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Volume 80 ◆ Number 14

The Gift of Pastors

"And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Ephesians 4: 11-13

The many precious truths taught in the first three chapters of this epistle are being applied, in these verses, to the lives of the recently converted Christians in Ephesus. The first application concerns the unity of the church of Christ and the necessity of keeping or preserving this unity (4:1-16).

The glory of the unity of Christ's body is that there is a diversity in the unity, and a unity that comprehends endless variations. The many members are not

merged together into a single, solid mass, nor are they made to be alike without individual identity. The unity does not do away with the diversity, and the diversity does not break the unity. The diversity in the unity makes for beautiful harmony! The source of the unity is also the source of the diversity. The source of the unity is Christ, the Head of the body. The source of the diversity is also Christ, the Giver of the various gifts in each member.

Our text speaks of one of the gifts the ascended Christ has given. What is said about this gift applies to all the gifts given to the church. Paul uses the gift of pastor and teacher as an example because it is one of the more important gifts given to the church. Paul is inspired to have the Ephesian believers of long ago and every believer today realize that each gift Christ gives to the church is designed for the building up of the church. Each diverse gift is not for itself and its self-expression, but is designed to work for the whole.

Christ gave to His church the gift of pastor/teacher. This is the permanent manifestation of the

temporary and extraordinary offices of apostle, prophet, and evangelist.

The "apostles" were those men who were appointed directly by Christ (Gal. 1:1). When the disciples were given the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20), they became apostles — "sent-out ones." The apostles had seen the risen Lord (I Cor. 9:1; 15:8,9). And they were given special revelations of the truth. The Ephesians heard about the dispensation of grace given to Paul, when he was given by revelation to know the mystery of Christ, which was "revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (3:2-5; Gal. 1:12). The special office of apostle could not continue because no others saw the risen Lord and were sent out by the Christ Himself.

The office of "evangelist" was held by men such as Philip, Timothy, and Titus. They were gifted men who were closely associated with the apostles. The evangelists were appointed by the apostles and often studied under them. Therefore they had a special ability and power to make known and expound the facts of the gospel. This office also was temporary, just because of

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its close association with the temporary office of apostle.

The “prophets” were New Testament prophets (2:20; 3:5). Though they did not see Christ, they (like their old dispensation counterparts) could speak under inspiration of the Spirit (Acts 11:27; 13:1; I Cor. 14:29,30). They received revelations of the truth with the right to speak this truth to others. Again, this office was temporary. It lasted until the canon of the New Testament was closed. The truth had not yet been completely revealed and written in a permanent record in the New Testament Scriptures. With all the truth needed for salvation now embodied in the New Testament, there is no need for further revelation from God through apostles or prophets.

The permanent manifestation of this gift from Christ is the pastor/teacher. This is one office, not two — notice that the word “some” is not repeated before the word “teachers.” The word “pastor” is used to describe this gift of Christ to His church. This word very beautifully describes the responsibility of caring for sheep. Jesus is the Chief and Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20; I Pet. 2:25; 5:4). However, He is now out of sight because He has ascended into heaven. He gives the office of pastor/teacher so that there might be a visible representation of Himself to His sheep. He gives under-shepherds to be guardians and protectors of His flock. This title emphasizes the fact that the bringing of the gospel is to be for the spiritual care of the flock.

The pastor is a teacher. He is to instruct the flock in the Word of God. His shepherding is to be in the way of teaching them. He cares for them, guards and directs them by teaching them the laws and truths of God’s Word. Not just when on the pulpit or in the catechism room, but always the pastor teaches — at the hospital bed, in the funeral home. From house

to house he shepherds the flock by increasing their knowledge and understanding of the Word of the Shepherd.

What a gift the ascended Christ gives to His church! How valuable is this precious gift! How carefully and joyfully must it be received. And what a great calling is given to them to whom the gift is given.



The ascended Lord gave the gift of pastor/teacher for the establishment and maintenance of the church by equipping the saints. The members of the church are described according to their calling: saints. This title is given, not to a few special members of the flock, but to every member. This title does not mean that they are perfectly holy. Rather the name “saint” means that they are essentially “holy ones.” As members of the body of Christ they have been given the life of Jesus, which life is holy. They have been separated out of the world of sinful mankind, have been forgiven, and have been given the perfect righteousness of Jesus. They are now dedicated to serve God and His Christ. They are saints.

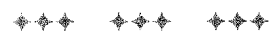
The shepherding to be done by the pastor/teacher is the “perfecting” of the saints. This refers to equipping or outfitting the saints. The preaching and teaching of the gospel is to promote the spiritual growth and development of each member. The saints are equipped when they are taught the Scriptures. The Word is to be applied appropriately to each sheep in every season. This is all they need — nothing but the Word.

The saints are to be equipped “for the work of the ministry.” The work of the ministry is literally the work of *serving*. Every saint has the office of believer. Each sheep is to be equipped by the preaching and teaching of the Word for the work of serving the body as a whole and each of the other mem-

bers of the body. “Every one who believes...must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members” (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 21). “As mutual members of the same body,” all believers are called to serve “the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them” (Belgic Confession, Art. 28). Each saint is called to serve the other members that God puts in his path, using the gifts God has given to him. It is in the activity of serving (ministry) that the members of the body of Christ function most beautifully.

The goal of equipping the saints unto service in the body is the “edifying of the body of Christ.” The shepherding by the pastor/teacher is unto the goal of the building up the body, both in the organism and in the institute of the church. It is through the preaching that Christ communicates Himself to the church, so that the church becomes increasingly Christ-like. It is when the members of the body help each other, that the image of Christ is reflected in them. In spite of the presence of the old man in every saint, the power of Christ’s Word transforms them into the children of light. It is the preaching of the gospel that builds up the body. By the preaching, every member becomes spiritually stronger and thus better reflects the Head.

Christ, knowing what His body needs, has given throughout the new dispensation the office of pastor/teacher, and He has filled the office with men to do the work of pastoring/teaching the saints with His Word.



The edifying of the body of Christ is not the end. There is a higher end. It is the “perfect” or complete man of the body of Christ in glory. “Perfect” means full grown, fully developed, or complete. The reference is to the

church as a whole being complete. God's grand purpose is that the church be full grown, with all the elected members being regenerated and gathered into the body of which Christ is the Head. The purpose of the gift of pastor/teacher is that this glorious end might be attained. When the body is complete, then there will be no more need for this gift.

This goal is described as "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The completed church is attained when every single member is fully developed. If there is any lack of development or any blemish in any part, then it cannot be said that the whole is complete. Each part, with its own variations in abilities and functions, must attain fully to that which it was ordained to be or do.

And notice that, according to our text, each member is complete when he is filled with Christ's life, and when every member is in the

body — not a single saint lacking. God knows them that are His — He chose them in love in His eternal decree of election. Not until every member is fully present will the body be complete. Then His fullness will be in us and we will fill Him (1:23).

We are taught in this passage that the ascended Christ gives the gift of pastor/teacher and then uses the gift of pastor/teacher to bring the body to "the unity of faith," and to the "knowledge of the Son of God." The "unity of the faith" refers to the one faith (4:5) concerning the Son of God and to the knowledge of this Son of God. The essential truth believed by all saints out of every age and culture concerns the person of the Savior. Each saint grasps by faith the knowledge that the Son of God is united with man in the wonder of the incarnation, and that He perfectly fulfilled God's plan of salvation.

This knowledge is much more than intellectual. It must be a deeper and more profound knowledge. The work of the pastor is to bring us to this fuller knowledge, for it is essential to the building up of the body. This is the knowledge of God's love for us and of us for Him. It is the calling of the church, through its ordained office of pastor/teacher, to direct the attention of the members toward Christ. It is Christ who must be known and loved.

So Christ ascended in order to give the gift of the pastor/teacher, so that they, through their instructional preaching, might equip each member of the local congregation to be able and willing to serve the other members, unto the goal of the building up of the body of Christ. This work must be done until our Lord returns.

Praise the Lord for the gift of pastor/teacher!! 

Editorial

Covenantal Universalism: New Form of an Old Attack on Sovereign Grace

The gospel of salvation by grace alone is in mortal danger in virtually every reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denomination in North America.

The threat is a doctrinal movement described variously by its proponents as the "Auburn Avenue theology" (from a Presbyterian church in Louisiana that is a center of the movement), the "federal vision" (because the movement claims to be developing the doc-

trine of the covenant—"federal" means 'covenant'), and "objective covenant theology" (because of the movement's peculiar stress on the objectivity of the covenant).

The essence of the movement is the teaching that the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ within the sphere of the covenant is universal. Every baptized child is object and recipient of the grace of God. Indeed, every one who is validly baptized with water in the name of the triune God receives the sav-

ing grace of God, those who eventually are lost as well as those who finally are saved.

The Reformed faith rejects the teaching of universal grace as a heresy. It is a fundamental departure from the gospel to teach that God is gracious in Christ to every human without exception. The movement now threatening the gospel in almost all Reformed churches in North America introduces the heresy of universal grace into the sphere of the covenant.

The right name for the movement is "covenantal universalism." By this name, I will refer to the movement in this and following editorials, in which I examine this latest threat to the gospel of grace in the Reformed community.

The movement is radical apostasy from the Reformed faith, that is, from biblical, Protestant Christianity. The movement of covenantal universalism rejects the doctrine of justification by faith alone, teaching that the sinner is justified by faith and by the good works of faith. At the same time, it denies all the doctrines of sovereign grace confessed by the Reformed churches in the Canons of Dordt. The movement denies the "five points of Calvinism." It denies the doctrines of grace in a remarkably open and bold manner.

Nevertheless, covenantal universalism poses a real threat to the Reformed churches. This is evident from the fact that virtually all the supposedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America are knowingly harboring in their bosom officebearers who teach, promote, and defend the heresy. Two of these denominations have already officially sanctioned the error by decision of their broader assemblies in 2003.

The reason why a movement denying all the doctrines of sovereign grace is a threat to these Reformed churches is that the movement is the natural, logical development of the doctrine of the covenant that the churches embrace.

I do not intend in these editorials to repeat what I wrote about this new development of covenant doctrine in an earlier series of editorials under the heading, "The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary Debate" (*Standard Bearer*, Jan. 1 – April 1, 2003). Those editorials exposed the new development of the doctrine of the covenant as denial of the truth of justification by faith alone.

