

# THE *March 15, 2004* STANDARD BEARER

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Volume 80 ♦ Number 12



# The Cast Down Soul

*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?  
and why art thou disquieted in me?  
hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise  
him for the help of his countenance.*

Psalm 42:5

**P**salm 42 was written by the sons of Korah. They were a guild of singers from the tribe of Levi that sang at the Temple as the people of God gathered for worship. They wrote as one man. Throughout this Psalm, therefore, they wrote in the singular. And so we will speak of the psalmist (singular).

This Psalm was written in connection with the flight of David from Absalom into the wilderness of Jordan. The psalmist experienced the same terrible plight as did David.

The theme of this Psalm is "longing for God." In the exile of the wilderness the psalmist was far from the house of God in Jerusalem. He longed to return to the house and presence of his God.

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Due to the difficult circumstances that he faced, the psalmist was cast down and disquieted. How easily this happens. The psalmist confronted himself. He rebuked himself with a question, Why art thou cast down? He turned his attention to the help of God's countenance that would surely come. On that basis, he counseled himself to hope in God. We must do the same in times of discouragement.



A horrible reality.

The psalmist's soul was cast down and disquieted within him. One who is cast down is bowed down. He walks in a stooped manner, giving out sighs and groans because he is dejected. This goes along with being disquieted. To be disquieted is to be in turmoil. All peace and quiet have been disrupted. This described the psalmist. There was no peace or quiet within his soul. His mind was in turmoil. He knew only grief and sorrow. He walked about bowed down, sighing and moaning. Tears had been his food day and night.

That which brought about this downcast state was the situation the psalmist faced. He had accompanied David and his small following into the wilderness of Jordan as they fled from Absalom. David's exile was God's judgment on David for his sin with Bathsheba. God had said that the sword would never depart from David's house. Absalom's rebellion was just one of many horrible incidents. David's exile was God's judgment, not only upon David, but in a real sense upon all those who stood with David. And so God seemed far from them. It appeared to the psalmist that God had forgotten him (v. 9). Those who witnessed David and his band concluded that their God was strangely absent (v. 3). The psalmist panted after God, even as a thirsty deer would stagger in the wilderness, panting after the water brooks (v. 1).

Small wonder the psalmist was cast down and disquieted.

The psalmist's experience is not unique.

We find many similar examples in Scripture. It was in the belly of the fish that Jonah cried out, "I am

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cast out of thy sight" (Jonah 2:4). David himself felt cast away from God's presence after his sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 51:11). Even our Lord Jesus Christ cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

This is also our experience from time to time. We too can feel that God has forsaken us, cast us off, and no longer cares for us. Affliction is often our companion in life. Sometimes affliction comes in the form of a debilitating illness. Sometimes God takes a loved one away and leaves us alone. Sometimes there is a family member that causes us untold grief. Or it may be that we are opposed for Christ's sake. Many are the afflictions of life. As we struggle with the pain of affliction, God often seems to have forsaken us and cast us off. Especially is this the case should our affliction be an obvious judgment of God for some sin or fault in our life.

Then do we become downcast and disquieted.



Hope in God.

The psalmist counseled himself. He asked his soul, "Why art thou cast down?" There is a note of rebuke here. His cast down soul was not in keeping with reality. The psalmist then focused his attention on the help of God's countenance and counseled his soul to hope in God.

Hope is an earnest expectation and longing for some future good. Hope has several elements. Hope is an earnest expectation for some future good. Yes, there is affliction for the present. But this will not continue forever. Good things await us in the future. Hope lives in daily expectation of this future good. Hope is also a longing for this future good. Contrary to our usage of the word, hope is also a certainty of this future good. Those who live in hope do not live in doubt but in confidence. Finally, hope is a patient waiting for deliv-

erance and the coming of a better tomorrow.

The psalmist instructed his soul to hope. When there is hope, then one's soul is not cast down. One is cast down and disquieted within only when he has lost hope. And so the psalmist instructed his soul to hope, to live in the expectation of better things to come. We must do the same. As you face affliction, make sure that you live in hope.

The psalmist could live in hope because of the help of God's countenance. His hope was in God. Without this help of God's countenance there is no hope, only false hope.

One's countenance is one's face. The help of one's countenance is the help provided by one whose face is turned to you and whose loving, caring eyes are watching your every move. Think of a parent who watches his little child with loving eyes. His child may not even be aware of it, but his parent's eyes are never diverted from him. These loving eyes bring help to provide for every need the child has and to keep him in safety.

In like manner can we speak of the help of God's countenance.

God has His face turned towards His people. They may not know it. The circumstances of life may even seem to contradict it. But the truth is that His eyes are always upon His people, watching them, loving them, and caring for them.

Because His face is turned towards them, He is always present to help them.

His face was turned toward them when they fell in Adam in the garden. In love He sent His only begotten Son into the world as their Mediator to save them from their sins. How wonderful and powerful is the help of God's countenance!

The help of God's countenance is also present when it comes to affliction.

Sometimes God helps us by

keeping us from affliction. One way the powers of darkness would destroy us is to afflict us with evil. Satan thought that by touching Job with evil he could get Job to curse God and die. Satan would do the same with us. We do not fully realize just how much evil is averted from our lives by the help of God's countenance that limits the power of Satan to hurt us.

But sometimes God does send evil into our lives. And when He does, we often ask, Why? Sometimes this evil is to correct us. Let's be humble enough to acknowledge that every child of God is in need of correction. This correction often comes in the form of affliction. Then again, God sends evil into our lives simply for the sake of maturing our faith. By maturing our faith, God causes us to live closer to Him. By the maturing of our faith God also prepares us for greater service in the future.

Because this is the nature of affliction, we may be assured of the help of God's countenance. Always God's face is turned towards us in affliction. The eyes of God are full of love and compassion. He will indeed help in time of need. He will preserve us in the midst of our affliction. He will one day deliver us from our affliction and will even turn it to our profit.

This gives the child of God hope for the future.

Hope in God! Look in hope for the help of His countenance. Be assured in hope that affliction is only for a time. Great good awaits us, even through affliction. This is the cure of the cast down soul.



I will yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.

Certainly praise is the appropriate response for the help of God's countenance.

This praise consists in pointing out and extolling the blessings of God's help. This is to be done in prayer, in song, and in our confession to others.



The psalmist speaks of praising God yet, i.e., yet again. In the past the psalmist experienced the help of God's countenance. And for that help he had praised God. Now the psalmist anticipated doing so again. Because He lived in hope, he not only anticipated the help of God's countenance but also anticipated praising God for it.

Let us not overlook the fact that the psalmist could live in hope in this present situation exactly because he had praised God for the


help of His countenance in the past. Those who receive the help of God and fail to praise Him are those who overlook and minimize that help. Neither are they grateful. This has sad consequences for them in the future. For affliction will come again. Because they have overlooked and minimized God's help in the past, they will not be inclined to lay hold of the help of God's countenance for the present. They suffer affliction without hope. Quickly they are cast down and

disquieted within.

Let us praise God for the help of His countenance. How faithful God has been to us.

And when affliction comes again, as it surely will, counsel your soul to hope in God.

In hope look forward to praising God yet again for the help of His countenance.

And the peace of God that passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. 

## Editorial

# Faith Is Assurance: Scripture

**T** rue faith is assurance of personal salvation. Because assurance is certainty—*absolute* certainty (to be redundant)—true faith is certainty of one's own salvation. It is certainty of deliverance from sin, death, and hell. It is certainty of acceptance into the fellowship of God, which is life eternal. Faith is assurance of salvation by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ according to the electing love of God in eternity.

True faith *is* assurance.

Assurance is not the fruit of faith. Assurance is not the reward of faith. Assurance is not a branch or appendix of faith. Assurance is not a later, heroic, rather rare development of faith, after many years of faith's struggling with doubt and working to attain to assurance.

Assurance is what faith *is*.

Assurance is of the very essence of faith.

Strip faith of assurance (to speak nonsense), and what is left is not faith. What is left is unbelief.

Believers can sinfully doubt their salvation. But this doubt is not inherent in their faith. Doubt is not an unfortunate aspect of the faith of most Christians for much of their lives. Doubt is not 75% of faith along with 25% assurance, or even 1% of faith along with 99% assurance, until finally, for a few of "God's best and dearest friends," faith becomes 100% (full) assurance. Doubt is not even an evil that faith placidly puts up with day after day, year after year, generation after generation, as the normal way of life of the believer.

Doubt of one's own salvation for a believer has its source in the Christian's depraved, unbelieving nature. The spiritual father and nourisher of doubt is Satan. He created doubt in the beginning: "Yea, hath God said?" Doubt is sin. Undoubtedly, if we judge our sins rightly, as God judges them, the sin of doubting our salvation is more heinous than adultery, or stealing, or murder, or the other gross fleshly iniquities. What are these sins in comparison with mak-

ing God a liar in His promises to us, or in comparison with accounting the suffering and death of the Son of God inadequate to redeem and forgive us?

Faith has nothing to do with doubt, except to condemn it, fight it, and overcome it.

### Biblical Definition

Holy Scripture defines faith as assurance of salvation in Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The word translated "substance" in the Authorized Version means "firm confidence," or "assurance." Luther correctly translated the word as "*eine gewisse Zuversicht*," that is, "a certain confidence." Faith is assurance that the things the believer hopes for, according to the promise of the gospel, are both real and for him personally. Similarly, faith is the "evidence," that is, the conviction, that the things not seen are realities for the believer. Since the things hoped for and the things not seen are the things of salvation in

Jesus Christ, faith is the assurance and conviction of salvation.

Assurance of salvation is what faith is.

That the apostle refers to the believer's assurance and conviction of his own personal salvation is put beyond doubt by verse 2: "For by it the elders obtained a good report." By faith the believer obtains a good report, obviously, about himself.

### Certainty in the "Union" Texts

All the innumerable passages in Scripture that describe faith as union with Christ, so that the one who has faith is "in Christ" and Christ is in the one who has faith, teach that faith is assurance of belonging to Christ. Such a passage is Ephesians 3:17: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." Faith receives Christ in the heart of the believer. The one in whom Christ dwells knows the love of Christ—knows the love of Christ for *himself* (v. 19). Union with Christ, which is faith, is certainty of this Christ. Union with Christ—with *Christ*—cannot but be certainty of this Christ for oneself. Union with Christ is as much certainty that Christ is one's own as the marital union is a woman's certainty that the man to whom she is united is her husband. Who would teach that a woman—a *Christian* woman—can be married to a man—a *godly* man—but live in perpetual doubt whether he is her husband.

