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The Availing of Faith

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Galatians 5:6

Blessed argument! The truth of God's Word, according to the Word itself, is to be argued and defended in all controversy. The epistle of Galatians is a masterpiece in argument. It is a massive volley launched from the citadel of the truth. It smashes to pieces all the devices and engines set up by the enemies of the truth.

That volley is thorough. Its main fusillade is a number of the Scriptures of the Old Testament that are applied to the controversy of justification by faith or by works. Those Scriptures are rallied in defense of the truth that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. But there are other elements in this volley also fatal to the enemy's forces. There is the fervent zeal that

pours itself forth in a torrent of strong words, even a deep, dark word of anathema, Let him be accursed! Paul expresses his desire that they would even be cut off who troubled the churches of Galatia.

The occasion for this volley is an attack on the gospel. That gospel is the truth that God's elect are justified by faith alone. The gospel is that they are justified by faith without any works. The blessed gospel of God's salvation was under siege. Its enemies claimed also to bring the gospel. In truth, their gospel was no gospel at all! For this gospel was a gospel of justification by faith and by works. Chief among the works they promoted was circumcision.

That attack must be repelled by everything that might be hurled against it! The munitions must be emptied, magazines emptied out, all for the destruction of that error and for the survival of the true gospel of God's gracious salvation in Jesus Christ. Let every argument conceived be brought out! The truth of the gospel is at stake!

As it was then, even according to holy Writ, so it must be in the present.

One of these arguments in this warfare is given in these words: "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." It is but a small, sometimes overlooked element in the volley. It carries no great vehemence. It is no anathema or destructive wish. Neither is it an appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures.

These words make a simple comparison. It requires that we put two side by side, and put the same question to each side. On the one side is circumcision, joined by uncircumcision. On the other side is faith.

Let us, for the sake of the argument, go a bit beyond the words of Galatians 5:6 themselves. Let us consider the context. For the argument is not only about circumcision. (Neither let the present-day enemies of faith alone say otherwise!) It is about the works of the law, including circumcision. Yea, more, it is about every human work, everything that might possibly be proposed as a condition for salvation! Let us put all these things together on the one side.

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What an enormous weight appears on this side: circumcision, uncircumcision, works of the law, human effort, human achievement.

Here is the question we address to this side: what does it avail? What is its strength? What is it strong to produce?

The answer?

Nothing! Circumcision does not avail! Uncircumcision does not avail! The works of the law do not avail! Neither does human effort or human achievement.

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth. Neither does the gospel of circumcision. Neither does the gospel of human effort and human achievement. They cannot save! Those who believe these "gospels" are still dead in their sins.

The other side is rather simple. It is faith. And, we emphasize, it is faith alone! It is faith without any works at all. In fact, it is faith in opposition to works, in antithesis to works, exclusive of works!

We put the same question to this other side, namely faith: What does it avail? What is its strength? What is it strong to produce?

The answer?

Everything! Faith is strong! Faith does avail! Faith is mighty to produce an abundance of fruit!

Faith is the victory! The gospel of justification and salvation by faith alone is vindicated! The lie of justification and salvation by faith and works lies vanquished and bleeding on the battlefield. It must beat a hasty retreat out of the faithful church and the pious heart of the true believer.

That faith avails is declared in the simplest way: it works!

How is faith this mighty victory? How does it avail?

We need not go far at all to find the answer. The proof of its might is found in its working.

Faith does work! It is of power and strength. It does actually produce. Its product is good, the greatest good.

For, this faith "worketh by love."

Be very careful here. Be careful of the Judaizers of the present day who would tell you that faith and love are here joined together, so that they operate in the same way and on the same level. They would thereby draw the conclusion that we are saved and justified by faith and love.

It is not so! We cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, see "faith and love" in this text.

"Faith which worketh by love." That is, faith makes its power known in works of love. That is, do you desire to know the proof of faith's might and power? Look for love. Look for deeds done in utter selflessness, merely for the promotion of God's glory and the neighbor's good.

Faith does indeed avail here. It worketh by love.

There is one more thing that we must say about the love that faith produces. With this one thing, we see the absolute power of faith, and that over against circumcision.

You see, it had been argued (and today is still argued) that faith is forever and always exclusive of the law of God. The law is still important, so the Judaizers said. For that reason, let us keep at least this commandment of circumcision. At least, in this small way, we shall show that we are still interested in fulfilling the law.

Oh, the foolish pride of man! Circumcision cannot fulfill the law. The circumcision made in the flesh, done by hands, has no power to fulfill the law. For the fulfillment of the law is love. The sinner, though he be circumcised, is not brought a whit nearer love than he was before. Circumcision availeth nothing. Uncircumcision availeth nothing.

Only faith, which worketh by love!

The reason is simple. That reason is to be found at the very beginning of the verse: "In Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is the end of

the law to everyone that believeth. He is the fulfillment of all the law. He is righteous, as the only begotten Son of God. He was perfectly righteous in His life upon the earth and especially in His death on the cross. That righteousness is ours by faith.

That righteousness is ours by faith alone, without any works of the law.

To that righteousness, circumcision cannot possibly compare!

But by faith the believer is also joined to Christ, so that the power of Christ is worked in Him. The availing power of faith is the availing power of Christ! Faith wrought in the elect is the good root that produces in him all manner of good works. He loves God above all. He worships and serves God. He confesses God's name and His truth. He loves the neighbor as himself, giving himself to promote the neighbor's well-being.

Here is power! Here is might!

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth!

But faith, which worketh by love!

No, this argument is not first. Nor is it the strongest. But its particular power lies in its practice. The believer knows the proof in his life. Believing in Jesus, He is filled with gratitude for the gift of divine righteousness imputed to him. In gratitude, he rejoices. Out of gratitude he works, offering himself a living sacrifice of thanksgiving. He loves God from his heart. He loves the neighbor from his heart. He loves not out of a sense of obligation, to merit with God, least of all to be justified. He loves because he is beloved.

In that blessed way of love, the believer knows the power of faith.

Keep the argument close to your heart. Be ready to bring it out as the battle of faith requires. Practice it, to know its strength.

Faith availeth indeed, for it worketh by love.

In Jesus Christ. 

Faith's Assurance

Assurance of salvation is an aspect of true faith. Assurance belongs to the very nature of saving faith. Faith in Jesus Christ according to the gospel of the Scriptures *is* assurance. Faith *is* certainty of salvation.

A believer can doubt his salvation. He ought not doubt, but it is possible that he does. But doubt is not part of his faith. His doubt of his salvation is his corrupt, unbelieving nature getting the upper hand in his consciousness.

According to his faith, whether great or small, whether matured at the end of the Christian life or immature at the very beginning of the Christian life, the believer never doubts.

Assurance of salvation by any and every true believer is not presumption. *Full* assurance (to use a redundancy) by a believer at any stage of the life of faith is not a rarity. Certainty—*absolute* certainty (which is the only certainty there is or can be)—of personal salvation by the blood and Spirit of Christ in the eternal love of God is not an abnormality in the Reformed congregations. Certainty of salvation is simply the reality of faith.

Certainty of salvation is *faith's* assurance.

Assured Union with Christ

Faith is assurance by virtue of faith's being union with Jesus Christ. When the Spirit gives faith, He unites the elect with Christ. Faith is the bond of mystical union with the Savior. As Paul never tires of teaching, the one who has faith is "in Christ." And Christ is in him. In this union, the assurance of the believer that Christ is

his and that he is Christ's is as normal, and necessary, as the certainty of the Christian wife that, united to her godly husband in marriage, she is his and he is hers.

Assured Knowledge

Faith is assurance as regards the conscious activity of believing. Believing consists of two distinct, but inseparably related, elements. Believing is knowledge. It is knowledge of Jesus Christ as revealed in the gospel of Holy Scripture. Not only does faith know Jesus Christ as the Son of God sent by God into the world as the only Savior from sin and death by His atoning death. But faith recognizes Jesus as the Savior of the one who believes.

The knowledge of faith—the knowing that faith consists of—does not respond to Jesus Christ presented in the gospel by saying, "Ah, this is surely interesting, and undoubtedly very important; here is this person, Jesus, who is the Savior of the world." There may be a response like this, at least for a short while, on the part of some, but it is the response of a false faith. This false faith is sometimes referred to as "historical faith." It does not last. It soon manifests itself as outright unbelief, rejecting and despising the Savior by refusing to trust in Him, if not by blaspheming Him. In any case, historical faith is not the response to Jesus Christ of the faith worked in the elect by the Holy Spirit.

True faith responds, "My Savior and my Lord."

Faith knows Christ in a living, personal way—as the lost sheep knows his seeking shepherd, as a

debtor knows his gracious creditor, as the sinful creature knows his loving God.

This knowledge of Christ as the believer's Savior is certain. There is no doubt about it. The reason is that faith's knowledge of Christ is Christ's own gift to the elect sinner. Christ makes Himself known to the sinner in the gift of faith, and faith knows Christ as the sinner's own. Christ makes Himself known with certainty.

Already, then, as regards the first element of faith, namely, knowledge—knowledge of Jesus Christ—faith is certainty—certainty of personal salvation. If it were not the case that faith knows Christ as the Savior of the one who believes, the guilty sinner would never dare to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. Faith is not a risky leap into the dark.

Assured Trust

The second element of the activity of faith is trust. Logically dependent upon faith's knowledge of Christ, but one spiritual activity with this knowledge, trust is the believing sinner's coming to Christ for forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The trusting sinner casts himself upon this Jesus Christ for salvation.

In this trusting, this casting oneself upon Christ, this seeking salvation where alone it is to be found, is assurance of one's salvation. Trust in Jesus, *which is an essential element of faith*, is not, and cannot be, merely the certainty that Jesus is the Savior. Merely to be sure that Jesus is the Savior is not trust. Trust is entrusting oneself to Christ, and to entrust oneself to

Him, or confide in Him, or depend upon Him, is certainty that He is the *Savior* of the one who trusts.

He trusts in Jesus, and he alone, who is persuaded of the sure promise of the gospel that every-one who does trust in Jesus shall be received by Jesus and shall find righteousness and eternal life. The activity itself of trusting is certainty, not doubt.

