.

Much more could be said of the biblical way of men with maids, and much more has been said by others (anyone desiring some good reading on this subject, just ask!). Appreciated the *many* responses I have received expressing appreciation for these articles, and also the

ones which have been critical. We learn, are encouraged, or humbled, all of us together, one family, for family.

Now then, who shall go forward, along *God's way*, of marrying? Where are those fathers who will take this seriously, covenantally, fearing God, and fearing lest they be the cause of the compromise of the covenant in their family? Where are the men who will be the King's men, and the daughters who will be wise virgins? For you all, no, for *one* of you, I have a son. When he's ready, and I know it. And a daughter. When I'm ready, and she knows it...

Looking forward, I am, to learning many more things together with you, through these pages, and from your thoughtful comments, and from God's Word. For Grace Life then, let us press on! 

Decency And Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

# Reconciliation of Public Sins

"The reconciliation of all such sins as are of their nature of a public character, or have become public because the admonition of the church has been despised, shall take place (upon sufficient evidence of repentance) in such a manner as the consistory shall deem conducive to the edification of each church. Whether in particular cases this shall take place in public, shall, when there is a difference of opinion about it in the consistory, be considered with the advice of two neighboring churches or of the classis."

Church Order, Article 75.

**A**rticle 75 deals with reconciliation of public sins, in distinction from Article 73, which dealt with reconcili-

ation of private sins. The article does not deal with the reconciliation of those who have been excommunicated. This is a special case and will be treated separately in Article 78. In general, the article calls for the reconciliation of public sins in a public way, before the entire congregation. This is in keeping with the biblical directive

in I Timothy 5:20, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." Public sins create offense in the congregation and bring a blot on the church. That offense and blot is removed by way of public confession. Through public confession, the sinner is restored to the community of believers, and the name of the church is cleared.

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## History of the Article

Our present Article 75 can be traced back to Article 29 of the Synod of Emden, 1571. This article provided that reconciliation should not take place publicly unless there was unanimous agreement in the consistory.

Sins which by their nature are public or which have been revealed to the congregation (because of rejection of admonitions) shall be openly reconciled, not according to the judgment of one or two persons, but according to the opinion of the whole consistory, in such a way and form which is considered to be most fitting for the edification of each congregation.

The Synod of Dordt, 1578, incorporated the decision of Emden into its Church Order, making it Article 98.

Concerning sins that by their nature are public or which by despising the admonitions of the church are made public, reconciliation shall take place publicly, not by the judgment of one or two persons, but by the judgment of the entire consistory, in such a manner and form as shall be judged most fitting for the edification of each church.

The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, revised the decision of Emden and Dordt by making two significant additions. First, Middelburg called for public reconciliation by judgment of the consistory *and advice of the classis*. No consistory might take a decision requiring public reconciliation without seeking the concurrence of the classis. And, second, Middelburg inserted the proviso that public reconciliation was to take place only after *definite signs of repentance* were evident. Article 63 of the Church Order of Middelburg stated:

Concerning sins which by their nature were public, or by rejection of ecclesiastical admonitions have become public, reconciliation

(when definite signs of repentance are seen) shall take place in public by judgment of the consistory and advice of the classis, in such a form and manner as shall be judged most fitting for the edification of each church.

The Synod of the Hague, 1586, further revised Middelburg. Classical involvement was removed, and instead the article provided that in the smaller, country churches that were served by only one minister, public reconciliation should proceed only after the concurrence of two neighboring consistories was secured. Article 68 of its adopted Church Order reads:

Concerning all such sins that by their nature were public or because ecclesiastical admonition has been despised have become public, when sufficient evidence of repentance is seen, reconciliation shall take place publicly by judgment of the consistory (in the country or in smaller cities where there is only one minister with the advice of two neighboring churches) in such a form and manner as shall be found most fitting for the edification of each church.

The decision of the Synod of the Hague was taken over by the Synod of Dordt, 1618-19, and became Article 75 of its Church Order.

When the Christian Reformed Church in 1914 translated and revised the Church Order of Dordt, it reintroduced the involvement of the classis. If difference of opinion arose in the consistory over the necessity of a public reconciliation, the consistory was to seek the advice of two neighboring consistories "or of the classis." This revision has been retained in our Protestant Reformed Church Order.