In these editorials, I will show that covenantal universalism delib-

erately, systematically, and openly denies all the doctrines of sovereign grace. More importantly, these editorials will trace this denial of the gospel of sovereign grace to the erroneous doctrine of the covenant out of which the denial arises. Most importantly, the present series of editorials will demonstrate that there is one doctrine of the covenant, and one doctrine only, that safeguards the gospel of salvation by the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ.

The Men of the Movement

The main interest of this and following editorials is not at all the names of persons, churches, and seminaries, but the doctrine. Nevertheless, it is both right and necessary that readers of this magazine know who the leading teachers of covenantal universalism are and where this contemporary development of covenant doctrine finds a home.

The chief source of covenantal universalism in conservative Reformed circles is the Presbyterian theologian Norman Shepherd. Shepherd taught systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia for almost twenty years. After seven years of struggle, on account of Shepherd's teaching justification by faith and works, the Board of Westminster Seminary "removed" him from the faculty in 1982. Shepherd then joined the Christian Reformed Church, where he served as a pastor until he retired. Rev. Shepherd continues to influence many in virtually all the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America by his recent book, *The Call of Grace* (P&R, 2000), and by his speeches. A more detailed account of the controversy at Westminster over Shepherd and his teaching is found else-

where in this issue of the *Standard Bearer* in the review article, "The Account of a Fallen Seminary and a 'Falling' Church."

Vocal, public proponents and defenders of the new development of the covenant are found in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and the United Reformed Churches (URC). Shepherd, of course, is a member of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC).

Among those who publicly espouse and teach covenantal universalism, or vigorously defend and promote it, are, in addition to Rev. Shepherd, who has great influence in the PCA and in the OPC, Prof. John Frame of the PCA; Rev. Steve Wilkins, also of the PCA; Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., of the OPC; Rev. John Baruch, of the URC; and the independents, Rev. Douglas Wilson and Rev. Steve Schlissel. Wilson and Schlissel have influence in the URC.

The role that the seminaries play in the spread of covenantal universalism is significant. The teaching of Shepherd and Gaffin has made Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia a fountainhead of the erroneous doctrine throughout reputedly conservative Reformed churches worldwide. There is reason to believe that influential men at other reputedly conservative Reformed seminaries are teaching the new development of covenant theology, or are open to the doctrine. John Frame teaches at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

Ominously, many seminaries remain quiet in the face of one of the gravest threats to the gospel of sovereign grace in the Reformed churches since Dordt. Reformed professors of theology, one of whose main duties according to the Church Order of Dordt is to "vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors" (Art. 18), fail, or refuse, to speak out, loudly and in-

Covenantal universalism deliberately, systematically, and openly denies all the doctrines of sovereign grace.

sistently, against the grievous threat to the people of God.

Every Child United to Christ

Covenantal universalism teaches that every child of believing parents without exception who is baptized, that is, sprinkled with water in the name of the triune God, is united with Jesus Christ. Every child, indeed every person who is baptized, adult as well as infant, is truly, spiritually, and savingly united with Christ. Every one receives the life and blessings that are in Christ. The teachers of covenant universalism are fond of saying that all without exception are branches united to the vine, in the language of John 15, and that the sap of the vine flows into all of them. Some of these baptized children apostatize later on. They are cut off, so that they perish everlastingly. But these were as truly united to Christ as those who abide in Christ and are saved.

In a speech at the 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastors' Conference, John Baruch taught that every one who is baptized is "in Christ." The "efficacy of baptism" results in communion with the triune God for every baptized person. "Every baptized person," said Rev. Baruch, "is in Christ and shares in His life."

Universal grace in the sphere of the covenant!

Belief that every baptized child is in saving union with Christ is one reason why many of these theologians teach and practice "paedo (child)-communion." Speaking at the 2003 Knox Theological Seminary Colloquium on the Federal Vision, Douglas Wilson told the conference of theologians that he recently administered the Lord's Supper to his one and a half-year old grandchild.

Every Child an Elect

Not only is every baptized

child of Christian parents saved, but every one is also an elect of God. The teachers of covenantal universalism do not mean merely that the members of the congregation *view* the children as elect with the "judgment of charity." All the children *are* elect. All are chosen by God unto salvation. All alike are elect in the sense that election has in Ephesians 1:4 and in II Thessalonians 2:13. They may very well lose their election, but for the time being they are elect.

At the Colloquium on the Federal Vision at Knox Seminary in Florida last year, Baruch criticized

those who distinguish election and covenant. He declared that all those in the covenant by baptism are elect. Every baptized child is an elect in the sense of II Thessalonians 2:13. All are united to Christ.

All "really experience His love, but they do not respond with repentance and faith and love." Significantly, at this point Baruch quoted the "Liberated" Reformed theologian Benne Holwerda in support of his doctrine of universal covenantal election.

Rev. Steve Wilkins also spoke at this colloquium. Referring explicitly to Ephesians 1:4 and II Thessalonians 2:13, he affirmed that every one who is baptized is elect. He went on to say that if baptized members of the congregation "later reject the Savior, they are no longer elect—they are cut off from the Elect One and thus lose their elect standing. But their falling away doesn't negate the reality of their standing prior to their apostasy. They were really and truly the elect of God because of their relationship to Christ."

The appeal to II Thessalonians 2:13 in support of the election of all the children shows that the

movement teaches that God loves all the baptized children alike. The text teaches that God has chosen those whom He loves: "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." According to covenantal universalism, God elects all the children unto salvation because He loves all the children, loves all the children with the love of His covenant in Jesus Christ.

Some of these beloved, elect children unfortunately fall away and become hated reprobates, who perish in hell, but all were originally elect.

Covenantal universalism!

The Death of Christ for Every Child

It is the teaching of covenantal universalism that Christ died for every baptized child of godly parents. This is necessarily implied by the teaching that all are savingly united to Christ and by the teaching that God loves and chooses them all. Besides, the very baptism that is supposed to signify, if it does not effect, union with Christ for all without exception is the sign and seal of washing in Jesus' blood, that is, the cross.

The teachers of the new form of covenant theology boldly declare that Christ died for all baptized children, indeed for every baptized member of the covenant community. John Baruch told his audience at the 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastors' Conference that "Jesus died for every baptized member of the congregation, head for head." He denied that this was merely a judgment of charity.

Universal covenantal atonement!

Resistible Grace in a Conditional Covenant

Universal grace does not, however, mean universal salvation. The reason, according to the teachers of covenantal universalism, is that cov-

Ominously, many seminaries remain quiet in the face of one of the gravest threats to the gospel of sovereign grace in the Reformed churches since Dordt.

enant grace is resistible. When the baptized children grow up, they can resist the grace of God in Christ. Resisting grace, they are cut off from Christ. Many do resist the grace of God that began a good work in them, and perish forever.

The grace of the covenant is resistible, because the covenant is conditional. As regards its initial establishment with every baptized child, the covenant is unconditional. At baptism, God brings every child into covenant union with Christ by grace alone. But for its continuance and perfection, the covenant depends upon the acts of the children themselves. These acts are faith and a life of obedience. Faith and obedience are conditions of the covenant. Since the continuance and perfection of the covenant are, in fact, the everlasting salvation of a person, the salvation of every baptized child depends upon the child's works of believing and obeying. By not believing and obeying, a child resists grace.

Here, of course, is the point at which justification by faith and works is introduced into the theology of covenantal universalism. If universal covenant grace depends for its efficacy upon works of the child, the righteousness of the member of the covenant is by faith and works. A conditional covenant implies justification by works. Indeed, in a conditional covenant faith itself is a work of the sinner upon which righteousness and salvation depend.

Justification by faith and works on the basis of a conditional covenant is the heart and soul of Norman Shepherd's *The Call of Grace* (P&R, 2000).

Virtually all forms of the heresy of universal grace necessarily teach that grace is resistible. The only exception is the universalism that holds the final salvation of all men without exception. Covenantal universalism is not an exception. Universal covenant grace is definitely resistible.

The Falling Away of Covenant Saints

It is an important teaching of the men who proclaim covenantal universalism that some who were savingly united to Christ, were elect of God, were justified, and were redeemed by the cross fall away and perish forever. In fact, the teachers of covenantal universalism like to emphasize this alarming feature of their covenant doctrine. They insist that they want to do justice to the notable warnings in Scripture against apostasy, especially Hebrews 6:4-8 and Hebrews 10:29. One can only fall away, they say, if once he was actually, savingly in Christ. Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10, they assert, are real warnings about a real possibility for every member of the church without exception. Rev. Wilkins emphasized this in a speech on "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation" at the colloquium at Knox Seminary.

Those who ultimately prove to be reprobate may be in covenant with God. They may enjoy for a season the blessings of the covenant, including the forgiveness of sins, adoption, possession of the kingdom, sanctification, etc., and yet apostatize and fall short of the grace of God.... *The apostate doesn't forfeit "apparent blessings" that were never his in reality, but real blessings that were his in covenant with God* (emphasis, Wilkins').

Against those who object to their doctrine of the apostasy of many who were once united to Christ, justified, and elect, they charge that we do not do justice to the warnings against falling away. Thus we contribute to the carelessness of life of many in the churches.

On the point of the possibility of the falling away of men and women who once were saved, the teachers of covenantal universalism are bold. They do not hesitate to suggest that Reformed churches must "re-think" the confessional doctrine of the perseverance of saints. What they mean is that per-

severance, as taught in the fifth head of doctrine of the Canons of Dordt, does not hold in the covenant. Covenantal universalism emphatically affirms the falling away of covenant saints.

Covenantal universalism attacks every one of the truths of the gospel of sovereign grace.


Covenantal universalism attacks every one of the truths of sovereign grace *as these truths apply to the covenant*. In the sphere of the covenant, God elects all with a lovable election. In the sphere of the covenant, Christ died for all with a death that fails to redeem many. In the sphere of the covenant, the Spirit regenerates and justifies all with a regeneration and justification that assure the salvation of none. In the sphere of the covenant, many resist grace that has actually begun to save them, and perish.

In the sphere of the covenant, God's grace is not sovereign. In the sphere of the covenant, *God* is not sovereign. The question is, "For covenantal universalism, who is sovereign in the covenant?"

In the sphere of the covenant, all of us must live in the terror, day and night, that we may well fall away from Christ and salvation into perdition. Present union with Christ, present redemption, present justification, and even present assurance of election mean absolutely nothing. All may be lost, for all is conditional.