### "Assurance of Faith"

Several passages of Scripture explicitly attribute assurance to faith. In previous articles in this series, I have already quoted and explained Hebrews 10:22: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." "Full assurance" in the translation of the Authorized Version is simply "assurance," which in the nature of the case is always "full." This assurance of faith is not certainty that the believer has faith. But it is the certainty that belongs to faith, indeed,

the certainty that is of faith's essence. It is faith's certainty that, washed with the blood of Jesus, his own Savior, the believer may boldly draw near to God Himself as his God. It is certainty of salvation.

"By the term *full assurance*," Calvin explains, "the Apostle points out the nature of faith, and at the same time reminds us, that the grace of Christ cannot be received except by those who possess a fixed and unhesitating conviction" (commentary on Heb. 10:22).

### "I am Persuaded"

The texts that characterize the one who believes the gospel as certain of the love of God for him, certain of the death of Christ for him, certain of the Spirit indwelling him, and certain of his future life and glory are legion. They are glorious. How did the Puritans dare to deny that faith is assurance? How do their spiritual heirs dare to deny this today? On the lips and in the heart of every one who believes the gospel of grace, every one who is "in Christ Jesus" by faith (Rom. 8:1), the apostle puts these sublime words of assurance: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... For I am persuaded that [nothing] ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39).

By faith, every believer knows with certainty the love of God in Christ for him. By faith, every believer is persuaded that he will abide in this love forever.

This grand passage in its context in Romans is by itself alone the utter refutation of the notion that assurance does not belong to the essence of faith.

### Justifying Faith as Assurance

In a class by themselves, as regards the question whether assurance is of the essence of faith, are the passages that teach justification by faith. Faith justifies. No one supposes that justification is a much later development of faith,

or a reward of faith, or an addition to faith, or an appendix to faith. Justification is the fundamental benefit of faith. So soon as one believes, regardless that his faith is weak or strong, God justifies him by means of his faith in Jesus Christ. But justification is the forgiveness of sins, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the adoption unto sonship, and the appointment as heir of the world *in the consciousness of the justified sinner*. "I tell you," said Christ about the publican, "this man went down to his house justified" (Luke 18:14).

If one hears the verdict of God in his consciousness, "I forgive your sins for the sake of Jesus Christ in whom you trust," he is certain that God is favorable *to him*, that Christ died *for him*, and that *he himself personally* is saved. Justification involves assurance of salvation. Since justification is the fundamental benefit of faith, faith is assurance.

If now, the advocates of doubt respond that justification is not forgiveness in the forum of one's consciousness, if they argue that it is possible to be justified without being sure of it, if they contend that, in fact, most Christians have faith and are justified without any certainty that their sins are forgiven, they sin against the basic gospel-truth of justification, as against the testimony of the entire Reformation.

And if they are right, the truth of God's free justification of sinners leaves me cold. Justification does me no good. It leaves me, believer though I am, groaning in the misery of the guilt and shame of my sins and sinful nature, and fearful of a wrathful God. It sends me home as condemned in my own consciousness as the damned Pharisee.

Of Psalm 23, as the confident confession of every believer, and of the model prayer—the "Our Father"—as the confident prayer of every believer, I have spoken before in this series on assurance.



Both of these familiar passages of Scripture are essential elements of the Christian's life. Both imply certainty of salvation. Both are the expressions of faith. Faith says, "The LORD is my shepherd." And faith says, "Our Father." Faith says, "The LORD is my shepherd," and, "Our Father," because faith is assurance of salvation.

#### Assurance by Virtue of the Sure Promise

Faith is essentially and necessarily assurance because of the promise to which faith looks and upon which faith depends. Faith never exists by itself alone. Faith is always trust in the promise of God. The promise creates faith and draws faith to itself. The promise of God is true and certain altogether. Faith is convinced of the promise. Because the promise is God's sure Word of the salvation of the one to whom the promise is given, and who believes the promise, faith is certainty of salvation.

As certain as is the promise of God, so assured is faith that receives and depends on the promise.

In Romans 4:13ff., the apostle teaches that faith is assurance by

virtue of the sure promise that faith has respect to. Abraham "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (vv. 20, 21). What was true of Abraham is true also of every one of us who has the faith of father Abraham (v. 23). Our faith too is "full persuasion" of God's promise of our salvation in Christ.

So much is God, the heavenly Father of all His sons and daughters, determined that His dear children not live in miserable, terrifying, sinful doubt, that He adds an oath to His promise. "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb. 6:17, 18). This implies all the more that faith, which knows and rests on the promise, is assurance.

#### Preaching Assurance

Believers and their children

must be *taught* that faith is assurance. The Spirit of Christ works assurance of salvation, that is, faith, by the sound, healthy, and health-giving preaching of the Word. Healthy preaching assures the believer that his faith may, must, does, and will consist of certainty of salvation.

Preaching that denies that faith is assurance; preaching that suggests that one can trust in Christ for salvation without having assurance; preaching that reserves assurance for only a few believers, who must make themselves worthy by years of struggle with doubt; preaching that delights in directing the spiritual gaze of men and women who believe the gospel away from Christ crucified to their own experiences, questioning the genuineness of their faith, the sincerity of their sorrow for sin, and the reality of their salvation—*sickly* preaching—creates doubters. The Spirit of Christ certainly does not make such preaching His means to work assurance, that is, faith, in the congregation.

Good preaching always comes "in much assurance" (I Thess. 1:5).

Not in much doubting.

— DJE 

## Letters

### Silence concerning Murray on Wesley in the UK

I am a subscriber to the *Standard Bearer*. I find constant encouragement and support from the magazine, as also from the literature put out by the fellowship in Ballymena, Northern Ireland and from the books published by the RFPA.

In the south of England, where I live and work, there is a scarcity of Reformed church life, although I am not disparaging the small fellowships with whom I huddle for comfort in this evil day.

My letter concerns the editorial on Iain Murray's book about John

Wesley, "Wesley and Murray, Who Follows" (SB, Dec. 15, 2003).

Having heard of the impending publication of the book, I wrote to Mr. Murray before he went to press. I mentioned to him the serious criticisms of Wesley's theology as un-Reformed by A.M. Toplady, J. Mclean, and others. Murray dismissed my enquiries and told me to comment after I read the book.

Having read the book, I began to prepare a reply. Then I read your editorial. Praise the Lord for such a sound, truthful, and articulate response to Murray's book.

Has Murray responded to your critique?

I am going to send the issue of

the SB containing your editorial to the *Protestant Alliance* based in Bedford, England. It ran an article in the vein of Iain Murray to mark the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wesleys.

It is amazing to me that, so far as I know, no one in Reformed circles in the United Kingdom has responded to Murray's book as you have.

Once again, the Protestant Reformed Churches have proved to be the churches standing firm in this godless age of apostasy and abounding error.

Jim Scoales

Portsmouth, England UK 



## Two Different Covenants, Two Different Schools (2)

**T**he two different covenants compared and contrasted in the last installment are the conditional and the unconditional covenants. By the unconditional covenant of grace is meant the relationship of friendship that God sovereignly establishes with Christ (eternally) as the Mediator and Head of the covenant, and in Christ with all the elect. This covenant is not merely a means unto salvation, but is the very goal of God, namely everlasting covenant fellowship with His people. God establishes His covenant unilaterally with His chosen in the line of continued generations, that is, with believers and their seed. At baptism, God promises salvation, and He always keeps His promises. However, His promises are only for the elect children, even as the promises of the preaching are only for the elect hearer. Upon this foundation, Protestant Reformed schools are established.

The conditional covenant view holds that God establishes a covenant as an arrangement in which He will give the blessings of salvation to some members of the covenant. The covenant is not established with Christ as Head, and thus with the elect only; rather it is established individually, with each believer and every baptized child. According to this view, God gives to every child of believers the promises of salvation and seals the

promises to each by baptism. Nonetheless, God's promises are conditional, and whether or not each child actually receives the promised blessings depends on the child's believing the promises, thus ratifying the covenant with God.

Reformed, Christian schools have ever been founded on the covenant of God with believers and their seed. Since the foundation of an institution determines much of its character, the school established upon the doctrine of the unconditional covenant is different in many respects from the school established on the foundation of a conditional covenant. In order to set forth these differences, we will first examine the schools that are established by parents who maintain the doctrine of a conditional covenant. Next time, these schools will be compared and contrasted with those founded on the doctrine of an unconditional covenant.

Do recall the caution given in the last article, namely, that not all schools established on the doctrine of a conditional covenant will be entirely consistent with their foundation for various reasons. Hence, not everything presented in this article will be found in every Christian school in this group. Nonetheless, what is presented is the logical working out of the conditional covenant, and most has been corroborated by documents and/or experience.

First of all, an examination of schools associated with the conditional covenant produces the startling discovery that the covenant often is not specifically identified as the foundation. The covenant is usually mentioned as an element in the school. Other significant "stones"

are more prominent in the foundation, especially that of preparing the students for service in the kingdom. (Recall the caution expressed in the first article, how other factors influence the school. One wonders how much of this is the result of the old AACS [now ICS] movement.) The covenant is usually cited, not as the foundation for the instruction, but as a reason why a child should attend the Christian school. It is stated that God created a distinction between the children of believers and the children of unbelievers; believing parents must recognize this fact and send their children to the Christian school. Or it is stated that these children have been purchased by the blood of Christ; they ought therefore to be sent to a Christian school.

Secondly, the character and content of Christian education is shaped by the teachers' view of their students. How would teachers that believe in a conditional covenant view their students? To begin with, they would believe that each of their students has all the promises of God. They do not believe that all the students are regenerated, nor do they like to emphasize regeneration. They might well say that the question whether the children are or are not (yet) converted is immaterial. What is important is that they have the promises; God's promises do not fail. Yet, for the promises to be realized, the students must keep the demands that God placed upon them, which are especially faith and obedience.

On the basis of the conditional-covenant view, one would presume that a high priority of teachers would be to call the students to believe and obey — to fulfill the demands of the

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covenant so that they may enjoy the blessings. I have not found this to be the case, either in personal contact with these schools, or in various of their writings, though this may vary from one teacher to the next.

