

# THE *January 15, 2001* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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# God Unveils Judah's Covering

*And he discovered the covering of Judah....*

Isaiah 22:8-14

**I**n the context Isaiah is faced with two very serious problems. The first is the spiritual complacency which has been characterizing the nation of Judah as a whole for several years. The second is the invasion of Judah by the mightiest of armies, the Assyrians.

The Assyrians, under Sennacherib, already had an easy time bringing the ten tribes of the nation of Israel to their knees. In fact, Israel as a nation had been completely destroyed. The land and all the physical structures were in ruins. The people who had not been killed were carried into captivity and scattered throughout the lands of other conquered countries.

Now the mighty Assyrian army is invading Judah and generally having an easy time of it. They were coming near to the capital city

of Jerusalem. Hezekiah, the king of Judah, responds by seeking Jehovah for deliverance. Hezekiah put forth necessary efforts, but he knew that all human efforts were vain without the help of Jehovah. With the help of the princes of Judah and his mighty men, Hezekiah stopped the waters of the fountains which were located outside of Jerusalem's walls, so that the Assyrians would not have easy access to water in the event of a siege. Also, Hezekiah gathered the men of Judah together to repair broken portions of Jerusalem's walls. He gathered weapons and organized the people into armies. Then Hezekiah directed the attention of the people to their only real help, Jehovah. "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: with him is the arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles" (II Chron. 32:1-8).

When we read thus from II Chronicles we would conclude that Judah was responding correctly. However, in spite of Hezekiah's good, spiritual leadership, the vast

majority of the citizens of Judah refused to follow the spirit and the advice of Hezekiah. Isaiah makes it clear that there were many who were not mourning for their sins, but rebelliously went about feasting and dancing. They did this, not because they were ignorant of the invasion of Judah by the Assyrians, but precisely because they saw the invading foe. They wanted to get drunk. They were following the ungodly advice to eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. This reaction both to the Assyrian invasion and to Hezekiah's advice makes it obvious that they refused to repent. Instead they rebelliously saw everything as futile. They believed that they were going to die anyway. So they might as well go out having a good time. In their unbelief they became fatalistic — they were going to die no matter what they did.

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Isaiah declares to Judah that God "discovered the covering of Judah" (22:8). This means that God removed the covering from Judah's eyes. They had put a veil over their eyes. This was their way of ignoring some deeply-rooted problems. Those problems are "breaches of

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the city of David" (22:9), that is, breaks in Jerusalem's walls. God tore the veil of complacency from the eyes of the nation. God used the Assyrian army as His instrument to tear this veil off their face. The mighty Assyrians were rapidly advancing on Jerusalem. The inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem suddenly began to examine their defenses. They found many breaches in the wall where it had weakened and in some places had even fallen down.

The breaks in Jerusalem's walls were caused, not by a previous foe, but by Judah's own complacency. As a whole they had been concerned only with enjoying themselves. For many years they had not been busy at the work of maintaining their defenses. They always responded to "alarmists" by saying that they had plenty of time. But they either did nothing or did not do enough. As a result, the defensive walls of Jerusalem had deteriorated over the course of time and had crumbled in places. God took the veil from the eyes of Judah.

How does this apply to the church in the new dispensation? In the old dispensational age of types and shadows, physical prosperity indicated God's blessing and physical trouble indicated God's displeasure. Today the normal way God calls spiritually is through the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel. However, God also uses adversities in this life to bring His people to the preaching in order that they might discover, either for the first time or anew, their sins on the one hand, and true, deep, spiritual joy on the other hand. God often uses physical difficulties to awaken His people out of spiritual lethargy and to greater spiritual joys.

It is human nature, also in the believer, to want to continue in a sinful way. In order to do this we often pull a covering over our eyes. In this way we can ignore or convince ourselves that we do not see the real problem of sin. In west-

ern civilization the veil of a good economy is pulled over the eyes of many so they can ignore innumerable breaches in the moral walls of our society.

Isaiah tells us that the walls of Jerusalem represent salvation (26:1). Salvation is knowing and enjoying Jesus Christ for forgiveness and perfect righteousness. Generally speaking, the walls of salvation do not get breaches in them overnight. Rather, deterioration and crumbling takes place over a period of time characterized by spiritual lethargy and complacency. "Things are going well, so don't worry, don't get excited, don't raise an alarm."

As a whole, the nation of Judah, the church of the old dispensation at that time, had been spiritually lethargic. This had been taking place during the reign of several kings prior to Hezekiah. The people of Judah had not been busy paying attention to the constant calling of faith and repentance — daily and hourly repenting and looking to Jesus for forgiveness and direction. They were not busy striving to become more and more spiritually mature, more and more to hate and flee their own personal sins, more and more to love and enjoy living according to God's will. In fact, false prophets would frequently arise and say that everything was just fine. The number of the faithful leaders and teachers of God's law had greatly diminished. The people as a whole did not want to hear that kind of a message. Now the presence of the Assyrians forces Judah to face the facts of their spiritual life.

God's people, individually and collectively, must always keep up their defenses against the world of sin which surrounds them. Sometimes we neglect to pray. Other times we are too busy to spend even a little time in God's Word. Sometimes we think that it is not too serious if we sin just a little. We are often too busy to maintain our marriages so that they may be

as happy as they can be. Or we are just too pessimistic (negative) of character to count the blessings God has given us (or we see that to be true of others, but not in ourselves). Or we are too mad or angry to forgive.

God has marvelously wise ways to awaken us, to tear coverings from our eyes. These can be most painful and most frightful. Sometimes it takes troubles and divisions in a local congregation before we will examine whether we are letting the walls in our own congregation crumble because we think we are justified to stay angry at a fellow-saint, or because we are too busy to put forth the constant effort needed to maintain good relationships within our congregation. Do you see breaches you (not someone else) have caused with your spiritual complacency? Do you see what ever-present sin is doing in your life, in your family, in your church, in society?



When God awakens us and makes us conscious of breaches, then it is necessary to respond correctly.

Judah's response was even more tragic. As a whole, Judah responded — but wrongly. This brought them to eventual ruin and captivity. Their total destruction was only delayed. "Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die" (22:14). It would not be the Assyrians, but later the Babylonians, who would destroy Judah and Jerusalem.

At first Judah feverishly went about to solve the problem. They took down houses in order to repair the crumbled portions of the wall, they gathered their weapons together, they dug a moat, they piled up stones for a barricade, they provided themselves with a constant supply of water (22:8b-11a). This activity salved their consciences. All this activity was good and even necessary in itself, but it is never enough! Judah did all this and stopped. They believed that they themselves had solved the



problem through their own efforts. They put their confidence in what they were able to do. They tried to save themselves.

This was *all* that Judah did. It was (and is) a sin for two reasons.

First, the activity of rectifying a problem must always begin with and be accompanied by repentance — godly sorrow for the specific sins which led up to the problem and for our sinfulness out of which all our sins constantly arise. God called and calls His people “to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth” (22:12). The covering of spiritual lethargy is taken off our eyes so we fall upon our faces in shame before the great Jehovah! God smashes our complacency so we are overwhelmed by the burden of our having so easily and quickly forsaken our God! This is a time for serious repentance. This is what Jesus meant when He spoke of plucking out our eye or cutting off our hand that we might enter into the kingdom of heaven. God calls His people to walk in continual repentance, always ready to confess quickly our contribution to any problem. God wants godly sorrow!

Second, Judah’s activity at rectifying their problems was not accompanied by a looking to their Maker (22:11). They helped themselves without thinking about their need for God’s help. We go to the doctor or take some medication,

but we forget to pray, asking the Maker of the doctor and medication to bless. We are so busy that we forget to ask Him who alone is able to fix the problem. And to forget to look to God is so foolish. After all, He is the Maker of all things. Frequently God declares Himself to be the Creator (the God of heaven and earth) in order to remind His people and all men that we need Him, and that with Him all things are possible.

Judah made things worse. The people not only were busy repairing things (trying to save themselves), but also they took on a most terrible attitude. After completing their repair activity, they fatalistically said, “Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die” (22:13). Instead of the weeping and sackcloth of repentance, they still wanted to have “joy and gladness.” Instead of the fasting of godly sorrow, they wanted to slay oxen, kill sheep, eat meat, and drink wine. Even though they saw the danger, they took the attitude that the consequences were inevitable. What a contrast to the citizens of Nineveh in Jonah’s time (Jonah 4:5-9)! Our flesh does not want to let go of our fun. “The economy is strong. So what?!” “There are problems, but they are not serious. We’ll take care of them later. Don’t disturb me now.” “Things may not be going well, but don’t take away my fun.”

It is so easy to react to “alarmists” by criticizing them. It is so

easy not to see (and not to want to see) the spreading cancer of spiritual indifference in many areas of our life: worldly entertainment, personal devotions, proper attendance at a worship service, relationships with *all* our fellow-saints, etc.

Instead, God calls us to the constant attitude of humility and repentance. Repentance is not optional in the life of God’s people. The Lord Jehovah of hosts calls for it to be a constant attitude. Not just the constant activity of repentance, but the ever-present attitude of humility. The great Maker calls His creatures to be ever humbly dependent on Him.

Humble repentance is always called for by the Lord Jehovah because the cause of all our trouble is the presence of sinfulness and sin in our lives. We know that all human efforts are futile to repair the breaches caused by sin. Then why do we keep trying? The efforts must be there, but they must always be accompanied with repentance and with prayers for help. God’s call is for godly sorrow, for flight from every disobedience, and for a constant striving to be obedient.

Let us see the breaches in the spiritual walls of our lives. Let us ever walk humbly with our God and with our fellow-saints. Let us ever look up to Him who alone is able to help, to save, and to restore.



## Editorial

# How Does Christ Speak in the Preaching of the Gospel?

**E**lsewhere in this issue of the *Standard Bearer*, a correspondent asks several questions concerning the subject of Christ’s

speaking through the preaching of the gospel. He addresses the questions to the editorial committee in “The Reader Asks” department.

The editorial committee agreed that these questions could profitably be answered in an editorial.