In addition, when one has trusted, he does not find merely that Jesus is a Savior of sinners. But he finds that Jesus is *his* Savior personally. This is the promise. The promise is not, "Believe on Him, and you will be convinced that Jesus is the Savior of many people." What do I care about that? That is not my great need—to be convinced that Jesus saves some people. I suppose Satan is convinced that Jesus saves people. The promise of the gospel is, "Believe on Him, and you—*you yourself personally*—will have forgiveness and eternal life." And one who has forgiveness and eternal life certainly is assured that Jesus Christ, who gives him forgiveness and eternal life, is his Savior.

To speak of people's trusting in Jesus for salvation while lacking, indeed being *denied*, assurance of salvation is absurd.

We may distinguish faith's assurance that Jesus is *the* Savior and faith's assurance that Jesus is *my* Savior. But it is impossible to separate these two aspects of assurance. If a man does not have the certainty that he is saved by Jesus, the reason (apart now from certain special circumstances in his spiritual life to which we return later in this series) is that he does not trust in Jesus as Savior. And, I may add, he does not trust in Jesus, because he does not know Jesus with the knowledge of faith.

To know Him is to trust in Him, and to trust in Him is to be assured of salvation by Him.

An illustration may help to make clear both that we trust in one of whom we are certain that

he is our helper and that the activity itself of trusting in a true and faithful helper necessarily implies assurance. When I was a little child, I knew my parents as my help and refuge. I went to them for everything—food for my hunger, comfort for my childish fears, relief in my pain. Sometimes I literally threw myself into their laps and arms. I trusted in them as in parents who loved me, and I trusted them because I knew them as my parents.

That little child was sure that his parents would help him. He never doubted it.

In the very activity of trusting in them, the child was certain that he was helped by them, and that he was helped by them because he was their child, whom they loved. He never doubted this either.

And this was what his parents wanted. They encouraged trust because trust is assurance of parental love, which is basic to the relationship of parents and child.

It certainly was not the case (the thought is silly) that the child depended upon his parents and was helped by them with all that belongs to covenant nurture and rearing, but doubted for many years whether they were his parents, whether they loved him, and whether he was their child.

Trust is assurance. One can no more separate assurance from trust than he can separate wet from water. As trust is of the essence of faith, so is assurance of the essence of faith.

"Esse" and "Bene Esse"

The great evil of certain Reformed and Presbyterian churches resulting in the doubt of many members that they are saved is the churches' denial that assurance belongs to the very nature of faith. This grievous doctrinal error, with its dreadful practical consequences,

they have inherited from the Puritans.

Many, if not most, of the Puritans taught that assurance is not of the "*esse*" (Latin for "essence," or "being") of faith, but only of the "*bene esse*" (Latin for "well-being") of faith. Faith, they said, is not itself assurance. Assurance is only a fruit of faith. One can have and exercise true faith without enjoying assurance of salvation. One can have faith for many years without enjoying assurance of salvation. Indeed, according to the Puritans, most Christians, although they have faith, lack assurance. Most Christians, although they believe, live in doubt much of their life. Most believers should *expect* to live in doubt—*doubt whether they are saved*—for a long time, very likely all their life. The Puritans taught that "full subjective assurance [that is, *assurance*—DJE] is often withheld until the moment of death" (William K. B. Stoever, *A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven*, Wesleyan University Press, 1978, p. 155).

For the Puritan, Thomas Brooks, assurance "is not essential to faith." Assurance is "of faith's *bene esse* [well-being], not of its *esse* [being]." Assurance of one's own salvation is "an aspect of faith which normally appears only when faith has reached a

high degree of development, far beyond its minimal saving exercise." Brooks spoke of assurance as "a reward of faith."

Thomas Goodwin, another notable Puritan, taught that assurance is "a branch and appendix of faith, an addition or complement to faith." Insofar as he was willing to view assurance as related to faith, he described assurance as "faith elevated and raised up above its ordinary rate." "Scripture," said Goodwin, "speaks of [assurance] as a thing distinct from faith."

According to Puritan scholar James I. Packer, Brooks and

*One can no more
separate assurance
from trust
than he can separate
wet from water.*

Goodwin's doctrine of assurance "was the general Puritan conception of assurance" (James I. Packer, "The Witness of the Spirit: the Puritan Teaching," in *Puritan Papers*, vol. 1, P&R, 2000, pp. 20, 21; see also Packer's *The Quest for Godliness*, Crossway Books, 1990, pp. 179-189).

William Perkins, towering Puritan theologian, taught that "no Christian attains to this full assurance at the first, but in some continuance of time, after that for a long space he hath kept a good conscience before God, and before men" (cited by Robert Letham, "Faith and Assurance in Early Calvinism: A Model of Continuity and Diversity," in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham, Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994, p. 382). This was to separate assurance from faith with a vengeance.

The causes of the Puritan denial that assurance belongs to the very nature of faith are not now our concern. Certainly, two of the causes were the Puritan doctrine of a conditional covenant and the Puritan penchant for suspending the certainty of salvation upon "experience." If one must attain assurance of his salvation first by fulfilling conditions and then by discovering within himself a sufficient "experience," assurance is effectively put out of the reach of all but the spiritual elite. And insofar

as the assurance of these elite rests on some "experience," by what the Puritans called the "mystical syllogism," their assurance leans on a broken reed.

What concerns us is the effect of the denial that faith is assurance. The effect is *doubt*. The Puritan preachers preach doubt into their people. They profess that they want the people to have assurance. No doubt they are sincere in this profession. But when they convince their people that faith in Jesus Christ—faith that believes from the heart the gospel of Scripture—is not assurance of one's own salvation by this Jesus, that faith in Jesus Christ is not sufficient for assurance, that faith in Jesus Christ is not itself the plainest proof from God in heaven that the one who has this faith is saved by Jesus Christ, they create doubters. They create whole congregations and denominations of doubters. They create lifelong doubters. They create doubters from generation to generation.

The very next chapter following James I. Packer's description and defense of the Puritan denial that faith is assurance, in volume one of *Puritan Papers*, is titled, "The Puritan's Dealings with Troubled Souls." Indeed!

Those who deny that assurance belongs to the very essence of faith are forever *seeking* assurance. To

hear them, the believer's relation to assurance is a "quest" for assurance. This is the title of the chapter in Stoevers' *'A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven'* in which he describes the relation between a Puritan and assurance: "The Quest for Assurance." Always questing, and very likely never finding!

There is even, among these people, a perverse esteem of doubt as a spiritual virtue. The one who goes on doubting his salvation year after year, always seeking and never finding, is regarded as quite spiritual. Not infrequently he regards himself as quite spiritual. He looks down on those who claim to have assurance simply by their faith in Christ as "unspiritual." Stoevers notes that the Puritan pastors made "a certain kind of earnest doubt itself a mark of blessedness" (*'A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven'*, p. 148).

But doubt is not blessedness.

Doubt is misery, the misery of the sin of unbelief.

The misery of doubt is dreadful.

And the doubter knows it.

Try telling the old man on his deathbed, terrified at the prospect of impending judgment, that the assurance he lacks because of Puritan preaching merely belongs to the "*bene esse*" of faith, not the "*esse*."

— DJE 

Letters

Dealing with Change

In response to Rev. Kortering's remarks about change in the February 1, 2004 *Standard Bearer*, I would like to comment on the subject of how we, as Protestant Reformed Churches, deal with change. As Rev. Stewart did, I too write regarding the subject itself, which caught my interest, not directly to anything Rev. Kortering wrote.

Not only is there a right way and a wrong way to deal with change, but there also is a right way and a wrong way to introduce change into the Protestant Reformed Churches.

One example mentioned was the matter of introducing "you" and "your" in prayer. I think very few of us have any difficulty with a "seeking soul" using "you" and "your," or, for that matter, saints

in other countries addressing God this way, since they have never known any different. Also, with respect to new converts who join a Protestant Reformed congregation, it is understandable that it may take awhile to adjust to praying "thee" and "thou." It is generally understood that the custom of praying "thee" and "thou" is not a matter of principle, but a practice continued because it is a reverent

way to set God apart from men. Most of us have been shown this by our parents and officebearers at a young age already. However, a non-principle issue does not imply license for individuals to begin praying this way in our Protestant Reformed Churches. This is the wrong way to introduce change, and will instigate a wrong reaction to change.

Scripture is our guide on such matters. Acts 16:3 relates that Paul had Timothy circumcised (during a time of change in the church), to keep from unnecessarily offending fellow brethren. It is no different in our churches today. For some members to begin using "you" and

"your" pronouns for God in public prayers, or for those who join the Protestant Reformed Churches to make no effort to conform to the established practice, will unnecessarily thus also offend fellow saints. Paul wouldn't do such a thing, even when he had a compelling and scriptural reason for change, because there was a right way to go about it. The right way to introduce a change on such a matter is by a decision of the churches as a whole, and this, for the sake of decency, good order, and unity. After all, the way we address our heavenly Father is not a passing fashion, in which a spirit

of independentism should prevail.

There may be a time to change to "you" and "your." It is when we begin to address God a certain way, imagining that it is necessary for salvation. Again, Scripture speaks of the apostle Paul dealing with this situation in Galatians 2:3 and Acts 15:1. Even in such an instance of resisting legalism and the like, it should be done in the proper way, the church orderly way that strives "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Individual members foisting their own changes on the people must not be tolerated.

Jeff Kalsbeek,
Grand Rapids, MI 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Marriage — Is It Necessary?

The concept of marriage has been rapidly changing. Though vows spoken often include the "until death do us part," some 50% of marriages are dissolved through divorce long before death comes. It is said that the same is true with marriages of those who belong to churches.

There are large numbers of "single parents," single not usually because of the death of one partner, but through choice. Women will have children outside of the marriage bond.

Then there is the growing pressure to pass laws declaring that there can be also legitimate homosexual marriages.

In the past the churches have taught, as Scripture insists, that marriage is for life. It is Scripture that sets the standards for marriage—not laws passed by legisla-

tors or validated by activist judges in the courts.