This is the doctrine that is spreading in virtually all the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches. This is the doctrine that the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches and learned Presbyterian divines cannot condemn. This is the doctrine that the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches are tolerating. This is the doctrine that some of the reputedly Reformed and Presbyterian churches are now sanctioning by official ecclesiastical decision.

— DJE

(to be continued) 

The Account of a Fallen Seminary and a “Falling” Church

The Current Justification Controversy, by O. Palmer Robertson. Unicoi, Tennessee: Trinity Foundation, 2003. 107 pages. \$9.95 (paper). *A Companion to the Current Justification Controversy*, by John W. Robbins. Unicoi, Tennessee: Trinity Foundation, 2003. 185 pages. \$9.95 (paper).

If there could still be such a thing in our doctrinally indifferent and apostate day, O. Palmer Robertson's *The Current Justification Controversy* would be a bombshell in reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America. The well-known and highly regarded Presbyterian theologian reveals the seven years of struggle and political shenanigans at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and in the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church over Prof. Norman Shepherd and his teaching of justification by faith and works. During those seven years, until his dismissal from the seminary in 1982, Shepherd was professor of theology at Westminster Seminary and a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Shepherd denied that the justification of the elect sinner is by faith alone, without any works whatsoever. He denied the truth confessed as the official Reformed faith in Lord's Days 23 and 24 of the

Heidelberg Catechism. He denied the truth that Martin Luther rightly called the “article of a standing or a falling church.” Luther intended by the distinction what Article 29 of the Belgic Confession refers to as the difference between a true church and a false church.

For seven years, some on the faculty of Westminster and among the supporting constituency of the seminary struggled to condemn Shepherd's doctrine and to bring him to account. For seven years, a majority of the faculty and the governing Board defended and protected Shepherd and his doctrine. At crucial junctures of the proceedings, the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was party to the determined effort of prominent, powerful men on the faculty and in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to defend Shepherd and his denial of justification by faith alone at all costs.

In the end, the Board of Westminster cravenly “removed,” or dismissed, Prof. Shepherd. The reason, as the Board was at pains to inform the Westminster community, was not his false doctrine. But Shepherd was causing the seminary too much heat. With the connivance of the Philadelphia Presbytery, Shepherd then fled efforts on the part of some to discipline him by leaving the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for the welcoming arms of the Christian Reformed Church.

The tale of Westminster Seminary's and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's disgrace is told by O. Palmer Robertson. Robertson

was a professor at Westminster during much of the time of the controversy and was intimately involved in the history he records. He names names, gives dates and places, and documents the issue. The issue was Shepherd's heresy of justification by faith and the works of faith.

What a devastating indictment of Westminster Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church! The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is closely associated with Westminster. It was an active participant in the justification of Shepherd and his false doctrine. For seven years, the Seminary and the Church allowed a professor who, by the admission of all, could not make plain that he believed and taught justification by faith alone to continue teaching young men in preparation for the ministry in Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

If a Reformed professor of theology cannot make plain—plain beyond the shadow of a doubt—in *ten minutes* that he believes—believes with all his heart—justification by faith alone, apart from works, and that he hates and rejects, with all his heart, the heresy of justification by faith and works, he must be summarily dismissed for incompetence. No one may teach young men to preach the gospel who is unclear on the heart of the gospel of grace.

But Shepherd clearly rejected justification by faith alone. According to Shepherd

Good works were necessary as the way of justification, and not sim-

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ply as its fruit. Walking in the way of obedience was necessary to maintain justification. The sinner seeking justification might just as well be told to follow Jesus as to believe in Jesus (*Justification Controversy*, p. 30).

Tapes of Prof. Shepherd's classroom lectures revealed that "he explicitly had been teaching in the classroom that justification was 'by works' as well as 'by faith'" (*Justification Controversy*, p. 31). The controversy had arisen because graduates of Westminster were confessing justification by faith and works before their examining presbyteries and were attributing their belief of justification by works to the instruction of Prof. Shepherd.

Denying justification by faith alone, Shepherd was bound to deny all the doctrines of sovereign grace. The faculty and Board of Westminster were well aware of this also. In the course of the controversy

Mr. Shepherd affirmed that a person could lose his justification. He proposed that an individual who was elect according to the election of *Ephesians 1* could become non-elect if he did not continue to walk in covenant faithfulness (*Justification Controversy*, p. 22).

Shepherd was known to teach that "the 'branches to be cut off' in *John 15* first were savingly united to Christ" (*Justification Controversy*, p. 57).

Westminster Seminary approved this man and his doctrine. It declared that his teachings are in harmony with the Westminster Standards. To the end, a majority of the faculty defended him. The Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church gave him a testimony of soundness in doctrine when it transferred him as a minister of the Word to the Christian Reformed Church.

The result has been the spread of the lie of justification by faith

and works throughout virtually all the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America. The many students taught by Shepherd, Shepherd's disciples in virtually all the reputedly conservative Reformed churches in North America, and Shepherd himself as a minister in good standing in the Reformed community are at this hour aggressively promoting the false doctrine that denies the heart of the gospel, the "article of a standing or falling church."

For this, Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as individuals from other churches who defended Shepherd and his doctrine, are responsible before the entire Reformed community of churches. More importantly, Westminster Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are responsible before God. God's judgment already falls heavily on the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The 2003 General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church approved the doctrine of justification by faith and works. It did this by refusing to condemn the doctrine, and advise the discipline of a teacher of the doctrine, in a case brought before it on appeal. The details of this case are contained in the companion volume to the book by Robertson, *A Companion to the Current Justification Controversy* (pp. 53-58). The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is a "falling" church.

The companion volume also contains the important documents of the controversy. These are "Some Reasons for Dissenting from the Majority Report," by Philip E. Hughes (1978); the "Letter of Concern," by forty-five theologians (1981); "Reason and Specifications Supporting the Action of the Board of Trustees in Removing Professor Shepherd" (1982); and "A Resolution to the Eleventh General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America," by O. Palmer Robertson. The last concerns a re-

fusal by the editorial committee of the journal of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri to publish Robertson's account of the Shepherd controversy on the ground that publishing might offend Westminster Seminary.

John Robbins has a long essay in the companion volume on "The Roots and Fruits of the Shepherd Controversy." Robbins calls attention to several causes of Shepherd's deviant doctrine of justification. But Robbins does not see the fundamental cause of Shepherd's error. The fundamental cause is Shepherd's doctrine of a conditional covenant. Shepherd's theology is *covenant* theology. His doctrine of justification arises out of his doctrine of the covenant. And his doctrine of the covenant is a doctrine of universal grace in the sphere of the covenant, dependent for its efficacy upon the faith and obedience of the covenant people. This comes out in O. Palmer Robertson's account of the controversy. Shepherd himself has put this beyond all doubt in his recent *The Call of Grace* (P&R, 2000).

The root of Norman Shepherd's teaching that sinners are justified by faith and works is the heresy of universalism—*covenantal* universalism.

I suspect that the covenant doctrine of Norman Shepherd, out of which comes his denial of justification by faith alone, is the reason why Westminster could not, or would not, condemn Shepherd's heresy. Westminster is committed to this doctrine of the covenant. If the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America, now put to the test regarding their confession of the heart of the gospel—justification by faith alone—and with it all the doctrines of grace, are to maintain the gospel of sovereign grace, they must reexamine and repudiate the doctrine of a conditional covenant that all of them embrace. I doubt that they will. I doubt that they *can*. I pray I am wrong. ❀

The Reformed Churches of South Africa: A Reformed Perspective on the History and Current Struggle in the Dopper Churches of South Africa (2)

Slabbert Le Cornu

3. Was it justified?

Before we try to understand the current crisis as mentioned in the introduction, we need to answer one very important question: was the schism of 1859 justified on biblical, confessional, and church order principles? Without doubt the answer is in the affirmative. To support this answer, I will start with a quotation of Calvin:

If it be inquired, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence among us, and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity, viz., a knowledge,

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(Preceding article: April 1, 2004, p. 300.)

first, of the mode in which God is duly worshiped, and, secondly, of the source from which salvation is to be obtained.¹

For Calvin, according to the Scriptures, how we *worship* God and how we obtain *salvation* are central to the Christian religion. That is why the Reformed confession clearly states:

We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein (the second point made by Calvin — SLC). For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us (the first point made by Calvin — SLC) is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul says. For since it is forbidden to add unto or take away anything from the Word of God, it does thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects....²

Therefore, the true Reformed church worldwide would confess the absolute sovereignty of God in our salvation and worship of Him, obedient to God's Word (Ex. 20:1-6). Just as God is sovereign in election and reprobation, so He is and

must be in our liturgy and services. His Word through the Spirit, and not the 'commandments of men,' must govern our worship of Him. This we also confess in Article 32 of the Belgic Confession: "And therefore we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever," and in the Heidelberg Catechism, "Q 96: What does God require in the second Commandment? A 96: That we in no way make any image of God (Deut. 4:15-19; Isa. 40:18, 25; Rom. 1:22-24; Acts 17:29), nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded us in His Word (I Sam. 15:23; Deut. 4:23-24; 12:30-32; Matt. 15:9; John 4:24)."

The reason for emphasizing our worship of God is that most Reformed churches today have forgotten about this most important issue of our Reformed faith. They suggest that it is only about salvation by grace through faith alone, although Calvin, following Scripture, says that *both* matter.³ If God is not confessed as sovereign in His covenant of grace, then He will not be sovereign in His law of worship. Jesus Christ came to save us from our sin of idolatry and false worship, to worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24), according to "all things that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19).

This was, consciously or unconsciously, exactly what was at stake for the Dopper reformers in 1859. In the deformed churches of the Cape, and later in the Free State and Transvaal, the doctrines of sovereign predestination, sovereign grace and election, and God's sovereign right to be worshiped as He commanded (and not according to the emotionalism of methodism) were under severe attack. Both central doctrines, salvation and worship, were attacked most heavily with the introduction of hymns. The second professor of the GKSA theological school, Prof. Jan-Lion Cachet, explained the central importance of church singing as follows: "What we sing, we believe ... and if false doctrine is found in the church song, then it will inevitably lead to the false doctrine spreading in the congregation."⁴

This last point is very important in understanding the current crisis in the GKSA. We will return to this issue.