To begin with the last question,

there certainly is a basic difference between Christ's merely being preached in the gospel and Christ's being the preacher in the preaching of the gospel. It is the same as the obvious difference between someone's speaking *about* our correspondent and our correspondent himself doing the speaking. In the preaching of the gospel, Christ is certainly the object, or content, of the preaching. The message is about Him. But Christ is also the subject, or speaker. In the preaching of the gospel by the church today, Jesus Christ proclaims Himself.

This high view of preaching is biblical. In John 10:27, Jesus says that His sheep always hear His voice. If we hear His voice, it is because He utters His voice. This must take place through the preaching of the church in the office of the ministry (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 4:11). According to the correct translation of the Greek original of the text, Romans 10:14 teaches that men believe only by hearing Jesus Christ and that they hear Him only through a preacher. Ephesians 4:21 declares that the Ephesian Christians "heard him (Christ)" and were "taught by him (Christ)," although the gospel came to them many years after Jesus ascended into heaven. They did not merely hear *about* Christ. They heard Christ Himself. They heard Him inasmuch as He spoke through the preaching of the apostle and others.

It is understandable that Reformed saints may have some question about this. For our confessions do not state this in so many words. This lack is related to the failure of our confessions to devote a separate article or Lord's Day to the preaching of the gospel as a means of grace. The Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession have much to say about the sacraments and relatively little to say about the preaching.

Nevertheless, the truth of Christ's speaking in the preaching is found in our confessions. It is

implied in Question 65 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The preaching of the gospel is not merely pious and edifying talk about Jesus. It is a means by which the Holy Ghost works faith in our hearts. This Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Christ. Christ works through the preaching. He works in accordance with the nature of the medium. He works by speaking faith into our hearts.

That the preaching of the gospel by the office of the ministry in the church is the authoritative, powerful Word, or speaking, of Jesus Christ is taught in Questions 83 and 84 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Mere human speech about Jesus cannot open and shut the kingdom of heaven. Only the living voice of Jesus Christ can open and shut the kingdom. In Question 84, the Catechism has John 20:21-23 in view: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." The passage assures the church and her preachers that the risen Christ Himself effectually speaks forgiveness in the consciousness of penitent sinners through the faithful preaching of the gospel. He also binds the guilt of sin consciously upon the unbeliever through the preaching of the gospel.

One Reformed confession made this explicit. This was the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, in its day one of the most widely accepted and influential of the confessions of the Reformation. In chapter 1, the Second Helvetic said this:

*The Preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is*

preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good (*Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane, The Westminster Press, 1966, p. 225).

The Protestant Reformed Churches have always believed that the preaching of the gospel is the voice of Jesus Christ. Herman Hoeksema taught this in his published sermon on Romans 10:14 in *God's Eternal Good Pleasure*: "A preacher is a man through whom it pleases Christ, the exalted Lord of all, the chief Prophet of God, to speak to you.... A preacher is not a person who merely speaks concerning Christ, but one through whom it pleases Christ Himself to speak, to cause His own voice to be heard" (RFP, repr. 1979, pp. 179, 181; see also his *Reformed Dogmatics*, RFP, 1966, pp. 637, 638, and his *Triple Knowledge*, vol. 2, RFP, 1971, pp. 407-410).

As recently as two years ago the editor of the *Standard Bearer* devoted a series of four editorials to the proposition that the preaching of the gospel is "the voice of God, the voice of Christ" (*SB*, Jan. 15, Feb. 1, Feb. 15, and March 1, 1998).

The more difficult question is at the same time the main question asked by our correspondent: *how* does Christ speak in the preaching? As the correspondent noted, the problem is that Christ is now in heaven. How can He then be present speaking through the sermon of a minister on a Sunday morning, say, in Loveland, Colorado?

Our correspondent himself points the way to the right answer to his question, "How?" In his question, he quotes from Lord's Day 30 of the Heidelberg Catechism: "Christ ... according to His human nature is now not on earth, but in heaven, at the right hand of God His Father, and will there be worshiped by us." These



words are part of the Catechism's explanation of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. That they are addressed specifically against the Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass does not now concern us.

The Catechism insists that Christ, according to His human nature, is in heaven, not on the earth. But this does not lead the Catechism to conclude that Christ is absent from the Lord's Supper, so that the sacrament of the Supper is merely a witness to, and memorial of, an absent Jesus Christ. On the contrary! Even though Christ is in heaven, He is present in the Supper. By means of the Supper, the believer eats "the crucified body and drinks the shed blood of Christ" and is "more and more united to His sacred body" (Question 76).

According to Article 35 of the Belgic Confession, in the Supper the believer eats and drinks "the proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ." The Confession fully agrees with the Catechism that Christ is now in heaven. Nevertheless, Christ is present in the Supper actively giving Himself and His benefits to believers.

Thus then, though Christ always sits at the right hand of His Father in the heavens, yet doth He not therefore cease to make us partakers of Himself by faith. This feast is a spiritual table, at which Christ communicates Himself with all His benefits to us, and gives us thereto to enjoy both Himself, and the merits of His sufferings and death ... (emphasis added).

When we teach, as we do, that Christ is present in the preaching of the gospel as the one who speaks good news to His people, we are not making any different claim for the preaching than the Reformed faith has always made for the sacraments.

This comparison of the preaching with the sacraments helps us to answer the question, "How?" How is the Christ who is and remains in heaven present on a Sun-

day morning in the preaching of the gospel in Loveland, Colorado, and how does this Christ at God's right hand speak through the preaching of the gospel by the ordained minister?

The "how" of the presence of Christ in the sacraments is the Holy Spirit. "The manner of our partaking of the same [namely, the proper and natural body and blood of Christ] is not by the mouth, but by the Spirit through faith" (Bel. Conf., Art. 35). Christ is present in the sacraments giving to believers the spiritual blessings signified by the sacraments, *by His Spirit*.

Likewise, Christ is present—*truly* present—in the preaching of the gospel by His Spirit. By His Spirit, He Himself speaks to the hearts of His people through the faithful preaching of the gospel by a man whom Christ has called.

Does this fully explain how the Christ who is in heaven Himself speaks His saving (and hardening) Word through the words of a minister? Of course not! The "how?" of Christ's speaking through the preaching remains as mysterious as the manner of Christ's presence in the Supper.

The Reformed have never claimed to be able to explain fully the presence of Christ in the Supper. Regarding the "mode" of Christ's presence in the Supper, after he has taught that Christ is present by "the secret operation of the Spirit," Calvin wrote:

Now, should any one ask me as to the mode, I will not be ashamed to confess that it is too high a mystery either for my mind to comprehend or my words to express; and to speak more plainly, I rather feel than understand it (*Institutes*, 4.17.32).

The Belgic Confession acknowledges the incomprehensible mystery of the manner of the presence of Christ in the Supper in these words: "The manner surpasses our understanding and cannot be com-

prehended by us, as the operations of the Holy Ghost are hidden and incomprehensible" (Art. 35).

We readily make the same confession concerning the manner of Christ's presence in the preaching. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth."

Some may have a problem with the high view of preaching because of the weakness, and even sinfulness, of the human instrument, the preacher. (This is not the problem of our correspondent.) Really, the problem with the presence of Christ in the Supper is not different. It is offensive to the natural mind that the exalted Christ and His spiritual salvation should be present in a ceremony of eating a little piece of bread and drinking a thimble of wine.

Paul solves the problem of the glorious Christ preaching His gospel through sinful dust in II Corinthians 4:7: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

It is vitally important that we maintain that Christ speaks through the preaching. Christ's speaking through the preaching is the reason why preaching is, and must be, at the heart of every service of worship. It is the reason why believers and their children expect grace and salvation from the preaching. It is the reason why everyone who is interested in the honor of God and in the salvation of himself and his family must join a church marked by the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel, and may never leave it. It is the reason why the minister must work hard at his sermons. It is the reason why the young people, with all the other members, ought to attend the preaching twice every Lord's Day. It is the reason why Reformed Christians may not abandon the preaching of the Reformed church for liturgical pomp and ceremony, for charismatic enthusiasm

and high jinks, or for evangelical gimmickry.

Jesus Christ speaks in the preaching of the gospel. His Father says, "Hear Him."

To abandon the preaching of the gospel is simply to refuse to hear Christ and to rebel against His Father.

Our inability to comprehend the manner of Christ's speaking in the preaching may not lead us to question the reality of His speaking.

There is yet another powerful evidence of Christ's speaking in the gospel.

The believer's experience.

I know that Christ speaks in the preaching, for I have heard Him. I am more sure of His speaking in the gospel than I am of hearing my own wife when she speaks to me.

I have heard Him speak as no mere mortal is able to speak, including the preacher through whom He speaks.

I have heard Him speak of the holy God, so that I trembled in God's very presence—in the preaching.

I have heard Him speak of my sinfulness, so that my heart broke

with the guilt and shame—in the preaching.

I have heard Him speak pardon, so that I was as a man released from hell and given entrance to heaven—in the preaching.

I have heard Him speak of the grace of God in His own cross, so that I resolved to persevere in the gratitude of a holy life—in the preaching.

Does Christ speak in the preaching?

Who could doubt it?

— DJE 

## The Reader Asks

### ■ How Does Christ Speak in the Preaching of the Gospel?

This regards the answer that Rev. J. Laning gave Mr. Chuck Doezeema in the letters section of the November 15, 2000 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

Please explain how it is that Christ is indeed the One speaking in the preaching of the gospel.

How is this possible since Christ is in heaven at the right hand of God His Father and will there be worshiped by us as the Catechism teaches in Lord's Day 30?

Please explain the difference between Christ being preached in the gospel and Christ doing the speaking in the preaching of the gospel.

Larry Nelson  
Loveland, CO

### RESPONSE:

We must not intrude upon the discussion between Mr. C. Doezeema and Rev. J. Laning. But our correspondent's questions raise other, though related, matters. These are important enough that the editor treats them in the editorial in this issue. We refer our correspondent to the editorial for answers to his questions.

— Ed. Comm. 