In his State of the Union address, President George W. Bush proposed the expenditure of 1.5 billion dollars for the promotion of "healthy marriages." On the surface, that appears to be a very praiseworthy way to spend tax dollars. The difficulty is that again money is considered a significant, if not all-important, way of curing the problem. Marriages are in trouble, not because of a lack of Federal funding, but because of the widespread and growing disregard of the clear teachings of Scripture.

An interesting editorial appeared in the *Grand Rapids Press*, January 26, 2004, written by William Raspberry (a conservative black writer). He correctly points out the consequences of ignoring the permanency of marriage in society today. His arguments are not, obviously, based on Scripture, but rather on the consequences of rejecting the permanency of marriage between one male and one female. He writes:

But wait: There's a baby in there that deserves more attention than some of us have been willing to pay.

...Take, for instance, the sacrifices that are necessary to raise the kind of healthy, happy and competent children we want. These sacrifices are almost always unequal between husband and wife. They are tolerable only if marriage is accepted as a permanent arrangement.

Marriage has always been a way of tying fathers to their offspring. But we've come to believe that this is no longer necessary because women (in economic terms, at least) no longer require the commitment of the fathers of their children. When dads become superfluous, it becomes more difficult for men and boys to see useful social roles for themselves. Too often, young males become threats to the families and communities that might once have considered them assets.

...If low-income women often opt out of marrying the men available to them ("I can do bad by myself"), middle-income women often opt out for the opposite reason: *I can do just fine by myself.* Even if there are children.

Rev. VanBaren is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

...About 10 years ago, the Annie E. Casey Foundation reported a study that compared two groups of Americans—those who graduated from high school, reached age 20 and got married before having their first child, and those who didn't. Only 8 percent of the children of the first group were living in poverty a few years later. For the children of those in the second group, the rate was 79 percent, nearly 10 times as high.

Marriage does matter, and I wish the president's proposal didn't treat it so cynically. But the rest of us had better get serious about doing what we can to restore marriage: by celebration, by exhortation, by making the workplace more accommodating to marriage, and by creating jobs that can make marriage a realistic option.

It is striking indeed that someone declares boldly that many of today's problems in society reside in the sad state of affairs in marriage. Raspberry correctly recognizes the consequences of the decline of marriage for society. He sees the sad consequences that all of this has for a generation arising with only "single parents" to instruct and guide them.

Raspberry's suggestions for the improvement of marriages are, perhaps, as flawed as President Bush's recommendation to spend vast sums of money to strengthen marriages. The basic, underlying problem is the denial of scriptural truths (separation between church and state, you know), and the taking of vows without meaning what one says. One need not wonder what our society will become as a consequence of this neglect of God's Word. The worst is yet to come.

■ Union of Dutch Churches

There is a brief report in the *Christian Renewal*, January 26, 2004, on the union of three churches in the Netherlands. The report states:

Three Netherlands churches

cast their final vote on union 12 Dec. Each of the three synods met separately on December 12 and approved the merger. The churches will become the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. The formal union will take place 1 May, 04.

In the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN), the vote was 66 to 6 in favor of the union. In the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NHK), the vote was narrower, 51 to 24, just making the two-thirds majority required. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands (ELK) voted 30 to 6 in favor. The GKN was a founding member of the Reformed Ecumenical Council in 1946. The new Protestant Church in the Netherlands will continue its membership and be the first REC member to include a Lutheran element in it. In addition, the new PCN will be the host for the next REC Assembly in Utrecht in July 05.

The two Reformed denominations and one Lutheran denomination have been in union discussions for decades, with the Reformed churches beginning the talks in the late 1960s. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands will have more than 2.5 million members, making it the second-largest church in the country after the Catholic Church. [REC]

Such is the development in the denomination in which many of our forefathers had their membership. There was a time, now long ago, in which doctrinal differences created debate and even ended in schism or separation. In our day doctrinal distinctives are not considered all that important. Today the "doctrines" of the church increasingly resemble the "politically correct" positions of society at large. One cannot but grieve at the developments taking place.

■ Who Will Lead Us?

We are bombarded with ads and speeches by wanna-be presidents. One must consider what these say and what they be-

lieve. One is appalled, however, by twisting of facts, innuendos, charges, and questionable presentations.

There are other disturbing things. One candidate is quoted by a secular columnist with using a sexually suggestive word in an interview in *Rolling Stone* magazine. If he used the "n" word so freely, he would have no possibility of being nominated, much less elected to the high office.

Another, suddenly showing a certain interest in attracting the "Christian" vote, reported that his favorite book in the New Testament was Job.

Another, as reported in *World* magazine, takes the following position on abortion:

But presidential candidate Wesley Clark, despite his relatively conservative reputation, has gone further than any of them in his support for abortion. He has gone beyond *Roe vs. Wade*, beyond any but the most radical pro-death theorists, whose philosophy he has embraced. Not only does he say that he believes in abortion till the moment of birth. Not only does he say that he would appoint no pro-life judges. He says that he does know when the fetus becomes a human being. As he told the Manchester (N.H.) *Union Leader*, "Life begins with the mother's decision."

Then we have a president and many other leaders in politics who repeatedly insist that the Christian, Muslim, and Jew all serve the same God. Many teach that in the churches as well today.

The next nine months we will be bombarded by many political charges and counter-charges. It is good to pay close attention. Our assurance must be that God is in control. He will provide that kind of leadership that serves His purpose. His Word is being fulfilled. Shortly the Antichrist will manifest himself to lead a kingdom that seeks to destroy the faithful church.

■ "...famines,
and pestilences, and
earthquakes,
in divers places."

The prophecies of Christ in Matthew 24 are being fulfilled. But ... pestilences? Has not the medical community produced medicines and surgical techniques so that life expectancy is 20 to 30 years greater than that of some of our forefathers?

Still, there is the fear that plagues can come upon our land as well. We have read of AIDS, and SARS, and other viruses that medicines might not be able to stop. There is concern about the possibility of a pan endemic.

One of the headlines in the *Grand Rapids Press* was: "The next plague," followed by the statement: "Killer bacteria defeat toughest antibiotic."

The only thing Robert Thompson knows for certain is that his patient died. Almost everything else about the young man's illness remains a mystery—and a

warning. Now, five months later, the Seattle physician still asks the same question.

How could a strong, athletic 19-year-old walk into a hospital emergency room complaining only of weakness in his legs and lower back pain and seven days later end up dead?

The initial diagnosis – MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, or "golden staph") – was dire, but not hopeless. While the bacterial infection is invulnerable to standard antibiotic treatment, it usually responds to vancomycin, the so-called "drug of last resort."

In this case it didn't.

The teen had a stronger, more resistant and more dangerous bug than Thompson ever had seen. The infectious diseases expert recognized something new – and worrisome.

What befell this one average, healthy teenager is happening in increasing numbers across the country and around the world. Antibiotics, the drugs that have saved millions of lives over the last 60 years, now are failing their mission, outsmarted by the oldest,

most successful life form on the planet: bacteria.

The article continued by explaining how this has come about.

What is worthy of our notice, however, is that all of the cleverness of man, all of his inventiveness, cannot stop the fulfillment of the Word of God concerning the signs of the end of time and Christ's soon return. Our society had thought that many major illnesses could simply be cured with a prescription from the doctor. But man discovers that disease can still kill. New and untreatable diseases can come on mankind. Life expectancy will not always continue to rise. On the contrary, there is indication that it may in fact begin to decrease.

All of this is presented not to cause the Christian to worry or to be afraid. We are to recognize that the prophecies of the Word of God are being fulfilled. Man is not almighty—but our God is. The child of God has more and more reasons to pray, "Even so, come quickly, Lord." 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

The Marrow Men (2)

Introduction

The Marrow Controversy, which troubled the Presbyterian Church of Scotland in the early part of the eighteenth century, had its roots in earlier history in the British Isles. Especially it had its origins in the struggle

that went on in England between a strong Calvinism and a lurking Arminianism and Amyraldianism.

The confessions did little or nothing to stop the debate. The *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* were weak on the doctrine of eternal predestination, and efforts to add to them the Lambeth Articles failed. Amyraldianism was represented at the Westminster Assembly and, while the Westminster creeds were a victory of uncompromised Calvinism, the fact that they were adopted as the creedal basis of a national church made the enforcement

of them very difficult.

John Owen's book *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* and Edward Fisher's book *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* were destined to play leading roles in the controversy. The former was better known than the latter, but the latter became the occasion for the bitter controversy that we discuss here.

The Occasion for the Controversy

In 1708 John Simson was appointed professor of divinity at Glasgow, one of the schools in which students from Scotland and

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(Preceding article: February 1, 2004, p. 204.)

Ulster received their theological training. In 1715 he was charged with teaching Arminianism, and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland appointed a committee on purity of doctrine to investigate the charge. The committee reported in 1717 and informed the Assembly that Simson had indeed used questionable statements, but had insisted that he intended to teach only what was taught in the Westminster Confession of Faith. He was, on the grounds of his intention, acquitted, but warned "not to attribute too much to natural reason and the power of corrupt nature to the disparagement of revelation and efficacious free grace."

As a footnote, we might add that only a few years later this same man was charged with Arianism, that is, a denial of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the very day that Simson was acquitted of charges of Arminianism, a case involving what seemed to be an opposite point of doctrine was treated. This case involved an appeal to the Assembly against the presbytery of Auchterarder, in the Highlands of Scotland. A certain William Craig was being examined for licensure by the presbytery. Among the questions put to him in the examination was one that asked him to assent to the proposition: "It is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ and instating us in covenant with God."

The wording of the statement is unfamiliar to us and is, for that reason, not so easy to decipher. Put in simpler language, William Craig was asked to declare that it was heresy to teach that a sinner had to forsake his sin in order to come to Christ. Or, to put it in a slightly different way: "It is biblical to teach that a sinner need not forsake his sin to come to Christ."