The history of Article 75 indicates the seriousness with which public confession and public reconciliation has been regarded in the Reformed churches. Great care must be exercised before a consistory proceeds along these

lines. This is perhaps the only instance in the Church Order in which a unanimous decision is required of a consistory. Unanimous decisions are always desirable, but not always possible. Ordinarily a simple majority is all that is necessary. But in this case, a unanimous decision is required. In order for public reconciliation to take place, there may be no difference of opinion within the consistory, according to Article 75. If even one member of the consistory is opposed to the public reconciliation, the matter must be presented to two neighboring consistories or to the classis. The requirement of a unanimous decision is in keeping with the seriousness of public confession of sin. No consistory ought to take this matter lightly.

## When Public Reconciliation Is Necessary

Only public sins are to be reconciled publicly. Public sins include sins which in their very nature are public, as well as sins which although private have become public because the sinner has refused to heed the admonitions of the consistory. In this latter case, the congregation has been informed of the transgressor's sin and his refusal to repent of his sin. Because the congregation has been informed, the sin has been made public and public reconciliation becomes necessary.

It may happen that a sinner does not repent after he has been admonished by those who are following the course of Matthew 18, but does repent when the consistory begins to labor with him and before any announcement is made to the congregation. In this case, reconciliation ought to take place before the consistory only. Those who were involved in the way of Matthew 18 should be either present at the time of reconciliation or be afterwards informed by the consistory of the sinner's repentance. In this case, no an-

nouncement should be made to the congregation. Never should a consistory reveal to the congregation the faults of a member of which the congregation is not aware. It is sufficient that reconciliation has taken place before the consistory.

Reconciliation is to take place "upon sufficient evidence of repentance." This is an important safeguard in Article 75. A consistory must not be too quick to accept a sinner's confession. A consistory must do what it can to insure that the sinner's confession is sincere. This is especially true in the case of a sinner who has fallen into the same sin more than once. It is well known, for instance, that those who are addicted to alcohol readily shed tears of sorrow and deplore having fallen back into the sin of drunkenness, but often relapse. In this case a consistory must not be too quick to accept the sinner's confession and proceed to his restoration. Article 75 requires that a consistory be convinced of the genuineness of the repentance by definite evidence that the sinner is repentant. It has not been at all uncommon that consistories place such a member on probation for a designated length of time. If this procedure is followed, the sinner is reconciled to the church, but the privileges of church membership are temporarily suspended, particularly the use of the sacraments. This may also be the procedure in the case of especially heinous sins. The Synod of Dordt, 1578, even made this provision a part of its Church Order. Article 99 of this Church Order reads:

Those who have committed grievous sins which are a disgrace to the church or which should also be punished by the government, even though they show penitence verbally, shall nevertheless be barred from the Lord's Supper to remove the offense and to test their penitence. But how often or how long this shall take place

shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

### **How Public Reconciliation Should Take Place**

When public reconciliation is to take place, the consistory should formulate a brief announcement to be read to the congregation. The announcement should be formally adopted by the consistory and should be read orally, not inserted into the weekly bulletin. Especially ought this to be the case in our day when bulletins are widely distributed and even posted on Internet sites. The repentant sinner ought to be spared, as much as possible.

The announcement should state the sin that was committed, inform the congregation of the sinner's repentance, and the decision of the consistory reconciling the sinner to God and the congregation. The purpose of such an announcement is not to administer a final word of rebuke and warning. But the purpose of the announcement is the sinner's reconciliation and reinstatement. This should be reflected in the wording of the announcement. The repentant sinner should sign the announcement that the consistory has drafted in the presence of the consistory. By doing this, he expresses his agreement with what will be announced to the congregation. This safeguards the consistory from any liability in making the announcement. This signed confession should be deposited in the supplements of the consistory for any possible future reference.

Some churches have adopted a Form for Confession of Guilt before the congregation. This is not the practice in our churches, but is the practice, for instance, in the Netherlands Reformed congregations. The Netherlands Reformed Confession of Guilt contains three questions:


1. Do you confess before God and His holy congregation that you

have sinned against the \_\_\_\_\_ commandment?