There are, however, clear indications that three other serious errors result from this covenant view. The first is *presupposed salvation*. Although conditional-covenant folks inveigh against Abraham Kuyper's view of presupposed *regeneration* (and rightly so), yet the logical conclusion of their doctrine of the covenant is that parents *presume* the *salvation* of their children. Consider that they insist (rightly) that God is sovereign, and thus His promises never fail. In addition, they maintain that God has promised salvation to the individual children. Even the actual act of faith, they agree, is by God's grace. The obvious conclusion is: All these baptized children are or will be saved. Even if they walk in sin for a while, God's promises are true, and these baptized ones have the promises of God guaranteed to them to the day of their death. So long as the child has not specifically become a covenant breaker by renouncing his baptism, the parents may (and do) take comfort in the thought that the child will come to salvation, for God's promises never fail. Presupposed salvation is the logical working out of the conditional covenant.

A second erroneous inference of the conditional covenant is *presupposed unregeneration*. Generally, the adherents of the conditional covenant also believe in mediate regeneration, namely that God works through the preaching to give the new life of Christ. God works salvation through *conscious* knowledge. Such knowledge an infant does not have. This is in perfect harmony with their belief that the baptized children do not enjoy the benefits of the covenant until they fulfill the demands of faith and obedience. Clearly no *infant* can do this. At what age can this

be done? No one is sure, but until that happens, the child is unregenerate. This is not openly stated, but it is a necessary conclusion of the conditional covenant.

This has far-reaching implications for instruction in the Christian school. The teacher cannot rightly maintain that the student has the power to obey, for the child is probably not regenerated. He must be guided and channeled, but largely in the same manner as the child in the public school would be. The teacher could try to have some good influence on the child, and hope that one day (after regeneration) the instruction would be recalled and then lived with conviction.

It is worth noting that most who teach the conditional covenant also maintain that God bestows a common grace on all men, or at least on all baptized children. Perhaps the Christian schoolteacher has some hope that this common grace in the (unregenerated) baptized child will apply the instruction for his good. At the same time, this also places the covenant child at the same level as the child outside the covenant. The teacher in the Christian school would have no more hope or basis for influencing his kindergartner, *at that time at least*, than a teacher in the public school would have.

A third tragic consequence of the conditional covenant is a practical antinomianism. According to this view of the covenant, God has spoken His promise *to this child* by name and sealed it to him by baptism. A dissolute life does not dissolve those promises. In the best of situations, it is inevitable that a live-as-you-please attitude develops among some of the youth. However, the conditional covenant's conception of children will allow a certain *toleration* of such an attitude, a recipe for disaster. For, according to this view, until the child accepts the promises, no one can expect him to live as a child of God. One may remind the covenant youth that God has a claim on his life, but God has

a claim on the life of every creature. One may enjoin the child to recall that God made beautiful promises to him, and that he must believe these promises and receive the blessings. But until the child has done so, he has not the power to live a sanctified life. Yet, he has the promises, and at any time in his life he may claim them. But for now....

These are some of the evil fruits of the teaching of a conditional covenant as it determines how children in the sphere of the covenant are to be viewed. These are not Reformed fruits. The effect on the instruction and atmosphere in the school is disastrous, insofar as the principles work through.

There are other implications of the conditional covenant for the Christian school. One has to do with the question: Is Christ the center of the instruction in the school? Christ-centered instruction is the mark of Christian education, as the very name demands. However, if the instruction is consistently in harmony with the conditional covenant, Christ will not be at the center of the instruction, for Christ is not the center of the conditional covenant. He is the Mediator of the covenant, not the Head. He earns the blessings of the covenant, but the covenant is with the individual, not with Christ. With consistent conditional-covenant instruction, Christ is off to the side, and the focus of the instruction is on the child. If this be the case, it is a serious indictment of the covenantal foundation.

What are the implications of this covenant view for the antithesis, another significant Reformed doctrine? Is the antithesis maintained? The proponents of the conditional covenant would affirm that it is, holding that the antithesis consists in the fact that the children of believers are separated by God from the children of unbelievers. No doubt there is truth in that — covenant children *are* distinguished from the children of this world by baptism. Although believing parents do not establish covenantal schools on the principle of



world flight, they do not either desire to send their children out into the world and immerse them in the filth and vile iniquity of the public school. A Christian school is for covenant children, for children of believers.

However, the antithesis is not maintained merely by sending the baptized child to a Christian school. This is plain, on the one hand, from the fact that the baptized children include elect and reprobate (witness Jacob and Esau), so in reality the antithesis between the godly and the ungodly is not being maintained. On the other hand, drawing the line thus will militate against *living* the antithesis. Living the antithesis demands living unto God and against sin, even when sin appears in the student in the next desk — in the Christian school. The reality is that in most conditional-covenant circles, the concept antithesis is rarely discussed, much less emphasized. If this same lack is reflected in the daily instruction, it is a serious weakness in the Christian school.

Discipline is a related concern in every school that bears the name of Christ. One would expect, logically, that the conditional-covenant schools would tend towards legalism, and that the discipline would be according to laws and demands. That has been the experience of this writer. To be fair, it must be acknowledged that virtually every Christian school struggles with good use of rules. Schools must maintain order, and rules must be made, and then enforced rather impartially. It is preferable that the school avoid endless rulemaking and operate out of principles. But the conditional covenant has law at its heart — demand and promise, conditions — and this ordinarily finds expression in the discipline exercised in the schools that maintain this covenant view.

Connected to that is the question of what is the motive for obedience in this system. The ordinary answer is: the motivation is the student's special status and privilege as a covenant child. The word *gratitude* is not ordinarily

used in these discussions. Responsibility is! But not gratitude. The children are not called to live antithetical lives out of gratitude. Why not? Could it be that, while the child has the great privilege of being in the covenant, doing good is *his* duty in the covenant, part of the condition *he* must fill to maintain the covenant? And thus salvation as God's great work is not consciously emphasized as reason for grateful obedience?

It should be evident that there are serious implications of the conditional covenant, which are worked out, to one degree or another, in the Christian school that is founded on it. Many of these implications are contrary to the very heart of Reformed education.

On the other hand, there are significant implications for the school built on the doctrinal foundation of the unconditional covenant. Those implications, when worked out, mark significant differences between the respective schools. More on this next time.



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanko

## Haggai: Rebuilding the Church (7)

### The First Prophecy (continued)

13. Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.

**T**he word of encouragement that Haggai brings to the people, who were now obeying God's command to rebuild the temple, is simple and short, but contains all that the people needed

to hear. It is for Judah the promise that the temple, though far less glorious than Solomon's, would be the house of God Himself, who would live among His people there, bless them from that place, and keep covenant with them.

That God speaks in the present tense (the word "am" is not in the Hebrew, but that is certainly the idea here, as the KJV suggests) and says, "I am with you." This does not only mean that now that they had obeyed and begun working, He would prosper their work and bless them according to all the promises, but it is also a reminder that their obedience itself was the result of His presence and grace.

In no other way could they possibly have obeyed or been stirred up out of their sloth.

This Word of God is, throughout Scripture, the formula for the covenant. In that covenant, the relationship between God and His people, the covenant is always described in those terms, that God is the God of His people and is with them, and that He takes them as His people. That promise is, of course, realized fully in the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21:3), but even now it is realized in the church as the body of Christ and the house of God.

The Lord fulfilled that promise as well. Ezra tells us that the

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eye of the Lord was on them to protect them from their enemies and to turn the heart of the king to favor their cause, so that the things they needed for the work were provided by His decree. God's words of encouragement are not empty as ours are, but are the powerful, helping, saving words of the Almighty. These words are like the words of blessing with which many New Testament books begin. Like them, these words actually bring God's richest blessing to His people.

The words that Haggai brought are the heart of every word of encouragement God gives us. He does not tell us what is ahead, He never tries to reassure us by minimizing future difficulties or by promising that there will be none. All He ever really says is this, "I am with you." We must remember that in all our work and not judge the value and profit by visible results, by the lack of difficulties, or by our own perceptions of the work.

This encouragement is given especially for the church and is given because God loves His church for Christ's sake. The Belgic Confession says this and states:

This church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof... [and] is preserved or supported by God, against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appears very small, and in the eyes of men to be reduced to nothing (Art. 27).

Let us notice, too, however, that this encouragement is given immediately upon evidence of repentance. God does not put His people on probation when they repent of their sins, but blesses them without delay, a great encouragement to repentance.

Haggai is called here the Lord's messenger, and his word of encouragement the Lord's "message." The word "messenger" or "mes-

sage" is, in the Old Testament, the same word that is often translated "angel" (Gen. 16:7; 19:1; etc.). It can, therefore, be used as a general term for any messenger or for those special messengers who live in the presence of God in heaven. That it is used here for Haggai is somewhat surprising, because he is always elsewhere referred to as a prophet. It must be used here to underline the fact that the encouragement given by Haggai comes from heaven, and is of the same order as the gracious messages of angels so often recorded in Scripture.

*14. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God,*

*15. In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.*

The date recorded is not merely a matter of historical record, but proof that the obedience of Judah was without delay, as all obedience to God and to men ought to be. Within a month's time the people were once more busy with God's work after a lapse of about twenty years. Their previous disobedience and sloth had proved them unwilling and unable to obey in and of themselves. The credit for their obedience must all be given to the grace of God, given through his prophetic Word, and worked by His Spirit in the hearts of His people. Haggai's contemporary, Zechariah, speaks of that in chapter 4 of his prophecy: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (v. 6).

We must not miss the fact, either, that the people began the work before the decree of Artaxerxes was repealed. Tatnai, the governor of the territory in which Judah was found, investigated the

news that they were building again and wrote the king, suggesting that it would be in his best interest to have the work stopped. He also reported the words of the people, who had said that Cyrus had sent them to rebuild the temple. When investigation was made in Babylon it was discovered that the Jews had spoken the truth. Cyrus had decreed the rebuilding of the temple and sent them to Judah to do it, and so Darius not only forbade the governor from interfering, but commanded him to give the people everything they needed for the work and for sacrifices. In that way God showed that He was with them. But the people did not wait for the matter to be investigated or for the decree of king Darius, but began and continued the work in obedience to God.

That is the nature of true obedience always. It does not wait for men, not even for kings and rulers, nor does it fear them and their decrees, but insists that God has spoken and that what He has said must be done, no matter what the consequences.