William Craig refused to agree to that statement and was denied licensure. He appealed to the Gen-

eral Assembly. The General Assembly was not pleased with the highly irregular conduct of the Auchterarder Presbytery and summoned the Presbytery to appear before it. It decided: 1) That subscription could not be required by any presbytery to any statement that the General Assembly of the church had not approved. The Auchterarder Presbytery was, therefore, reprimanded for going beyond anything the General Assembly had required of its ministers. 2) The Auchterarder Creed itself was condemned as antinomian because it taught that repentance was not necessary to come to Christ. 3) The Assembly also warned against the evils of denying the need for holiness in the lives of people (antinomianism) and warned against the teaching prevalent in the church that good works are the basis for salvation (neonomism). The Assembly expressed its abhorrence of the "creed" as most detestable, tending "to encourage sloth in Christians and slacken people's obligation to Gospel holiness."

The Presbytery attempted to give a good interpretation of the statement by insisting that all they meant was that a sinner cannot go to the cross of Christ for forgiveness unless he takes his burden of sin with him. If he does not take his sins with him, he has no need of going to Christ. The Presbytery accepted this explanation, but in 1718 forbade the use of such dangerous expressions in the future.

Both Antinomianism and Arminianism had been condemned, although some wryly noted that the former had been condemned with greater ferocity than the latter.

The Problem

It is, I think, quite clear what the problem was.

The creed was condemned because, so the Assembly said, it was antinomian. The argument was that the Auchterarder Creed taught

that a man could continue in his sin, have no sorrow for it, and yet come to Christ. It was not necessary to forsake sin and confess sorrow for it to seek forgiveness in the cross. One can, therefore, go to Christ, find forgiveness for sin, and continue in that very sin.

Anyone can see that this is contrary to all that Scripture teaches and is, indeed, an antinomian statement.

However, the delegates of the Auchterarder Presbytery also argued that if repentance from sin and sorrow for sin were conditions to come to Christ for forgiveness, then sorrow for sin and fleeing from sin are the grounds for forgiveness, and forgiveness is conditioned on the works of the sinner, namely the works of sorrow and contrition. This is Arminianism and makes forgiveness (justification) dependent on the works of the sinner.

The debate is illustrative of the battle going on in the church between those teaching an Arminian doctrine and those tending towards Antinomianism. The debate over the Auchterarder Creed highlighted the differences and dangers.

What can be the solution to this problem? Perhaps to pause a moment to discuss this matter is necessary.

Must a sinner forsake sin to come to Christ? Or, perhaps to put the matter a bit more cogently, What does repentance from sin, repentance that brings the sinner to Christ, consist of? It seems important, first of all, to emphasize that the repentance of a sinner is the work of the Spirit of Christ in the hearts of His people, a work of the Spirit that is the Spirit's means of bringing the elect sinner to the cross. This needs to be emphasized because, as we shall note later, many in the church did not ascribe sorrow for sin to the saving operation of the Spirit. But if we look at the whole matter from this point of view, there is no problem.

Obviously, the sinner does not follow a pattern something like this: he first comes to see his sin as it truly is. Seeing sin as it truly is persuades him that he ought to abandon this sin. At that point he decides that he must seek forgiveness from sin. He then proceeds to go to the cross to seek such forgiveness.

Nor is the matter thus: The sinner goes to the cross to seek forgiveness without any desire to forsake sin and without any sense of the need to be obedient to God. That is what the Auchterarder Presbytery wanted William Craig to say. That was wrong.

Rather, as the Spirit works in the sinner, all these things take place together. Under the Spirit's working and by the power of grace, a sinner suddenly sees the horror of his sin, recognizes that he has come under the judgment of God, desires holiness that he is unable to attain by his own efforts, learns of forgiveness in the perfect satisfaction of the Son of God, hears the promise of forgiveness in that cross when he comes by faith, and flees in faith to seek all his salvation in the cross. It all happens at the same time, and efforts to sort it out in some kind of time chart fail to recognize the power of the Spirit's work in a sorrowing sinner. But it is the Spirit's work and His alone. The sorrow of one with a broken spirit and a contrite heart gives no thought to a neatly packaged list of duties and what comes next on the list.

The Marrow Controversy

But we must return to the controversy itself.

From a certain point of view, the issues in the Marrow Controversy were not the issues that had just been decided on the General Assembly. We dealt at such length with these issues because the controversy cannot be understood without knowing something of these things. But the controversy itself had a different origin.

The origin of that controversy is this. During the lengthy debate on the Auchterarder Creed at the General Assembly, Thomas Boston leaned over and whispered in the ear of John Drummond, a fellow delegate, that he knew a book that answered admirably all the points that were under discussion on the floor. The book he referred to was Edward Fisher's *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. Thomas Boston had seen this book on the shelf of a cottage of one of his parishioners, and being unacquainted with it but interested in it, had borrowed and read it. He was impressed.

The book was read by some, and James Hog, a friend of Thomas Boston and pastor at Carnock, decided to have it reprinted. He added a highly commendatory preface to it. This gave the book wider circulation and many within the Presbyterian Church of Scotland read it. Both Thomas Boston and James Hog were ministers in the church. Boston is still famous for his book *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, which has become something of a classic in Presbyterian literature. He was pastor of the church in Ettrick, where he spent most of his career as pastor.

Because of the popularity of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* and because of its doubtful teachings, the book soon became the object of official scrutiny. Principal Haddon of St. Mary's College, St. Andrews condemned the book in a sermon opening the Synod of Fife. The sermon was later published. It pointed out Antinomian teachings in the book and quoted references from it that were contrary to the teachings of the Westminster Confession of Faith. James Hog published a reply to the criticisms that Principal Haddon made. The scene was set for a bitter controversy.

The General Assembly of 1719 instructed its commission on purity of doctrine, by this time a very busy commission, to study the book and the pamphlets that ap-

peared as a result of the book, and bring a report to the Assembly. The committee pointed out five separate heresies in the book; it also proved that the charge of Antinomianism was justified. The Assembly adopted the report, forbade ministers to use or recommend the book, and told them that they must warn their parishioners against it.

The errors found in the book by the commission on doctrinal purity were: 1) The book taught that assurance was of the essence of faith. (Note: the Westminster Confession in Chapter 18, paragraph 3, denies that assurance is of the essence of faith.) 2) It taught a universal atonement and pardon in Christ's cross. 3) It took the position that holiness was not necessary to salvation. 4) It said that the fear of punishment and the hope of reward are not allowed to be motives of obedience. 5) It held that the believer is not under the law as a rule of faith.

Twelve men, called the Marrow Men, and including Thomas Boston, Thomas Hog, and the two Erskine brothers, Ebenezer and Ralph, protested these decisions. The matter was further discussed by the commission as well as the assemblies of 1720 and 1722, but the outcome was that the Marrow Men were condemned by an overwhelming vote, although they were not disciplined — in spite of the fact that they informed the Assembly that they would never live with nor be able to abide by these decisions. Their determination to maintain the doctrines of *The Marrow* is significant.

In 1730 the Marrow Men, along with others, left the Presbyterian Church of Ireland to establish a Secession Church. It is not clear what role the Marrow Controversy played in the Secession. There were other issues that became the immediate occasion for secession, but it is striking that the Marrow Men, for the most part, left the church in 1730. 

Eastern Ideas (5)

Their Influence on the Church (cont.)

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

I Chronicles 12:32

They could be right! Erwin Lutzer and John DeVries, that is, in their fourfold explanation of Satan's strategy to deceive the nations (see *SB* Jan. 1, 2004). The question is: *how* could the mainline Protestant churches of the West be duped into accepting these strange Eastern ideas? One might be able to understand that the secular West would be receptive, or at least tolerant, of these strange Eastern ideas, but surely not those in the tradition of the great Protestant Reformation? Impossible! How can these things be?

James Herrick, Professor of Communication at Hope College, believes this has happened because,

Pluralism has come to dominate the Western religious scene in the past thirty or so years. The pluralistic perspective affirms that all religions provide unique insights into the transcendent and reflect a similar human longing for the divine. In addition, pluralism

insists that no single faith can make an exclusive claim to truth and that there is no superior spiritual perspective from which other perspectives can be assessed.¹

Herrick's evaluation rings true; especially when one considers that more and more it is claimed that all religions are just different ways to worship the same God. Less and less is there room these days for theological exclusivism, that is, the idea that there really *is* only one way of salvation. Herrick goes on to suggest that current religious pluralism is unified by an emphasis on mystical experiences. Whereas in the past, Western Protestantism was rooted in actual history as expressed in the infallible Word of God, now it is open to subjective religious experience as its foundation of truth. Evidence for this turn-about in religious thinking can be found in some startling statistics that demonstrate that an increasing number of evangelical youth reject the concept of absolute truth. According to a poll that was taken, in 1991 52% of these young people said there was no absolute truth. This increased to 62% by 1994, 78% by 1999, and 91% by 2002. If this is indicative of Western Protestant belief, little wonder, then, that relying on *experience* now dominates. If there is no absolute truth, we are left to depend on ourselves and what we experience as the basis for our decision-making. The following example illustrates the point:

...A Reformed Baptist minister in England was invited to speak at a Christian Union house-party weekend. On arrival he was informed that a young lady had claimed that the Lord had appeared the previous day and told her personally that she was to be the main speaker that weekend.

When the issue was put to a vote, most of the students voted in favor of the young lady. The visiting minister did not return home, but awaited the outcome. At the first session the young lady began, but in less than three minutes dried up.

Heads turned to see if the visitor was still present and available. He was. The rest of the weekend went according to the original plan.²

That religious *experience* has trumped the historical revealed Word of God as the rule for the faith and life on much of Western Protestantism is abundantly clear. Consider very briefly a few examples. In Pentecostal circles, speaking in tongues and the performance of miracles are the important thing. In the Toronto movement "holy laughter" and /or the making of animal sounds during worship works. In the Episcopal Church (and others) practicing homosexuals are fine — even in the priesthood. From many pulpits women preach because they have "felt" the call. On many an elders' and deacons' bench women sit because there they can best use their perceived God-given gifts. It doesn't seem to matter what Scripture says about these practices; as

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long as it feels good, is fulfilling, is fun, or attracts people it must be okay.