## Contribution

Rev. Barry Gritters

# Shall We Dance, Rock, and Play?

## Or: How Shall We Judge Contemporary Worship? (2)

The church of Jesus Christ is encouraged these days to adopt some new kinds of worship styles. More often than not, these services include some sort of dancing, rock music, and drama. Thus, the question: "Shall

we dance, rock, and play?" One kind of worship, described last time, is the "seeker-service," designed to attract those who know nothing about church, who are uncomfortable in a church building. This service is casual, relaxed, and unceremonious.

### The Liturgical Service

The second type of innovation in modern worship is the "liturgical service." You might expect

much ceremony, formalism, and a robed clergy, as though you were in an Anglican or Roman Catholic Church. There is much more to this second type, though, than the formalities of Rome and Canterbury.

For examples of this kind of service, I read recent *Reformed Worship* magazines, most of which are not recognizably Reformed.

In one sample service proposed for use, members dressed up to be Bishop Ambrose of Milan, Martin

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Luther, John Calvin, Fanny Crosby, John Newton, and another John (hymn-writer) with an unfamiliar name. Each actor began by saying, "Good evening, my name is 'so and so'...." Then they recited a little history of the person, explained why he wrote the hymn he did, and asked the congregation to sing the hymn. This was meant to be the substance of the worship service.

Another local church had as their theme for the weeks of Lent: "Picture Jesus." So their banners, bulletin covers, and projected pictures all were intended to help you "study the character of Jesus more closely" with "a gallery in which a variety of portraits were displayed... to illustrate the multiple dimensions of the person and work of Jesus."

One suggestion for worship during advent was to hang large figures of angels over the windows of the sanctuary, one more each week and increasing in size toward the front. The purpose was to fill "the worship space with angels so that as they heralded Christ's birth on Christmas morning, the effect would hint at the overwhelming announcement to the shepherds." Then, members of the congregation carried forward in procession copper flames matching those carried by the angels. Do you ask, "Why the emphasis on angels?" Well, the "growing popularity of angels in our secular culture provided opportunity to intersect the message of salvation with popular culture."

Or, it was suggested that the congregation celebrate an Old Testament Seder meal (part of the Passover feast) during worship. The author presented elaborate descriptions of the different elements of the meal and how to participate in this feast. Aside from the decidedly Jewish and pre-Christian slant to this suggestion, here is the justification for the practice: "It is important for us to acknowledge the problems and injustices of our times, but we must have hope that things are not unalterable." Not

one word about the gospel and the cross of Christ. Not one mention of sin, our real bondage. Only injustice, oppression—of women and other races (Israel was oppressed in Egypt and delivered through the Passover; women are oppressed today, too).

And don't forget candles. Four of them would be good. Why? Well, four usually represents four people or four groups of people: Mary, Joseph, the Magi, and the Shepherds. Or, perhaps four different angels. Or four Old Testament prophets. Or, better, simply to "signal a great crescendo of anticipation and hope in the advent season." One poor parishioner, confused about the symbolism, had a profound question for the wise editor of the magazine: "Should we use one pink candle among the four?" To which the authoritative declaration was given: Pink "requires you to understand the link between Advent and Lent." No explanation or justification. Just: This "requires you to understand the link between Advent and Lent."

If one is confused and would like guidance for his church to introduce this kind of service, there are now training centers available for him throughout the country and qualified trainers who have seminars and books to teach his worship committees how to worship in this way. May I tell you the names of the seminar leaders? Arnelia, Catherine, Diane, Linda, Valerie, Nina, Wendy, Marie, Dot, Kay, Barb, Geania, Ardis, Carol, Alice, Marcia, Deb, Ellen, Karen, Ann, Candy, Nancy, Edith, and Dorothy. It won't surprise you that the editor of this magazine with all these ideas is: EMILY.

Pray the Lord spare your church from such folly. Its wickedness hardly deserves sarcasm. It is the sin of "will worship" as Paul describes it in Colossians. Its origins are not the Scriptures. What no confessing Christian would dare claim for his *individual* service of God, many boldly proceed to do in their *public* service: "I will de-

cide how to serve God."

But "will worship" is our sin, always. Our nature inclines us to the same, always. Privately and publicly, we want to determine how to serve God.

Pray the Lord spare us, personally, from the desires of our own heart. And give us a heart after His. For His glory, into eternity. Practice well. Eternity is a long time.



### A Defense of the Innovations

But the modern forms of worship are not without their own defense. Realizing that what they are doing is new, the proponents of contemporary worship at least attempt a defense of their practices. They justify their behavior.

**Practically**, their defense is that *the church must reach the unchurched.*

Their defense is the urge to ask the question: "What is it that makes the unchurched comfortable enough to lure him into the sanctuary?" They often find an answer. The local newspaper report covering the new Mars Hill Church showed a young man in jeans, tennis shoes, and a sweatshirt (one of the 5000 who attends regularly) proclaiming: "This makes me feel good; I'm comfortable here; that's why I'm here."

Second, they seek worship that *applies to our particular circumstances*, worship that is applicable and *relevant* to our age. The worship must appeal to baby-boomers, "Generation Xers," and those who have little ability or interest to read or think linearly. Because we live in an electronic, image-oriented age, we must use electronics and images that people are familiar and comfortable with.

A defense of the cloth images of angels to assist in worship came in answer to "the challenge to provide relevant, fresh, and meaningful worship opportunities."

Another man argues: "I grew up in an oral culture; the new generation did not...." His culture used proverbs; they talked; they



thought. Today's culture uses pictures, videos, televisions, and feel rather than think. His book has a particular audience: "I am interested in the clergy... who simply don't see what all the commotion is about with respect to the electronic culture and who wonder why the church can't continue to do what it has done all along."

Or: "Out of what contexts have these liturgies arisen? The simple answer is our recent culture. Fresh cultural realities, new musical expressions, changing aesthetic values, and new styles of personal expression demanded a fundamental reevaluation of received worship traditions." Thus the "advent of radically contrasting new styles of worship ... to meet these modern realities."

"Western society was turning away from the printed word and bound texts, toward an audio and video culture."

The pastor of one local megachurch explains: "We're trapped in an evangelical sub-culture. The people we need to reach are out of touch with our culture." We must "put the gospel in a culturally relevant context."

The blurb on a book from a "reformed" author defending the innovations says: The author "offers to us what we need most right

now: biblical principles of worship that we must apply to our particular circumstances." Hmm. What it ought to say is: "With an eye on modern culture, the author mutilates Reformed worship with a Procrustean bed-like hack, to fit modern culture."

*Theologically*, their defense is the incarnation and the need (as they put it) to think and act "incarnationally."

Their reference to incarnation, of course, is to the reality that God became man in Jesus Christ. Their appeal is to John 1:14: "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us." Their interpretation of that passage is that Christ accommodated Himself to His particular culture and age when He was born and lived with the Jews.

One man translates John 1 this way: "Jesus became flesh, and moved into the neighborhood." Another, with more polish, but the same reckless use of Scripture, said: You must "understand this as God becoming flesh and joining the indigenous practices of the culture of Jesus' time." We need to help people "connect with God" through different generational styles.

Applied, this means that Christians must "be incarnational" in the

way Jesus was. Read this carefully: "The incarnation—God taking human form—witnesses to God's affirmation of humanity in a particular cultural context. Jesus, the Word become flesh, preached inside and outside of the synagogues and temple and took the gospel to a lake, mountainside, homes, and streets. Peter invited Gentiles into the church, and Philip witnessed in a chariot to an Ethiopian eunuch."

Let me be clear. They mean: We must live in the neighborhood with the *styles* of the neighborhood. They don't understand our *music*, so we must use theirs. And, "to speak the language of the neighborhood, Christians must be more agile than they used to be." Translated, means: "Christians must contort themselves to fit the mold of the neighborhood." In dress, in language, in music, the church must become like the world.

These innovators have never heard of the antithesis. The church conform to the world? Let the church call sinners to conform to the church, and to the beauties of her Lord, Jesus Christ.

(Next time: A Reformed Critique of these new forms of worship.)

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

# Chastisement

*Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby.*

Hebrews 12:11

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Affliction is experienced by every person that lives on earth. It is true that some suffer more than others, but none is exempt. Old and young, male and female, godly and ungodly — all suffer.

There is a great contrast, however, between the suffering of the people of God and that of the

wicked. For the wicked it is punishment for sin. For the child of God, however, it is chastisement.

The chastisement God's children experience comes in various forms. Sometimes God sends it in the form of the troubles and trials of this life. We are chastised by means of sickness, or loneliness, or poverty. We are chastised through

disappointments in our daily work and calling. We are chastised by means of the death of a beloved spouse, child, or friend. We are chastised by being persecuted for our faith.

At other times God chastises us by means of judgments He sends on us for specific sins we have committed. These chastisements are the consequences that flow from those sins. A man who lies or steals is not trusted. A permissive parent has wayward children. An irresponsible driver is injured in a car accident. All of these constitute, for the child of God, chastisement.

It is crucial that we understand exactly what chastisement is. If we do not, we can very easily fall into despair when chastised.

To understand chastisement, we need to consider the difference between chastisement and punishment. There are similarities between these two. Both come from the hand of God. Both can be the same kind of affliction, or the same judgment for a sin. But there are at least three essential differences.

First of all, the objects of chastisement and punishment are different. Punishment is sent by God only and always upon the wicked. Already in this life God punishes those He has predestined to eternal destruction in hell. If a wicked person loses a spouse, or suffers from cancer, or loses his house and all his possessions in a fire, God is punishing him through these things. Always "the curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked" (Prov. 3:33).

Chastisement, on the other hand, is only and always for the people of God, for the elect whom God has chosen unto life eternal. No matter what suffering or affliction or judgment they experience, it is never punishment from God. To say so would be to deny the cross of Jesus Christ, where all the sins of all the elect were forever punished. There is no punishment left for us, because Christ bore it

all. Chastisement is never punishment.

A second important difference between chastisement and punishment concerns the motive of God in sending each. When God sends affliction or punishment upon the wicked, God is motivated by hatred and wrath. He is angry with the wicked every day. Whatever is experienced by a wicked man comes to him from the hand of a righteous God who hates sin and the sinner.