2. Do you acknowledge that this transgression grieves you?

3. Do you promise to forsake this sin and the world, and to live in a Christian way in the future?

Ordinarily, when this form is used the sinner rises before the reading of the questions and answers affirmatively before the congregation. The use of such a form is entirely in keeping with Article 75 and has much to commend itself. Nevertheless, Article 75 does not refer to or require such a form, and the sinner's reconciliation can as appropriately be effected by means of an announcement prepared by the consistory and read to the congregation. It is assumed that whatever method is used, the announcement is read to the congregation during the course of a regular Sunday worship service.

A special case presents itself when repentance occurs after the first step of censure has been announced to the congregation. In this instance, the congregation has been informed that a certain member is living impenitently in a specific sin and has been placed under censure by the consistory, but the name of the sinner is not announced. When a sinner under the first step of censure repents, reconciliation must be made not only before the consistory, but also before the congregation. An announcement must be made to the congregation that the censured member has repented, his censure has been lifted, and he has been restored to the congregation. Although a public announcement must be made, because the sinner was under only the first step of censure, his name must not be included in the announcement. It is sufficient that the consistory inform the congregation of the fact of his repentance and restoration, without mentioning the sinner by name. ...to be continued. 



## The Election and Installation of Deacons (5)

# The Installation Ceremony

**A**fter the deacons have been nominated and elected to office, it is necessary and fitting that they be installed into office in a ceremony during the worship service.

Our Church Order, on the basis of Scripture, requires such a ceremony. Article 22 says of elders and deacons: "that they may ... be installed with public prayers and stipulations ... agreeably to the form for this purpose."

According to Acts 6, the first deacons were installed in a church ceremony. The congregation, having chosen seven men to be deacons, placed these seven before the apostles; "and when they (i.e., the apostles, DJK) had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (v. 6). Although this is the only explicit scriptural reference to such a ceremony at the installation of deacons, other passages indicate that missionaries, pastors, and elders were installed in similar manner (Acts 13:3, I Tim. 4:14, II Tim. 1:6, Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5).

For a deacon to begin the work of his office prior to this ceremony, or even apart from such a ceremony, contradicts scriptural principles that must govern us in our church life.



Where and when should this ceremony take place?

It should take place in a public worship service of the congrega-

tion. Article 22 specifies that the installation must include "public prayers," indicating that the ceremony should be one in which the congregation is present. The example of the installation of the first deacons also indicates that the church must be present. A private installation ceremony at a meeting of the council only is improper. The congregation must witness the vows and the signing of the Formula of Subscription and hear the charge given to it regarding the men who hold office.

While it is not commonly the practice to hold a special midweek service for the purpose of installing elders and deacons, such would not be out of order. Commonly, however, such officebearers are installed at a regular worship service on the Lord's Day.

This installation should take place relatively soon, but not immediately, after the election.

It should not take place immediately after the election because there must be a period of approbation in which the congregation, by its silence, approves of these men holding office. In the event that the council submitted to the congregation a nomination of men from which the congregation voted, the congregation already had one opportunity to give its approbation. But this second period of approbation is important, for the congregation must now approve those specific men who are appointed to office. The Form of Installation assumes such a period of approbation has taken place: "Beloved Christians, you know that we have several times published unto you the

names of our brethren here present who are chosen to the office of elders and deacons in this church, to the end that we might know whether any person had aught to allege why they should not be ordained in their respective offices; and whereas no one hath appeared before us who hath alleged anything lawful against them, we shall therefore at present, in the name of the Lord, proceed to their ordination."

Though this ceremony should not take place immediately after the election, it should take place soon after. These men have been chosen to office, and after a reasonable period of time for the congregation to give its tacit approval, they should be installed so that they can begin their work. Customarily this installation takes place either on New Year's Day or, more preferably, on the first Sunday in January, allowing for an approbation period of two to four weeks.



More important than the question regarding where and when is this question: what is the significance of the installation ceremony?

Certainly the significance is not that which Rome claims it to be, namely, that installation is really a sacrament ("holy orders") by which the deacon or officebearer is given grace to carry out his duties. The fundamental problem with this view is that Christ did not institute installation or ordination to be a sacrament in His church. Furthermore, God's grace is never actually conferred by the church through any activity or ceremony which she may perform.

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Nevertheless, the ceremony does have significance, first of all, for the officebearer being installed. In *The Church Order Commentary*, VanDellen and Monsma sum up that significance in these words: "So that the appointees may publicly accept their appointment to office, and publicly assume their responsibilities, openly promising before God and His Church loyalty and devotion, and openly testifying that they accept the appointment as coming from God Himself" (p. 106).