Taking Leave of History

If Herrick is right in his assessment, namely, that "Pluralism has come to dominate the Western religious scene," and what unifies religious pluralism is its emphasis on mystical experiences, the obvious question that follows is: how did this happen? Herrick's answer is that Western Christianity is "taking leave of history." He writes, "...while not denying the validity of individual experience, advocates of the Revealed Word perspective have always insisted on history — not individual experience — as the ground (emphasis mine, c.k.) of religion."³ Herrick goes on to explain why this is so important:

Should history ground spirituality, as the Revealed Word tradition has insisted? Or should myth, allegory and private spiritual experience—each cut free from external events—provide the basis of our religious commitments? We might say that the advantage and the risk of basing spirituality on history are the same—the possibility of proof and disproof. Vulnerability to historical scrutiny imports openness and candor. When a religious claim can be examined, tested, subjected to critical review, the public being asked to accept the claim is at the very least invited to participate rationally in a process of choice. When, on the other hand, a claim cannot be tested or subjected to any of the ordinary tests of truthfulness, we are left with no recourse but to trust the probability (integrity, c. k.) of the claimant....

Does spirituality need history? The Revealed Word tradition has always answered *yes*; the New Religious Synthesis says *no*.⁴

All of which begs a deeper question: if Western Protestantism really has to some extent taken leave of history, how did *that* come about? The obvious answer is that

Western Protestantism has compromised with evolutionary theory on the historicity of the Genesis account of creation. This was done by accepting the notion that Genesis merely informs us *that* God created, but it does not tell us *how* God created. That fatal concession has had devastating consequences:

It is tragic to realize that Western Europe rapidly changed from an area of strong Protestant faith to its present-day paganism. The cause was not evolution by itself, but Christians compromising to make Scripture fit evolution....

Causes have effects. As Ed Wharton notes, "Any view of these chapters in Genesis other than authentic history will necessarily regard the genealogies and the tracing of the messianic seed-line as unhistoric and unimportant. This will eat away at trust in God's Word and cause faith's fire to go out."⁵

Sad to say, these faith-quenching compromises to evolutionary theory were not confined to Europe. Rev. Mark L. Shand traces in some detail the history of these compromises by Presbyterian and Reformed churches both in Europe and America (*Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, November, 2002; April, 2003; November, 2003).

The gap theory represented a concession on the part of theologians to the demands of geology that the crust of the earth required a great deal of time for its formation. For a while there was a measure of peace between the theologians and the geologists. However, that peace did not last, because geology began to make further concessionary demands. It soon became apparent that the problem presented by geology was not just the need for long periods of time, but there were also issues concerning sequence.... Therefore, theologians felt compelled to develop a further theory that would accommodate the new demands of geology. Geology

was a demanding taskmaster, and the theologians became her compliant servants.⁶

The demands of evolutionary science at the expense of the historicity of Scripture continue. This can be seen from an article by Prof. David Engelsma titled, "Pulling the Plug on the Flood." He writes, "From the science department of Calvin College have come, in quick succession, two violent assaults upon the foundation of the Christian faith in Genesis 1-11. Howard Van Till demolished the historicity of the creation-account. Now Davis Young has undermined the historicity of the account of the flood."⁷ From a quote in the *Grand Rapids Press* concerning his rejection of intelligent design, it appears that Van Till has developed in his errors:

We will experience God as creator better by learning to see the need for God, the action of God, in everything that the creation is gifted to do. I don't think we should look for evidence of the creator's action in what the universe is unable to do, but rather in the remarkable things it has been gifted to accomplish.⁸

1. James A. Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2003) pp. 227-228.

2. Peter Bloomfield, "Ongoing revelation?" *Evangelical Times* February, 2003: 29.

3. Herrick, p. 252.

4. Herrick, pp. 252 & 257

5. Fred Wilson, "Compromises and Consequences: The Genesis Account," *Impact* January, 1994: 3-4.

6. Mark L. Shand, "In the Space of Six Days (2)," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* April, 2003: 24.

7. David J. Engelsma, "Pulling the Plug on the Flood," *The Standard Bearer* 15 September, 1995: 511.

8. Matt VandeBunte, "Scientist debunks intelligent design bill," *The Grand Rapids Press* 8 November, 2003: B3.

Two things from the above quote nearly jump off the page. In the first place it appears that our "experience" trumps history in Van Till's perspective on origins, and in the second place, for Van Till what "the creation is gifted to do" overrules what God *has* done. One is hesitant to place Van Till in the Eastern camp, but his ideas are a better fit with Eastern mysticism or what Herrick calls the "New Religious Synthesis" than with the "Revealed Word tradition."

Some Lessons for Issachar

All of which should lead modern-day Issachar to sit up and take notice. That this has happened to others in Western Protestantism should be warning enough that we are not immune. Satan's temptations are often deceiving and attractive, even for Issachar. C. S. Lewis warned of this over 40 years ago when he wrote his classic book *The Screwtape Letters*. There the demon Screwtape teaches Wormwood how to lead men astray.

Keep his mind off the plain antithesis between true and false.... What we want, if men become Christians at all, is to keep them in the state of mind I call "Christianity And." You know—Christianity and the Crisis, Christianity and the new Psychology, Christianity and the New Order.... If they must be Christians, let them at least be Christians with a difference. Substitute for the faith itself some Fashion with a Christian colouring.⁹

Isn't that exactly what is going on in the whole creation-evolution debate in the Protestant churches? All of the attempts to reconcile creation with evolution (the gap theory, the theistic evolution theory, the age-day theory, the framework theory, etc.) are in Lewis' words attempts at substituting "for the faith itself some Fashion with a Christian colouring." It doesn't seem to matter that Genesis 1 *does* tell man *how* God cre-

ated, Christians in general and Christian scientists in particular continue to compromise on this in exchange for perceived respect from the scientific community.

Strikingly, not all in the scientific community are sufficiently impressed. Tom McIver, writer of anti-creationist articles and books, condemns Christians for trying to make Genesis fit evolutionary science. He writes: "Each (theory, c.k.) ...involves critical compromises with the plainest, most literal reading of the Bible to force Scripture into concordance with scientific evidence regarding the age of the earth."¹⁰ Another secular humanist, A. J. Mattill, concurs: "Many creationists have taken the dishonest way of lengthening the days into millions of years, but the creationists make it clear that such an approach is nothing but a make-shift and is unacceptable Biblically and scientifically...."¹¹

Compromising with evolutionary science has serious consequences. Not only is the historicity of Scripture undermined, at bottom its clarity, reliability, and inspiration are also at stake. Which leaves Western Christianity with no more to offer than Eastern mysticism. Both are left with man's beliefs and experiences as the basis of their religion. Which means, of course, that Christianity becomes just another belief system in the whole cartel of world religions.

But there is another temptation for Issachar in this regard. Many in the Christian, science community (Institute for Creation Research, for example) seem most interested in *proving* that God created the heavens and the earth. Consequently their emphasis is on what can be discovered in the creation to support their belief in creation, rather than approaching the whole issue from Scripture's perspective. The Bible is clear: "Through *faith* (emphasis c.k.) we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things

which do appear" (Heb. 11:3). So let us be clear as well: neither creation nor evolution can be proved. Both are based on faith. The one is a faith rooted in man. The other is a faith rooted in God. The ultimate consequence of belief in one or the other is expressed in this simple yet profound way by Prof. Herrick, "People who have a God do not need to become one themselves."¹²

Understanding these times would seem to be depressing for Issachar: both Western civilization in general and Western Protestantism in particular appear to be under the growing influence of Eastern paganism. Yet, for "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14), opportunity knocks. Against this backdrop of spiritual darkness lies opportunity for the light of truth to shine more brightly. Thus Issachar has the privilege of knowing and presenting the message of hope in an increasingly dark world.

Sons of Issachar, let us continue to grow in our understanding of the times and live. 

9. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978) 43-44, pp. 115, 116.

10. Tom McIver, "Formless and Void: Gap Theory Creationism," *Creation/Evolution* XXIV, Volume 8, Number 3, 1988.

11. A. J. Mattill, "Three Cheers for the Creationists," *Free Inquiry* Vol. 2, Spring 1982) pp. 17, 18.

12. Herrick, p. 28.

A Word Fitly Spoken

"Arminianism [is] an error that maketh the grace of God lackey it after the will of man, that maketh the sheep to keep the shepherd, that maketh mortal seed of an immortal God."

— Francis Rous (1629)

The Perseverance of the Saints

Having discussed the truth of the preservation of the saints, we now turn to the perseverance of the saints. Preservation and perseverance — two very similar words and two words that go hand-in-hand. While our assurance rests in God who preserves us to the end, the way in which God preserves us is the way of our persevering in the faith.

God preserves, we persevere. God keeps us in the palm of His hand, we continue in the way of salvation. God guides us by His counsel, we walk the pathway to everlasting glory.

Our Calling

God calls us to persevere in the faith. Our Canons speak of persevering “in a state of grace.” On the one hand, that state of grace is the state of being delivered from God’s wrath and brought under His fatherly love and grace. But on the other hand, in that state of grace the believer experiences the Spirit of God and the fruits of the Spirit in his heart. To persevere in that state of grace, therefore, means that the believer continues steadfast in faith, in repentance, in love, in hope, in joy — in all the benefits of the gracious salvation God has worked in him.

In his brief inspired epistle, Jude says (vv. 20-21): “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on

your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

The apostle Peter points us to the fierce attacks of our adversary, the devil, saying, “Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (I Pet. 5:9).

The Lord Christ, speaking to the church at Smyrna (Rev. 2:10), says, “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

So also we read in I Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

We might say, in fact, that all the admonitions set before us in Scripture are so many calls to persevere in the faith. And “he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matt. 24:13).

We do well to remember, however, that these very admonitions are the means that God uses powerfully to accomplish His work. Through the almighty, calling word of His power, God, by His Holy Spirit, moves us to perseverance, so that we actively enter into that work.

Our perseverance, therefore, is not a work independent from or

even in distinction from God’s work. It is not a matter of finally coming to what *we* can do for God. Our perseverance is the *fruit* of God’s preserving work. We persevere, working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12, 13).