However, the motive of God in sending afflictions upon His elect people is always that of love. All chastisement is sent in love. For whom the Lord loves He chastens. Chastisement is for the child of God a proof of God's love. It is an evidence of sonship of God (Heb. 12:7, 8).

Thus, if God sends cancer as a chastisement, His motive is love. If God sends death, His motive is love. If God takes away all of one's earthly possessions, His motive is love. Always love, the tender love of a Father for His children. And nothing, not even the severest chastisement, can separate a child of God from His heavenly Father's love.

The third, and perhaps the most important, difference between chastisement and punishment is the difference with regard to God's purpose. With the wicked God's purpose is to destroy him. Already in this life God carries out that purpose, and to all eternity He will continue to do so. All that the wicked person experiences, therefore, has as its purpose his destruction (Ps. 7:11-16, 73:18-20).

God's purpose with regard to the elect, however, is to save.

God's purpose with chastisement is never negative. He is never out to destroy or to harm His people. At times it might seem to us that He is. In the midst of affliction we sometimes wonder if God has forgotten to be kind. When troubles come as a flood upon our souls, we are inclined to

say, "All these things are against me!" It seems to us impossible that God is working out our salvation through these things.

But He is. His chastisement is always good. It is impossible for it to be otherwise. For God is a God who, in unchanging love, always seeks our good. God cannot harm us. For the sake of Jesus Christ, He can do nothing but good toward His people.

God's purpose with chastisement is always positive.

Sometimes that positive purpose of God is to draw us closer to Him. Then affliction is indeed for our profit. It leads us to the Rock that is higher than we are. It makes us more aware of our need of God. It causes us to depend more upon Him. It leads us to a closer walk with Him.

At other times that positive purpose of God is to show us our sins. Chastisement is discipline. Just as a parent spansks a disobedient child, so God often spansks us for our disobedience and sin. He deals with us as children who need to be corrected.

The Old Testament is filled with examples of God dealing thus with His people. Think, for example, of Israel's journey through the wilderness. Many times God sent judgments upon them for their rebellion. And not only was reprobate Israel affected, but also elect Israel. They were chastised. The same occurred again and again during the period of the judges. When God's people forsook Him, He sent enemies against them in order to correct them. In this way He led them to repentance.

God also deals in this way with us. Through chastisement He purposes to convert us from the error of our ways. Often we are deeply involved in a sin, and blinded to that fact. God must stop us in our tracks. We are heading in the wrong direction. God must turn us around. For a time we travel the broad way that leads to destruction, and God must rescue us



and place us again on the narrow way that leads to life.

The true believer must realize that this is an important purpose of God with chastisement. As difficult as it may be to experience chastisement for sin, we must acknowledge that we need it. We need to be corrected. We need to be disciplined. And we need God to do it. Left to ourselves we simply will not see the error of our ways and turn from it.

Chastisement is part of God's work of sanctification, for it purifies us. The flames of affliction and judgment must burn away the sins that still cleave to us. But when He has tried us, we will come forth as gold (Job 23:10). God molds and shapes us for our special place in heaven.

Since God's purpose with chastisement is always good, we ought to learn through the chastisements God sends.

All too easily, it seems, we fail to do this. We rebel against the chastisement, or we become despondent and dissatisfied. Then Hebrews 12:5 applies. We despise the chastening of the Lord, or we faint when we are rebuked. Instead, we should pray that God will use this affliction for our good. We should seek to learn whatever God is teaching us.

It could be that we have to learn the patience of Job. It could be that we have to learn to be more spiritually minded, to spend more time with the Scriptures and in prayer. It could be that God is teaching us our weaknesses so that we rely more fully on Him and His grace toward us in Christ.

But it could also be that we have to learn something concerning a specific sin. We have to look for that too. Perhaps God is showing us a sin that we need to confess and forsake. Maybe it is worldliness, or pride, or hatred of the neighbor. Maybe it is the sin of being irresponsible, or the sin of lying, or the sin of using bad language. God uses chastisement to

reveal these sins to us.

However, when considering if we are being chastised for sin, we must not become despondent and desperate. If God is teaching us concerning a specific sin, God will make it obvious to us. It may not be clear to others, but God will make it clear to us personally. He sovereignly sends the chastisement with the purpose of turning us from a sin. Therefore He will sovereignly enlighten our understanding so that we see what He is teaching us through the chastisement He sends.

God makes this clear to us by means of the direct connection between the chastisement and the sin. We sometimes say concerning those who are punished, "The punishment fits the crime!" A drunkard suffers kidney problems. That fits. A homosexual gets AIDS. That is an appropriate punishment of God. A murderer is put to death. He gets what he deserves. So also with the chastisements God sends us. It can be said that they are appropriate for the sin. God sees to it that they are. His justice demands that. And in this way He makes it clear to us what sin we must forsake.

A warning is in order here. While it is true that God chastises His children for specific sins, it is not right for others to make this judgment concerning someone who is chastised. This was the mistake Job's friends made when he was afflicted. We must not do that. We must not accuse of great sin every child of God who is afflicted or who suffers. We may not even make such a judgment in our minds. God Himself will make it known to the person concerned if he is being chastised for a specific sin. It is not for us to do that.

It can happen, and it has happened, that a child of God, when chastised, is driven to despair. He considers the chastisement and becomes despondent. He thinks he is such a terrible sinner that he is not, and never could be, a child of God.


This comes about because of the devil. He has as his purpose to put doubts and fears in our minds. And he uses the chastisements of God to accomplish this.

To guard against such despair we need always to keep the following things in mind.

First, remember that God is dealing with us. We are not in the hands of Satan when chastisement comes. In all the afflictions and troubles of life we are in the hands of our heavenly Father. And He is sovereign. Without that great truth, we would have no comfort. Knowing God is in control, we have the assurance that all is well. Secondly, remember that God is dealing with us in love. God is never motivated by hatred in sending chastisement. Always He deals with us according to the everlasting love He has for us in Christ. He can do us no harm.

Thirdly, remember that God has a good purpose. God is not for a moment intent on harming us. He seeks to correct and save. Through chastisement He leads us to the cross of Christ and thus to blessed life with Himself, now, and in heaven. Through chastisement He strengthens our faith and teaches us to rely solely upon Him.

We ought to be thankful for God's good chastisements. That is difficult, for chastisement is hard to bear. No chastisement, at the time, is joyous. Rather, it is grievous. But God is being good when He chastises. And the good He is accomplishing is beyond any good that anyone else could do for us. For God is saving our souls. He is sanctifying us. He is preparing us for glory. And until we get there, He gives us the grace we need to bear the afflictions He sends.

Be thankful for the good chastisement of our heavenly Father, for it "yieldeth peaceable fruit." 

## The Nature of the Diaconate (3)

# The Office of Mercy

**I**n examining the nature of the diaconate, we have noticed that it is an office of authority and of administrative service. These aspects also characterize the nature of the other offices; pastors and elders also have authority to serve God by administering to the church God's Word, rule, and care for His people.

How, then, does the *nature* (not merely the work) of the office of deacon differ from that of the other offices? For if all three offices have the same nature, we would in essence have one office, not three. The nature of the office of deacon is distinct from that of the other two offices in that the diaconate has authority to administer the mercy of God to His people.

The prophetic office (pastor) administers God's Word, making known His truth and faithfulness. The kingly office (elder) administers His rule, making known in a particular way His justice and holiness. The priestly office (deacon) administers mercy to the poor and needy, making known God's pity and compassion. This distinction between offices does not imply that the elders and deacons in no way make known God's truth and faithfulness, or that the pastor and deacons never manifest His justice and

holiness, or the pastor and elders His pity and compassion. But by virtue of the nature of each office, these attributes of God are seen the more clearly in the one office than in the other.

The diaconate is that office in which the mercy of God is concretely manifest; it gives the people of God practical proof that our God is merciful, tender, and kind to His people in need.



God is a God of mercy.

When one studies the concept of mercy in light of the two Hebrew words often translated "mercy" (or a synonym, such as "compassion" or "pity" or "lovingkindness"), one sees two aspects of the concept. The first aspect, emphasizing the emotional aspect of mercy, is that of pity and compassion upon one who is in misery, and a deep inner desire to deliver that person from his misery, and to bless him. No one who shows true mercy is without deep feeling and compassion for the one in need to whom that mercy is shown — such deep feeling, in fact, that the Hebrew word suggests one's innards are disturbed by the plight and misery of the wretched one. In our vernacular, we might say that the sight of such misery is "gut wrenching" — such is the depth and intensity of the feeling one has who is truly pitiful. His response, then, is to desire that person's deliverance, and to work to obtain that deliverance.

The second aspect emphasizes

the act of showing mercy and the love which motivates the act. Mercy is a practical evidence of the steadfast covenant love of Jehovah. In expressing His faithful love, He delivers us from our misery and blesses us with the experience of blessedness and covenant fellowship!

In Himself and to Himself Jehovah is merciful. In this sense, mercy is that perfection of God "according to which He is tenderly affected toward Himself as the highest and sole Good and implication of all perfections, and as the Triune God knows and wills Himself as the Most Blessed forever."<sup>1</sup> God's mercy in and to Himself is not so much His pity of Himself, for He needs no pity; not His desire to be delivered from misery, for He experiences no misery; but His faithful covenant love toward Himself, which leads Him to bless Himself and seek His own good. This mercy is part of His glory! It is an essential part of His Godhead! He proclaimed this very fact to Moses, who desired to see God's glory, and whose request was granted to the degree it was possible without dying. For when Moses was hid in the cleft of the rock, and covered with the hand of the Lord, and permitted to see only Jehovah's back parts, he heard the Lord make mention of His mercy before any other attribute: "Jehovah, Jehovah

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), page 115.



God, *merciful* and gracious..." (Ex. 34:6). The church sings of it in Psalm 103:8: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy."



This mercy He shows to His people — "God's mercy is His attitude of pity towards His people in their misery and His power to deliver them from it."<sup>2</sup> We are delivered, by God's mercy, from the deep pit of wretchedness to the height of blessedness!