The questions put to the appointees by the minister, according to the Form's direction, would indicate that indeed this is part of the significance of the installation. The appointee testifies openly that he understands himself to be called to office, and will do his work faithfully, as required by Scripture, which he understands to be God's Word.

However, VanDellen and Monsma's explanation of the significance of installation is insufficient. It ignores the fact that the ceremony of installation is a means by which God, through the church, actually confers authority upon the officebearer. The officebearer has authority to do his work, not merely because he has been called to it by a majority of the congregation, but also because the church, in the service of Christ, has officially given him that authority.

Furthermore, inasmuch as the officebearer is actually given this authority, the installation ceremony serves to give the officebearer assurance that God will equip him to serve. This assurance is rooted, ultimately, in the fact that God called him to office. Whom God calls, He equips. Similarly, to that man whom God gives authority to work, God also gives the promise that He will continually equip for the work.

Where is the evidence that the ceremony has this significance, that it is the actual conferring of authority upon the officebearer, and that

it assures him that God will continually equip him for his work?

First, this is indicated by the words that the minister says as soon as the men have answered "Yes" to the questions put to them: "The Almighty God and Father replenish you all with His grace, that ye may faithfully and fruitfully discharge your respective offices. Amen." This is a form of blessing — not merely a prayer *that* God do it, but a statement that God *will* do it. It is spoken by the minister, as the prophetic mouthpiece of God.

Second, the fact that prayer is made by the church through the minister, that God would equip the officebearers for their work, indicates such. We read in the prayer of the Form of Installation, "We beseech thee, replenish them more and more with such gifts as are necessary for them in their ministration — with the gifts of wisdom, courage, discretion, and benevolence.... Give grace both to the elders and deacons, that they may persevere in their faithful labor, and never become weary by reason of any trouble, pain, or persecution of the world." Such prayer God will surely hear, for the sake of Christ His Son.

Thirdly, the laying on of hands in the New Testament, and the anointing with oil in the Old, signified both that God had called one to official work in God's church, and that God would certainly give him the gifts of the Spirit necessary for the work. These gifts were not necessarily given at the very moment of the anointing; in fact, they were often apparent in a person before he was anointed. Furthermore, we must remember that the giving of such gifts is a continual work of the Spirit of God. Nevertheless, that the anointing signified that such gifts would truly be given is evident from the fact that, when David was anointed, "the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" (I Sam. 16:13). And Paul tells Timothy not to neglect "the

gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (I Tim. 4:14). Just as the laying on of hands was the public testimony that one was given authority to hold office in the church, and just as the laying on of hands was a word of assurance that God would equip the one He had called, so is this the significance of installation into office today.

Should we still lay hands on those being installed?

One could argue that we should do so. First, we appear to be inconsistent in this matter, because we do lay hands on those being ordained into the office of the ministry. Second, the practice was used in biblical times, and was a beautiful picture of God's work of equipping officebearers for their work.

At the same time, one could argue that the church is not obliged to include the laying on of hands in the installation ceremony. For, in the first place, although we read of instances of such in Scripture, Scripture never commands the church to do this. Second, our Form of Installation directs us to the reality to which the laying on of hands pointed. Because we know and are reminded of this reality, it is not crucial that we have the sign. Third, the reason why we lay hands on ministers at their ordination but not on elders and deacons at their installation is that the former are called to their office for life, the latter only for a time.

Our answer to the above question, therefore, is this: to lay hands on those being installed is not a matter of right or wrong. In this matter the church of Jesus Christ on earth has liberty to do as she pleases.

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An installation ceremony is significant, not only for the officebearer, but also for the congregation as a whole. According to VanDellen and Monsma the



Church order provides for proper installation "in order that the congregation may receive its new officebearers in the right attitude of heart and mind. Furthermore, in order that the congregation may appropriately implore God's blessing upon the newly elected officebearers" (p. 106).

That this is the significance of the installation is also made clear from the Form, which requires the minister to give this exhortation to the congregation: "On the other hand, beloved Christians, receive these men as the servants of God; count the elders that rule well worthy of double honor; give yourselves willingly to their inspection and government. Provide the deacons with good means to assist the indigent." Later, the minister is to pray for the congregation: "Grant also especially Thy divine grace to this people over whom they are placed...."