The Great Struggle

Perseverance is a truth that emphasizes the struggle, the battle of the Christian life. The very word *persevere* presupposes difficulty. It is to continue walking a certain pathway even in the face of difficulty and opposition.

The Christian life is no game. The Christian life is not a life of ease. We have unspeakable joy, yes indeed. But our joy is mingled with sorrow. We enjoy the peace that passes all understanding. But the peace that we have is a peace in the midst of warfare. The victory is ours in Christ Jesus, to be sure. But it is a victory only through conflict, and the final experience of that victory awaits the peace of heavenly glory.

So we are left no alternative but to join the fight of faith. A neutral bystander there is not. The true church of Jesus Christ consists not of dead firewood, but of living members who bear the flame of the gospel torch, their lights shining to the glory of God, even according to the gifts of the Holy Spirit that God has given them.

Perseverance is running the race, fighting the fight, guarding against the enemy. We must not

be surprised, therefore, when our life seems filled with obstacles and when we are troubled by opposition, when we bear affliction, and even suffering for Christ's sake. In fact, the greatest battle is with our own sinful flesh (see Romans 7). But run the race we do. We fight the fight. And we endure unto the end. That is the doctrine of perseverance. In dependence upon our faithful heavenly Father, we persevere.

Of Saints

The Arminians, and all those who join them in rejecting this doctrine, argue that this doctrine is "a cause of indolence and is injurious to godliness, good morals, prayers, and other holy exercises" (Canons of Dordt, Fifth Head, Rejection of Errors, Article 6). They insist that this doctrine of the certain perseverance of the saints encourages carelessness and destroys the motives for godliness.

But there is a reason why we use the expression "perseverance of saints."

God's people are made *saints*, holy ones. As certain as is the perseverance of the saints, so certain it is that without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14)!

The Canons of Dordt, in rejecting the error just mentioned, point us to I John 3:2-3, where the apostle John writes, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

The way of salvation is the way of holiness. Those who would lay claim to the doctrine of preservation, while saying, "It really doesn't matter how you live," show not only that they do not understand the doctrine of preservation and perseverance, but also that they do not understand the Christian life!

It is impossible that one who

has been purchased by Christ's blood, made one with Him, should continue in the service of sin. That is the plain instruction of Romans 6.

"For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin" (Rom. 6:5-7).

So the truth of the perseverance of the saints guarantees not only that we *shall be* delivered, but that we *are* delivered!

About Sin

What about our sin, then? When our Canons of Dordt introduce the subject "Of the Perseverance of the Saints," they do so by defining *saints* as those whom God has called to the communion of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and whom He has also delivered from the dominion and slavery of sin in this life (Canons V, Article 1). But they also point out that being a *saint* does not mean that one is altogether freed from sin.

Though we are saints, we are not yet delivered from the body of sin and from the infirmities of the flesh. We still have our old sinful nature, that old man with which we constantly do battle. That is why our perseverance depends upon God's preservation of us.

Far from causing us to be complacent, our calling to persevere and our consciousness of our daily sins and the spots that adhere to the best of our works furnish us "with constant matter for humiliation before God, and flying for refuge to Christ crucified; for mortifying the flesh more and more by the spirit of prayer, and by holy exercises of piety; and for pressing forward to the goal of perfection, till being at length delivered from this body of death,

(we) are brought to reign with the Lamb of God in heaven" (Canons V, Article 2).

By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and the temptations of sin and of the world, those who are converted could not persevere in a state of grace if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end (Canons V, Article 3).

It is in fact to teach us our complete dependence and reliance upon Him, that God sometimes allows us to fall into sin. If left to our own strength, we cannot stand a moment. And sometimes our falls can be grievous and hard falls. The Bible gives us many examples, as does our own experience. Nevertheless, God continues to preserve us, so that we also persevere.

For in the first place, in these falls He preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing or being totally lost; and again, by His Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore His mercies, and henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Canons V, Article 7).

And while there are those who fall away, fulfilling such passages as Hebrews 6:4-8, I Timothy 1:19-20, II Timothy 2:17-18, and II Peter 2:20-22, it is of such that the apostle John writes in I John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." The context of Hebrews 6, and particularly verse 8, speaks of them as

bearing "thorns and briers." Even for all their appearances, even the appearance of those who "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost," they prove that they are not of the true seed. They are imposters, but weed seeds that bear thorns and briers, "whose end is to be burned."

Those who are Christ's, called *saints*, persevere. Being preserved by God, they persevere. In sorrow for their own sins, walking in the way of true repentance, they persevere. Laying hold of God's Word, they persevere. Yes, God's doctrine determines our walk of life. Our persevering is the crown and seal upon our doctrine. So we

hold fast, that no one take our crown.

But the glory for our perseverance is God's. For our salvation is all of Him. So we may be "confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

God's Command to Mothers

"She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."

Proverbs 31:27, 28

The place of a mother in the home and family is a much disputed one. For years now unbelieving society has insisted that the role of a mother in the home is no different than that of a father. Both are equals and therefore, to be fair, they must split the labors of the family and the care of the children in half. The father has his time to go out and work as he pleases, but then so does the mother. Both may and should pursue careers of their own, and both, when they are around the house, should split the chores.

This viewpoint of unbelief, however, has caused a dilemma. When both father and mother are busy pursuing their own careers and interests, what becomes of the children? Children cannot and

may not take care of themselves. Everyone recognizes that this would be neglect on the part of parents. But mother has the right just as well as father to be out and about earning her own money. The wicked have come up with a number of solutions of their own to the problem. First, do not have children until later on in life. There are so many convenient means available to assist in avoiding pregnancy. That way husbands and wives may go out and do what they want to do without being hindered or burdened by children. Then they finally have a child or two, or none at all, when the biological time clock is on its last minutes.

Then what?

In the last number of years daycare has become a booming business. While the children are young they are sent away all day to be raised by someone in a daycare environment. Mom or Dad can pick them up at night. When the children get a little older, they are given the keys to the house and they can let themselves in and fend for themselves until Mom or Dad comes home in the evening. The results of all of this

have left even unbelieving psychologists alarmed. We have a generation of children who have had to make it on their own in this world, with little training and not much in the way of a role model. The values children have learned have been taught them in the movies and from the TV set. The role models have been the godless, profane movie stars, who fill children's lives with violence and sexual immorality.

Ignored is a fundamental principle of Scripture: the important and glorious role of a mother in the home. The ungodly hate this role. The feminist movement has convinced our society that the role of a mother in the home, "looking well to the ways of her household," is degrading. A woman tied to her house? Is she little more than a slave to wait on her husband and children? How demeaning! Women must be liberated from this old chauvinistic mindset! Society, including many within the realm of the church, have bought into this life style. But in the midst of all the name calling, God's people quietly and humbly see the wisdom of this role of a mother in the home.

But does the Bible teach that

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the place of a mother is indeed in the home "looking well to the ways of her household"? Yes it does, without a doubt! And it all begins with the creation account. In the last several verses of Genesis 2 we learn of the creation of the woman. There we learn that man was created first. It was after Adam named the animals that God caused him to fall into a deep sleep. From a rib of man, God created the woman and brought her to the man to be his wife. God did this because "it is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Alone, Adam could not procreate. Alone, Adam could not function in society. He needed a female counterpart exactly fitted by God to bring forth children and also to care for those children. So God created the woman to be a "help" for the man. This role as a help to man was confirmed after the fall of man into sin when God said to the woman in Genesis 3:16, "and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." Already the Bible, in these verses, defines the role of a mother in the home.

The mother's role in the rearing of children is critical. The father simply is not able to take upon himself the task of earning a living for his family, and also taking care of his children to raise them carefully in the fear of his Creator. He cannot be off at work and at home at the same time. If he is working, he cannot be at home to instruct, guide, nurture, and discipline his children. He cannot do both! For this reason, God created the woman. A man enters into marriage, and together he and his wife have children. While the man is earning a living for his family by the sweat of his face, the wife is his help. How? She remains in the home and cares for the children God has given them. In this way the husband and wife are perfect complements to each other.

Is this an ugly picture, as the ungodly want to present it? I be-

lieve it is most beautiful! Husband and wife work together in harmony as a team accomplishing God's will for them in their families. Together they raise children that grow up to be responsible citizens of the country, laborers in the work place, and members of the church. All because mother saw her role in the home, not as demeaning, but as being vital and important!

The Bible everywhere testifies to this glorious role of mother. The psalmist draws this earthly picture for us in Psalm 128:3: "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house...." In the days of the psalmist a householder would oftentimes plant a vine just outside of

his house. Some people still do that today. The vine, as it grows, will reach out and cling to the walls of the house, covering the house and keeping it from rain and sunshine. This is the picture of a godly wife and mother that the psalmist draws here. She is one who clings to her house. She is one who sees to it that her household is protected and cared for. One is reminded here of what Solomon wrote in Proverbs 31:11, 12, "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life." All this is true because she is as a vine by the sides of his house!

There are two passages in the New Testament that also address the place of the mother in the home looking to the ways of her family. One of these is I Timothy 5:14. In the context of this verse the apostle Paul gives the requirements of a special group of widows who did alms deeds in the church. Those who belonged to this group had to be well reported of, for the good works they did in the church. Some of these works are listed in verse 10: bringing up her children

well, lodging strangers, washing the saints' feet, and relieving the afflicted. Another requirement of this order of widows, however, was that they had to be sixty years old and upward. No younger widows were to be allowed into this number.

The reason Paul gives for this requirement is found in verse 14: "I will therefore that younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." In this almost passing remark concerning younger widows, Paul mentions that the place of a young mother is to "guide the house." She is called by God to see to it that the house,

that is, the family, runs smoothly and well. Paul does not lay down this idea as a law here. He simply assumes that this is the role of a wife and mother in the home. She guides her house. That, of course, is no little task. The mother sees to it that the children are clothed properly, are trained in social graces, are respectful toward superiors, but most importantly are nurtured very, very carefully in the ways of God. Much of the spiritual training of children falls upon the shoulders of mother.