This deep pit is, of course, the pit of sin and sin's effects. Due to sin's guilt and corruption, we are wretched, miserable, spiritually dead by nature, unable to have any fellowship with God. And Jehovah took pity on us! He was moved by the sight of wretched man! And He desired and determined to bless us! "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him" (Ps. 103:13).

This height of blessedness is the living relationship of friendship which we enjoy with Him. It is that imperfect experience of salvation which we enjoy now, but is ultimately the perfect and sinless covenant fellowship which we will enjoy with God in heaven! In that day we will be perfectly and finally crowned "with lovingkindness and tender mercies" (Ps. 103:4).

This mercy He showed in Christ. Sending Christ into our flesh, sending Him to the death of the cross, raising Him the third day that He might have life and give us life — all these actions of Jehovah manifested His mercy. So great was His pity for us, that He caused His only begotten Son to come in the flesh to bear our wretchedness and misery. So great His desire to bless us, that He blessed Christ, and us in Him.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively

hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!" (I Pet. 1:3).



This mercy God bestows upon His people *continually*.

He does so continually, because it is one aspect of the grace of salvation. The salvation of a sinner is a continual process, beginning with regeneration, and ending with glorification. Salvation is a continual process because the sinner, though saved, remains a sinner in this life. He falls repeatedly into sin, and also continually suffers the effects of sin. So from his misery God continually delivers him in mercy.

This mercy God continually bestows through Christ, by the Spirit. That is, because mercy is one of the graces of salvation, bestowed upon the undeserving, God gives it to His people through our risen Lord and Mediator. And Christ bestows it upon us by His Word and Spirit. But the Spirit uses means, one of which is that of office in the church.

Some effects of sin are spiritual, such as sin's guilt and corruption. To deliver us from such, the Spirit dispenses spiritual mercy and grace through the offices of pastor and of elder. To one holding the office of pastor, God gives authority to teach the church God's will regarding our salvation. Through such teaching the Spirit works faith, by which we are assured of our blessedness and by which we are strengthened unto godliness. To the office of elder God gives authority to rule the church. By such rule, and in the way of submission to it, we are also given strength to overcome sin's corruption, by hating and fighting sin. And strength is, in a sense, mercy.

However, other effects of sin are physical, such as sickness and poverty. From them also God would deliver us, as is evident from the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. A day is coming in which all God's elect, redeemed

saints will be free from bodily suffering! Death, sorrow, crying, and pain will have passed away (Rev. 21:4)! And although God will not completely deliver us from sickness and poverty before that day (the poor will always be with us), nevertheless He does not ignore our sickness and poverty until that day either, but provides a way in which His mercy can be shown to His sick, suffering, and poor. This way is that of the church caring for her poor and needy. Through the church's acts of mercy, Christ shows mercy. And the church shows her mercy particularly through her diaconate.

The diaconate, then, is the office through which Christ continually bestows mercy on those of His saints who suffer in their bodies the effects of sin!



The congregation as a whole and the deacons in particular must never forget that the diaconate is an office of mercy.

The congregation as a whole must remember it in her support of the work of the diaconate. Giving of our riches for the relief of the poor, or giving our services for the relief of those in need, must manifest our mercy. The mere act of giving is not enough; we must give from a heart that is full of tender mercies. The fact is that such a heart motivates us to give. If we do not have a heart full of pity for those in poverty or other earthly distress, we will give grudgingly or not at all. How ungrateful is that one who, having been delivered from the misery of sin and death unto life with God, does not feel pity for fellow saints in their poverty, and desire to deliver them from it! "He that sheweth mercy" must do so "with cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:8). To that end, the elect of God, holy and beloved, are exhorted to put on bowels of mercies

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2 Herman Hoeksema, *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine*, Lesson 5.

(Col. 3:12). This we can do in the power Christ gives those whom God has given Him.

The poor and needy of the congregation must remember that the diaconate is an office of mercy. To seek help from the diaconate, when truly in need, is to seek the mercies of Christ! When one truly has need, one need not think that seeking the help of the diaconate is an admission of failure and defeat, or is a shameful thing to do. One must go meekly and humbly indeed, but in the same way in which we all come to Christ in prayer, asking Him for mercy because of our wretchedness, knowing that He will give us what we need. To seek the mercies of Christ from the diaconate is to come to Christ for help in time of need!

And deacons, *show* mercy! Comfort ye, comfort ye God's people! That means that you go to God's people or receive them in true love for them, truly pitying them in their distress. It means further that you understand their distress to be twofold: physical and spiritual, distress of body and distress of soul. The distress of body

will be evident in their poverty or sickness. The distress of soul is due to the fact that they are sinners by nature as are we all, and due also to the fact that their particular earthly condition of poverty or illness (or whatever else it may be) leaves them susceptible to certain temptations, which they are fighting or into which they may already have fallen. (I do not mean to suggest that this is true in every instance of those in need; but it is true of us all, and therefore also of those in need, that Satan uses the circumstances of our life to tempt us, and we often succumb in weakness, or must fight hard to overcome him.)

The deacons show mercy, then, in two ways: physical relief, and spiritual relief — food, money, clothing, or whatever else is needed, and the Word of God, brought to bear on the needs of the people.


Then the mercies of Christ have been administered!

How different this administration of mercy from that of the world! "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Prov. 12:10b). Cruel because true pity from the

heart is never the world's motivation for bestowing mercy. They have no true pity; it is a perfection of God worked, by the Spirit of Christ, only in His people for whom Christ died. Cruel because the world in administering mercy relieves only the physical, earthly need, and ignores the spiritual need. And cruel because the world never truly sympathizes with the poor in their misery, but merely tries to get them out of it quickly, while the church and deacons, knowing that we will always have the poor with us, and that we are also wretched spiritually, are able to sympathize with the poor.

What an incentive for the church's poor to seek the mercies of Christ, rather than those of the wicked!

And what a great responsibility falls on the deacons to be compassionate, caring, merciful men — men worthy (by grace) of representing Christ in this work.

No wonder, then, that Christ tells us in His Word what *kind* of man the deacon must be. To the qualifications of the office we will turn our attention next. 

## The Place of the Law

*For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

John 1:17

**T**o Dr. Schilder, the covenant of grace was forensic, a matter of law. He saw it as being founded on the fact that children of believing parents are set

before the promises of God, but only and always in connection with God's legal demands, warnings, and threats, which are related to the promises conditionally. Every child born from a circumcised father was — even as any baptized child today is — to be raised under the instruction of God's covenant, given the promises with the assurance that they rightfully belong to them unless they should fail

to meet the demands of God's law, and thereby fail to receive the blessings promised to them. According to Schilder, it is in this legal relationship, this conditional tension between promise and demand, that the essence of the covenant of grace is to be found.

With this, however, there are difficulties. While it may be true that in a sense the covenant as it manifested itself in the old dispen-

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sation presented Israel with legal demands and requirements, these never stood between God's elect children and the grace of the covenant, and the very function they served then no longer obtains in the same way today. All through the New Testament emphasis is placed on the fact that through the work of Jesus Christ the law has been fulfilled, so that it no longer stands in the same relationship to the children of God that it did before. This was brought out some seventy years ago when Herman Hoeksema, in a sermon on the 34<sup>th</sup> Lord's Day of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 92 & 93, explained:

The Christian knows that he is under grace, and not under the law. And when the church reads, studies, and meditates upon that law, it is not our purpose to have that law rule over us again. It is not the purpose of the church to obtain righteousness through the law. In that sense the Christian is free from the law. No matter how he may abuse the law, he is righteous. He is free in Christ; and he never allows that law to rule over him and to say to him, "Thou shalt, and thou shalt not." He never allows that law to frighten him with its "Cursed be everyone that abideth not in all the words of this law." He is not afraid of the threat of the law. He is free from the curse of the law. And we are not under the curse of the law anymore.

Nor should we allow that law to rule over us again. The law formerly was our governor, but it is not anymore. To be sure, that old governor is inclined to assume his old place as our governor. He is inclined to forget that the child has grown up. That old governor used to say, "Cursed are all that do not keep all that is written in the book of the law." But now, if that old governor starts to curse, you must tell him to keep still. You must tell that old governor to get out of your house if he starts to curse you. If he starts to curse you, you must tell him, "Christ has removed the curse. He has

made me free from the curse of the law." The Christian is not under the law, but under grace.

It is, however, just because we stand in that relation of freedom to the law, that we do it. We are no more under the law but under grace, and therefore we delight in that law, and delight to do its precepts. And as far as our freedom is concerned, it is true that the Christian is not lawless, but has a delight in the law of God.

Nor was this just a passing thought, for, so important was this to Hoeksema that as an introduction to his following sermon on the First Commandment (Question and Answers 94 & 95), he reiterated the same thought by saying:

The law of God, as written on the two tables of stone in the ten commandments, can no more occupy the same place in the church of Jesus Christ in the new dispensation that it occupied among the people of God in the old dispensation. That law can no longer tell us that we must keep its precepts in order to live. Nor can it curse us anymore if we do not keep its precepts, for Christ has redeemed us from the curse. And neither can it be our taskmaster to lead us to Christ. For we have the law written in our hearts.

The law, however, can be our friend and guide; and we can look up to it for advice and guidance. As a friend and guide, it must still have a place in the life of the Christian. The law is now principally theological, as is all truth. That is, the main theme of the law is God. In the same sense that all Scripture is theological, because, for of Him, through Him, and unto Him are all things, all truth is theological, because all truth has its origin in Him, and centers around Him, and has Him for its object.

At first glance — and particularly after a century of frequent emphasis on the need to restore the Mosaic law as a standard for Christian behavior — these remarks might well seem to be antinomian

in tenor. In actuality, however, they may well be seen as a basic principle of the New Testament Scriptures, as when Paul wrote in Romans 3:20: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin"; and again in Galatians 3:15: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law." In turn, it was this truth that lay at the heart of the Reformation, as Luther reflected some years later:

Once when I was meditating in the tower of the monastery at Wittenberg, and I saw the difference that law is one thing and gospel another, I broke through; and, as I formerly had hated the expression, the righteousness of God, I now regarded it as my dearest and most comforting word, so that this expression of Paul's became to me in very truth a gate to Paradise.

In a very real way the Reformation was essentially an unfolding of this principle into the life of the church, a laying aside of the law, or the legalistic framework which had been erected again by the Roman Catholic Church for the gospel of grace. It was a principle that was carried on for centuries, even to the theology of Herman Bavinck when he wrote concerning the covenant of grace:

After all, when the covenant of grace is separated from election, it ceases to be a covenant of grace and becomes again a covenant of works. Election implies that God grants man freely and out of grace the salvation which man has forfeited and which he can never again achieve in his own strength. But if this salvation is not the sheer gift of grace but in some way depends upon the conduct of men, then the covenant of grace is converted into a covenant of works. Man must then satisfy some condition in order to inherit eternal life.

As far as he was concerned a re-

turn to a conditional, and therefore a legal, framework for the covenant was a forsaking of grace and a return to salvation by works, which is rejected throughout the New Testament Scriptures.

But all of this leaves us with one question, what is the place of the law within the context of the history of the church of God?



The law, as it is primarily spoken of in Scripture, "was given by Moses" (John 1:17), and endured throughout the Old Testament age until it was finally fulfilled by the atoning work of Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. There are other special and more general uses of the word "law" in Scripture; but in its principal usage it refers to that special period during which, in the terminology of Paul, the law served as Israel's schoolmaster, or pedagogue, until the coming of Christ.

The children of Israel were the natural children of the three historical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and as such were a covenant people who were holy, in the sense that they were set apart as a people among whom the covenant of God would be realized. For this, however, it was necessary that the nation of Israel, made up of a people who were no less sinful than any other people, should be delivered from that sin and made perfectly righteous before the sight of God; and this deliverance He chose to make, not by an immediate fiat of command, but by bringing them through a long hard battle with that sin until they should be delivered by grace alone. It was within this purpose the law was made to serve.

The children of Israel, unitedly or individually, were by nature as sinful as any other of Adam and Eve's descendants, sharing in the guilt of their parents' first sin, and inheriting the corruption that came from it. They bore culpability for what Adam had done; and they received from him all of the natural

inclination toward pride and rebellion that Satan deceived the world into pursuing. That is to say, as Adam's descendants they were all, even as are we still today, born with a nature driven to prove Satan's contention that it is their right to "know" — or to decide for themselves — what is "good and evil," and in doing so "be as gods" in their own lives. It is that contention to which all men are enslaved; and Israel was no different. They wanted to believe that by their own effort they could prove themselves to be righteous, if only they knew how, and others did not prevent them from being the people they were convinced they could be — even as we do still today.

So it was that Jehovah, while meeting with Moses in the wilderness, instructed him to deliver Israel from the Egyptians, to whom they had been enslaved for generations, and bring them to that very place where they were standing. There He would begin to instruct them as to their own real value and worth, and concerning the nature of human sin. It was a course of instruction that would last not for just days, or years, but for generations, until the time of maturity would come.



Jehovah's work of preparing Israel for the coming of Christ began, therefore, when they arrived at Sinai. At that point they had just been delivered from the bondage of Egypt in a way that was beyond all human comprehension. Although they may well have thought within their hearts that somehow they deserved what Jehovah had done, there was nothing in that whole work of redemption that was of their own doing. The fact was that they had deserved nothing more than the slavery they had known in Egypt; and yet Jehovah had come to them, taken hold of them, and demonstrated, for the entire world to see, the wonder of that grace which He

was bestowing symbolically upon them. It was all of grace, for even though the children of Israel were often so fearful of what the result might be that they refused to condone what He was doing, Jehovah had proceeded to rain justice upon Pharaoh and his people until they were all but completely devastated in punishment for what they had done to the people of God. And, in turn, Israel was brought forth out of its bondage by the working of the mighty hand of Jehovah, the God of their fathers.


So they came to Sinai, and there Moses told them that the way of true righteousness was about to be made known to them. Jehovah Himself would appear to them and set before them in direct terms what it meant to be righteous, and what it would require to attain to such righteousness and be true children of God. To begin with, they must cleanse themselves through ritualistic symbolism three days, and even then should be careful not to presume to come nigh to the mountain on which Jehovah would descend; for, even though they were to be a nation of priests before him, symbolic cleansing would not be enough. Should anyone, man or beast, presume to come nigh to that mountain on which Jehovah appeared, that one would be struck dead. It was only through Moses, their God-appointed mediator, that they could come to him until true righteousness, that which Jehovah was about to make known to them, could be obtained. To Israel it was a thrill. At last they would learn what was needed to gain the approval of their God, which they were inwardly convinced they deserved, so that with enthusiasm they responded, "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do." To them this would be like a covenant in which they would stand over against Jehovah, and in which they would be able to do their part.

Then it happened: "Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke,



because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, ... the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount, ... And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. ... Thou shalt not ... Thou shalt not ... Thou shalt not...." In ten distinct words, directed to ten distinct areas of human ethics, Jehovah, Israel's covenant God, laid out

the first and great commandment of the law, and the second, which is like unto it (Matt. 22:38). So overwhelming was the force of what they saw and heard that the people for the moment were struck with fear before the sense of the immensity of divine justice, and they drew back, pleading that henceforth God would no more speak to them directly but only through the mediation of Moses — who thereby became to them symbolically a type of their coming Redeemer. And yet, within a few days their confidence had so returned that they were able to exclaim, before Moses was about to ascend into the mountain to meet

with Jehovah on their behalf, "All the words which the LORD hath said will we do" (Ex. 34:3). And yet, in less than forty days, with Moses absent from them, these people broke every last commandment of that very law, which they had received from the mouth of Jehovah Himself. It was the first great demonstration of a truth which would be demonstrated again and again in succeeding history, to the point that the apostle Paul would finally exclaim, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). 

*Go Ye Into All the World*

*Rev. Jason Kortering*

## The Congregation's Role in Evangelism



**S**everal years ago, when I was serving in one of our congregations, a member of the church came to me to ask for assistance. He was having good discussions with a colleague at work and this man seemed to be interested in the truth of the gospel. I do not recall if he was interested in becoming a Christian or if he was already a Christian but showing interest in the Reformed faith. The point of his inquiry was whether this interested person could come to see me and talk things over.

Though a busy pastor, I consented, and we gave a few suggestions on possible free evenings

when he could come. I also sent along a pamphlet which he could read in preparation.

The outcome was that he never showed up in my study, neither did he ever show up in church. Looking back, I can now assess this event from a better perspective. I gave bad advice to this member. If we had taken more time to try to understand the needs of this inquirer, we might have "checked" our mistake. At that time, it was very easy for the member to pass off to me this person who seemed interested. My zeal to do outreach work was genuine and I sincerely wanted to minister to this person. This inquirer, however, was not ready for the "preacher." He needed someone much less intimidating than I. He became "scared off," and we lost the opportunity to minister to him. I should have

insisted that the member of the congregation continue to meet with him and continue their study of the issues together. If the member needed help, I should have immediately encouraged and helped him so that he could fulfill his calling to be busy in evangelism. Under God's blessing, this inquirer would later be ready to face the preacher.

More recently, one of our university students, Fiona (not her real name), brought to church a young girl of about twelve years of age. Fiona saw her looking at a picture of Jesus in one of the stores. She asked her if she was a Christian and discovered that she was not but was interested to learn about Jesus. Fiona met with her and soon became something like an older sister to her.

Ping Ying (not her real name) continued to show interest in the

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Christian faith and expressed a desire to come along to church and worship on Sunday. It was at that point that I met her, a vivacious and likable young girl. There was a time when she was also able to include in her Sunday visit the meetings of the Sunday School.

That, however, soon changed. One Sunday, Fiona took me aside and asked me for some advice. Ping Ying was having difficulty at home. Her mother had discovered that she was coming to a Christian church on Sunday morning and strongly objected. What were we to do? I asked her how bad the opposition was. She said, "Come over here and take a look." I tried not to act too repelled, but the back of Ping Ying's legs were scarred with cane marks. She told me that almost every Sunday, after her return home from church, her mother would go into a rage and beat her. I encouraged her to continue coming to church and that we would all pray for her and her mother that God might help us find some sort of a solution.

Her way of dealing with the weekly battle was quite different from ours. She began to lie to her mother and told her that she was going to the mall with other girls and that she would be back home early afternoon. Once we learned of this, we saw that we had a real dilemma. Here was this twelve year-old girl interested in becoming a Christian, but every Sunday she denied everything which we Christians represented, that is truth and honesty. If we continued this way we would indirectly approve of her wrongful way of living and we would reap sad rewards for that.

In our talking things over, we concluded that, rather than come to church on Sunday, Ping Ying ought to meet with Fiona during a week-day and have Bible study with her. For the time being, Sunday worship was not appropriate, but we could have one of the mem-

bers of the congregation meet regularly with her and teach her the truth of God's Word and pray with her. Ping Ying could do the latter more easily unnoticed.

The congregation thus filled its God-given role in evangelism. That was beautiful. God blessed those meetings. We met Ping Ying just last evening and heard from her that the Lord had caused her to grow in the faith and even used her to lead her parents to the Christian faith and that she is presently worshiping with them in a Chinese-speaking Presbyterian Church.

### **The congregation has this duty assigned to them from God**

The primary method of the church in evangelism is *always* and under every circumstance the preaching of the gospel. The preaching is the duty of the church, not her members. We must in no way confuse the important and distinct calling of the ministry of the church in her institute and in her offices from that of her members. The church through her office-bearers preaches the Word. I need not belabor this point.

The congregation becomes witness-bearers of that word. They take that word which is preached to them and speak it forth and bear witness to everyone who is around them. Some of them take it into non-Christian homes and share the gospel with the extended family. Others take it into their covenant homes and instruct their children. They take that word into the market-place, where they work, and share the message of the gospel with everyone around them. They put into practice the exhortation of I Peter 3:15: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear...." When we speak and act according to God's way of faith and life, we are assured that some will take note and respond. When that happens, the saints are

ready and equipped to teach others the truth of God's Word and help them come to a deeper understanding of spiritual truths. This may go on for a few sessions or a number of years. The goal is to take them into the worship of God with the church on the Lord's Day. The congregation has an important part in the work of evangelism.