4. Why, though, did the Doppers reject the hymns?

This is a very important question, because later church historians tend to differ on this matter. Some historians simply answer that the problems were not with the hymns as such, but only with the content of some hymns and the way they were introduced and, in fact, forced onto the churches (binding of consciences). Thus, they wanted to reduce or simplify the church schism to a doctrinal issue only, or to a church government matter, and not to a worship issue as such. In fact it was a matter of all three issues that were at stake. Dr. GCP van der Vyver writes:

It is clear: they (the Doppers — SLC) were convinced that the Hymns carry a false Gospel.⁵ ... The Synod (NG Church of 1847 — SLC) distinguishes between two sorts of complaints, i.e., those of

the concerned members who refused to sing the Hymns, which points towards a complaint against the Hymns *as such*, and secondly, ... those who have a problem with one or other of the Hymns, which points to doctrinal complaints against certain Hymns.⁶

Van der Vyver summarizes the Doppers' complaints, which were based on their understanding of verses like Deuteronomy 4:2; Matthew 15:9; and Revelation 22:19, as follows:

The introduction of Hymns placed them on an equal standing with the inspired Word of God. Referring to article 7 of the Belgic Confession, they accepted the Word of God as perfect and sufficient, to which nothing should be added. They regarded the acceptance of the Hymns along with the Psalms in the worship services, as such an addition.⁷

It is thus clear that the Doppers supported the *sola scriptura* principle of worship (also called the 'regulative principle of worship,' or 'the second commandment' principle of worship), following in the Reformed tradition of Calvin, Knox, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Confession, the Dordt fathers, and so on.

Even after the NH Church decided not to make the singing of hymns binding on the churches, the GKSA did not return to this state church, nor to the NG Church, because they believed:

That our differences were not obstinacy, but for the sake of conscience, not to build on human decrees, but on God's Word and the example of the well-tested Reformed Church of the old days; and that we wish also to serve God according to His Word without hindrance in this country, even if we are in the minority.⁸

A Reformed pastor of the GKSA, the Rev. LS Kruger, also posed the question in his well-

known book on the GKSA, "Why are you a member of the Reformed Church?" He stated that if we add anything to the singing of the Psalms, we accuse God's Word of being insufficient, and therefore we actually reject the teaching of Article 7 of the Belgic Confession.⁹

But the hymns were also used to sing heresies into the church. Many of the hymns were liberal, Arminian, and Romish in spirit. The reality is that when one tends to be weak in doctrine, this will eventually lead to false worship. The NG and NH churches in the nineteenth century rejected, in one way or another, the Canons of Dordt, which deal expressly with God's sovereignty in salvation, by election and reprobation:

No wonder (then) that the doctrine of universal atonement, which underlies many of the Hymns, was not detected and opposed. In line with this, the doctrine of election was openly rejected from some pews in the Cape church and suppressed in many others.¹⁰

1. *Tracts relating to the Reformation by John Calvin*, translated by Henry Beveridge, vol.I (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), p. 116.

2. Belgic Confession, Article 7.

3. See his *commentary* on Lev. 10:1; 22:32; Num. 15:39; Deut. 4:1; 12:32; 2 Sam. 6:6-12; Is. 29:14; Jer. 7:21-24; 7:31; 19:4, 5; 26:2; Matt. 15:1, 9; Kol. 2:22, 23. See his *Institutes*: I.XII.1; I.XII.3; II.VII.5; II.VIII.17; IV.X.1, 8-11, 16-18, 23, 24, 26.

4. G.C.P. van der Vyver, *ibid.*, p. 203.

5. Which they also rejected with an appeal to Gal. 1:9.

6. G.C.P. van der Vyver, *ibid.*, p. 206.

7. G.C.P. van der Vyver, *ibid.*, p. 204, 205.

8. G.C.P. van der Vyver, *ibid.*, p. 335.

9. L.S. Kruger, *ibid.*, p. 143.

10. G.C.P. van der Vyver, *ibid.*, p. 284.

Here I would briefly like to mention a conversation in those days between Gert Steenekamp, a Dopper Calvinist, and the Rev. Taylor, a liberal pastor, which the former narrates as follows:

I talked to him about Election. He said to me you can work out your salvation yourself according to Phil. 2:12, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Yes, I answered him, but what do you make of the next verse: "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." The answer which I received to this, was: "That is why I cannot work with you Doppers!"¹¹

Amongst the Doppers, there was a great thirst for Calvinistic preaching. What did they mean by this? It meant that they wanted preaching according to the doctrines of "election and reprobation."¹²

It was also the time of the well-known preacher and teacher the Rev. Andrew Murray, whose books are still in print today and sold worldwide. Unfortunately he was not a consistent Calvinist, as many thought he was. Murray felt that the Canons of Dordt were documented in such a way as to leave them open to interpretation for those who "preached openly that Christ had died for everyone, and that God wants and sincerely desires the salvation of all (people)."¹³

Dr. van der Vyver replies to Murray's heresy in the following most important excerpt:

That the calling should, and must go out to all nations, is correct, but the grace in Christ is only established in the hearts of "the elect." Murray has, with these words, made himself guilty of grave heresy under the banner of the Canons of Dordt. (H.D.A.) Du Toit comes to the conclusion that the Scottish preachers did accept predestination, but that they held it back on the pulpits, yet still

claiming that they were "Calvinists." To allege that someone is a "Calvinist," however, and to suppress the election on the pulpit, is a *contradictio in terminis*,¹⁴ and not in line with Calvin, who called predestination the *cor ecclesia*.¹⁵ Suppressing simply means forsaking, and in its deepest essence is the disregarding of the Reformed confession. Liberalism did not only show itself in the sermons of the outspoken liberals in the Cape Church, but also in the way that the confessions in the sermons of so-called orthodox preachers, were disregarded and rejected.¹⁶


Today we could say there are many evangelical Calvinists who disregard the *cor ecclesia* and the Reformed confessions by not preaching on Romans 9. This brings us to the twentieth century, up to today, the year 2004 of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, in the twentieth century, especially after the Second World War, the GKSA itself became more worldly and materialistic. This could be because of a lack of the biblical antithesis (Gen. 3:15; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1), and also because of a too close relationship between church and state from 1948, when the Afrikaners became the governors of South Africa, implementing in the next few years the much-hated policy of *apartheid* (separation).¹⁷ Like the Israelites of old, the Afrikaner Calvinists also wanted to become more like the world, especially in academics and theology (1 Sam. 8). This, among other reasons, such as the change of government in 1994 to an anti-Christian ANC government that does not favor "Christian Higher Education," finally led to the demise of the only Christian university in South Africa. The PU for CHE officially died in 2003, and was "buried" on 31 December 2003. The name of the new university, in its place, is the Northwest University, operating since 1 January 2004. In

my estimation, the main reason for this was not political, but religious, namely covenant disobedience. For many decades there have been faithful Reformed believers from all of the Afrikaans churches, who have fought and struggled for the survival of Christian private schools, where covenantal education in obedience to the *Form of Baptism* could be offered.

In the history of the Afrikaner people, however, it has been a tiny minority — like today — that takes this command seriously. Even today, when the state schools are forbidden from teaching only and exclusively the Christian faith, most parents belonging to the Afrikaans Reformed churches still send their children to such humanistic religious schools. This has been the sad story of the twentieth century, and it seems not to be changing, no matter how much deformation there is in the state schools. An even more sad case is that many of the private Reformed schools use the humanistic framework of the "Outcome Based Education" and then only "baptize" it with a Christian "*sousie*," proclaiming to the world that they are busy with consistent antithetical "Reformed education." For a growing group of Reformed Dopper parents, Reformed home schooling seems to be the best solution available today. Reformed home schooling brings the family into contact with each other again, and also with like-minded Reformed home schoolers, so that the heartfelt calling to obey the *Form of Baptism* in the education of the covenant children can be followed. These Reformed people also obey the calling to receive the blessing of covenant children, praying to God for a great prosperity.¹⁸ In this sense, they are true to the heritage of the original Doppers, who as families and as church members gathered, worked, and lived around God's Word and the confessions antithetically in the

new age, in the postmodern anti-Christian South Africa. This can only be done by God's grace.

... to be concluded 

11. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 285. See especially footnote 528.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

14. *A contradiction in terms.*

15. *The heart of the church.*

16. G.C.P. van der Vyver, *ibid.*, p. 286.

17. I am not going to go into the whole issue of apartheid, but can only recommend readers to the biblical-critical articles and studies of Dr. Mark

R. Kreitzer on South Africa. Some of it can be found at the Contra Mundum website: www.contramundum.com

18. Concerning 'calling,' Totius has written this excellent comment in one of his articles: "The Remonstrant has a choice, the Reformed has a calling!"

A Little Bit of History

It is with great joy and thankfulness that we introduce ourselves as the "Wingham Protestant Reformed Church," the newest church in the Protestant Reformed denomination. We have read much in the 75th Anniversary Yearbook about who you are. Here is a little history of who we are.

The Wingham Orthodox Christian Reformed Church was first established in Listowel in 1979. It was called Listowel OCRC. The first pastor was Reverend Harry Vandyken. This church was organized by families who left the CRC for doctrinal reasons. This Listowel church was the first church in the OCRC. Soon other congregations formed: Grand Valley, MI; Toronto, ON; and Burlington, WA.

Representatives of these churches began meeting in 1981 to discuss church order and federation. The OCRC was formally organized in March 1988 with seven congregations. The denomination is now ten congregations, divided into Classis East and Classis West.

Our second minister was Rev. Bronsveld, who was ordained under Article 8 not long after the Listowel Church was organized.

The Listowel OCRC had a humble beginning and also some trying times. At one point the membership was down to four

families. It was at this low point in their existence (1985) that the pressure was on the consistory to close its doors. Just when the church was ready to disband, four families from a local CRC took interest in this church. They worshiped with the saints in Listowel, visited with the consistory, and came to the conviction that the biblical, Reformed preaching of this church was the very teaching they were missing in the CRC. When we consider the preaching of Rev. Bronsveld, we can understand why PRC views are so familiar to us. We heard from him that: marriage after divorce is accursed of God; belonging to unions is not biblical; and God's grace is particular, not common.

In 1988, with eight families, the church bought an old mechanical shop in Wingham. With much volunteer work, the congregation transformed it into our current building. We have since added a lunch room/nursery. Between services we have lunch together. Our services are at 10:30 and 1:00 because some members have a lengthy drive. The time between services is for us a wonderful opportunity for fellowship.