We must not forget the active role that father must take in all of this too! We must not forget that God holds him ultimately responsible for all of this, since the father is the head of the home. But that does not detract from the fact that much of a child's values in all things, including things spiritual, is shaped and molded by mother. The instruction Paul gives in I Corinthians 11 speaks of this wonderful truth. Paul sets forth the chain of authority in life: God, Christ, man, woman. A ground he gives for this is, "For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man

Elders and preachers of the church are shaped by mothers who took seriously their calling to be in the home "guiding the house."

created for the woman, but the woman for the man" (I Cor. 11:8, 9). But Paul does not leave it at that. In verses 11, 12, he adds this: "Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God."

The man is *by the woman*. The woman was created out of the man, but the man is also by the woman. This not only means that it is the woman who gives birth to the man. But it also means that the man is shaped and molded by the woman! The man is who he is by means of the woman.

Great men have stood up in the church and defended fearlessly the truths of the Scriptures. Great names have been recorded in the history of the church. Men have become famous for their faith. But we ought not to forget the quiet, humble nurture that such men received by the hands of their mothers when they were but children.

Augustine acknowledged this when he spoke so highly of the instruction and the prayers of his mother, Monica, for him. Elders and preachers of the church are shaped by mothers who took seriously their calling to be in the home "guiding the house."

This same sort of instruction was given by God to the young preacher Titus. Titus was told to exhort the older women of his congregation to "teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers of the home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Tit. 2:4, 5). This verse is definitive on God's command to mothers. It reveals not only that a mother and wife in Zion must be a "keeper of the home" (homemaker), but also that her whole life must be wrapped up in her husband and family. The wicked chafe at the calling given here. The young wife and mother

of the church strives to fulfill it because she sees in this Word of God an exciting and a challenging line of work, which will give her all the purpose and fulfillment that she needs in this life!

Oh, it is hard work! It will have its ups and downs. But what this work accomplishes is worth it all. All the money in the world could not pay the dividends that this line of work pays. To see sons and daughters who in strength and noble truth are like pillars that grace the palace of our King, Jesus Christ — that is worth every drop of blood, sweat, and tears that go into this work.

"Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her." For godly women of Zion, that's powerful motivation. But there's more. The inspired writer fixes the value of the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 for all time. "Her price," he says, "is far above rubies." That's *God's* estimation. And, in the final analysis, that's all that counts. 

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanko

Haggai: Rebuilding the Church

The First Prophecy (cont.)

9. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man to his own house.

10. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.

11. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the moun-

tains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands.

God is showing the Jews that the drought they suffered was His judgment for their sins. Not only are all things from God, who by His providence controls and directs even the forces of nature, but they are used to accomplish His sovereign purpose. In this case He had specifically called for a drought upon them and upon their land that they might learn to obey

and to see that only through obedience could they enjoy the blessing of God. This drought had been so severe that all the produce and work of their hands had been affected by it. How long it had lasted we do not know, but it had affected the cattle as well as the crops and even the work of those who did not live as farmers and herders.

Haggai expressly mentions the fact that this drought was a result of God's *call*. The call he speaks of is not the call of the gospel, but what is known in theology as the *vocatio realis*, the call of God through the things that are made. That call of God in the creation is

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one of the ways in which He makes Himself known even today. Paul is speaking of that call in Romans 1 when he says:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (vv. 18, 19).

As we learn from these verses and in the word of God through Haggai, that call and witness of God in the creation is a witness against the wickedness of men and has no saving power. Apart from God's grace and the saving work of the Holy Spirit, that call only leaves men without excuse. Here, that His people might not only be reminded of their sins, but that they might obey and turn from their wickedness, that call of God through the creation is accompanied by the call of the gospel, which comes in the prophecies of Haggai.

For us in the New Testament church the drought spoken of is not a lack of dew and of the fruits of the ground, but a spiritual drought and famine, such as the Word of God describes in Psalm 106:15 and in Amos 8:11:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.

This kind of famine and drought came on the church of the Old Testament in the period between Haggai, Zechariah, and the coming of Christ. For 400 years the word of God was not heard in Israel. It comes also on the church today when she does not heed God's Word and has no care for His house.

Such famine is common in the church. There was a long spiritual

famine in the years before the Reformation. There have been periods of famine in more modern times, especially in the nineteenth century, when apostasy and liberalism held sway in the church. It is not uncommon today, for the Word of God, read, sung, and preached, is hardly to be heard in some places. Sermons, even where they are not open heresy or the words of men, are no longer biblical — no longer God's Word to His people. The Bible is little read and less studied and its fountains of living water little desired. So dull are we and so unspiritual at times, that few even realize that the days of famine prophesied by Amos have come. Certainly they do not see that it is the judgment of God for disobedience and neglect of His house and covenant.

All this is summed up in the opening words of verse 9: "Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it." How true that is in these last days. Every Christian expects much when he reads the promises of God's Word, but how little profit and blessing there really is. How little peace and happiness, how little knowledge of God, how little enjoyment of the riches of grace and salvation! How little godliness and piety, how little blessing in family life and in marriage! God blows upon our spiritual harvests and leaves us impoverished and hungry.

Insofar as the Word of God is still heard and read and prayer offered, little comes of it because, for the most part, the church is disobedient to God and almost completely disinterested in seeing His house built up. God will not allow us to enjoy the blessings we do have and the spiritual privileges that still remain if we neglect His house and the glory of His name in that house.

12. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord.

This historical notice, the first of two in the book of Haggai, is the occasion for the second prophecy, the shortest of the five. The obedience of the people to the word of God through Haggai is recorded in this verse and is the reason for the four words of encouragement (two words in Hebrew) that follow.

Zerubbabel and Joshua are mentioned first because they took the lead in obeying

God's word. This Ezra indicates in Ezra 5:2 when he does not even mention the people but these two men only. Their leadership, however, is not only an example of what every leader in the church — minister, elder, or deacon — ought to do, and how he ought to lead the people in obedience to God, but also a reminder of the fact that ultimately it is Christ Himself who leads us in obedience to God, not only by His own example, but by giving us the grace of obedience. These men, in their offices, are pictures of Christ as the king and priest of God's people, who atones for all their disobedience and sends them His Spirit that they may be led by the Spirit in the way of obedience.

We should note that the name Joshua is really the same name as Jesus, Joshua being the Hebrew version of the name, and Jesus the Greek version. And we should remember that Zerubbabel was of the royal line of David and an ancestor of our Lord. Also as governor of God's people he foreshadows Him who governs the church in perfect righteousness.

The people are referred to now

The Bible is little read and less studied and its fountains of living water little desired.

as the remnant, not as “this people.” In that way God shows that He still cared for them as He had when He brought them back from Babylon. For us, however, that name “remnant” not only reminds us of their small numbers — fewer than 50,000 had returned from Babylon — but also shows us that the church is always but a remnant among men, and that her size and insignificance do not in any way excuse her from her calling to be built up a spiritual temple and a dwelling place of God. It reminds us, too, that the word of encouragement that God sends through Haggai was necessary because of their small numbers and other discouragements.

That God speaks to the people as well as to the leaders is a striking reminder of the calling that every believer has towards the church. Very often the attitude of the members is that the work of the church is solely the responsibility of the leaders, and the members are content merely to fill the pews and go along with whatever the leaders decide, or to blame them when things go wrong. Especially in the New Testament, and because we are all priests and kings (Rev. 1:6), we are all equally responsible for the life and work of the church.

A good example is church discipline. Long before sins come to the attention of the elders and through them to the attention of the whole congregation, it is the responsibility of every member to be busy admonishing his fellow believers and to be heeding their admonitions. Even when a particular sin comes under the formal discipline of the church it is the responsibility of every member to be praying for the errant brother and admonishing him to turn from his

Very often the attitude of the members is that the work of the church is solely the responsibility of the leaders, and the members are content merely to fill the pews and go along with whatever the leaders decide, or to blame them when things go wrong.

sin and repent. If that is not done, discipline is incomplete, even if the elders fulfill their responsibility and the sinner is excommunicated. Indeed, if it is not done, there is little chance that the elders will continue to do their work in admonishing, censuring, and excommunicating the wayward.

The fact that all the people are commanded to be busy with this work of building is striking because in the Old Testament, gener-

ally speaking, the ordinary people of God were far less responsible than we are. For the most part, the work of the Old Testament church belonged to the kings, priests, and prophets that God gave them, and the people were largely passive spectators in worship, prayer, sacrificing, and serving God.

God emphasizes the fact that the command was His and the duty owed to Him, not only by telling us that it was His voice the

people obeyed, but by reminding us that Haggai, through whom God’s voice was heard, was himself sent by God. That remains true today. Those whom God chooses to use to bring His word must be sent. Romans 10:15 asks, “How shall they preach, except they be sent?” Unless they are commissioned and sent by God Himself, they have no right to expect that the people will listen to and obey the word of God through them.

In the New Testament, that commissioning is not direct, as it was in the Old Testament, but is through the church. Paul and his fellow laborers did not begin their work as missionaries until they were sent by the church in Antioch, and by the Spirit through the church. Those who are not so sent have no commission from God.

That the people feared before

the Lord means that they understood that God was speaking through Haggai and that they must obey Him or perish. This fear is not the terror that the ungodly experience when they come face to face with God’s wrathful judgments, but an awe and reverence of God, mixed with the love of God, that recognizes one’s own sin and creatureliness and the great glory and holiness of God, and trembles before Him.

Obedience to God is always rooted in the fear of God. The reason why obedience is such a rare virtue in the church has to do with the fact that God in all His glory is not known, nor his judgments understood. He is viewed for the most part, if known at all, as one like us, who can be spoken of as we speak of our fellows and who can be met and talked to as one meets a casual acquaintance in the street and speaks to him as an equal. Only when the fear of God is born again in the hearts of God’s people will obedience to God follow.

This fear of God has His approval and blessing. He proves here what He says in Isaiah 66:2:

To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

The fear of God is pleasing to Him because it is always the fruit of His own grace. He cannot and never does despise His own work in His people.

That obedience and fear are produced by the Word of God. Just as the word “then” suggests this in English, so the “and” in Hebrew does the same. The Word of God has that power because it comes from God. Its power is the same as the power of God’s creative word, by which He called the things that were not as though they were (Rom. 4:17). That is always a reason why the whole Word of God must be preached. It is its own power and produces that which it requires. 

Grandville Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, January 14, 2004 at the Grandville PRC. As is typical of the January session, the meeting was long. Classis adjourned at midnight. Each church was represented by two delegates. Also present were the church history classes of Covenant Christian High School, representatives of the Wingham OCRC, and the delegates *ad examina* from Classis West.

Significant business was done at this session. First there was the decision of classis to admit the congregation of the Wingham, Ontario Orthodox Christian Reformed Church into the fellowship and communion of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This is not a usual event in the life of the churches. Rarely does an entire congregation request to join the denomination. The admission of this congregation was the culmination of the work of the Contact Committee of the PRC and of our ministers, both from Classis East and Classis West, who preached there on a regular basis during this past year. The testimony of Wingham was that the preaching they heard was soundly Reformed, firmly based on the Scriptures and the confessions. They were edified by the preaching and were moved by the Spirit to make their request to join the PRC. Classis gave thanks to God for His leading them to our fellowship. So, the Wingham OCRC is now the Wingham PRC.

Classis also dealt with two overtures to synod concerning the financial support of Richard and Jannet Moore. Both overtures request synod to establish a fund, apart from the Emeritus Fund, to support the Moores. Both overtures were rejected on the grounds

that 1) historically emeritus money is tied to the office of the minister, and 2) the administration of such a fund would be difficult practically since others have been deposed or are no longer in the ministry.

Classis also considered an overture to synod concerning the pronouncement of the benediction on the mission field. Classis also rejected this overture on the ground that the brother bringing the overture did not prove that the grounds given by Synod 2001 allowing this practice were invalid. Classis essentially supported the grounds given by Synod 2001 that there is allowance for administering the sacraments and pronouncing the blessing on the mission field.

An overture from Grandville PRC concerning the work of the stated clerk was considered. Grandville requested that the stated clerk send to each consistory the minutes of each session along with the supplements referred to in the minutes which were not already printed in the agenda. Classis approved this overture.

The report of the church visitors was heard. They reported that the churches are in good spiritual condition and that, for the most part, peace and harmony prevail in the congregations.

The church visitors also served as a committee of classis to investigate the continued viability of our Covenant PRC in New Jersey. Synod 2003 had instructed classis to monitor closely the condition of this congregation, giving special attention to its evangelism activity. Synod also asked for a recommendation concerning the continued subsidy support of this congregation. The committee reported that

there is increased activity in the work of evangelism and that the overall condition of the congregation is good. The committee also recommended that Covenant's subsidy be continued for another year. Classis adopted these findings, including the recommendation for continued subsidy, and will forward this information to Synod 2004.

In other matters, classis approved an emeritation request from Southeast PRC for Rev. Peter Breen. Subsidy requests were approved, and will be forwarded to synod, for Covenant, Kalamazoo, and Wingham. Classical appointments were given to Byron Center, Hudsonville, and Wingham. Classis West will also assist with pulpit supply to Wingham. The expenses of classis amounted to \$1,413.62.

Classis elected the following as delegates to Synod 2004: **MINISTERS:** *primi:* W. Bruinsma, R. Cammenga, K. Koole, C. Terpstra, R. VanOverloop; *Secundi:* M. Dick, R. Kleyn, W. Langerak, J. Laning, J. Slopsema; **ELDERS:** *Primi:* M. Engelsma, D. Kregel, C. Kalsbeek, D. Ondersma, H. Pastoor; *Secundi:* P. Adams, A. Brummel, J. DeVries, H. Kamps, D. Schipper.

Revs. Bruinsma and Dick were elected to serve as delegates *ad examina*; Rev. Koole was elected to the Classical Committee; Revs. Slopsema and VanOverloop were elected to serve as church visitors, with Rev. Cammenga as alternate.

The next meeting of classis will be on Wednesday, May 12, 2004 at the Georgetown PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk 

Young Adult Activities

Members of the Young Adults Society of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI planned an over-night retreat at Maranatha Conference Center in Muskegon, MI for January 23 and 24. All from their congregation who fit into that age group were invited and encouraged to attend. Rev. J. Kortering agreed to lead two discussions for the group, one on witnessing and the other on being single and being content.

The young people and young adults of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada were invited to join the young people and young adults of First PRC in Edmonton for an evening of ice-skating on Friday, January 23, at Hawrelak Park in Edmonton. Plans also called for the group to go to Pizza Hut afterwards.

The Young Adult Society of Grace PRC in Standale, MI has been enjoying a Bible Study this year in I Thessalonians. A recent study brought them to the second chapter and the question, "What do pastors do, anyway?"

Young People's Activities

The young people of the two societies at the Hudsonville, MI PRC were invited to their annual ski and snow-boarding outing at Caberfae Ski Resort on January 23.

Congregation Activities

The consistory of the Loveland, CO PRC recently approved the formation of a helping hands committee to help in the coordinating of help for families who need meals because of illness or the birth of a

child, etc., as well as to organize such things as funeral lunches. Loveland's consistory also stressed that this committee was not meant to replace or discourage individuals in their congregation from helping families with meals.

The church renovation project at Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI remains on schedule, as of the last day of January. Their balcony has been roughed in. Drywall is being finished in the bathrooms and in the balcony. Carpeting is scheduled for the week of February 16, with pews being upholstered the week of February 23. Southwest's congregation will probably wait to meet in their church until after that is completed, meaning either late February or early March.

The men of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL were reminded in a recent bulletin that efforts were under way in their congregation to organize a male chorus. The initial rehearsal was scheduled for Sunday evening, February 8. Four rehearsals were planned, with a performance to be part of a singspiration sometime in March.

The men and boys of the Loveland, CO PRC were invited to attend a Guys' Night on Thursday, January 22. Plans included a wonderful meal, along with special music from some of the boys and men of the congregation. The theme for the evening was, "Walking in His Ways," and proceeds raised went to support Loveland Christian School.

Mission Activities

Members of our denomination's mission in Ghana were able to arrange a brief welcome program for Rev. and Mrs. R. Miersma after their morning service on January 18. Continue to remember the Miersmas as they

now join with the Bekkerings in the work of missions in West Africa.

Rev. A. Spriensma, our churches' missionary to the Philippines, writes that on Saturday, January 24, he was able to speak in Bacolod on the island of Negros to a group of 43 men. Rev. Spriensma spoke on the Reformed pastor — his calling, his life, and his fallibility. A good discussion followed, with the meeting lasting until about 4:30 P.M. The next day he and his wife, Alva, enjoyed Sunday worship in the backyard of the home of Mr. Rey Decierdo and his wife, the family who are the main contacts in Bacolod. Mr. Decierdo led the Sunday School on God's covenant with Noah, using Gertrude Hoeksema's Bible material. Rev. Spriensma preached under a tarp over some chairs, with his feet in the mud because it was raining, on Titus 2:1, on the theme, "The Things That Become Sound Doctrine" — looking at the need of sound doctrine, the things that become sound doctrine, and the command to speak these things. Rev. Spriensma was also scheduled to begin teaching a class of some seven Bible students and pastors in Laguna on the doctrine of theology and Old Testament interpretation on February 2. This will involve leaving home very early and returning quite late, with lots of driving in addition to teaching. Rev. Spriensma hopes to do this every other week.

Minister Activities

The Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada has extended a call to Rev. C. Terpstra to become their next pastor.

Sunday evening, February 21, the congregation of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI extended a call to Rev. R. VanOverloop to become their next pastor. With him on that

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

THE STANDARD BEARER

P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI 49468-0603

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Grandville,
Michigan

trio were the Revs. W. Bruinsma
and A. Brummel.

Rev. R. Cammenga declined
the call extended to him to serve

as the next pastor of the
Hudsonville, MI PRC. 

Announcements

NOTICE!!

All standing and special
committees of the synod of
the Protestant Reformed
Churches, as well as indi-
viduals who wish to address
Synod 2004, are hereby no-
tified that all material for this
year's synod should be in
the hands of the stated
clerk no later than April 1.
Please send material to:

Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Wyoming, MI 49418

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation
of Hope PRC, Walker, Michigan ex-
press their sympathy to Elder Tom
DeVries and his wife Marilyn in the
death of her father,

HUGO SCHWARZ,

of our Loveland PRC. "The suffer-
ings of this present time are not
worthy to be compared with the
glory which shall be revealed in us"
(Romans 8:18).

Rev. James Laning, Pastor
David Moelker, Clerk

SPRING LECTURE

The Lord willing, a spring lec-
ture on the subject,

*"Is the King James Version
Still the Best Translation
Available?"*

will be given by

Prof. Herman Hanko.

The lecture is sponsored by
the Evangelism Committee of
Peace PRC,

located at
18423 Stony Island Ave.,
Lansing, Illinois.

Plan to attend this timely lecture
on Friday, April 16, at 8:00 P.M.,
at Peace PRC.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Senior Adult Bible Study
of Byron Center PRC expresses
Christian sympathy to Bernie &
Ruth Lubbers and family in the
death of Bernie's father,

MR. GERRIT LUBBERS.

"The days of our years are
threescore years and ten: and if
by reason of strength they be four-
score years, yet is their strength
labour and sorrow; for it is soon
cut off, and we fly away" (Psalm
90:10).

Leroy DeVries, Leader
Ardith Oomkes, Secretary

NOTICE!!!

Each issue of the *Standard Bearer* is available on cassette tape for
those who are blind, or who for some other reason would like to be able
to listen to a reading of the *SB*. This is an excellent ministry of the
Evangelism Society of the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church. The
reader is Ken Rietema of Southeast Church. Anyone desiring this service
regularly should write:

Southeast PRC
1535 Cambridge Ave. S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for March

Date	Topic	Text
March 7	"Jesus Sentenced to Death"	Mark 15:6-15
March 14	"Jesus Mocked By the Soldiers"	Mark 15:16-20
March 21	"Jesus Brought to Golgotha"	Mark 15:20-23
March 28	"Jesus Crucified and Derided"	Mark 15:24-32