Public installation is God's way of showing the congregation whom He has placed in office. The congregation then knows that it is their duty to submit to and honor these men for God's sake. Having ap-

proved the installation of these men into office, and having witnessed the installation ceremony, the members of the congregation are without excuse before God if they resist their officebearers.




It is the custom in Reformed churches that the man being installed into office, if he has never before held office in that particular congregation, sign the Formula of Subscription. Article 54 of the Church Order requires this: "Likewise the elders and deacons shall subscribe to the aforesaid formulas of unity." (Article 53 requires the ministers and professors to subscribe to the Reformed creeds, and requires those who will not do so to be suspended from office, and ultimately deposed if they obstinately persisted in refusing.) To "subscribe" means literally "to write under," to sign one's name underneath, indicating that one agrees with what is taught. So we have our officebearers sign the Formula of Subscription, as a way of indicating that they agree with the

Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dordrecht.

By signing the Formula of Subscription, the officebearer indicates that he believes that the teachings of the Reformed confessions are in full agreement with the Word of God; that he will diligently teach and faithfully defend the truths summarized in these confessions; that he rejects the errors condemned in them; and that he stands ready to explain his beliefs to the consistory, classis, or synod, if so asked.

The officebearer must sign this form in good conscience and in sincerity of heart. By signing it, one commits himself to keeping the congregation and churches free of all impurity, and to maintain and defend the truth. This formula is to be signed publicly so that all can see that the officebearer has done so, and witness his testimony.

Having answered yes to the questions, having signed the Formula, having received the exhortation to diligence, and having been committed to God in his need for grace, the officebearer is ready to begin his work. 

*Taking Heed to the Doctrine*

*Rev. Steven Key*

## Justification and Good Works

**T**he Reformed faith insists upon the *must* of doing good works. That is biblical. It refuses, however, to attribute justification in any sense to those good works. That would be contrary to biblical teaching. For we have seen that righteousness is by faith only, not by the works of the law.

### No Wage-Earners with God

It is impossible that our good works be a ground for our righteousness before God, in whole or in part. It is impossible, because you and I do not stand in relation to God as wage-earners.

The working man stands in such a relation to his employer that he earns something for his work. Whether written or unwritten, we live in a contractual society. That is, a working man has a contract with his employer, under which contract he becomes a wage-earner

who can claim wages for what he does. As an able-bodied man, you present your employer with your time and abilities, seeking wages in return. You are called as a Christian to labor diligently in your vocation to the glory of God. But you do so for something in return. And as long as you have not entered into a contract for a specific period of time, and as long as such a move is not spiritually detrimental (we have no business making any work-related move without first evaluating its effects upon our

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spiritual life), you have the right later to take your time and talents to another man who offers you more for your labors. That is the idea of merit.

But merit is absolutely impossible with God. We can claim nothing from God. For we have nothing of our own to give to God. All that we are and all that we have — all our time and all our talents, all the power, the strength of our entire body — is not of us, but of God.

You cannot walk into a store and pick up that which belongs to the owner, and say, "Sir, I would like to sell you this item." The very thought is absurd! How is it, then, that some would teach that we can merit something with God? God gave us everything we have! And He gave us what we have for one reason, namely, that we might serve Him and glorify Him. That's all.

When we serve God and when we glorify God, we do not earn anything by that. We were *obligated* to do it from the beginning.

Christ tells us that specifically in Luke 17:10. Having spoken a parable about the relationship between servant and master, the Lord says, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded of you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

Our Belgic Confession goes even further. Article 24, treating "Man's Sanctification and Good Works," states:

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

merits of the suffering and death of our Savior.

### Defiled Works

The Belgic Confession, in speaking so of our good works, is speaking the language of Isaiah 64:6: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

Although many would reject the interpretation of that text as referring to the speech of a regenerated child of God, even as they reject the language of the apostle Paul in Romans 7 as belonging to the regenerated child of God, nonetheless, the context makes very clear who they are that speak this language. They are those who indeed rejoice in their salvation, and who remember Jehovah in His ways. But at the same time they live in the consciousness of the sinfulness of their natures, and the consequence of their own uncleanness, as well as belonging to a nation — Israel, the church on this earth — that is also defiled by sin.