After fifteen years of faithfully bringing forth the Word of God (all of them in Wingham/Listowel) Rev. Bronsveld retired. Being without a pastor was new to our church, and finding a new pastor was more difficult than first

thought. A candidate from the Free Reformed Church, Mr. Alfonso d'Amore, came to be stated supply for us for two years. We extended a call to him, which he declined. He has never entered the ministry full-time.

Rev. Garry Vanderveen was our next minister. He was a member of the OCRC in his youth and graduated from Greenville Seminary. He was pulpit supply for us for two years, was ordained, and served as our minister for a year and a half. He accepted a call to serve the Langley Reformed Evangelical Church. Rev. Mark Zylstra (URC) was our pulpit supply for about four months.

The next man to preach for us was Mr. Don VanderKlok. He is from Grand Rapids, and has done much in the way of preaching. He is a member of the HNRC. Upon retirement, Mr. VanderKlok began attending seminary class, classes in the HNRC seminary, and some in the PRC seminary. Although the PRC name had come up during the history of the Wingham OCRC, we didn't know much about the federation. As Mr. VanderKlok got to know us, he came to understand that the doctrinal standard and the biblical standards we held were much the same as the PRC. Soon our church foyer had a new tract rack filled with PRC and HNRC materials. For approximately four years, the Lord gave traveling mercies to Mr. Vander Klok as he un-

Harv Kikkert

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selfishly drove five hours each Friday and Sunday so that he could teach catechism and preach for us.

It was exciting for us, as we could see the Lord leading us to a denomination where we could be united with an entire federation — that is, all churches believing the same truths. This is something we were missing in the OCRC. As we came under PRC preaching and had much interaction with their Contact Committee, it was amazing to see your oneness in faith. The messages of the ministers and professors and the guidance of the members of the Contact Committee were always consistent, never contradictory, always Reformed, and always in complete harmony with the Reformed creeds. This clearly showed us some of the blessings that abound because you have your own seminary. The seminary and the professors are truly a blessing for the churches. Let us never take this for granted. Remember always to keep in our prayers those who are teaching, who are being taught, who have been taught, and for those in authority over the seminary. It is the

preaching of the gospel that is the chief means of grace.


The difficult part in our history is the loss of members. From the beginning of our walk towards the PRC till now, we have lost four families. This is hard for a small congregation, but we find comfort in knowing that the Lord has purposes for all things.

At this time, we are a congregation of 13 families. There are 27 communicant members, 55 souls, 23 children under 11, 7 between 16-22.

Our regular congregational activities include: Bible study every

other Thursday, Young People's every Tuesday, ladies' monthly nursing home program, three catechism classes on Friday night, and pre-confession class Saturday night.

We thank our heavenly Father for holding this congregation together, for sinful man has tried to pull it apart many times. We praise God for leading us to a federation of churches that God has kept strong and faithful through many trials of their own.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. 



Wintham congregation

Grace Life

Rev. Mitchell Dick

The Passion of the Christ: Are We There?

Hoopla over the movie *The Passion of the Christ* will, by the time this article is published, have simmered somewhat. Evangelical faddists will have begun testing the market for another new thing (a Disney version of the Chronicles of Narnia, anyone?). Conservatives will have gone back to the Bible for sermon

material. Writers, if you will believe me, will still be finding *The Passion* grist for their mills.

At this same time most churches are, in their worship services, in their concerts, and in their devotions, reflecting upon the real passion of the Christ. We think of it always. But it is that time of year according to the church calendar when we focus on the last week of our Lord on earth, His suffering, death, and resurrection. And that is good. By seasonal re-

flection on the very historical events of our Savior's life and death, we are led to ponder anew the Wonder of Eternity intersecting Time, Truth among us, the significance of soul *and* body, resurrection, and such like.

So there you have them: *The Passion of the Christ*, the new movie; and the passion of the Christ, the thing the Church of Christ has always thought and also now thinks is God's own old inimitable drama. Good time for Grace Life to con-

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sider, methinks, a couple of questions. First, *Were you there?* Second, *Are you there?* At *The Passion of the Christ*, that is. At the passion of the Christ, that is.

Were you there?

The hymn asks the question: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" It is a beautiful line. It takes us right to Jesus' suffering for our sins. It sings us to Calvary. It tells us to tremble, to tremble, and to tremble. And we do. For we *were* there! Jesus Savior died. And we were there, with Jew and Roman, a whole world of us spitting good riddance! Crucify him! Crucify him! That was our devil chant....

And so we know the meaning of it all. Jesus died for us while we were yet in our sins. Christ Jesus died for the ungodly. The Christ Jesus died for the Christ crucifiers. God in the death of His Son revealed righteousness meeting grace, in grand and bloody embrace, and so was the beginning of the gospel of God. God in Jesus, God through that Jesus the Christ, *with us sinners!* Of His divine fullness and His crucified emptiness have all we received, and wave after wave after wave...of grace.

Were you there, Grace Life reader? Does the song take you there? Does your faith take you there? Does the Word of God take you there? Do you tremble, and tremble, and tremble?

Show me a young man or woman who has begun to tremble about Christ's passion, and I will show you one who has begun, as the very spring, to blossom in the true religion, to stand up for Jesus, to confess Jesus, to bow down before Jesus, to follow hard after Jesus...to tremble, and also to rejoice, at the very mention of His Name.

We will then be showing each other, of course, a person who trembles even to think about seeing the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*.

He truly trembles about that *Passion*.

Not because he is afraid that if he does see the movie God might (!) see and he might be struck by lightning (as was the actor who portrayed Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ*). Not first of all because she does not like the prospect of Christ's vigilant Elders knocking at her door.

The movie is sin. *The Passion of the Christ* is Gibson's folly and the blasphemy of man. Being entertained by it, or even seeking to be inspired by it, is the viewer's folly, blasphemy, and ignorance.

That is why a Grace Life, true passion-of-Christ-life believer trembles about this new movie. The believer loves the real passion, the real and atoning suffering of his Lord Jesus. He is reconciled to God by that suffering. He is favored and forgiven by that suffering, and that, even though he was there crucifying when they crucified his Lord! But the movie, *The Passion*, is the lie about the passion of his Jesus. For our Jesus is our God. And when He comes in human flesh He is ever God, and without sin. And when He is crucified He bears the wrath of God, and goes to hell for our sake. And love, not nails, held Him to the cross.... All these things may not and cannot be portrayed by a man and a sinner. God is the *above* God, dear reader! Even when, and *especially when!* He shows Himself to be the *God who is with us* God, in human flesh even, no one dare impersonate Him and His work (read the 2nd commandment in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5; Deuteronomy 4: 14-20; Isaiah 40:18-26; Romans 1: 23-25; Acts 17: 22-29)!

Bothers the believer, does this *Passion*, precisely because of this. It is not because *The Passion* is an inaccurate rendition of the gospels, which it is. It is not that *The Passion* is one Roman Catholic's attempt to foist Roman Catholicism upon the world, which it is. What troubles and trembles most is this bold Hollywood assault on and infinitely cheap R-rated imitation of

the sacredness of the Person of the *Son of God*, and the *Passion of the Son of God!*

Are you there?

Whatever biblical arguments one can adduce against *Passion* it is not to be denied that for many there is a great urge to see it. Not sure why. Maybe it is this perceived need for some sort of *experience* to ground and to revitalize religion. Probably many go because so many are going (I think lemmings say that too). Definitely many are just doing as their evangelical bosses say, and going because their church just bought a block of tickets.

Whether or not you have seen *The Passion*, the movie, you may, and I may, "kind of be there" *in spirit*. Christ's true passion may not mean as much as it ought to us. It is all and just doctrine to us, but really, not even that, for we do not appreciate the doctrine. It is history to us, but not really even that, for we do not live, in our time, and on our Friday nights, as if there were incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection, and Pentecost in the fullness of the time. It is nothing to us. And we pass by. From Sunday to Sunday, from lifeless prayer to lifeless prayer, we pass by the cross, are acquainted with it somewhat, and still may have good religious form. But the passion, Christ's passion, is not our world, nor our love, and certainly not our passion. The other world, the world "not of the Father" has taken over. At first we liked it, pitched our tent toward it, and now we love it, and are in it up to our pillars. We butcher the popular song, singing instead: "you can have this whole Jesus...give me the world!"

Do you tremble *now*? And is your trembling, dear reader, the sobbing...of shame?

To those who may be reading who want it another way, I write. To those who are tired of wavering between the worldly *Passion* life,

and the godly life loving Christ's passion, listen closely. To those who were there when they crucified the Lord, and know it, and who want at any cost in their heart of hearts to show their love for Jesus, and to appreciate His passion, yet who sense the need to revitalize their love for their Lord, and who may even be tempted, as have many, to view *The Passion* as a help to their religion, and a tool for evangelism...there is another way.

The other way is the Word of God's way of knowing and appreciating the passion of our Savior. What way is that? Why it is the *preaching* of that passion! We learn from the book of Romans (10:14,15) that the preaching of the gospel by the very ambassadors of Jesus called and sent out by God through the Church, is Christ Himself speaking to His Church, and is salvation to the people of God.

Indeed, God has appointed preaching so that now, 2000 years after the fact, His people can know and be impassioned about His Son, the cross, and the peace of God. For through this preaching God works an amazing thing. It is called faith. Indeed—an amazing gift! For faith is the gift of God whereby our eyes are lifted up to heaven, and directed to the Word of Holy Writ to see and understand what the natural man and mind cannot perceive. It is the power of God that takes us *back* 2000 years, when all we could think about was sins and hurts of youth. It is the spiritual telescope whereby we are enabled to see *beyond* another lonely and mateless next week to the new heavens and earth and the kingdom coming. It is the graft of God joining us *now* to Jesus when all we thought was with us were demons....

All attempts to see and believe Jesus through James Jesus Caviezel (the actor), or to have the religious fires fanned there at the theatre, are in vain at best, for unholy fire usually, for unholy alliances always. The many calls of leading evangelicals to see *Passion* betray a shocking mistrust of the sufficiency

of preaching, and will convey the damnable distortion that it is the more blessed thing to see and touch and to have moving (and movie!) experiences of Christ than to believe (John 20:29).