Such obedience is always the fruit of God's own grace. That is evident from the testimony of these verses. The people and their leaders obeyed because God stirred up their spirits. He did that by His Word through Haggai and by the internal work of the Holy Spirit. His Word is always quick and powerful, the way in which He gives His grace to us, not only at the beginning of our Christian life but daily. May He so stir up the spirits of His people today to obey and to come and work in the house of the Lord their God, that is, in the church, which is also the pillar and ground of the truth.

We should note that a stirred up spirit is characterized by the fear of the Lord. Such fear is not the slavish terror of those who hate God and who come under His judgments, but a fear that trembles in awe and reverence before the presence of His majesty. Such fear



is sadly lacking among Christians today and is the result of a lack of knowledge of God and His glory. Such fear is necessary if ever we are to understand the importance of His house and the urgency of our calling to work in His house.

Having such fear, according to Isaiah 8:13, means that we “sanctify the Lord,” and Peter adds that we do this in our hearts (I Pet. 3:15). To sanctify something is to make it separate and holy, and we sanctify God when we know in our hearts the glory of His holiness and esteem Him separate from all others in glory and power. We hold Him holy in our hearts when we are governed by a deep awareness of His holiness in everything we say and do.

Judah showed that fear of God when they once more put His glory and His house first and set it above their earthly concerns. They showed the fear of God when they turned to God in repentance and conversion, remembering the Lord’s holiness and turning from sin.


A stirred up spirit is also char-

acterized by quick and ready obedience. That was so in the case of the people of Judah. It is the case also now. A stirred up spirit does not make excuses, does not procrastinate, does not continue idle, indifferent, and careless, but immediately does what God requires. Such stirred up spirits are a great necessity in the church of Jesus Christ, for without them, the people of God will continue to run to their own houses.

Such stirred up spirits are the work and gift of the Holy Spirit and are given when the Holy Spirit applies Christ and His work to God’s people. The Spirit, in other words, does not stir up their spirits by some secret and hidden operation but by showing them the loveliness of Christ and of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. God does that here by the promise, “I am with you,” a promise that is really the promise of Immanuel, God with us.

Stirred up spirits are much needed and seldom found in the church today. People are often stirred up, but by the wrong things and for the wrong ends. They will

be much stirred up about turning the church into a soup kitchen, about entertaining the young folk, about speaking in tongues and miracles, but few are stirred up at the thought of fellowship with the living God, with a desire to see His house built and prosperous, to see Him worshiped there as He has commanded in His Word. These Jews, as we ought to be, were stirred up by a desire to obey God, to work in His house, and to enjoy once more the fellowship and blessedness of His covenant in that house. May God, by His Spirit, so stir up ours.

Finally, let us note that for the first time in the prophecy God identifies Himself as the God of His people, “their God,” not because His favor and relationship to them depend on their obedience, but because it is only in the way of obedience that His people know and can believe that He is “their God.” How wonderful, after all His former threats and judgments, to know that He once more looks with favor on His people and accepts them as His own! 

## *The Fundamental Work of the Deacons (3) Determining Need*

**T**he first aspect of the fundamental work of the deacons is that of collecting the alms. This must be first in priority, as well as in time, for imme-

diately needs must be immediately relieved. They must be relieved immediately, partly because of their urgency. Such needs must also be relieved immediately as a picture of how our Savior supplies our needs. Our Heavenly Father always gives us our immediate needs immediately. Trusting He will do this, we pray: “Give us this day our daily bread.” And when we seek the blessings of our Lord

and Savior Jesus Christ, He never sends us away empty, telling us that His storehouse of blessing is empty, but He always has abundance of blessing to bestow upon us. So the deacons must collect the alms, to have in hand the means to relieve the needy when the needy seek it.

After those alms have been collected, however, the next step is not simply to disburse them, but to de-

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termine need. This work involves determining who is genuinely needy, and exactly what that need is. Conscientious deacons will not quickly pass over this aspect of their work but will carry it out carefully.



Although those documents that speak of the duties of deacons in Reformed churches do not specifically require the deacons to determine need, they do clearly imply that this is part of the deacons' work. For instance, the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons speaks of two fundamental duties of the deacons: first, to collect and preserve the alms, and second, to distribute them. But in explaining that second duty, the Form indicates that the deacons must have "discretion and prudence to bestow the alms only on objects of charity." In the exhortation to the deacons after they have made their vows, the minister must tell the deacons to "provide for the *true* widows and orphans" (emphasis mine, DJK). True widows, in this sense, are not simply women whose husbands have died, and true orphans are not merely those without parents; but true widows and true orphans are those widows and orphans who are poor and in genuine need of the mercies of Christ. Furthermore, the Church Order, Article 25, requires deacons to distribute the alms to the poor "as their needs may require it." Finally, the Belgic Confession, Article 30, speaks of the need to relieve the poor and distressed, "according to their necessities." These phrases imply that the deacons must first determine need, before distributing the alms.

The necessity of determining need is clearly based on scriptural principles.

In the early New Testament church, the saints who sold their possessions distributed their wealth to others, "as every man had need" (Acts 2:45; cf. also Acts

4:35). Soon afterwards, the first deacons were appointed to care for the material needs specifically of the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1ff.). It was clear to the apostles that these widows had genuine need.

The inspired apostle Paul says to Timothy (I Tim. 5:16): "If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed." The elders, and especially the deacons, whom Timothy ordains in the church at Ephesus are to care for the poor in their midst. In determining who has true need, the deacons are to investigate whether the needy have other means of relief.

Why must the need of a family or individual be determined before alms are distributed?

First, need must be determined because God calls the deacons to be good stewards. To the deacons are entrusted the alms that are given to relieve the poor and needy. These alms must not be squandered or misused by the deacons. The deacons must remember that they will answer to God someday for how they did their work. And God commands them to serve the poor and needy.

Need must be determined, secondly, as a reminder to God's people that the deacons do not simply hand out money to anyone who seeks it. Those who are truly needy must not hesitate to come, thinking that by seeking money they will be a burden on the church; nor must they be ashamed to come — ashamed that they have been brought so low as to need the deacons. However, the church certainly does not encourage who have the means and ability to provide for themselves those to come to the deacons.

Finally, need must be determined so that the needs of those who are truly needy are fully satisfied. The goal of determining need is not only to use the money wisely, but also to be sure that the

needs of the poor are fully met. For while one might overstate his need because he is lazy or afraid of not having enough, another might understate his need, trying to be frugal, and to appear very humble. The deacons must determine genuine need, and supply that need in full, whether it be greater or less than the amount requested by the members of the congregation.



Determining this need in a particular instance is not always an easy task.

The fact that we live in such an affluent and materialistic society makes the task difficult. Not easily answered, and the source of much debate, is the question: "What constitutes legitimate need for a person living in a modern country in the twenty-first century?"

Those needing assistance from the deacons can make the task difficult. To determine proper need, the deacons must ask questions of those in need of help, and those needing help must be ready to answer the questions honestly.

The circumstances unique to an individual case can make the task difficult. No two cases are alike. The case of a destitute widow with no family to help her must certainly be dealt with differently than that of a previously successful business man who has now fallen on hard times. The most experienced deacon surely finds that, while his experience helps him greatly in his work, he still does not have an answer to every question that arises.

In determining need, deacons must pay attention to at least three factors.

The first factor is that of the family's immediate financial situation. The sum total of money the family has on hand must be determined, as well as the sum total of bills that are due or past due. The deacons need not require of a family that all its investments be completely depleted, and even less that



all its assets be liquidated, before they give them aid; but the deacons may take into account the value of investments and assets in determining the family's need.

The second factor is that of the family's more general financial situation. This includes the issue of whether the total family income is sufficient for the family's legitimate needs. Most would surely agree that the legitimate needs of a family living in America include the means to support kingdom causes (putting money in the collection plates, and paying Christian school tuition); to pay taxes; to provide for one's needs of food, clothing, shelter, and medicine; and to provide for the family's utility and transportation needs. In other words, even though one might argue that many of today's "needs" are actually luxuries, no Christian family living in a modern culture should be expected, before coming to the deacons for help, to sacrifice the basic earthly comforts that their Christian brothers and sisters enjoy. Nor must the family be required, before being helped, to work harder to provide for its own needs, if the head of the family is already being diligent in this regard. To require mothers to work instead of mothering their children, or to require fathers to work two or three jobs, with the result that they cannot function well as fathers and heads of their homes, is not in keeping with biblical principles.

At the same time, those seeking benevolence must be prepared to demonstrate their need. They must demonstrate that they are diligent in working to provide for the needs of the family. They must demonstrate that their needs are proper. Certainly one who seeks diaconal help ought not claim as "needs" those things that are luxurious and extravagant, not even by using the argument that he "needs" them for his emotional health. Those seeking the help of the deacons must be ready to demonstrate that their priorities are right, that

they are living within their means to the best of their ability, that they endeavor to live as pilgrims and strangers on this earth, and that they know their true riches to be spiritual.

The third factor is that of what other resources are available to the family — particularly whether or not their extended family is able to help them, and if so, to what degree. I Timothy 5:16 clearly permits — even requires — the deacons to consider this factor in determining need. The principle is that the near relatives of the needy person show their love and care by being the first to help him, enabling the church better to help those who have no family, or whose family is unable to help.

In suggesting these factors, I give only the basic starting point for deacons to use in determining need. These three factors might not have equal weight in any given instance. In the case of a family with large medical bills because of a recent hospitalization, the first factor might weigh more heavily than the second. In the case of a family who chronically seeks the help of the deacons, the second might weigh more heavily than the first.

What if the head of the family is unwilling frankly to discuss his needs with the deacons? Peter Y. DeJong insists on the right of the deacons to refuse help in such an instance:

After all, they [the deacons, DJK] are not dealing with the needy in their own right but come in obedience to the mandate of Christ and clothed with His authority. Those therefore who refuse to discuss their need with them honestly forfeit all right of assistance. In most of these instances it will become evident that assistance is not needed. However, if it can be shown that the family is actually suffering hardship, then the deacons in spite of the lack of proper cooperation may feel obligated to extend some help.<sup>1</sup>

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To determine need rightly requires the deacons to do this work with a proper attitude.

A proper attitude is one of compassion. After all, the deacons represent Christ, who showed compassion on the hungry (Matt. 15:32). And John said that the child of God manifests the love of God by opening up his "bowels of compassion" to the brother that has need (1 John 3:17). So must the deacons have and show compassion. Their genuine desire must be to relieve the needs of the needy, and they must manifest that to be their desire in how they determine need.

An attitude of compassion will naturally be accompanied by a gracious attitude. Christ, in pity for us and to show compassion, bestowed grace on us by delivering us from our spiritual poverty (2 Cor. 8:9). So must the deacons manifest favor to those in need.

How will such an attitude be manifest in determining need?

First, the deacons will not be overly critical in doing their work. Certainly the deacons must make judgments regarding the family's need, and perhaps even regarding how the family uses its money. But they must be careful not to pass judgment on every aspect of the family's financial dealings in such a way as to convey the impression that, if the deacon himself were in that family's circumstances, he would have been able to get by without needing any help.

Second, in determining need, the deacons will be ready to hear from the family why they consider certain things to be needs. What one might consider a necessity, another might consider a luxury. The deacons might have to tell people,

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1. Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), pages 145-146.

sometimes, that what they think they need, they do not really need. But the deacons should not do so before hearing from the person seeking help the reason why he considers himself to need this or that.

Third, the deacons will not pry into the family's financial matters any further than they think is necessary to determine genuine need. While the family must be ready to discuss their needs, the deacons must not think that every instance of benevolence requires a detailed investigation into how the family uses its money.

Fourth, the deacons will, upon having determined need, be ready to supply that need in full, even if that means giving more than was requested.

Finally, the deacons will keep the matter confidential. Not only the details of the family's financial affairs, but even which families are being worked with, is not a matter for public discussion, or even private discussion with one's wife.

Such an attitude will encourage those whose needs are genuine to seek out the mercies of Christ. Nothing scares the people of God away from coming to Christ's officebearers more than the fear that they will not be treated as Christ would treat them! God encourages His people to come boldly to His throne, in order to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16). This encouragement is based on the fact that Jesus Christ, our high priest who understands our infirmities, is

at God's right hand (Heb. 4:14ff.). So will God's people be encouraged to come to the deacons, in knowing that the deacons will work hard to understand their infirmities, and supply their needs with the compassion of Christ our Lord.

When the people come to the deacons with such trust, and when the deacons perform their work with this attitude — what a manifestation of God's blessing on that church! What a marvelous demonstration of the presence and working of Jesus Christ Himself in her midst! What a token of God's grace to us sinners!

God grant that deacons in our churches always treat the needy with such grace and compassion.



## All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

### "The Passion of Christ" – A Movie Review

A movie review?? A movie review in the *Standard Bearer*? Really?? Why? Do not our churches strongly frown upon and condemn movie attendance? Not too many years ago most Reformed churches forbade movie attendance. (And that was at a time when the movie was relatively "tame.") Today these churches have rather advocated that children of God strive to "redeem" both the dance and the movie. The result is that some movies featuring violence, sex, and the vilest profanities have been recommended for their "art." One wonders if the churches have become so much more spiritually discerning that they can now do what their forefathers strongly condemned.

We have condemned all such movie attendance and dramatizations for several reasons. First, there is the question of attempting to take on the personality of another and pretending to do what the portrayed character has done. May an actor take on the character of one who has committed murder or adultery, doing it in such a realistic manner that the viewer considers it actually done? May one pretend to curse and swear without at the same time violating the third commandment? Or may one pretend to be Martin Luther and utter some of his heart-wrenching prayers? God approves sincere prayer—not pretense, for whatever the reason.

Even unbelievers are appalled by the filth, corruption, and evil examples portrayed on the screen. How much more so should the Christian, who still loves the law of God!

Yet a movie, soon to be released, has been attracting wide

attention. It is to be released on February 25 (Ash Wednesday) and is called: "The Passion of the Christ." Why it is worthy of note is especially that churches (among Reformed as well) are strongly recommending their people, especially the youth, to see it. Many well-known religious leaders have been said to weep as they saw the portrayal. It is said to be as close to the biblical gospel accounts as would seem possible. Even the original languages are used in the film. It is claimed to be in fact a wonderful evangelical tool. Church people can take their unbelieving neighbors to see it. It has already led some unbelievers to conversion—such is the claim. So perhaps the movie is one we can see and use too? Is this movie to be an exception to our usual condemnation of the drama in movies? We ought to consider some of this lest we also be led astray.

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First, it should be understood that normally one who reviews either a book or movie should read it or see it himself. How else can he give a fair evaluation?

Secondly, this "reviewer" has no intention or desire to see the movie mentioned in the title. He has read sufficient reviews of others to come to some conclusions.

Thirdly, we must be aware that this movie, like many others, can have a tremendous effect on how we view certain things. The movie, so it is said, will have an "R" rating—not suitable for children (and perhaps many adults as well). Those who have seen the film speak of the way it has affected them emotionally. There is no doubt but that a capable director can do that for the audience.

What has been said about the movie? Paul Harvey, well-known conservative radio commentator, wrote:

...this was not simply a movie; it was an encounter, unlike anything I have ever experienced.

In addition to being a masterpiece of film-making and an artistic triumph, "The Passion" evoked more deep reflection, sorrow and emotional reaction within me than anything since my wedding, my ordination or the birth of my children. Frankly, I will never be the same. When the film concluded, this "invitation only" gathering of "movers and shakers" in Washington, DC were shaking indeed, but this time from sobbing. I am not sure there was a dry eye in the place. The crowd that had been glad-handing before the film was now eerily silent. No one could speak because words were woefully inadequate. We had experienced a kind of art that is a rarity in life, the kind that makes heaven touch earth.

David Limbaugh wrote another commentary:

During the filming, Gibson, a devout Catholic, attended Mass

every morning because "we had to be squeaky clean just working on this." From Gibson's perspective, this movie is not about Mel Gibson. It's bigger than he is. "I'm not a preacher, and I'm not a pastor," he said. "But I really feel my career was leading me to make this. The Holy Ghost was working through me on this film, and I was just directing traffic. I hope the film has the power to evangelize."

Even before the release of the movie, scheduled for March 2004, Gibson is getting his wish. "Everyone who worked on this movie was changed. There were agnostics and Muslims on set converted to Christianity ... [and] people being healed of diseases." Gibson wants people to understand through the movie, if they don't already, the incalculable influence Christ has had on the world. And he grasps that Christ is controversial precisely because of WHO HE IS – GOD incarnate. "And that's the point of my film really, to show all that turmoil around him politically and with religious leaders and the people, all because He is Who He is."

A review in *The West Michigan Christian*, February 2004, by Dick Rolfe likewise very favorably reviews the film:

The cast is made up of a well-rounded ensemble of actors who are true to their characters and decidedly believable. Actor, James Caviezel (The Count of Monte Cristo, Frequency) who performs brilliantly as Jesus is a relatively unfamiliar face to movie audiences. Caviezel was totally given over to his character. His depiction of the range of emotions Jesus must have experienced during those agonizing twelve hours is riveting. Caviezel's shoulder actually became dislocated while he was hanging on the cross during the hours it took to film the crucifixion. In what he describes as "an oddly poetic coincidence," Caviezel was also struck by lightning during the filming, which took place on the outskirts of Rome, Italy....

The Passion of the Christ is a movie that every Christian adult must see. It is transforming to watch the words of the Gospels come to life before your eyes and your heart. It was difficult to separate myself from the spiritual meaning of this story....

Even the Pope, after seeing the film, is said to have remarked, "It is as it was."

*Newsweek* magazine, February 16, 2004, has a cover story about the film. In a lengthy article the writer, Jon Meacham, writes about the film and his evaluation of it. It is clear that he writes first from the perspective of one who denies the infallibility of the Bible—and the Gospel accounts. He also claims that much of that presented in the movie is either not found in the Gospel accounts or are distortions of that. Of the film, he writes:

Shot in Italy, financed by Gibson, the \$25 million film is tightly focused on Jesus' final 12 hours. In the movie there are some flashbacks giving a hint—but only a hint—of context, with episodes touching Jesus' childhood, the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the Sermon on the Mount, the Last Supper. The characters speak Aramaic and Latin, and the movie is subtitled in English, which turns it into a kind of artifact, as though the action is unfolding at a slight remove. To tell his story, Gibson has amalgamated the four Gospel accounts and was reportedly inspired by the visions of two nuns: Mary of Agreda (1602-1665) of Spain and Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824) of France; Emmerich experienced the stigmata on her head, hands, feet and chest—wounds imitating Jesus'. The two nuns were creatures of their time, offering mystical testimony that included allusions to the alleged blood guilt of the Jewish people.

The arrest, the scourging and the Crucifixion are depicted in harsh, explicit detail in the Rated movie. One of Jesus' eyes is swollen shut from his first beating as he is dragged from

Gethsemane; the Roman torture, the long path to Golgotha bearing the wooden cross, and the nailing of Jesus' hands and feet to the beams are filmed unsparingly. The effect of the violence is at first shocking, then numbing, and finally reaches a point where many viewers may spend as much time clinically wondering how any man could have survived such beatings as they do sympathizing with his plight. There are tender scenes with Mary, Jesus' mother, and Mary Magdalene. "It is accomplished," Jesus says from the cross. His mother, watching her brutally tortured son die, murmurs, "Amen."

The film, according to these accounts, does not do as other films about Jesus have done: portray Him as a homosexual, or some sort of pervert, or an adulterer. He is presented as One who has come to redeem mankind of sin.

Many who claim it is anti-Semitic raise their criticism of the film. The same claim has been made of the Gospel accounts themselves. But this criticism, for the Christian, is not the problem. The arguments showing that it is not anti-Semitic are quite convincing. The fact is obvious: He came to His own (Jews), who were supposed to be looking for the Messiah, and His own received Him not. But the sad fact is that the nature of all peoples is to reject Him. It was not because we first loved Him, but because He first loved us, that we are saved.

But we would have other very serious objections to the film. The first, of course, is the matter of the drama itself. I recall many years ago when I attended a Christian high school (where dramatic presentations at that time were not allowed), that one teacher defended the movie with its drama. But there was one exception, he insisted. It would be absolutely wrong to try to portray Christ. He is the perfect and sinless Son of God in our flesh. It would be pre-

sumptuous, to say the least, for any sinner to try to portray Him. He was right in saying that it is horribly wrong for any sinful man even to try to portray the perfect and sinless One. It is shocking that anyone would want to see such a portrayal of the sinless One by a sinful man.

No doubt the portrayal of this film is deliberately made very gory. One sees an individual severely beaten. He is treated horribly. He is nailed to the cross. No doubt such a presentation can move one emotionally. But it is too emotional, too dramatic, for children—therefore its rating: "R." So it's "evangelism," but not for children or even squeamish adults.

But it is also a way to present heresy in a convincing manner.

There is, first, the blasphemy of portraying the Son of God in the flesh by way of a human actor. Who can ever assume the likeness, the holiness, the infinity, and the wisdom of the Son in the flesh? Though one strives to follow as much as possible the testimony of the Gospels, it is audacious, to say the least, that the actor should think himself capable of portraying our Savior through human drama. Besides, however terrible His physical suffering must have been (and it was very great), there is no way the horror of the wrath of God, the agony of hell, which He must bear, could be presented visibly. The greatest, the most awful, aspect of His suffering goes beyond human portrayal or even full comprehension.

Secondly, the director has, according to the reports, taken both the Gospel accounts and the testimony of two Roman Catholic "saints" in the portrayal he presents. That is, to say the least, disquieting.

Thirdly, all of the reports indicate that the portrayal is of Christ who dies for the sins of all—universal atonement. Surely that's not what Christ taught in John 6 and 10 and elsewhere in the Gospels. If the presentation is as powerful

as the reports indicate, what effect will this false doctrine have on those who behold? Will one hold to Scripture—or to this false presentation of Scripture?

Fourthly, one must recognize that this sort of drama will surely have a powerful effect on the feeling or emotion of the observer. When suffering is portrayed through drama, and it looks very real to the observer, how can he not be affected emotionally? But is this the way of proper evangelism? Are converts made on the basis of intense emotion?

Fifthly, the reports indicate not only that Muslims and agnostics have been converted already in viewing the film, but also that people have been healed of their illnesses as a result of viewing the movie. One cannot help but think of those Roman Catholic shrines where, presumably, other healings take place. Will this film be another Lourdes? How many will be impressed by the "conversions" and the "healings"? How many will even be persuaded to seek this film for such healings?

Finally, the film makes a mockery of the testimony of Scripture about the "weak means of preaching" (I Cor. 1:17). "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." And in verse 21, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

But now we have presented something other than the "foolishness of preaching." Mel Gibson is wiser than God. With dramatic presentations of the crucifixion, he will convince sinners. He will bring many to the cross of Christ. It is disturbing, to say the least.

Striking, too, is the account of




the man portraying Christ. He was asked by one interviewer, "You got struck by lightning?" His answer:

Oh, yeah. We were shooting the Sermon on the Mount. About four seconds before it happened it was quiet, and then it was like someone slapped my

ears. I had seven or eight seconds of, like, a pink, fuzzy color, and people started screaming. They said I had fire on the left side of my head and light around my body. All I can tell you is that I looked like I went to Don King's hairstylist.

"Did it occur to you that if you're playing Christ and you get struck by lightning, maybe...."

[Laughs, then, as if speaking to God:]  
"Didn't like that take, huh?"

And this is what preachers and churches are recommending to their congregations? God grant that His people may flee such abomination and hold to the faithful preaching of the Word. 

When Thou Sittest In Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

# The Hasty Fruit Before Summer

## Summer

**R**ightly viewed, the Scripture knows but *two* seasons of year: summer and winter.

You hear this in the divine utterance after the Flood: "Henceforth, while the earth remaineth, cold and heat, summer and winter shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22).

So in Psalm 74:17, in silence passing spring and autumn by: "Thou hast made *summer and winter*."

And in the vision of Zechariah (14:8) it is said that "living waters shall go out from Jerusalem, and that these waters shall be in *summer* and in *winter*."

Spring and autumn are transitions, they form no antitheses. There is heat or cold, there is life or death, there is light or darkness; and everything that lies in between may differ in degree but is no third, new something.

When Jesus says: "Now learn a parable of the fig-tree, when his

branch becomes tender, and putteth forth leaves, then know *that summer is nigh*" (Matt. 24:32), and from Matthew 21:19 you observe how already *before* Passover the fig-tree was in leaf, it is clear, that "the nearness of summer" means what we call spring.

That this antithesis between summer and winter is altogether the outcome of the curse and is come upon us exclusively on account of sin is difficult to accept.

The curse certainly operates definitely in the intense cold of severe frost, and in the sultriness of *excessive* heat, which makes breathing difficult.

Frost that is too severe in winter kills man, even as sunstroke at too great summer-heat is always death by reason of the curse.

So there is ground of acceptance that the curse has intensified the antithesis between summer and winter; but from this it does by no means follow that this antithesis originated from the curse.

Already at the creation, before sin came in, you come upon the antithesis between day and night, between light and darkness, and it is evident that the antithesis between cold and heat, and also between summer and winter, is of one piece.

Night cools off, day brings a softer atmosphere.

And so we may accept that the antithesis between summer and winter, i.e., between two periods of time during the course of the year, in which now cold predominates, and again heat prevails, belongs to the ordinance of creation.

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Summer abounds in wealth of nature, but winter also exhibits a glory of its own, and in both of these God glorifies His majesty.

If you subtract from winter the cutting sharpness of the wind and the stiffening of nature by reason of too great severity of cold, winter has a beauty altogether its own and an attractiveness which nothing else can supply. There are days in winter, so tempered in cold, with high, clear skies, that in beauty of kind is by nothing excelled.

To suppose that this winter beauty would forever have remained hidden if man had not fallen falls short of the glory of God's work.

That a result of sin has its aftermath in winter as it now is, even as in summer, which frequently loosens every restraint of human elasticity, is clear; and it also ap-

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pears from John's Revelation, in which the Tree of Life blooms twelve months together and bears fruit, that in the state of glory this antithesis also, even as that of day and night, of light and darkness, falls away; but this does not take away the fact that in this provisional dispensation, both summer and winter were made to give us a speech of God's majesty; and it is this speech that goes out not only from winter, but also from summer, to all nations and to all parts of the earth.



That speech of summer is the language of brightness and ardor, of fullness of life and of superabounding wealth.

The nights are short, and even in their brevity less dark. The day is long begun before you leave your couch, and reaches almost to the hour of retiring.

Artificial light is little needed, and fire, indispensable for the preparation of food, is put out as soon as possible.

So in summer there is far less suffering. The lot of the poor, in winter oft so bitter and so hard, in summer is far more enjoyable. Human need grows less. Food is more abundant. Even all fruit and vegetables do not pass by the dwelling of the poor. His frugal home no longer shuts him in. Windows are opened wide. In streets and byways one runs out, and even sits down, to enjoy the freer life.

The misery of the sickroom is lessened with the coming of summer.

The consumptive, who fetched the summer, revives again with the feeling of recuperation. Unless an epidemic breaks out, hospitals depopulate.

All suffering of troubled humanity summer cannot dispel, but summer brings moderation and amelioration of pain.

Even where fullest enjoyment of summer is not possible, the warm, softer season of year renders

almost everyone's lot in life more bearable.



Summer has also this wondrous good to its credit, that it accustoms us again to life in and with *nature*.

Compelled by necessity, life in our homes is for the most part artificial, and in many respects unnatural. Too narrowly enclosed. Too greatly crowded. Too greatly separated from God's rich creation.

But when summer is come, nature entices us again out of doors. The full impression of God's glorious creation is upon us. Nature fondles us to her heart and affects us benignly by her soft embrace.

We become as children again, who revel in what God gives us to enjoy.

And this life with nature rejuvenates physical powers, enriches the blood, and opens the heart to purer sensations.

The motion and struggle of spirits takes a surcease during the summer months, as though we refuse to disturb the pleasure which God grants us in the wealth of summer.

Schools are closed for many weeks. Children are at liberty. Parents and children, brothers and sisters, live together again the livelier day.

Even the heavy-hearted feel moods of cheer come upon them. The end of it all is that life is lived in a happier way.

True, thunder sounds time and again from on high, and lightning darts through the clouds, as though to remind man of God, and in the midst of so great wealth not to forget Him; but even that thunder-shower leaves a blessing behind, and when the skies clear, and the sun breaks out, for everything that hath breath, there is fuller happiness.



But harvest is not yet. This follows in autumn days. At least the

harvest of the finer fruits. So everything together bears the character of preparation for the harvest that comes later.

In the wealth of summer, the work of God which aims at fruit goes restlessly on.

There is brightness, there is richness and splendor, there is fragrance and choice of blossom and flowers, but in all this life aims at a still higher something.

The wealth of summer is not simply for its own sake, but finds its consummation only when presently the full harvest is brought in.

Herein lies the admonition to seriousness.

In our human life there may be much beauty, and much may be granted us to enjoy, but in that beauty and in that wealth our life must not lose itself.

The most beautiful and richest life is worthless, when in the end nothing buds but leaves.

Presently the heavenly Husbandman comes to gather fruit from us.

And woe unto him, in the hour when his life is cut off, on whose branches fruit, well-ripened fruit for the barns of heaven, is wanting.



Yea, there is more.

Though summer is only consummated in autumn harvest, yet the Scripture speaks of a summer fruit, and of a "hasty fruit before summer" (Is. 28:4).

Such is God's ordinance in nature that already in summer itself there is fruit ready to be gathered, and so is His ordinance with respect to you, that already in the summer of your life fruit shall not be wanting.

The spring of your life is your youth, and harvest reminds you of old age, but the summer of your life is the years of your full manly strength.

From you, therefore, it is demanded that the years of your




manly strength are not merely marked by harmony of character and enriched by the unfolding of your God-given talents, but that they shall cast off those desired summer fruits, in behalf of your environment, of yourself, but above all for the glory of God.

In the summer of your life

something must ripen for the great day of harvest, when the angels shall put forth the sickle into the corn; but there must already now be fruit ripened, a summer fruit that can be picked already on earth, a fruit received from God, and therefore in deep humility laid on His altar.

And when the years run their

course, and every time again summer comes after spring, that new summer always comes back to you with the old inquiry: whether at length you will become wise not merely to make a show of leaf and blossom, but also to be mindful of *the fruit of your life*, which must ripen to the glory of God. 

*Go Ye Into All the World*

*Rev. Jason Kortering*

# Nurturing Godliness in Missions

**I**n obedience to Christ's command to make disciples of all nations, the church sends forth missionaries. The task of making disciples is both joyful and difficult. We experience the blessings of this activity when God gives converts. The early church rejoiced when they learned by first-hand experience that the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). Many a missionary, along with his sending church, experiences that joy today as well. It is a never-ending wonder of God.

Mission work does not end with the confession of faith and baptism of a new convert. Jesus made this very clear by His parable of the different kinds of soil (Luke 8:5ff.). The word preached falls on different kinds of hearers. Some respond in true faith, others respond in pseudo faith, which is determined over a testing period. For the most part, the missionary and his church cannot judge at the moment of conversion which is which. In due time, and that is also

God's time, it becomes evident and the church has to deal with it. That is why Christian discipline in the mission church is just as vital as it is in the mature congregation, where the youth of the church must be disciplined if their confession of faith proves pseudo.

The labors of the missionary and the mission church upon such a convert are crucial. In a general way, this labor distinguishes Reformed missions from Arminian. Because Arminianism is so individualistic, Arminians are focused upon getting souls saved, and they seem to neglect the nurture of those whom God saves. Reformed missionaries recognize this great need from two points of view. First, for the good of the convert, if he is going to "endure unto the end," his young faith has to be exercised and trained. Second, we realize the importance of the church and the place of the convert in the body of Christ. Great effort has to be expended to prepare the new convert to take up the Christian commitment to let his light shine and behave as Christ wants him to act. Only then is he an additional blessing to the witness of the church in the midst of the world.

There are two aspects to his spiritual growth.

First, his knowledge of the truth must grow into the conviction of the truth. In the early stages of his spiritual development, he learns so much that is new and wonderful. His perspective of the world changes, for example, from that of insignificant material propelled by spiritual energy to that of a significant material world controlled by a personal God. His own personal importance changes, from that of a blob of cells floating on the merry-go-round of reincarnation, to that of one who was recreated in the image of God and is renewed in Jesus Christ and therefore has a purpose in serving such a sovereign God. The goal is that this newfound knowledge be more to the convert than an intriguing theory to be contemplated. It becomes truth bound upon his conscience because it is knowledge given from the infinite God of revelation.

Second, his life-style must change into a life of obedience before God. This is just as amazing as the substance of faith. When a person becomes a Christian, his entire value system and sense of right

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and wrong are shaken to the core. In the early days of his searching, he learns much about the holiness of God and how he is to respond to it as a Christian. The entire law of God sets before him a different way of thinking and acting. The Bible expounds on this law and gives further details as to how we are to act in our relation to God and our neighbor.

There are many things forbidden that before he practiced. There are many things that the Christian is exhorted to do, but he never considered them as worth doing or even cared about them. The law touches him on every level, especially the first table. He rejects idols and all the activity associated with their worship. He worships God in an entirely different way, and that too on the Lord's Day. His prayer life changes. He learns to reverence the name of God both in prayer and when speaking about Him to others.

The second table of the law is just as radical. His honor of father and mother is far more profound than "filial." It is a true love for his parents, so much so that he desires above all else their eternal salvation. Even though most of his family members and colleagues at work may reject him for his new faith, yet he does not hate them but loves them so much that he wants to share the gospel with them. Many of the Christian sisters and brothers learn to honor God's gift of marriage to such an extent that, rather than marry a non-Christian, they forego marriage for God's sake. Their value of earthly, material things changes from a pursuit of riches to using money for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Their mouth is an important vehicle for good or evil. Uncontrolled anger and wrath expressed in harsh words quickly spoils their godly witness, so they have to learn to control their tongues. And, last of

all, they learn to covet the best gifts rather than seek after that which destroys their faith.

The part of this spiritual maturing that we want to focus upon now is that of obedience to God and His law. Obviously, we cannot separate this from faith and knowledge. The maturing process is one whole, both faith and life, and they cannot be separated, but go together. We can at least distinguish the two and focus our attention upon obedience to God's law. How can we help a new convert become

an obedient Christian who loves God and practices His law in all areas of his life? How beautiful he is when he says no when God says no, yes when God says yes, and learns to use Christian liberty properly. In many ways he is a weak Christian. He may know some guiding principles of holiness from the Bible, but he lacks the ability to apply them to his own life. He struggles with his own failures, since he too has a nature that opposes everything that is good. He faces keen opposition and even persecution from those who ought to support him, e.g., parents, siblings, and even friends. Such a fellow saint needs guidance. How must we give that to him?

There is a wrong way that is very tempting for a missionary to follow because it seems so right and effective. It consists of three elements, and notice with me that each one of the three is right and good in itself. The error is that, when taken together, and emphasized to the exclusion of love, it becomes a mind-set that produces wrong results. First, God is sovereign over all creatures and therefore has the right to determine right and wrong. He is the supreme authority. Second, as the sovereign God, He has the perfect right to set forth the demands of the covenant. He expects obedi-

ence to His law; He threatens all disobedience with punishment. To make this crystal clear to all the hearers, the demands of the law are spelled out in detail, usually a list of do's and don'ts. The young converts need to know right and wrong, and the missionary is right there to indicate under each commandment what is expected and what is forbidden. He may even be tempted to flip off a list of "Reformed distinctives" or go so far as to legislate in areas of Christian liberty. Thirdly, the young Christian is told that it is his duty to obey God's required law. If he wants to be a Christian, then he has to abide by its rules and conform to its practices as the church is teaching.

You see what I mean when I say that all three are perfectly correct if placed in a right context. The above context is incomplete because it emphasizes exclusively *external* conduct and does not deal with the *inner* workings of grace and the Holy Spirit. It is the teaching of morality that Christ criticized when he addressed the Pharisees. Work righteousness is intimately connected with authority, rules, duty, and such like. It attempts to make Christians by external compulsion, by rules and demands. The result of such attempts is to produce hypocrites, who conform to the rules outwardly, but give precious little attention to the heart.

Jesus condemned all such wrongful attempts to teach morality when He said to the rich young ruler, who had just testified that he kept the entire law from his youth onward, "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come and follow me" (Matt. 19:21). Yes, he *externally* kept the law, but *internally* he didn't know the first thing about love (the heart of the law). The way to prove love would be literally to sell all his goods and give it to the poor and become Jesus' disciple. That made him sad.

The antidote to the above is to

*When a person becomes a Christian, his entire value system and sense of right and wrong are shaken to the core.*



teach godliness. Do we not read in the Proverbs of old, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning (principle) of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10)? The message of Galatians is that we are no longer under the law as a schoolmaster, "for we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:24ff.). In contrast to the law and its teaching as used by the Pharisees, Jesus called to the people, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28ff.). Why is it easy? It is easy because doing the will of the Father out of love, rather than duty, is a pleasure. This can be forgotten in a zeal to get converts to shape up in a hurry. Teaching godliness is far more difficult and takes more time, especially prayer, because we admit that we cannot get people to "shape up," we can only be agents in God's hands for His Spirit to do this work.

Yes, God is sovereign and possesses all authority to demand obedience to His law. When we teach respect for God and obedience to His law, we must include references to God as the covenant God, the God of love and mercy. The demands of the law were laid upon Jesus Christ; the punishment for disobedience fell upon Him as He bore the guilt of our sins. He fulfilled the law for righteousness, both in His suffering the pains of death and hell imposed by the holy law of God and in living a perfect life of love before God and His neighbor. No one has greater love than "to lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The amazing thing is that this love God gives to us when we become a Christian. We are changed, in our legal standing before God, from guilty to righteous, but also, in our personal relationship, from enemies to friends. We become the friends of the living God, and He is our Friend. Love dominates this relationship. Our

obedience to the law of God is not simply out of duty in response to His demands. It is much more. We freely, out of love, desire God's friendship; and we know we can enjoy it in the way of keeping His law.

The same is true for us in our earthly relationships. A wife may say to her husband, "I submit to you and obey you because it is my duty." That is of course true. But as every husband knows, it means much more to him if she says, "I submit to you and obey you because I love you and I love God." By such an expression, the delight is there and the yoke of Christ is easy then. It is rooted in our heartfelt relationship of love to God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Such godliness must be nourished.

First, the missionary himself must be a godly man. His power is not to throw his weight around because he has authority, even if it is from God. His power is in prayer, zeal for God, and holy living. All who observe his life know he is a man of God who lives in close fellowship with God. He becomes an important role model to the young Christians around him.

Second, in both his preaching and teaching he administers the Word of God not with some high-handed warning of authority (you had better listen to my preaching because I represent God, and you had better do what I say because I am the preacher), but with humility. He knows his own sin and openly leads the congregation both in public prayer and personal conversation to admit and confess sins earnestly before God. In my limited mission experience, I found that the three parts of our beloved Heidelberg Catechism served as the framework, not only for all my preaching, but for my pastoral counseling as well. Comfort is found only in admitting sin, seeking forgiveness in Jesus, and living a grateful life according to


God's ways. Such a pastor or missionary is kind, understanding, patient, and non-judgmental when he labors with young converts. Yes, he must be firm and uncompromising, yet it is in a way that exudes mercy and forgiveness. After all, that is the way our heavenly Father deals with us, no matter how mature we may be. Only then will obedience be more than just necessary, it will be delightful.

Finally, because our entire ministry, whether as missionaries or pastors, is completely dependent upon God, and obedience to God's law and holy living is His work of sanctification, we realize that prayer is vital. Again, our catechism expresses it so well, "God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires, continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them" (Q. 116). Sin has a devastating effect in the life of any person, including new converts. It works havoc in the church, whether mission or established. We need and therefore must seek holy living. Such living comes from God, who continues to give His Holy Spirit to work grace in the hearts of His children. Prayer is the God-appointed way for such spiritual presence and blessings. Just as we

parents must pray for the individual needs of our children and families, so we must pray for the individual needs of struggling converts, backsliders, and persecuted ones, that God may give them strength to be faithful and thus to be useful in His kingdom to His glory.

True obedience is a spiritual act that flows from a godly heart.

If we stop to think about it, this is also true as we lead our children and youth to obey God's will and way. We need to nurture godliness in them.

May God bless every effort to nurture such godliness whether at home or in the mission field. 

*True obedience  
is a spiritual act  
that flows  
from a godly heart.*





*The Irish Puritans: James Ussher and the Reformation of the Church*, by Crawford Gribben. Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2003. Pp. 160. £7.95(UK)—\$14.99(US) (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

Little is known among us about the Irish Reformed theologian and churchman, James Ussher (1581-1656) than that he determined from his biblical studies that God created the world in 4004 B.C. This is unfortunate. Crawford Gribben supplies our lack in the well-written, interesting book, *The Irish Puritans*.

Ussher was a significant Calvinist in his day. As archbishop of Armagh, primate, or leader, of the Irish [Protestant] Church, he worked at making Ireland Calvinistic. He was a defender of the Reformed faith against the Roman Catholicism that dominated Ireland and against the Arminianism that was taking over the Anglican Church through Laud. A great scholar, his 10,000 volumes became the basis of the library of Trinity College Dublin.

The time of Ussher's life was the period of dramatic history in Great Britain. Around the middle

of the seventeenth century, first Parliament and Scotland withstood Charles I and then Cromwell and his New Model Army defeated and executed Charles and put the Scots in their place. Ussher was involved in this history. As an Anglican archbishop and as a Reformed Christian, Ussher supported the monarch.

Ussher and the movement on behalf of the Reformed faith in Ireland, which movement the author chooses to describe as Puritan, are the subject of the brief, but thorough study, *The Irish Puritans*. The author is research fellow in the Center for Irish-Scottish Studies at Trinity College Dublin.

Ussher's greatest and lasting accomplishment was authoring the Irish Articles (1615). This confession, "agreed upon by the Archbishops and Bishops, and the rest of the Clergy of Ireland in the Convocation holden at Dublin in the year of our Lord God 1615, for the avoiding of Diversities of Opinions, and the establishing of Consent touching true Religion," is a solid, full statement of the Reformed faith. These 104 articles were influential in the formulation of the Westminster Confession of Faith

some thirty years later.

Article 12 of the Irish Articles confesses double predestination: "By the same eternal counsel, God hath predestinated some unto life, and reprobated some unto death: of both which there is a certain number, known only to God, which can neither be increased nor diminished."

Articles 26 and 27 teach that all works done by the unbeliever "are not pleasing unto God" and are "sinful." Among these deeds, all of which are alike sinful, "some [are] far more heinous than others."

In Article 80, coincidentally numerically the same as the great article in the Heidelberg Catechism condemning Roman Catholicism, the Irish Articles identify the Bishop of Rome as Antichrist: "that man of sin, foretold in the holy scriptures, whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of his mouth, and abolish with the brightness of his coming."

*The Irish Puritans* includes the full text of the Irish Articles as an appendix.

In North America, the book is available from Evangelical Press, P.O. Box 84, Auburn, MA 01501.



## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Evangelism Activities

On February 19 the Evangelism Society of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ sponsored a viewing of the video of the Engelsma/Mouw debate on Common Grace, held this past summer in Grand Rapids, MI.

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

The Byron Center, MI PRC sponsored a lecture entitled "The Christian, Politics, and the Antichrist," by Rev. R. Cammenga, pastor of Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, on February 12 at their church. Anyone interested was encouraged to join Byron Center for a timely discussion on our calling towards government and our call to watch for the coming of Antichrist. The lecture was followed by a question and answer period and refreshments.

Starting February 12, and then again on February 18 and 26, the Evangelism Committee of First PRC in Holland, MI hosted what has become their annual Winter Conference. The topic of this year's conference was "God's Covenant of Grace with His People." Thursday, February 12, Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on "God's Sovereign Covenant with His People," followed the next Wednesday with Rev. G. VanBaren speaking on "Sovereign Election and the Particular Prom-



ise," and Rev. C. Terpstra speaking the last Thursday on "The Particular Implications of the Covenant of Grace."

### Mission Activities

**T**he Steering Committee of our denomination's mission work in Pittsburgh, PA recently made a decision to advertise their Fellowship and its activities in *Faith Talk* magazine. This magazine was referred to Pittsburgh by WORD FM, where one can hear our eastern home missionary, Rev. J. Mahtani, speak throughout the year and the Reformed Witness Hour each week. There are over 16,000 people who receive each issue of this magazine.

Recently a committee made up of members of the Pittsburgh Mission and of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ organized under the name Eastern Mission Retreat Committee. At their first meeting in late January, this committee decided to have the Eastern Mission's Retreat May 26-30, 2005, which is Memorial Day weekend. The purpose of the retreat will be for a time of fellowship and instruction among the isolated contacts we have in the Eastern United States, as well as those who are new to the Reformed faith, and a limited number of members of our denomination. The theme of the retreat will be "Reaching the Nations with the Gospel of Grace," with an emphasis on the content of the gospel and how we reach the nations, and how we do evangelism work. The committee is working out additional details regarding the venue, guest speakers, activities, etc. The Lord willing, the committee will meet next in New Jersey, July 1-5.

### Contact Committee Activities

**R**ev. K. Koole, of our denomination's Contact Committee, and Mr. John Buiter, from the Hope PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, the calling church for our missionary-on-loan in Singapore, left Tuesday, February 17, for a two-week trip to visit our sister churches

there and Rev. A. denHartog, our minister-on-loan. This was according to a synodical mandate to visit the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore, as well as Rev. denHartog and his family. The timing of this trip also made it possible for the emissaries to visit the Classis of the ERCS, which met during the time that the emissaries were there. They planned to return, the Lord willing, on March 1.

### School Activities

**T**he Eastside Christian School Promoters invited interested supporters of their school to gather together on February 19 at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI to hear Prof. Robert Fortner of the Communications Dept. of Calvin College speak on the topic, "The Computer and the Human Condition: Help or Hindrance for the Soul?"

On Thursday, February 12, parents and teachers of Hope PRC Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI met for one of their semi-annual PTA meetings. At this meeting, Mr. Joel Minderhoud, a science teacher at Covenant Christian High School, spoke on the theme, "The Unity of the Human Body and the Unity of the Church."

Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI had their All-School Program on February 19 at the Fairhaven Ministries in Jenison, MI. The theme for this year's program was, "A Wonderful Savior."

### Minister Activities

**R**ev. and Mrs. J. Laning, serving the Hope PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Julianne Rose, born on Wednesday, February 4.


The congregation of the Byron Center, MI PRC was to call a pastor on Sunday evening, February 22. From a trio of Rev. C. Haak, Rev. D. Kleyn, and Rev. R. Van Overloop, Byron Center called Rev. VanOverloop.

### Young People's Activities

**T**he Young People's Society of the Lynden, WA PRC planned a dinner for their church members on the evening of Saturday, January 17 in the gym of Covenant Christian School. Dinner began at 5:30 P.M., with games and fellowship following.

A Candlelight Supper was planned by the young people of the First PRC of Edgerton, MN for Monday, February 9. Group seating was available for those who preferred it, as well as babysitting for those who needed it.

Friday, February 6, the Young People's Society of Byron Center, MI PRC hosted a Valentine Banquet, and on Saturday, the 7<sup>th</sup>, the Young People of First PRC in Holland, MI sponsored a Soup Supper, with proceeds going for the 2004 Young People's Convention.

Which reminds me that registration for this year's convention is due by April 9. Young people, have you sent your registration forms in? This year's convention, hosted by Southwest PRC Young People's Society from July 12-16 at Covenant Hills Camp in Otisville, MI, will provide you with an opportunity to spend a week with like-minded young people from many different churches and missions. What a wonderful way for you to "Draw Near to God." 

## Announcements

The Lord willing, a spring lecture on the subject,  
*"Is the King James Version Still The Best Translation Available?"*  
by Prof. Hanko.

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

**18423 Stony Island Ave., Lansing, Illinois.**

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



P.O. Box 603  
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## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Edgerton PRC express their Christian sympathy to the Glenn and Irene Gunnink family in the death of Irene's father,

### HARVEY SAMUELSON.

May their comfort be found in God's Word in Psalm 23:4; "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, Pres.  
Al Brummel, Clerk

## PUBLIC LECTURE

"Jesus Christ in the Movies"

March 26, 2004, 7:30 P.M. at  
Trinity Protestant Reformed Church,  
3385 VanBuren St.  
Hudsonville, MI, 49426

Speaker:

**Rev. R. Kleyn**

Recordings of the lecture will be available by contacting Chuck Ensink at (616) 669 2412 or [chensink@iserv.net](mailto:chensink@iserv.net).

For more information go to our website [www.prc.org/trinity](http://www.prc.org/trinity) or call (616) 669-7024.

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 25, 2004, our parents and grandparents,

**ARIE and ANN GRIFFIOEN,**

will celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We are thankful for the many years that God has blessed them in their marriage. We are thankful for the love, patience, and covenant instruction they have given us. We pray that God will continue to bless them. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- \* Kurt and Debra Griffioen  
Roger and Farrah  
Gerald
- \* Douglas and June Griffioen  
Jeffrey, Emily, Steven, Todd,  
Esther, Betsy, Lucy
- \* David and Phyllis Griffioen  
Jennie, Joy, Joel, Jacob  
Jill and Chad Rus
- \* Robert and Kristi Buiter  
Thomas, Michael, Molly

Jenison, Michigan



## British Reformed Fellowship Family Holiday Conference

High Leigh Conference Centre  
Hertfordshire, England  
13-20th August 2004

Conference Theme:  
**Keeping God's Covenant**

Conference Addresses:  
**Professor David Engelsma & Professor Herman Hanko**

- 1) *The Covenant that we must keep*
- 2) *Keeping God's Covenant in the Church*
- 3) *Keeping God's Covenant in Marriage*
- 4) *Keeping God's Covenant in the Home*
- 5) *Keeping God's Covenant and the Exercise of Discipline*
- 6) *Keeping God's Covenant and the Antithetical Life*

Plus — Special Lecture by Mr. Chad van Dixhoorn  
*The Westminster Assembly and Its Catechisms*

The conference is to be held at High Leigh Conference Centre, a beautiful Christian centre with 40 acres of lawns, parkland, and woodland. For more information, see [www.cct.org.uk](http://www.cct.org.uk).

The conference will be of a relaxed nature, and adequate time will be available for recreation with family and friends. Meetings will be held in the mornings or evenings in the Conference Centre hall, and trips to local places of interest will be arranged. Two optional day trips are being planned. The first is to Cambridge (16<sup>th</sup> August, DV), including Christian Heritage tour of this breathtaking University City and centre of the Protestant Reformation. The second is to London (18<sup>th</sup> August, DV) including a guided tour of Westminster Abbey, where the Westminster Assembly met to draw up the Westminster Standards.

## NOTICE!!

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

Don Doezema  
4949 Ivanrest Ave.  
Grandville, MI 49418

## For more information and booking forms contact:

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