This mandate is given to us in such familiar passages as Matthew 5:16: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet, declared to Israel on behalf of God, "I have declared and have saved and I have shown when there was no strange god among you, therefore ye are my witnesses saith the Lord, that I am God" (Is. 43:12). That continues to be the duty of the church even to this day. We are to witness that Jehovah is *God*, and there is none besides Him.

Thus the Samaritan woman filled her role in the church of the New Testament. After she heard *the* preacher, she left her water jars and spoke of the message she heard and invited the men of the city, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29). In the end, they believed, "not because of thy (the woman's) sayings, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

The early Christian church had many such members in the congregation who assisted the apostles and leaders of the church. The book of Acts makes clear that there were members of the congregations, who were not office-bearers, who were heavily involved in the growth and well-being of the early church. The congregation of Antioch began because members of the church of Jerusalem fled there to escape persecution (Acts 11:20, 21 and Acts 13:1). Women did not serve in office, but were neverthe-



less much involved in the outreach and ministry of the early church. Mention is made of Priscilla, Chloe, Apphia, and Phoebe. At Philippi it was a woman, Lydia, who was the first contact. She played an important role in the congregation (Acts 16:15). Households were involved in ministry. At Thessalonica we find Jason and his household (Acts 17:5-9). At Corinth we find Crispus and his household (Acts 18:8). The story goes on and on.

### **The congregation is qualified by the Holy Spirit to do this important work**

The explanation both for the divine assignment and for the doing of work is the fact that when God calls one to work He also qualifies him for the task. The congregation is abundantly qualified to do their part of gospel witnessing.

We need but reflect upon the presence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This event was described as fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, "It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17, 18). "Prophecy" has its limited application to the unique, immediate revelation of truth which was a temporary wonder in order to confirm the authenticity of the apostles. Yet, it has a broader application in that prophecy also includes the Bible and the interpretation of the Bible. In this quote of Peter, he is obviously not referring to preaching (otherwise women would be excluded) but to the witness of both men and women in the service of the gospel.

The Heidelberg Catechism explains this in connection with the prophetic office, common to all

members of the congregation. Q and A 32 explains that we are called Christians because "I am a member of Christ by faith and thus am partaker of His anointing, that so I may confess His name." Developing this idea, the same Catechism Q and A 86 states later that one of the important reasons for our ability and duty to perform good works is "that by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ."

### **The church officebearers must equip her members to do this work**

One of the largest obstacles to effective witnessing by members of the church is that they think they cannot do it. We live in an age of so much professionalism, and this has also affected the church. There is a temptation among the leaders of many churches today to develop highly professional manuals and how-to-do-it books on evangelism. Some even leave the impression that they have developed a secret formula and well-tested and proven method that guarantees success. By that they mean, ways to fill up churches. We must not lose our biblical balance in all of this. We must not deny what rightly belongs to our members because we are so afraid that we may do it wrong. The fear of abuse may not keep us from doing anything at all. We must do what is right.

There is an important place for church leaders to help their members witness more effectively. The passage in Ephesians 4:11,12 continues to stimulate discussion. "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." There are at least three different ways of explaining this verse among the likes of Calvin, Matthew Henry, John Eadie, William Hendriksen, and others. The explanations given in the *Standard*

*Bearer* differ as well. My conclusion is that it is legitimate to explain the passage this way: Christ gave at least one continuing office to the church, that of pastor/teacher (the others listed have ceased). He gave them to the church for the express purpose that their work would accomplish the perfecting of the saints. Because the Greek uses a different preposition in the two following clauses, those two clauses can be understood to define more carefully what such perfection is, namely, the saints' work of ministry on the one hand, and their edifying of the body of Christ on the other. This passage then indicates that pastors must view it their responsibility to equip the saints for ministry (serving others) and to equip the saints so they can edify the entire body of Christ.

The entire concept of such ministry, by the officebearers of the church, does not depend solely on the interpretation of this passage. Because pastors are ministers of the Word of God, it is their duty to equip the members so that they can function in all aspects of their office of prophet, priest, and king. Here we are discussing the prophet part of that office.

Hence, I return to where I began.

The members of the congregation have a key role in evangelism outreach. They, after all, function where the people are located. (We pastors have to put forth effort to leave our studies and mingle with the world if we are going to witness to them.) There are more members of the congregation than preachers; hence, to marshal their God-given gifts and duties is most helpful. Besides, who can better testify concerning the joys and sorrows of being a Christian than our members who live and work beside their fellow-men.

May God use these words to stimulate this activity among us.



## Widow of Zarephath

The land is parched here.  
Not one small, tender root has sprouted forth  
from this cracked ground,  
it seems,  
forever.

Our god, our Baal,  
is found to be  
no friend to widow  
or to fatherless.

It is my guess that  
one small meal remains  
for us —  
my son and me.

We'll eat — and then we'll die.  
Already Hunger pains us daily —  
stalks—  
with Death not far behind.

And now,  
who stands before,  
who speaks to me?  
And has he come  
just to remind this widow  
of her terrible lack —  
requesting all I have  
in this, my barren life,  
for sustenance?

If favored Israel starves for daily bread,  
then who am I to feed  
the great Jehovah's prophet —  
widow of Zidon, nearly dead?

And yet,  
I move at his command.  
There is in me a parchedness  
this man of God requites.  
There is a longing of the soul  
e'en as I give my widow's mites,  
that he can satisfy,  
I know it to be true.

And so I do  
what I am told to do.  
Although my empty stomach  
has a burning ache —  
as does my little son's —  
already there is quenching of my soul.  
I'll gather just a few more sticks  
and pat together one small cake,  
which I'll serve graciously to him.

"Fear not."  
His kind words stop my toil  
and I look up.  
"This barrel from which you scrape meal,  
this cruse of oil —  
they shall not fail  
until the rain shall fall once more.  
Israel's Jehovah speaks this word."  
I pour for him  
and pour again for us,  
abundant oil —  
oil running over this dry meal  
as rain falls on a dusty land.  
My heart soaks up the goodness  
of Jehovah, Israel's God,  
and I know now  
we never shall be poor,  
we'll never lack for more  
to soothe our pains  
when in our hearts  
He rains.

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in South Holland, Illinois.*



# Family Heirloom (1)

**T**here is an heirloom, a priceless treasure, that has been passed down from one generation to the next. It is something that has become more and more beautiful with age. The surface glows with a patina that only centuries of careful use and maintenance can produce. Over time, blemishes have been meticulously and painstakingly rubbed out, so that the treasure seen today is more beautiful than even fathers of past generations possessed. And, if the Lord tarries, the heirloom that future generations inherit will be more beautiful still.

Can you see this thing of beauty?

You *can* see it — by grace. It is grace. It is the truth of sovereign, particular, efficacious grace. The unmerited favor of God towards His people — absolutely so. What an inheritance! Martin Luther, in thesis #62, stated it this way: “The true treasure of the church is the most holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.” More treasures have we — how rich we are! But this one treasure especially has been commended to the care and keeping of the church by her heavenly Father. Oh, not that the grace itself requires our protection or would ever improve with age. That work of grace belongs to God and God alone from all eternity, and it changes not one iota. But we must come to see that work of grace for what it is. It is the church’s perception of it that has

changed over time. It has become clearer — sharper — fuller. There has been development. The Spirit of truth has seen to that. “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth...” (John 16:12-13). With the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the precious heirloom was pulled from the Romish pit of mire and dross. The following centuries saw it polished to an uncompromising sheen by Canon, by controversy, by tears, and by blood. The creeds were given as a vital and essential part of that development. The history of our own Protestant Reformed denomination has added to the luster by the struggles of ‘24 and ‘53. Clearly uncommon, clearly covenantal — such is the grace we see in our churches today.

This distinctive and glorious inheritance must be maintained and passed down to the next generation. We must do more than admire it. We must do more than be glad we have it. We must continue the work of inspecting and polishing, inspecting and polishing. To let one spot of tarnish exist is to let the whole process of corrosion begin. How quickly in the past century have others lost their treasure, the acid of apostasy quickly eating it up before their children’s children are even grown! History has proved that it is naïve and foolish to think we are safe, to think the work is done, and to let the polishing cloth slip from our fingers. But more importantly, Scripture calls us to “... shew the same diligence to the full assurance

of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:11, 12). Let us be busy even now. Not one mar may be allowed!

God will preserve His truth. We know that. He will have it shine brighter than the sun. We know that! Else would our knees quake and our hearts melt. In fact, it is in the very truth of grace itself that we find strength to persevere. Yet, God uses means to accomplish His will. So now as parents let us examine some of these means in a very practical way.

First of all, the doctrine of grace that we want our children to see and embrace must be set clearly and distinctly before their eyes. There is much talk of grace all around us, but it is talk that includes a common grace of God for all men everywhere as well as a universal love of God. It is not the Calvinistic sovereign, particular grace that we know. At worst, the TULIP of Calvinism is stripped of all its petals, or, at best, it is completely wilted. In dealing with one of these truths, Prof. Hanko writes: “... the truth of total depravity is softened and even openly denied, for Arminianism has gained the day. Yet these truths are fundamental to the truth of sovereign grace, for it is only because we are totally depraved and unable to do or will any good that salvation is by grace alone” (*God’s Everlasting Covenant of Grace*, p. 39). We may not be shy about pointing these things out to our children:

It is very important that you know why we are members of this

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church and not another church down the road. Other churches proclaim that God loves all men and that He has a grace that is common to all men. But that's not true! Scripture makes it plain that God's love and grace are only for His chosen, elect people. Let's get the Bible out and see where this is taught. Here's one place — "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

The heirloom is distinctive, genuine, and true, proven from Scripture, and not a product of man's whim. Our children must know that.

Now let's polish it up a bit more:

Where do you and your friends intend to go tonight? Remember, we have no place joining with the wicked world. We have nothing in common with them — not even grace. There is no common grace of God in their dancing and drinking. There is no common grace of God in their movies and entertainments.

The heirloom is very practical. It is not a relic for the shelf. Nor is it plain, intellectual knowledge without feelings deep within the heart:


This doctrine of grace which we

teach you is a doctrine we love and cherish. We love it because it means the difference between living in the assurance that God has truly saved us — or living in doubt. If we say that God has a kind of grace or love for all men, and yet we know that not all men are saved, what kind of grace is that? That grace didn't save them — and it might not save us. But that's not the grace of God we know. No, there is only one grace of God, it is given only to His chosen people, and not one of those chosen people will be lost. Particular grace is real grace. Our salvation is sure. What a comfort it is — our only comfort in life and in death!

The heirloom is real, as real as a silver vase or golden candlestick might be in our hands. It very really accomplishes what it is meant to do.

It is also, indeed, a family heirloom. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7). Rev. H. Hoeksema wrote: "History is never thus, that here and there a few believers are called, that a few individuals enter into the church

of Christ, called out of the darkness of heathendom, in order then to disappear again from those regions. But history is thus, that the church of Christ in the world is established and in various definite places continues to exist in generations.... The Lord established His covenant and will perform the work of His grace in the line of the continued generations of believers" (*Believers and Their Seed*, p. 89). Also from *God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace* we find this simple yet profound statement: "This then is the covenant. It is God's work of grace; a work in which there is no cooperation of man..." (p. 19).

The grace we hold dear is God's work. All of it. Else "grace is no more grace" (Rom. 11:6). That God works His grace in families emphasizes this. That God works grace in families also emphasizes our calling as parents to teach our children in the knowledge of this grace. We are a means in His hand for instruction. Yet, we can apply that grace to the hearts of our children no more than we can work the mystery of life in their conception. It is God's work. The Lord willing, we will explore some practical implications of this aspect of the heirloom next time. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Evangelism Activities

If you have a very good memory, you will remember that last May we told you that the Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Holland, MI had decided to sponsor a chapel service one night a month at the Holland Mission for the rest of the year, after which their council would review the program and decide if it wished to continue the service into the next year. Evi-

dently that project has met with enough success to warrant continuing it for the year 2001.

First's council has also approved the purchase of a set of basic RFPA books for their Evangelism Committee to be used for display for their special meetings as well as for congregational purchase.

### Congregational Activities

If you are one who likes to make plans well in advance, then perhaps you might be interested to know that the Loveland, CO PRC and their Young People's Society

has agreed to host the 2003 Young People's Convention, which tells me that conventions have gotten considerably bigger and more expensive. Back when I was going to conventions, only 12 months were needed to do all of the planning and fundraising. Now it takes almost 36 months. But despite all that, conventions are still well worth it, no matter what the cost.

As you might imagine, this just-concluded holiday season saw many of our church choirs giving their annual Christmas concerts. The Choral Society of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, as well

*Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*



as the Choral Society of the Loveland, CO PRC, presented their Christmas concerts on December 10.

In early November the congregation of the First PRC in Edmonton, Alberta got together for their annual Car Rally and Soup Supper. I know we have included news about this event in past issues, but I noticed that this year the proceeds from the event were going towards a Young Adults' Retreat in Alberta, for the year 2002, D.V. So here again, if you like to plan well in advance, and you will be a young adult next year, keep this possible retreat in mind.

Many bulletins this time of year include comments concerning various decisions made at annual congregational meetings. At First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada, their Building Committee asked for a brief discussion to receive the input of their congregation regarding the possible need for a new/different church building in the next 5-10 years.

The congregation of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI approved a proposal to save money for a possible daughter congregation.

### Mission Activities

Rev. J. Mahtani, our denomination's missionary in the Pittsburgh, PA area, recently wrote a letter to the small group he visits on a regular basis in Fayetteville, NC. He writes in part, "There is so much reason for us to be thankful here in Fayetteville. God is opening doors. He is giving us lively preaching. All the ministers who have visited you have given positive and encouraging reports. During this visit, I made more contacts than in all previous visits. Much of that has been due to your lively witness and godly perseverance. May the Word of God continue to sound out to others in the area through your lively participation in evangelism."

In early December we read in a bulletin from our mission in Ghana that the work goes well at the site of the new church building. The foundation blocks are in place and soon the walls will go up. Needless to say, Rev. and Mrs. Moore and all those attending the weekly services are looking forward to seeing the progress that is made towards the obtaining of a new building to worship in.

### School Activities

On December 1 the students of the Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI presented their annual all-school program. This school year they presented a program entitled, "Great and Precious Promises."

### Minister Activities

Rev. R. Cammenga, pastor of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, considered a call from the vacant Randolph, WI PRC to serve as their next pastor. On December 10 he declined that call. On that same Sunday, Rev. D. Kleyn, pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC, also declined a call he had been considering to serve as minister-on-loan to our sister churches in Singapore.

## Food For Thought

"Doctrine is the framework of life — the skeleton of truth, to be clothed and rounded out by the living grace of a holy life."

—Adoniram J. Gordon

## Announcements

### Conference on Pentecostalism

*Spirit-Filled Blessing or Dangerous Error?*

January 26, and 27, 2001  
at First Protestant Reformed Church  
of Holland, Michigan

**Friday night, 7:30 PM,**

Professor David Engelsma will give an overview of the Pentecostal movement and a biblical critique.

**Saturday morning, 9:00 and 11:00 AM,**

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma and Rev. Charles Terpstra will discuss specific Pentecostal beliefs and practices.

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, IL express their sincere Christian sympathy to Mrs. Sadie Smits and her family in the recent loss of her husband,

**Mr. Menno Smits.**

Our prayer is that Sadie and her family will continue to find comfort in the confession of Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Rev. Allen Brummel, pastor  
Mr. Bert Worries, clerk

### NOTICE

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by the Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa on Wednesday, March 7, 2001 at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the classical agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by Monday, February 5, 2001, thirty days before classis convenes. An officebearers' conference is being planned for Tuesday, March 6, on "The Minister As the Man of God." All delegates or visitors in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Doon, Mr. Jim Hoogendoorn, 702 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Doon, IA 51235. Phone: (712) 726-3573.

Rev. Daniel Kleyn,  
Stated Clerk



## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to God we are privileged to celebrate, on January 19, 2001, the 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

### WILLIAM and THERESSA HOFMAN.

We are grateful to our heavenly Father for the years He has given them together, and for their faithfulness to one another and the church.

We give thanks to God for their godly example to us, their children. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to bless their lives together and keep them in His care. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- \* Bill and Joan Hofman  
Katelyn, Jeffrey, Jill, Michelle
- \* Tom and Darla Hofman  
Jacob, Emily
- \* Doug and Melissa Looyenga  
Stephanie, Justin, Nicholas

Grand Rapids, Michigan

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

January 25 marks 50 years of marriage for our parents and grandparents,

### HERMAN and LOUISE OPHOFF.

In covenant faithfulness and mercy, we are blessed through their fearing the Lord.

Those who His gracious covenant keep;

The Lord will ever bless;

Their children's children shall rejoice;

To see His righteousness

Psalter 278:5 (Psalm 103)

May the Lord continue to bless and keep them in the coming years. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations" (Psalm 90:1).

- \* Steven and Karen Ophoff  
Steven Charles
- \* Bruce and Rosanne VanSolkema  
Tedd Herman, Andrew Steven,  
Nancy Louise
- \* John and Patricia Ophoff  
Jessica Marie, Monica Ann,  
Natalie Sue, Lexi Nicole

Grand Rapids, Michigan

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to God, we would like to announce the 30th wedding anniversary of our parents,

### ED and MARY LOTTERMAN.

We are thankful that God has preserved them these years, and given us godly parents who have raised us in the truths of God's Word. It is our prayer that He will continue to bless them and care for them in the years to come.

"For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- \* Larry and Amy Rypstra  
Alaina, Jesse, Lydia, Corina
- \* Cornelis and Rebecca Kleyn  
Rachel, Abigail, Kelsie, Justin
- \* Andy and Rebecca Lotterman  
Jacob
- \* Mike and Heidi Haveman
- \* Lindy, Russ, Katie, Holly, Emily,  
and Bethany Lotterman

Byron Center, Michigan

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to God, on January 28 we remember the 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of our parents,

### MR. and MRS. RODGER A. MAATMAN.

We are grateful to God for the covenant instruction that they have given unto us. We as a family are thankful to our heavenly Father for the faithfulness He has shown us through their love, guidance, and prayers. May our gracious God continue to bless them and preserve them in their life together.

"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1).

- \* Todd and Marykay Maatman
- \* Jim and Tammie Swan
- \* Troy and Rebecca Maatman
- \* Robin Maatman
- \* Rodger Jr. and Cheryl Maatman
- \* Larry and Roxanne Leoni  
11 grandchildren

Leesburg, Indiana

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary-Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands express their sincere Christian sympathy to our fellow members and sisters in the Lord, Jeanne Jabaay, Janine Meelker, and Laurie Jabaay, in the loss of their father-in-law and grandfather,

### MR. JOHN JABAAY.

We pray that they might be comforted by the words of our Savior: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

Rev. Arie denHartog, President  
Marlys Mantel, Secretary

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 9, 2001, our parents and grandparents,

**MR. and MRS. HENRY HOEKSTRA,**  
celebrated their 45<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

We are thankful to God for giving us God-fearing parents and pray that God will continue to bless them in the years He may give them. Trusting in God's covenant promises, we, their children, can find joy in the truth preserved in their generations. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- \* James and Gladys Koole
- \* Brian and Pauline Kroese
- \* Henry and Linda Kamps
- \* Harlan and Lenora Hoekstra
- \* Vernon and Kari Hoekstra
- \* Mark and LaBeth Hoekstra
- \* Jeffrey and Mary Kalsbeek
- \* Jeffrey and Rosalynn Andringa
- \* Barry and Patricia Pollema  
45 grandchildren

Hull, Iowa

## NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Dan Huizinga (Phone: 616 453-3191). This contact should be made prior to the next scheduled meeting at Southwest PRC, February 12, 2001, D.V.

Student Aid Committee  
Dan Huizinga, Secretary