Preaching! Preaching, and precisely not reenactment, is for the faith of the Church, and for her daily and annual celebrations of the Christ's passion. Preaching is the spark and the fire of *holy* passion for Jesus. Preaching is what the Lord Jesus Himself did always and then first thing *after* His passion, death, and resurrection. You remember? Remember one time, when there were two confused souls traveling away from Jerusalem to Emmaus? Jesus had died just a few days before. The Hope of salvation, they thought, lay buried. Then Jesus came to them preaching. When they are given to recognize Him, and after He had disappeared, they remember *how their hearts burned within* while He talked with them by the way and while He opened to them the scriptures (Luke 24:32). Preaching by Jesus — *not even the sight of Jesus* (for they did not recognize Him!) was the important thing. Taking people to the scriptures, and not to the theatre — that was how our Lord fanned the flame of holy devotion to His Person and Passion. Preaching — that is how Jesus Himself instructed and saved His people to believe *passionately* His passion! Preaching — now given to us by God so that the light from heaven is known, and sinners saved, built up, and set all aglow with holy zeal and love for God, principles, and persons.

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Now showing...*The Preaching of the Passion of the Christ!*

At your local, but true, church, where through faithful declaration of Truth, there is Christ, evidently set forth, crucified, in the congregation of believers and their seed (Gal. 3:1).

In the virtuous and honored bride of Christ, God blessed for

ever! (Ps. 45) where the virtues and glories of Christ Himself are displayed.

In the virtuously busy body (I Cor. 12; Gal. 6:10), whose hands and feet never cease doing good to the household of faith, and in all the world for praise to God.

By the righteous believers willing to suffer and even die for Christ's sake (Acts 7).

Among holy saints who know the difference between the cross of our Lord, and the cultivation of true piety and virtue, and the cross of an apostate church and the culture of this world (Acts 17; 2 Cor. 6:14, 15).

Among the happy saints who know, in living and in dying, and by the very faith worked by preaching, their belonging to Jesus, and that this is their only comfort in life and in death (Lord's Day 1).

Go see that Preaching and that Preaching's Passion, and that Preaching and that Passion's fruit! Be part of it! And bring your friends. Start young pursuing it. And grow old enjoying it. No need for tickets, as if attending a cheap thing. For there is wine and milk and a Jesus without money and without price.

Just grace. Just faith. And Jesus above all.

Were you there? Are you there? At the passion of the Christ, that is.


Then see you in Church! See you in the home. See you in the universities. See you on the street. See you working. See you playing. See *you*, the body of Christ, the passion of the Christ. See you at the cross, and at the empty tomb. See you forgiven and forgiving, graced and gracious....

Trembling. Trembling. Trembling....

That's life, isn't it?

Yes!

Grace Life. Trembling. But faith trembling. There where is the blessed communion with the living God. And righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost....

Are you there? 

The Marrow Men (3)

Introduction

Although the Auchterarder Creed was the immediate occasion for the Marrow Controversy, the controversy itself involved the publication of Edward Fisher's book, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. While the book had been published almost eighty years before the controversy, it had passed into oblivion until it was reprinted by James Hog, one of the Marrow Men.

When the book was officially treated by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, it had been condemned for various errors that were contained in it. One error, however, is of particular interest to us. It is the error of the extent of the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The book was condemned for teaching that Christ's death was for all men.

The Marrow Controversy stirred around that point.

And yet, the controversy was not so much about the extent of the atonement of Christ as it was about the nature of preaching. A vast and crucial difference in the idea of preaching separated the Marrow Men from the rest of the church.

Christ's Death and Preaching

It may not be immediately evident that the extent of Christ's atonement and the preaching of the gospel are related to each other so closely, but a moment's reflection will prove that this is indeed the case. The preaching of the gospel

is the preaching of Christ crucified. Is Christ crucified, as an atoning sacrifice, for all men, or only for the elect? The answer to that question will determine the character of the preaching.

The Marrow Men considered the preaching that was generally practiced in the church of which they were a part to be sterile, cold, distant, and conducive to a careless and profane manner of life among those to whom the preaching was addressed. The Marrow Men wanted the preaching to be addressed to the evils of external religion, carnal security among those who were at ease in Zion, and a spirit of smug self-satisfaction among the people who were content with the observance of outward ceremonies and requirements of the church. The Marrow Men were concerned about a perceived Antinomianism in the church.

In other words, they wanted the preaching to address people on a more personal and experiential level. To accomplish that end, they wanted preaching to press upon people the urgent demands of the gospel to seek one's salvation in Christ alone, to believe in Him as Savior, and to flee to Him for refuge from sin.

All of this sounds good, of course. And, as such, it is true that there is a need for this emphasis in the preaching of the gospel. The Marrow Men, however, firmly believed that this could not be done without making the gospel an expression of God's love for all who hear and of God's desire to save all. It was not called that in those days, but what the Marrow Men wanted was a general well-meant offer of the gospel.

In order to accomplish the purpose in preaching that these men strove for, they talked a lot about the "warrant" to believe. They distinguished between having Christ in possession and having Christ in warrant. This is a rather strange way of putting things, but it was language commonly in use in the first part of the eighteenth century in Scotland.

The idea was that while all those to whom the gospel came did not have Christ in actual fact, they possessed the warrant to have Christ, and therefore the warrant to believe. The best way to explain their use of the word "warrant" is to substitute the word "right": all who heard the gospel have the right to believe. They have this right to believe because God has expressed in the gospel that nothing can possibly stand in the way of their salvation. Those who hear the gospel have no excuse for not believing what the gospel proclaims.

But this means, of course, that when the gospel proclaims that Christ died for sinners, those who hear have the right to say, Christ died for me; I have a right to believe that Christ died for me. It means, in fact, that when, more specifically, the gospel says that Christ died for His people, the individual hearer has the right to say, "I am one of God's people, if I believe."

Now it ought to be clear that the minister in his preaching must make this as strong as possible to his hearers. First of all, if the minister is to press home this "warrant" to believe, he must make clear that the promises of the gospel are *objectively* for everyone. If

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I may introduce an aside at this point, this is amazingly like what was preached fifty years ago from the pulpit of First Protestant Reformed Church and became the occasion for the schism in the denomination. The statement made was, "God promises to everyone [who hears the gospel] that if he believes he will be saved." But that is an aside.

In the second place, the minister could press home the "warrant" to believe by stating emphatically that the God who promises Christ to all who hear, even objectively, can do so only because, objectively, He loves all and desires their salvation. The minister can say to everyone who hears: "God gives you the right to believe because He loves you and wants your salvation."

Third, as far as the hearer is concerned, when persuaded that he has a right (warrant) to believe, he has also the promise of God along with the assurance of God's love for him and God's desire to save him.

Fourth, the only reason why a man with this warrant to believe is not saved is because he does not believe. Everything hinges on his faith. To have Christ in possession rests on faith. He has Christ in warrant, but in possession only at such a time that he "closes with Christ."

Finally, this view of preaching opened the door to the minister's use of earnest pleadings and passionate urging to the sinner to close with Christ, that is, accept Him by faith, because he had the warrant to believe, and all that prevented him from being saved was his own sinful and stubborn heart.

Thus faith itself is not included in this warrant proclaimed in the preaching, and it is not included in God's promise of Christ. Hence, it is man's work. That is Arminian and Amyraldian.

The Extent of the Atonement of Christ

It is quite obvious that the twelve Marrow Men, among whom

were Thomas Boston, James Hog, and Ebenezer Erskine, who opposed the decisions of the General Assembly that condemned Edward Fisher's book, and who did so because of their view of preaching, also had to say something about the extent of the atonement of Christ. What they really wanted was a general and well-meant gospel offer. The Assembly had condemned such an offer, and the Marrow Men insisted that by this condemnation the Assembly had made the preaching of the gospel to all men impossible. That is, more specifically, the Assembly had made it impossible to fulfill the divine commission to preach salvation in Jesus Christ to all men without distinction.

But such a view of the Marrow Men required that they say something about the extent of the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Marrow Men denied that they taught a universal salvation, but their denials rang false. These men distinguished between a giving of Christ in possession and a gift of Christ as warranted men to receive Him. Where did this warrant come from? It had to come from the atoning sacrifice that Christ completed on Calvary.

The Marrow Men solemnly denied that they taught a universal atonement. However, they approved of Fisher's book *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, which taught that (and again we have a very strange distinction) while Christ did not die for all, He is dead for all. They solemnly assured the Assembly that they considered it heretical to teach that Christ's atoning sacrifice was for all men; but they approved of the expression that Christ is dead for all men.

The distinction is impossible to understand, and can only be interpreted as a rather subtle way to introduce into the teachings of the church a universal atonement of our Lord. It was intended to teach, I think, that while Christ did not in fact die to save all men, never-

theless, His death has universal significance and benefit. But it made the atonement universal, and that is not surprising. If everyone who hears the preaching has a "warrant" from God to believe in Christ, that "warrant" must have a juridical basis. That is, if I promise ten men a thousand dollars each if they will come to my house, I had better have ten thousand dollars available to me, or my "warrant" is a lie. If God gives everyone who hears the gospel a "warrant" to be saved if they believe in Christ, that salvation must be available. If it is not, the promise of God is false.

Thus the atonement of Christ was for all in an important and significant way.

Wrong Interpretations of the Marrow Controversy

There have been other interpretations of the Marrow Controversy. Some have maintained that the Marrow Men were concerned with various evils that were present in the church. Among these evils was a conditional grace. This was closely tied with the charge of hyper-Calvinism. Christ, so it was said, was being separated from His benefits in the preaching. The church could not offer the benefits of Christ to all because they were only for the elect, and the church had to know who were the elect before these benefits could be offered them. But those who were elect could be known as elect only by the manifestation of election in their lives. Thus Christ's benefits hinged on this manifestation of election in a holy and sanctified life. The conclusion is, so the argument went, that the offer of the gospel was made conditional. One receives salvation only if he is elect, i.e., if he manifests election in his life and if he is assured of his election. Hence all the salvation was made conditional on the works of sanctification that prove election.

The Marrow Men claimed to preach an unconditional salvation, according to this interpretation.

They taught that God, moved by love to all, made a deed of gift and grant to all, that whoever believed might have eternal life. This, so it was said, was the offer. This was not Arminian or Amyraldian, it was claimed, but a gospel of free grace, offered freely to all, a grace that was not conditional. The defenders of the offer were, therefore, to be considered the orthodox, while the General Assembly was given over to a conditional salvation.

This interpretation, found among the defenders of the well-meant gospel offer, is an attempt to turn the tables by charging those who repudiate the offer as teaching conditions, while those who


maintain the offer are the ones holding to sovereign and free grace.

This interpretation is, however, false.