The Heidelberg Catechism speaks the same language in Question and Answer 62, when it says that our good works cannot be the whole or part of our righteousness before God, "because that the righteousness which can be approved of before the tribunal of God must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin."

We are compelled to emphasize again that justification is through faith alone, and is not attributed to man for anything that he brings.

### Answering an Objection

But when good works are excluded as a ground for our justification, there is an objection that we face — an objection that the apostle Paul also faced, and which he was compelled to answer under the in-

spiration of the Holy Spirit in Romans 6.

Bear in mind the context of this chapter.

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, had been teaching the impossibility of being justified by the works of the law. All righteousness of works the apostle has condemned as impossible for man in this world.

Secondly, he had shown, from the examples of Old Testament saints, that God's people had never looked for a righteousness by works. Abraham was justified by faith.

And finally, only by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Our righteousness is only in Christ.

In other words, he had just set forth the truth of the forgiveness of sins out of mere grace, or justification by faith only.

I think you can understand that the whole idea of forgiveness of sins is foolishness to the world. That God justifies the ungodly merely for the merits of Christ and by faith alone is a foolish doctrine to the world, because they cannot experience the forgiveness of sins. They don't see the forgiveness of sins anywhere.

What they see is this: If I sin I am punished. If I live in immorality, I suffer the consequences. Some are willing to risk that. But they see the consequences of sexual promiscuity, adultery, and fornication. The world sees that if I live as a drunkard or become involved with drugs, I wreck my life. If I live by violence, I will likely die violently too. The world sees those things.

But they cannot see this truth of forgiveness of sins. That is seen and experienced only by the children of the living God who are in Christ Jesus.

You can understand, then, that the only conclusion the world can draw from such a doctrine is this: Let us continue in sin! To the world the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins seems absurd.



The devil also draws conclusions from our doctrine. Satan, the great deceiver, would have us believe that, from a practical point of view, this doctrine is even dangerous! That is true of all the most comforting doctrines of Scripture. Always the most comforting doctrines of Scripture are under the most vehement attacks, because Satan would take our comfort from us. He would have us conclude that if we teach this doctrine of justification by faith alone, then Christians will say, "What difference does it make how I live? God justifies the ungodly anyway. I'll continue in sin, that grace may abound." That is the argument that the apostle anticipates and answers in the opening verses of Romans 6.

"What shall we say then?" You teach forgiveness of sins, justification by faith only, without works. Doesn't this doctrine make men careless and profane? "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" And God's people say, "God forbid!" By no means! "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

That is the spiritual marvel of

the forgiveness of sins. When you are forgiven by God's wonder work of grace, with that wonder comes the confession, "God forbid that I should live any longer in that sin!"

Notice, the apostle does not say that we no longer sin. But the question the apostle asks is this: "Shall we *continue* in sin?" That is, shall we *remain* in sin? Shall we *dwell* in sin, so that in sin we have our *delight*? And to that question the one who has truly been justified by a true faith in Christ Jesus says, By no means! "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

It is a spiritual impossibility and a doctrinal monstrosity that we who are dead to sin should live any longer therein; that we who are Christ's should not show the fruits of Christ.


We who are justified by faith in Christ Jesus are now dead to sin and alive in Christ.

That we are dead to sin means that the former friendship between us and sin has been broken. That is also why we find ourselves involved in a great spiritual conflict *within* ourselves. We have this life within a sinful nature. There is

now a great battle — clearly depicted in Romans 7. That which we formerly loved, we now hate.

And although it is true that sometimes it seems that sin almost reigns over us, the result is always that we get on our knees, in that prayer which is the chief part of thankfulness to God, and plead: God, be merciful to me, the sinner.

That prayer is a fruit of our justification. That prayer is ours because Christ works in us through faith and by His Holy Spirit. Christ causes us to love God and to love Him and to appreciate the privilege of doing good works, and to fight the good fight of faith. Isn't it so? In that way we also receive the testimony of the Spirit that we are the children of God.

So those fruits are also important for our own comfort and assurance. They are the evidences of God's continued work in us by the Holy Spirit. They are indeed God's own testimony of His glorious grace. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Mission Activities

**I**n news from Ghana we found that our missionary, Rev. W. Bekkering, with help from his wife, Phyllis, have decided to start a library for the benefit of the members of the Fellowship there in West Africa. They have painted the "consistory" room in their church and have added some bookcases. The mission has a number of books that the Moores left behind after retirement, and Audra

Bol also brought some books from the members of Georgetown PRC when she was there as part of a Calvin College tour. Hopefully this will give the serious reader in Ghana a place to read and learn more about our churches and the Reformed faith.

The Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL now has a Mission Bulletin Board located in their narthex. This was constructed by one of their members. The hope was that Bethel would make use of this means of keeping in contact with our missions and missionaries. Bethel's Evangelism Committee was looking for families to volunteer to

maintain current information on each field. This board contains several elements. The first is a world map on which locations of our mission work are noted. Also marked on the map are all our PR churches. The map also shows any Bethel members in distant locations, such as students. Alongside the map there is information about missions: missionary profiles, upcoming mission activities, and possible requests for prayer from each field.

A delegation from our churches' Domestic Mission Committee visited our mission in Pittsburgh, PA, March 28-31. Gary Boverhof and Rev. B. Gritters went

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



together by car, leaving Friday morning and returning home on Monday afternoon. This was the DMC's annual visit. The saints there are doing well. The visit not only served to encourage them, but also gave the delegation time to meet with Rev. and Mrs. Mahtani, as well as the Mission's steering committee, to hear their perspective on the work.

Coincidentally, the same weekend that the two members of our denomination's DMC were visiting, approximately eighty young people from the Covenant Christian High School Band in Grand Rapids, MI, along with several chaperons, paid the mission a visit. They were there March 27-29. Thursday night they gathered at Trinity Christian School for dinner and fellowship, followed by a ride to Mt. Washington. On Friday morning they visited with the students at Trinity, visited the Mission office, and toured the Science and Sports Centers. In the evening the band gave a concert at Trinity.

### Congregation Activities

At least three of our churches in west Michigan (Grace, Grandville, and Trinity) sponsored visits to the Van Andel Museum Center in downtown Grand Rapids, MI in past months to visit the exhibit of the Dead Sea Scrolls. A lot of excitement and anticipation

from local church leaders and archaeologists has certainly added to the interest of this exhibit this spring, and a visit certainly proved of interest to members of our churches too. It was surely worthwhile to see the connection these scrolls have to our Bible and the Christian faith. It is noteworthy that these scrolls are almost identical to the previous oldest text used as the basis for the King James Bible.


For some time now our Byron Center, MI congregation has supported what they call a Children's Activity Night. This night consists of one meeting per month, where the children of Byron Center from grades 4-8 meet together, with help from parents, to work on various projects and spend time in the study of God's Word and song. Byron Center is somewhat unique in that it has children in three of our Christian grade schools, and it was thought that these activity nights could help these different groups get to know each other a little better. This past year, besides monthly Bible studies, activities have been as varied as a summer outing to a member's nearby cottage, to writing letters to Byron's shut-ins, to making and launching home-made rockets from their parking lot, to racing derby cars across their all-purpose room.

Later this April the children will also enjoy their annual overnight camp-out north of Grand Rapids. They stay in tents while the adults spend the night in a cabin. In the morning all the campers are given their own mess kit of two eggs, two slices of bread, and two sausage links. It is their responsibility to prepare their own breakfast over an open fire. Needless to say, there are some interesting results.

### Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL sponsored a spring lecture on March 21 at their church. Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on "Labor Unions in the Light of Scripture." The Peace Choir also sang a few songs, and a time of fellowship and refreshments followed this timely lecture.

### Minister Activities

Rev. D. Kleyn, pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC, received the call from Hull, Iowa to serve as our denomination's second missionary to Ghana. Rev. R. VanOverloop declined the call he had been extended from the Byron Center, MI PRC to serve as their next pastor. Byron's new trio is Rev. M. DeVries, Rev. M. Dick, and Rev. J. Mahtani. Rev. G. Eriks declined the call he was considering to become the next pastor of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. 

## Announcements

### NOTICE

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan, is inviting applications for a full-time and part-time high school teacher for the 2003-2004 school year. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, biblical inerrancy, six-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Applicants should send a letter of application and resume to: Reformed Heritage Christian School, 700 North Fletcher, Kalamazoo, MI 49006. For more information, phone: 1 (269) 279-7373.

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The ladies Mary-Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA extend their sincere Christian sympathy to our members, Jeanne Jabaay, Janine Meelker, Lori Jabaay, and their families and relatives in the passing of their husband and father,

#### JAKE JABAAY.

May God be with them in their time of sorrow. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth" (Psalm 131:1, 2).

Amy Gritters, Secretary

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Young Adult Bible Study Society of Grandville PRC expresses its heartfelt Christian sympathy to Jim and Kim VanDyke in the passing away of Kim's father,

#### MR. RICHARD VANDER PLOEG.

May God be with them in their time of sorrow. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth" (Psalm 131:1, 2).

Bill Huber, Pres.  
Lisa DeBoer, Sec.



## PUBLIC LECTURE

Eastside Christian School Promoters are pleased to present a public lecture titled,

"How Did We Get  
the New Testament?"

on Thursday, May 15, at 7:30 P.M.  
at First Protestant Reformed Church,  
2800 Michigan NE, Grand Rapids.  
Our lecturer is

**Dr. Theodore P. Letis,**

director of the Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies, Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Letis is a church historian and has special interest in the intellectual history and discipline of biblical criticism. His emphasis is on the development of the Reformation Bible tradition, the Authorized Version, and its underlying texts. You will not want to miss this fascinating lecture by an exciting speaker.

## NOTICE!!!

Future PR preachers and teachers are eligible to receive financial assistance from the

### Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee.

For an application packet, contact:  
Brenda DeJong  
phone: (616) 662-2187;  
e-mail: brendadj@juno.com

Deadline for application-packet requests:  
May 17, 2003

Deadline for completed applications:  
June 7, 2003

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Senior Bible Study Society of Byron Center PRC express their Christian sympathy to members Bob and Bonnie Velting in the death of his mother,

**MARTHA VELTING.**

The Lord in His mercy saw fit to take Martha home to eternal glory on March 15, 2003. May they take comfort in the words of Isaiah: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

Leroy DeVries, Leader  
Ardith Oomkes, Secretary

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Jim and Kim Van Dyke and family in the death of Kim's father,

**MR. RICHARD VANDER PLOEG.**

May they be comforted by God's Word, "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Psalm 73:26).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President  
Dan Key, Assistant Clerk

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Society of the Doon PRC expresses its heartfelt sympathy to our fellow members Mr. and Mrs. Jim Regnerus and their family in the death of their father and grandfather,

**MR. LOUIS REGNERUS.**

May God's rich grace sustain them in their sorrow and may they be comforted with the words from Psalm 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Rev. Richard Smit, President  
Daris VanBemmel, Secretary

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of the Doon PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to our fellow officebearer Mr. Jim Regnerus and family in the death of his father,

**MR. LOUIS REGNERUS.**

May the bereaved family find comfort in the assurance of God's Word, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. Richard Smit, President  
Gene VanBemmel, Clerk

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Southeast PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to the Richard and Jeanette, and Bernard and Henrietta Kamminga families in the death of their dear sister,

**MRS. MARTHA VELTING.**

May they find comfort in God's Word: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Harlow Kuiper, Vice-President  
Doug Mingerink, Clerk

## CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2002 appointed Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan the calling church for the 2003 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2003 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 10, 2003 at 8:30 A.M. in the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 9, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. Slopsema, president of the 2002 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Ralph VanderVeen, 2973 Willow Run, Hudsonville, MI 49426 Phone: (616) 669-5833.

Consistory of  
Hudsonville PRC  
Ralph VanderVeen, Clerk.

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On April 5, 2003, our parents and grandparents,

**JOHN and SANDRA HEYS,**

celebrated 35 years of marriage. With gratitude to God we rejoiced with them on this special occasion. We are thankful for the many blessings that God has given to them and to us through them. Our humble prayer is that God will continue to keep them in His care and bless their marriage in the years to come. "For the Lord is good; his mercy is ever lasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- \* John and Tracy Heys
- \* Dustin, Randy
- \* John and Lorinda Tolsma
- \* Sonja Heys
- \* Trisha Heys

Berthoud, Colorado

## Reformed Witness Hour

### Topics for February

Date	Topic	Text
May 4	"Continue in Prayer"	Colossians 4:2
May 11	"The High Calling of Motherhood"	I Timothy 2:15
May 18	"Bitter For Sweet (1)"	Isaiah 5:20
May 25	"Bitter For Sweet (2)"	Isaiah 5:20