The General Assembly never taught a conditional salvation. The Assembly did maintain that the promises of the gospel were only for the elect — that is true. But it did believe that the gospel had to be publicly and indiscriminately proclaimed along with the command to repent and believe in Christ. And this, as we know, is the teaching of the Canons.

The Marrow Men taught a conditional salvation, and all attempts to turn the tables is a failure. The

Marrow Men taught that everyone has a warrant of God that Christ is for him. This warrant from God is based on the cross, in which Christ became dead for everyone. Why are not all then saved? All are not saved because the condition for having Christ in possession is faith in Him, and all do not fulfill the condition. That is conditional salvation, pure and simple, which makes salvation dependent on the will of men and not on the sovereign grace of God.

The issues brought up in the Marrow Controversy are still pertinent issues today, and the errors of the Marrow Men are still destroying the preaching of the gospel today. 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

The Beginning of our Glorification

“And whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30b). The final step in the order of salvation is glorification, the crowning work of God in the salvation of His people. Thus we read of our glorification in the Canons of Dordt, I, 7: “This elect number...God has decreed to give to Christ to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit; to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His Son, finally to glorify them for the demonstration of His mercy, and for the praise of the riches of His glorious grace.”

The reference to glorification in Romans 8:30, however, must be understood to include both sanctification and preservation. In glorification, God brings to completion the

work of salvation that He began in the regeneration of His people.

The true glory of God’s people is their holiness. As those who have been given to see Christ with the eyes of faith, “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (II Cor. 3:18). And so we are delivered from glory to glory, the final perfection of that work being our entry into that state of perfection, heavenly glory.

While a discussion of our final glorification, therefore, really belongs to the doctrine of the last things, the fact that we enjoy the beginning of our glorification even now makes it necessary to say a few things about this truth as we conclude our consideration of the doctrine of salvation.

Quickened Together with Christ

It is a profound truth of the gospel that we are quickened to-

gether with Christ. God has “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6).

The truth of our glorification emphasizes our union with our exalted and glorified Savior. One of the most beautiful expressions in the Bible, and one of the most significant, is the little expression “in Christ.”

What blessedness when we begin to fathom the glory of our union with Christ! God has quickened us *together with Christ*, and has raised us up *together*, and made us sit *together* in heavenly places *in Christ Jesus*. It is in that union that we enjoy the beginning of eternal glory even now.

Because Christ is the Head of the body, His church, one cannot be a member of that glorious body without being together with Christ, *one* with Him. That union is a spiritual union. It doesn’t come by our own doing. We do not attach ourselves to the Head. God establishes

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that union. He does so by quickening us together with Christ. That happens instantaneously, in the moment of regeneration. But that wonder work of God's grace by the operation of the Holy Spirit affects my whole being. It affects my heart; it affects my mind; it affects my will. That is why the apostle says in II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Ours is the resurrection life! Ours is the life of attachment to the glorified Lord Christ! God has given us an amazing position, an exalted position, in Christ Jesus. That is our glorification.

An Accomplished Fact — in Principle

When we consider what the Bible teaches about our glorified state, we must recognize the truth that this is an accomplished fact.

Just as Christ has risen from the dead, so God has raised us up together with Him.

This emphasizes the truth that we are no longer dead in sin. We are no longer in that state.

But what does that mean in actual practice?

Well, for one thing, the fact that God has raised us up together with Christ means that we are *no longer under God's condemnation*. The last part of Romans 4 and the first part of Romans 5 sheds light upon this very truth. Paul closes Romans 4 by pointing to Christ, "Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." Because Christ had accomplished His work, and because on God's part Christ's death fully satisfied His justice, He was raised again. And so the apostle goes on in the very next verse, the first verse of chapter 5, to draw out the logical conclusion: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We are raised from the dead as those justified, and therefore there is no condemnation any

longer. That is the glory of our life *in Christ*.

It means, secondly, that we are *dead to the law*. To use the biblical expression, we are not under the law, but under grace. We seek the law, longing to live in the way of God's commandments. But we do so in love. Being in Christ, and having been raised together with Him, we have been established in a new relationship, a relationship of love to God. We now find our freedom in the life of obedience.

Thirdly, because we are risen with Christ, and glorified with Him, we are also *dead to sin*. The apostle, pointing to the truth that we have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, and have been raised with Him unto newness of life, says in Romans 6:11, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." That doesn't mean that we no longer sin. In the folly of our old man, we might still yield to temptation and follow the desires of our sinful flesh. But the truth of being raised together with Christ means that we are no longer slaves to sin. We have died with Christ; we have risen with Him. We are no longer held by the prison walls of sin and death.

That is a remarkable and wonderful thing! That explains why we cannot be content in ways of sin. That explains why we must fight against all sin, and struggle against anything that would hinder our fellowship with our Savior. That is the Spirit of the risen, glorified Lord working in us! We have an entirely new attitude toward God! We have a new mind! We have been changed from death unto life! "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

God has made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Christ has been exalted at God's right hand in heavenly glory. He has been exalted as our Head.

But that being the case, God has also exalted us with Him, not only so that we partake of His heavenly glory and mighty dominion, but so that we have fellowship with God in a way that was never open to us before.

That our conversation is in heaven means that we live now in the realm that is *near to God*. We have opportunity for fellowship with Him in a most blessed way. We can talk with Him, and hear Him speak to us by His Word. We can know His will. We delight in His blessings. We lay hold of His promises, knowing His unchangeable faithfulness.

Such is the fruit of that wonder work of God's grace, whereby He has glorified us in Christ.

Partly, it is true, this fact is an object of our faith. Our blessed experience of this wonder is such a small beginning. Our glorification is an accomplished fact, in principle. That is, its beginning is ours as the small seedling and not the fully developed tree.

But it is a fact nonetheless, and a matter of our own experience.

From the darkness of death in the midst of which we have our present existence, we rise victoriously by faith. We look upon our crucified and risen Lord; we know that God has exalted Him at His own right hand in heavenly glory. And we believe that God has quickened us together with Him, and raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Him. For He dwells in us by His Spirit. We believe.

Awaiting the Full Realization

But we await the full and complete realization of this glory. Because we are risen with Christ and our life is hid with Christ in God, we hear the call to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. And we look forward to the day when we shall also appear with Him in glory (Col. 3:1-4).

We who *have been raised to*

gether with Him are also those who *shall be raised* together with Him. Then our yet unseen sitting with Him in heavenly places shall be openly and fully manifest! Death shall be completely swallowed up in life!


So we can say with the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:21: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is

gain." To look at death as gain is possible only because we are risen with Christ *now*, and are partakers of that glory that shall be revealed only through death.

While we await consideration of that final glory until we consider the doctrine of the last things, we remember that Scripture defines that glory in terms of living before

the face of God in Jesus Christ. Living in the fellowship of His love, unhindered any longer by our sinful flesh and the corruption of this present sin-cursed world — that will be the blessedness of our final glorification.

And living in the hope of that, we purify ourselves (I John 3:3).

You do, don't you? 

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanko

Haggai: Rebuilding the Church (7)

The Second Prophecy:

Haggai 2:1-9

1. *In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai, saying,*

2. *Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying,*

The second prophecy comes nearly a month, that is, 27 days, after the people had begun working again on the house of the Lord, and nearly two months after the first prophecy. It comes, as will be seen, in response to their discouragement with the work. That it comes so quickly is a wonderful testimony to God's watchful care for His people and to His mercy. He no longer chides them for their previous sins, or because of those sins keeps them on probation, but immediately comes with a necessary word of encouragement through Haggai.

The encouragement God gives has two parts. In the first part God speaks of the temple in past times and compares the temple they were building to the older temple of

Solomon. In the second part He speaks of the temple in the future and of its future glory. In both parts God is reassuring them that the temple they were working on was necessary in the history of His house.

That this prophecy is addressed not only to Zerubbabel and Joshua but to the people is the case because it was they who were doing the actual work and who faced many discouragements in that work. God wishes them, therefore, to hear His gracious words directly and not just through the mouths of their leaders.

Zerubbabel and Joshua are also named, however, because this prophecy concerns Christ as the one through whom the temple of God would be filled with glory greater than the glory of Solomon's temple, and these men in their offices were the representatives and pictures of Christ to the people. God not only speaks to them and to the people about Christ, therefore, but He holds them up as prefiguring Christ. Their glory, though very dim in those days, was still part of the glory that God had given in Solomon's days and a hint of the glory that would follow when a greater than Solomon appeared.

This prophecy would have been delivered on the last day of

the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:34-42). This is of more than passing interest in view of the fact that the feast celebrated Israel's deliverance from Egypt, to which God Himself makes reference in the verses that follow. That deliverance would have been on the minds of the people, therefore, and must have made them wonder whether God was really with them as He had been in the days when they came out of Egypt. Then they were a great host, now they are but a remnant. Then they had been on their way to a land flowing with milk and honey, now they are having difficulty even subsisting in the land.

3. *Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?*

There are those who think these words to be proof that Haggai was among those who had seen and still remembered the temple of Solomon (Ezra 3:12, 13), but that cannot be demonstrated either from this verse or from other passages. Nor is it the point of this verse. Haggai is not speaking of himself, but of the people and their discouragement in the work of rebuilding the temple. That they were discouraged is clear

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from the exhortation to “fear not” (v. 5).

Haggai’s words show that the people, having begun the work of rebuilding, could see at once that this temple would neither be as beautiful nor as glorious as Solomon’s. It may have been larger than Solomon’s (the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 6:3, 4 stipulated a temple of 60 by 60 cubits as compared to the 60 by 20 cubits recorded of Solomon’s temple in I Kings 6:2), but it had not the richness of Solomon’s temple.

Solomon’s temple had been covered with gold and silver on the inside and much of the furniture and many of the vessels had also been of precious metal. This was impossible in Zerubbabel’s temple because of the poverty of the people. God Himself alludes to this lack of ornament in Haggai 2:8. Even that, however, was not the chief cause of the people’s discouragement, but rather the fact that some important things from Solomon’s temple were missing in this temple. Most importantly, the ark of the covenant was not there.

The Jews traditionally listed five things lacking in the second temple: (1) the ark with its mercy seat; (2) the holy fire that burned perpetually in the candlesticks and on the altar (Lev. 6:8-13; 24:2); (3) the cloud of glory (I Kings 8:10, 11); (4) the spirit of prophecy; and (5) the Urim and Thummim (Ezra 2:63). Certainly we can agree that four of these five were indeed lacking (the spirit of prophecy did not depart until after Malachi’s work was finished). That this temple was lacking in glory in comparison to Solomon’s was evident already when the foundations were laid. Then the older people who had seen and remembered Solomon’s temple wept bitterly (Ezra 3:12, 13).

Of all these the ark of the covenant was the most important because it symbolized God’s presence with His people in the way of mercy and atonement for sin.

Without the ark, it must have seemed to the believing Jews that the temple they were building was worthless.

We know that the ark was not in the second temple because it is not listed in Ezra 1:7-11 among the items that the Jews took back with them to Jerusalem. All they took back were some smaller dishes and other items. Nor is the ark ever mentioned again in Scripture, and Jewish tradition confirms that after the captivity the only thing that stood in the holy of holies was a large rock. Probably the Jews did not dare rebuild the ark without an express command from God.

The ark was so important because it symbolized the presence of God in the house and among His people in the way of blood atonement, for it was there that the blood was sprinkled on the great day of atonement. The people must have feared, therefore, that they were building the house in vain — that God would not be there and dwell with them there. That this is not speculation is clear from the verses that follow, in which God reassures them on exactly that point.

The other ways in which this temple lacked beauty were not unimportant, however. The beauty and glory of Solomon’s temple and the gold and silver that adorned it were ordered by God Himself for the purpose of reflecting His own glory and showing that He who promised to live in the temple was the sovereign Lord and Owner of all, the King of kings and Lord of lords. This temple lacked all that. It has been described by one commentator as “drab and utilitarian.”* The people’s fears and discouragement were well-founded, therefore. Nor did the fact that Ezekiel had prophesied of a more glorious temple help.

God, instead of glossing over these things, Himself reminds the people of them through the words of Haggai, all but rubbing their noses in the fact. In that way He

shows that He knows their hearts and the fears that were troubling them. He also shows by these words that this matter is important to Him. As He tells the people more plainly in the verses that follow, it is His will that the glory of His house be less than in former times.

It is at that point that the word of God through Haggai touches a sensitive nerve in every member of the church who loves God’s house in the New Testament. Everyone who is spiritually sensitive can see that what was true in Haggai’s day is also true today. The house of God, the church in the world, is much less glorious today than it was in former days. Compared to the church in the days of the apostles or in the days of the great Reformation of the sixteenth century the church today is nothing.

We see the church splintered and divided. We see the glory of her worship waning as the emphasis in worship is less and less on God and more and more on the worshipers. We see worship changed to entertainment and socializing. We see the preaching and sacraments despised and misused and discipline non-existent. Even the glory of the members, those living stones of which God’s house is built, appears as nothing, for their glory is the glory of holiness, and that too is departed in these last days. That helps us understand the feeling of these Jews and their need for encouragement. But their need is also ours.

Lest we be discouraged, God Himself tells us that He is aware of these things, and He addresses both to Judah and to us words of encouragement that keep us busy with the work of building His house, even when, humanly speaking, their seems so little point to it. Those words of encouragement are found in verses 4-9 and consist in a number of distinct though connected promises.

God first encourages them, however, by speaking of the fact

that this temple was really a continuation of Solomon's temple. Though less glorious, it was nevertheless the same house. Both are referred to as "this house." In that way God tells the people that whatever may be lacking in this rebuilt temple, it is still His house, the same that He commanded to be built in the days of David and Solomon.

God promises first that He will be with His people and dwell among them as in former days (vv. 4, 5). He promises a greater glory for His house than that of the house that Solomon had built. And He promises that He will give His people peace and deliverance from their enemies in that house, when

its glory finally transcends the glory of Solomon's temple. Included in these promises are the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the promise of Christ's coming both in Bethlehem and at the end of all things, the promise of a new heavens and earth, and the promise of the salvation and glorification of His church.

Why was it, though, that God was satisfied with a house that was only a poor shadow of the house Solomon had built? You would think that God would want the most beautiful temple possible, and that He would have supplied the Jews with gold, silver, and precious stones and woods, so that His house would be more beautiful

than any kingly palace. Why did He remind the Jews of the poverty of this house and do nothing to change that?

The answer to these questions is that Christ was coming, and the people had to start looking away from the earthly types and shadows to Christ Himself. It would be only a little while before the Desire of all nations would come, and they had to be ready. Haggai 2:9 is a promise of the coming of Christ. He is the true temple of God because He is Immanuel, God with us, the fulfillment of all God's promises to dwell with His people.



* Motyer, *Haggai*, vol. III, p. 987.

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

We rejoice with the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, the calling church for our denomination's mission work in Pittsburgh, PA, their missionary, Rev. J. Mahtani, and the Fellowship in Pittsburgh, in the administration of the first Pittsburgh baptisms on Sunday, March 7. Eight children (one entire household), ranging from 2 to 15 years old were baptized. The Pittsburgh group is also preparing for five more baptisms and several confessions of faith in the year ahead, D.V.

The continued growth of the work in Pittsburgh had led the council of Southwest and our churches' Domestic Mission Committee to begin seeking a volunteer missionary assistant (office bearer of ex-office bearer) to help with the work there for approximately three weeks at a time, twice a year.

Rev. A. Stewart, our denomination's missionary to the PR Fel-

lowship in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, writes that he was asked to contribute to a radio program on City Beat 96.7 FM, based in Stranmillis, Belfast, on Mel Gibson's film, "The Passion...." He was asked because of a letter published by the Fellowship against the film in the Newsletter, a Northern Ireland daily paper.

Evangelism Activities

Friday, March 12, Rev. D. Overway, pastor of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ, went to the Good Shepherd Mission in Paterson, NJ with a group from the Free Reformed Church on one of their regular visits to the mission. Rev. Overway brought with him a box of food that had been donated by members of Covenant. The idea of this visit was that Rev. Overway, as a representative of Covenant's Evangelism Society, would report back to Covenant so that they could discuss whether or not they would be interested in sponsoring visits of this kind in the future for their church members. The visit included a chapel service of singing, prayer, and a message delivered by the Free Reformed minister and opportunity

after the service to talk with and witness to the men staying at the mission. In other evangelism efforts at Covenant, we read recently that their Evangelism Society sent out flyers informing their mailing list of their Prayer Day service, and they were delighted to have several of their contacts join them for that service. Covenant plans to do the same for their upcoming Good Friday and Easter services.

A recent bulletin from the Byron Center, MI PRC contained a note from their Evangelism Committee asking for volunteers to join in singing songs celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ at the Ottawa County Jail in March.

Saturday, March 6, the Calvin College Student Organization "By Faith We Understand" and the Evangelism Committee of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI together sponsored a creation conference at Calvin entitled, "When Faith Meets Science: Standing by the Bible in the Face of Evolutionism." Those who attended watched two educational videos, and heard a speech by Rev. W. Langerak, pastor of Southeast, on the subject.

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

School Activities

The students and teachers of Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA invited supporters to their annual Spring program on March 19. This year's theme was "God's Children: Pilgrims and Strangers."

Early in March the Junior High students from our Christian schools in Hull and Doon, Iowa presented a combination choir and band concert. This concert was held at the Hull PRC.

Congregation Activities

At a congregational meeting in early March, the congregation in Wingham, Ontario officially adopted the name Wingham PRC.

Members of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI gathered together on March 20 for an evening of fun, food, and fellowship. That late afternoon and early evening the congregation enjoyed basketball games, activities for the children, and food for everyone.

All interested ladies of the Lynden, WA PRC were invited to their parsonage the morning of March 1 for a time of Reading, Prayer, and Fellowship. Plans called for the ladies to read together from volume one of *Upon This Rock* on the life of Jesus, and spend time in prayer and fellowship.

Members of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI were encouraged to join together on March 18 for an evening centered on ministering to elderly saints in their congregation and in the local area. Plans called for a time of singing and fellowship followed by refreshments.

Friends of First PRC in Edgerton, MN were invited to Edgerton's Request Night for a night of fellowship and praise to God on March 19. Numbers were given by members of the Doon, Hull, and Edgerton congregations. An offering was taken for Edgerton's next retreat effort.

Minister Activities

Rev. C. Terpstra and his wife traveled to Orlando, FL in early March for a Reformed theology conference. This national conference, sponsored by Ligonier Ministries 2004, was entitled, "A Portrait of God: The Abundance of His Perfections."

The Wingham Ontario PRC has extended a call to Rev. J. Slopsema to be its first PR pastor. Faith PRC in Jenison, MI has formed a new trio of the Revs. W. Bruinsma, A. Brummel, and D. Kleyn. The Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada has a new trio of the Revs. C. Haak, J. Slopsema, and R. Smit.

Seminarian John Marcus will be doing his internship under the consistory and pastor (Rev. C. Terpstra) of First PRC of Holland, MI. Seminarian Dennis Lee will be doing his internship under the consistory and pastor (Rev. K. Koole) of the Grandville, MI PRC. Both internships begin in July and end in December.

Announcements

SPRING LECTURE

*"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 located at 18423 Stony Island Ave., Lansing, Illinois. Plan to attend this timely lecture on

Friday, April 16, at 8:00 P.M.
at Peace PRC.

YEARBOOK CHANGE

New bulletin clerk for Kalamazoo PRC:
Trisha Bruinsma
3514 Stolk Dr.
Kalamazoo, MI 49004
Phone: (269) 552-8893
e-mail: bbruinsma@netpenny.net

Check out the new and updated
RFPA web page at www.rfpa.org.

NOTICE

Are you thinking of becoming a teacher or a minister in the PR schools or churches? The Protestant Reformed Scholarship committee offers scholarships to prospective teachers or ministers. If you would like to obtain a packet of information, please contact Brenda DeJong at 616-662-2187 or brendadj@juno.com with your name and address by May 8. All packets will be due May 29, 2004.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC express their sincere Christian sympathy to Mr. David Pryor in the passing of his father,

PHILLIP PRYOR.

May our brother be comforted in the words of Lamentations 3: 24-26, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, President
Tom Kiel, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On April 20, 2004, D.V., our parents and grandparents,

ROGER and FLORENCE KEY,
will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them in the faithfulness of our God to His covenant with us. We pray that God will continue to bless them and keep them in His sovereign care. "For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Rev. Steven and Nancy Key
Andy and Stephanie Lanning
Jessica
Michelle, Elizabeth, Mary Anne
- * Dan and Judy Key
Jonathan, Deborah, Timothy, Brian
- * Tom Key
Hudsonville, Michigan

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 12, 2004 at the Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church.
Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk