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Volume 84 ◆ Number 4

The Danger of Forgetting God When Full

"When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day."

Deuteronomy 8: 10, 11

National holidays may and can be properly observed by the Christian. Christians in Canada (on October 8) and those in the United States (on November 22) observe their national holidays of Thanksgiving Day by gathering in worship services in order to bless and worship Jehovah,

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their God. The focus of the day is gratitude for material things, especially for the harvest.

Our text is one of many that call believers to express their gratitude to God for the material things of this earth on which we are dependent. We are admonished not to forget God for the physical and material blessings He gives to His children. Because it is so easy to take these blessings for granted, we are specifically warned about forgetting Him when it comes to material and earthly blessings.



Moses is informing Israel that the land of Canaan, into which they are about to enter, is a land of plenty. It was a good land, with plenty of water and fertile soil, with already cleared and planted fields and fully prepared vineyards. They would be moving into houses already built and furnished,

with wells already dug. Further, Moses promises that in this land their possessions would multiply: their flocks, their silver and gold, and everything else they had. They would lack nothing, eating bread without scarceness.

This prosperity would be in marked contrast to the deprivations they endured as slaves in Egypt and during their forty-year experience in the wilderness after they were delivered from Egypt. While they had been very well cared for, never lacking, it was without plenty. But now they would experience a sharp and quick contrast, and they must be mentally and spiritually prepared to handle this great change.

In the old dispensation, God used types and shadows, physical and earthly things to picture spiritual and heavenly realities. God used the physical prosperity of the land of Canaan as a picture and type of His rich, spiritual blessings.

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The material abundance of Canaan was part of the blessings of God's covenant. Canaan's prosperity was an outward sign of God's favor toward His people, which is the greater, spiritual blessing. God brought them out of Egypt and through the wilderness precisely to bring them to this land. In Canaan God would dwell with Israel as their God and bless them with every good blessing. In addition, Canaan's prosperity was a picture of the fullness of blessings in heaven.

The church of God in western civilization at the beginning of the twenty-first century also enjoys great plenty. Spiritually we have been delivered from the bondage of sin. Presently we are being led through the spiritual wilderness of this life. We will be brought into the heavenly Canaan, which will be filled with the boundless riches of divine grace. In our pilgrimage through this spiritual wilderness we presently have been given a great plenty of material possessions. In the new dispensation, earthly plenty does not typify God's blessing as it did in the old. Nevertheless, like Israel, we must learn how to use our plenty properly. We learn that whatever God gives to His children in His love and grace is to be used and enjoyed with thanksgiving (confer I Tim. 4:4; 6:17b).



In our text Moses warns that the great and serious danger that comes with material prosperity is that of forgetting Jehovah our God. Just as poverty and adversity have their dangers, so prosperity has its dangers (confer Prov. 30:8, 9). Thankfulness is not natural for our natural man. Only the Holy Spirit can enable one to be thankful to the Giver.

The specific danger of prosperity is that our hearts are easily lifted up. Moses warned about this: "...when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy

gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied: then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deut. 8:13, 14). When we are not in conscious need of daily necessities, then we are inclined not to be conscious of our dependence on God. We tend to forget Him when our every physical need is easily satisfied. It is not that we want to forget Him and that we do so deliberately; but the abundance of our necessities takes away the consciousness of need. Also, prosperity can intoxicate (slowly), so that we trust in riches rather than in the living God who gave the prosperity to us. Paul admonished Timothy to warn those who "are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (I Tim. 6:17). Keep your eyes on the Giver, not on the gifts.

The other danger is that we are inclined to take credit for the prosperity, claiming that we obtained it with our might or by our efforts. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17). Proverbs 30:9 explains that when we are full, then we are inclined to deny God and say, "Who is Jehovah?" as if we do not need Him. When it is easy to obtain what we need, then we tend to rely on ourselves and not on our God. Then we begin to imagine sinfully that our abundance is the result of our efforts. This is what God calls "highminded" in I Timothy 6:17.

This forgetting is the forgetting from where we have come (our "natural face," in James 1:23, 24). We forget that spiritually we came from the poverty of slavery (Satan's) in spiritual Egypt and in

the wilderness of want. And we forget that physically we were born with nothing ("naked," Job 1:21), so all that we have has been freely given to us. When we remember our origin, then we realize that all that we presently have is ours by gift.



Our text admonishes us that when we have eaten and are full, then we are to bless Jehovah, i.e., speak beautiful words to our God and about Him. We bless God by thanking Him, by acknowledging again and again that He is the Giver of it all. We thank Him when we remember that He has given us all of our plenty. We thank Him when we remember that He gave us this plenty as the God of intimate friendship. He has saved us from the slavery and bondage of sin, miraculously preserving and guiding us through the wilderness of this life.

We bless Jehovah our God by sanctifying and enjoying all the material possessions He has given us. We do this by striving to remember that they are gifts from Him, each and every moment that we have them. We do this by not letting them distract us from the keeping of His commandments, the essence of which is that we love Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We do this by sharing our possessions with others and by giving to the various kingdom causes.

We bless Jehovah our God by realizing that He is the One against whom we sin with our lack of proper gratitude. So we ask Him to forgive us. Then He assures us of gracious forgiveness and declares again that we are righteous in Christ. Then we thank Him the more. Bless Jehovah, your God!



When we are not in conscious need of daily necessities, then we are inclined not to be conscious of our dependence on God.

Sound Theology - Reasons For Thanksgiving

As believers within the Protestant Reformed Churches, we have reason for thanks—thanksgiving to God for preserving us in His truths, and for His preserving various truths in our assemblies.

At the same time, we acknowledge we must be wary of allowing thanksgiving to transform itself into unseemly self-congratulations when we see what is happening to other denominations not so blessed. As if we have made ourselves to differ! As if we cannot lose what has been passed on to us! What is our esteem for sound doctrine if it does not promote in us humility before God and men?

That having been said, we reiterate, we have much reason for thankfulness to God for preserving us in sound doctrines, doctrines that, if they go lost, would lead to an impoverishment of life beyond words. This was brought home to me in a couple of ways recently.

The first instance was that of a death just three months ago in my own congregation—a young daughter, about the age of the daughter of Jairus, was lifted by the hand of Jesus to glory in an automobile accident. A heart-wrenching separation for her family. That Sunday morning we turned as congregation to Romans 8:17, 18. The apostle, having pointed out that children of God are joint-heirs with Christ to His glory, goes on to declare that he “reckon[ed] that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed

in us.” Words of greatest comfort and of encouragement of hope—a most practical word.

And then it struck me, these words of Paul are imbedded in the most doctrinal of books. Romans is the “Mt. Everest” of doctrinal books. Once again I was reminded that there is nothing so important for *life* as correct, true, and biblical theology.

We live in an age when the whole of Christendom disparages theology. “Who needs theology? Just give us the practical, that is, tell us how to live and get along with each other. As for the manna of theology, we weary of it. Of what use is it, except to divide?”

And then comes death, and, perhaps, tragic death. Is anything more *practical* than death? When death strikes, there is nothing in the whole of one’s life more important than that death. It puts the life of the living themselves on hold. And the question that takes hold of one like the grasp of a drowning man is, “Who or what shall answer to this death! What possible answer is there in the whole wide world?”

And then the vital importance of theology, of God-glorifying, biblically sound, soul-comforting theology comes home. Because without it there is no answer to the destructive power of death. Without it, death has the last word.

The heart and soul of theology revealed was ordained by God with death in mind. For, “Since by man came death,” so by a man must come “the resurrection from the dead” (I Cor. 15:21). And *what*

a man that man would have to be! For there to be any real hope at all, He would have to be nothing less than God Himself in our flesh. Nothing less, no one less, would do. It is the theology of Christ Jesus, and who He is (in very truth, God the Son in our flesh), that alone answers to the sting of death, to the curse of the law, and who alone could be the propitiation for sin and the justifier of those who believe (Rom. 3:26).

It is in the context of death and what death is and does (“The wages of sin is *death!*”—Rom. 6:22) that one understands and glories in the doctrines Paul spells out in his *Epistle to the Romans*.

At the time of death, thanks be to God for the wonder of His truth of justification by *faith alone!* For “by faith alone” means that it is by *grace alone* (Rom. 4:16 and 11:6). And what is “faith alone” but shorthand for saying “by Christ alone,” by His death and righteousness alone?

If, at the time of death, it is not “by Christ’s righteousness alone,” what is the option? This: Did I do enough? Did my loved one do enough? The dying loved one asks, “But what about all my sins and disobediences, those wrongs I did against you and others?” Imagine having to reply, “Do not worry, my love. I am sure, pretty sure at least, that you have done enough to make up for all those lamentable sins of yours. Keep thinking of the good things you did too. Those should be worth something, you know.”

And that’s going to bring peace to a troubled soul?

If that's how it is, purgatory makes more sense all the time.

God preserve us from the corruptions of Rome and those of her stepchildren, the Federal Vision men. God be thanked, so far He has.

In addition, thanks be to God for the theology of the sovereignty of God we hold so dear, a doctrine that looms large in Romans (cf. chapters 8-11). Practically speaking, it means God controls and directs all things that happen, not only the good and pleasant, but also the hard and severe. Yes, sudden death that brings such sorrow too.

Without the assurance that God in His sovereign wisdom and power is directing every event of life, including the most severe that brings death, with what are you left? This: God surely did not plan this to happen. God did not want this to happen. It could have gone otherwise.

Well, then, why did it happen? I made a number of untimely decisions, that's why. If only I had done this or that instead, it all could have been avoided.

A life of endless regrets. "It was all my fault." What a terrible way to have to deal with death.

And you can take Romans 8:28 with its comfort and throw it out the window as well. "For all things work together for good to them who love God, who are the called according to his purpose."

But grab hold of God's sovereignty and one can say, "Yes, I believe that the all-wise God is using even the grim reality of this death for the larger purpose of the victory of His cause. This death too is not without purpose in the tapestry of God's saving design."

Theology—apostolic, biblically sound theology—is the only thing that can answer to the power of death and quicken a hope that is real.

Of what practical use is sound biblical theology, indeed! The whole of one's hope and peace hinges on it. Without it, one is left defenseless against that last enemy. With it one can stand at the lip of

the grave and still sing songs of victory, though it be through tears. "O death, where is thy sting!" And "Death, thou shalt die!"

The other instance that reminded me forcibly of why we should be thankful to God for His preserving in our churches a continuing esteem for biblically-sound theology was the notice that our "mother church," the CRC, is celebrating her sesquicentennial this year, or if you prefer, her one-hundred and fiftieth anniversary (AD 1857-2007). A transcript of a speech by Dr. J.C. Schaap entitled "What About a Bicentennial?" placed in Dordt College's *Pro Rege* (Sept. 2007) reminded me. It had slipped my mind. Such a significant anniversary should not pass without comment in the *SB*.

But what are we, whose spiritual forbears were expelled from the CRC's assemblies, supposed to say? Congratulations? All the best? Thanks be to God for your faithful witness over the years? Somehow, such does not fit. A passage comes to mind, but it is not a pleasant one. It is the words of our Lord in Luke 13:34: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered thy children together..., but ye would not..."

What Schaap has to say brings home into just what a sad spiritual condition our mother church has fallen, a denominational malaise of lost Reformed identity, knowledge, and biblical soundness of life, a spiritual confusion that we might well be sharing with her members if not for the Lord's providential deliverance of our spiritual forbears in 1924-25.

Commenting on the massive loss of numbers the CRC has experienced during the last few decades, estimated to be in the neighborhood of 30,000, Schaap wryly writes, "In the last thirty years the denomination has hemorrhaged from every possible orifice and it's as much a blessing as a wonder we've survived at all. But we have. Sort of." (p. 28)

No, things are not at a high-water mark in the denomination, to say the least. Even Schaap, who wants to put the best face possible on matters, is forced to acknowledge it. Commenting on what has taken place in his own congregation in Sioux Center, Iowa (once called First CRC) just over the last three decades, Dr. Schaap writes:

Thirty years ago, First Church was always packed, even the balcony, even—mostly—at night. Bona fide "oncers" were around, but there weren't many. Thirty years ago, with that commanding prof. [a conductor of music] at the helm, the whole roof jumped with our singing, several hundred souls booming out much beloved hymns in four-part harmony.

By a pilgrimage through local churches, my wife and I now worship with a different congregation, but in the very same building as old First Church. Today, that building is, at best, half full. On Sunday nights (we're still among the traditional) we worship—but the gathering is far smaller, smaller and, well, "oncer." On Sunday nights, a praise team stands up front and tries to inspire the meager faithful. Anyone can lead. You don't have to be a musician, you just have to want to praise the Lord. We're far more democratic. But even with the praise team at the front leading maybe a hundred souls, we barely reach a decibel level high enough to reach the vacant balcony.

Much of what we sing frequently has the feel of ballads, not anthems, they're introspective, love songs that carry no marching orders; instead, music nurtures us in the therapeutic character of our culture: Jesus is love, and he loves me. Even if the sanctuary were packed, the more contemporary music itself couldn't generate the massive timbre that once filled the very same physical space.

Indeed, change has taken place, a diminishing by all accounts. Schaap goes on to note:

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Who would have guessed, a half century ago, that people who worshipped in the building we worship in today would be discussing—as many of us already have—the issues related to the viability of the second service; who would have guessed we’d have elders who are oncres [sic!—kk]—or women, for that matter?... Who knows what [another] fifty years will bring? Who knows if the Lord should tarry? (pp. 35-36).

Indeed, as Schaap senses, something is missing, something deeply spiritual. Whether he wants to acknowledge it or not, for all his reserved hopefulness for his church’s future, Schaap has come very close to uttering the word “Ichabod!” (the glory has departed) over his own denomination.

And why, pray tell, has all this come to pass?

In what may well be the most enlightening statement in his whole

historical assessment, Schaap declares what, in his opinion, it most certainly is *not!* Lest there be someone who “...might assume that the dramatic changes in the ways in which we see denominational life have been caused by a decline in orthodoxy (sic!),” Schaap, in dogmatic fashion, flat out states, “He’s wrong. The fact is, we live in a different world” (p. 19).

Not doctrinal departure, mind you, but simply the environment of our age is the stated cause.

Most enlightening, I say, when it comes to insight into a willful blindness. It is called “living in denial.” And as long as the root cause of her sad deterioration goes unacknowledged and unconfessed by her officebearers, for our 150-year-old mother church there shall be “Reformation no more.”

Is such reason for thanksgiving on our part?

Not at all. We do not glory in

the plight and sad withering of our mother church. Rather, we grieve and shake our heads. How the glory has departed.

But for this we do give thanks, namely, for forbears who were so committed to the sound theology of particular, effectual grace that they would have nothing to do with the incipient modernism behind the infamous Three Points of Common Grace, and for the sake of sound theology were willing to be expelled from their own denomination and begin anew. All in the interest of sound theology—and theology’s practical benefits.

They entrusted to us a goodly heritage. Its pedigree is thoroughly Reformed and Apostolic. Their commitment to sound doctrine and biblical theology has spared us many griefs and untold spiritual impoverishment.

Thanks be to the God of all comfort and truth. 

Letters

Special Issue

The October 15, 2007 issue of the *Standard Bearer* is outstanding. The articles are well researched and documented, instructive, and well written. Having now covered the *Afscheiding* of 1834 and the

Doleantie of 1888, perhaps you and your colleagues will give us the history of the merger of these two in 1892 with the emphasis on an exploration of the influence of these two secessions on the Protestant Reformed Churches.

We cannot live in the past, but we must live out of the past. To help us do this, continue bearing the standard of confessional, Reformed orthodoxy.

Rev. Robert D. Decker
Jenison, Michigan 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper (5)

As we continue our consideration of the spiritual feast that is ours in the Lord’s Supper, we must also understand that we receive that spiritual nourishment only by a spiritual operation, a spiritual work of the Holy Spirit.

Eating and Drinking by Faith

That spiritual operation occurs through *faith*.

The Belgic Confession in Article 35 sets forth the truth that, when we eat and drink the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper, “we also do as certainly receive by faith (which is the hand and mouth of

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our soul) the true body and blood of Christ our only Savior in our souls, for the support of our spiritual life.”

Faith is “the hand and mouth of our soul.”

When, therefore, we speak of *faith* as essential to this spiritual operation that takes place in the Lord’s Supper, we speak of the *activity* of faith.

Faith is first of all and essentially the bond by which we are united with Christ. God establishes that bond. He makes us one with Christ, one with Christ’s life. That is the essence of faith.

But faith is also an activity. And when we talk about eating and drinking, or the exercise of the hand and mouth, we are talking about activity. It is important that we understand that in connection with the Lord’s Supper. We are nourished unto everlasting life by *tasting* the wonder of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

It is possible in our day for a man to be nourished without any activity on his part. Hospitals and nursing homes have people who are so ill that they cannot eat or drink. In such cases a patient is fed by the injection of an intravenous line into which fluids are dripped into the veins. Or, in some cases, a surgical procedure is done by which a feeding tube is inserted into the patient. In such cases, those who are very ill are nourished without any physical action on their part. They cannot even taste their food.

But that is not how Christ nourishes us in the Lord’s Supper. To partake of the Lord’s Supper requires *activity*. It requires the *activity* of *faith*.

This belongs to that which cannot be entirely explained. For faith is a very mysterious spiritual power by which we lay hold of Christ and draw out of Him all the blessings of grace that are in Him.

That activity of faith is such that the sinner draws out of Christ His own life and all the blessings

of salvation. The believer eats Christ’s flesh and drinks His blood. We draw from Him the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

Again, there must be *life* there, if the sinner is to draw nourishment from Christ. Bring the unbelieving, dead sinner into contact with Christ as He is revealed in the gospel, and there will be no saving activity. But when the *believer* is led to Christ through the preaching of the Word, *he* will lay hold of Christ and, as a plant sinking its roots deep into the soil, draw out of Him all the nourishment necessary unto life.

The Connection of Word and Sacrament

Since Christ is revealed to us in the Scriptures, true faith always lays hold of the Word. It delights in the Word, hungers and thirsts for Christ as revealed in the gospel, is called into activity through that Word preached, and grows as it lays hold of that Word.

That is an element also in the Lord’s Supper that we must not forget. It reflects back on the institution of the Supper, as we considered it previously. But it stands intimately connected with the administration of *grace* in the Lord’s Supper.

I refer to the fact that we not only have the bread and wine in that feast, but we also have the *Word* of Christ. That is absolutely necessary for the administration of this holy ordinance.

Without the Word of Christ, there is no sacramental operation in the Lord’s Supper. Without the Word of Christ there is no *grace* in the Lord’s Supper.

What did Christ say? He said this, pointing to the signs: “This is my body, which is broken for you; this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

Why is that so important? Because, as we have pointed out from Scripture before, that Word of Christ is spoken in *power* as applied

by the Holy Spirit. It is a Word that *works*.

We must understand that the grace administered in the sacrament is not something that comes by the physical eating and drinking of the elements. There is the thought, the superstition, that prevails in the minds of some that says that all you have to do is partake, because the operation of God is not on the heart, but on the sign.

That is not just the superstition that permeates Roman Catholicism. We have to acknowledge that the thought is not totally foreign to us. Whenever we come to the table thoughtlessly, out of mere habit or superstition, we come with that same idea. “All you have to do is to partake, and your faith will be strengthened. Grace is in the bread and wine.”

That common-grace conception of grace being in things must be rooted out and cast into hell. There is no grace, except the grace worked by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of His children. There is no grace in bread. You could stuff half a loaf of bread in your mouth at communion, and it would only fill your stomach, not your soul. That is what Paul found in the church at Corinth. Read I Corinthians 11.

We confess that there is an action of Christ by His Spirit whereby He imparts Himself to us His people, changing us and making us partakers of His righteousness, holiness, and life. That is one side of the operation of this spiritual nourishment.

The other side is this: There is a spiritual activity on our part, worked by the Holy Spirit in our hearts, whereby we appropriate this spiritual nourishment.

Once again we refer to our Belgic Confession in Article 35:

Now, as it is certain and beyond all doubt that Jesus Christ hath not enjoined us to the use of His sacraments in vain, so He works in us all that He represents to us by

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these holy signs, though the manner surpasses our understanding, and cannot be comprehended by us, as the operations of the Holy Ghost are hidden and incomprehensible.

That having been said, however, the Confession goes on to speak about our partaking of Christ by the Spirit through faith.

The Incomprehensible Work of the Spirit

Now without question there is something here that is incomprehensible.

The operation that Christ performs by His Spirit upon the elements of the Lord's Supper, and particularly upon *us* as we partake, is mysterious, wonderful.

Just as Scripture reveals throughout that in the preaching of the gospel there is a mysterious work of the Spirit, so that Christ speaks to His people by that Word, even though what we hear with our ears is the speech of a man, even so with the administration of the sacraments, while we eat bread and drink a little wine, those very elements become a means of *grace* to us, as Christ speaks His powerful, efficacious Word. He says, by His Spirit, "This is my body; take eat. This is my blood; drink ye all of it."

And when we hear those words with our spiritual ears, we eat. We eat and drink with the mouth of faith the very body and

blood of Christ. We assimilate Him into ourselves, so that as Paul wrote in I Corinthians 10, in a way beyond our comprehension, "we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

We are one with Christ!

Let me ask you now: Do you know Christ in this way, as the fullness of life?

I do not ask whether you know *about* Him. But do you know *Him*, also in the Lord's Supper, as the fullness of your own emptiness, as the righteousness to replace your unrighteousness? Do you know Him as the Bread of Life for which you hunger and the Water of Life for which you thirst? Is your longing, your love, your delight, found in Him?

If in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper you hear with spiritual ears the Word of Christ, you will certainly find in Him your spiritual delight. And you will partake with rich spiritual benefits.

Christ is first.

We must have spiritual nourishment. But *Christ* must impart to us that spiritual food. He must give us in the Lord's Supper not only a little bread and wine, but the *reality* of those signs, i.e., the reality of His own body and blood.

Then we eat and drink unto life eternal.

Oh yes, we must be spiritually fit. We can only eat and drink to

the nourishment of our souls when we are well. That is certainly a matter of emphasis in I Corinthians 11:27-30. Perfection is not the requirement for such nourishment. But we can eat and drink only when we are well, and when we hunger and thirst for the body and blood of the Lord.

That is why we must also examine ourselves and come prepared spiritually for that spiritual feast. That is why we give attention, already the Sunday before the Lord's Supper is administered, to the importance of preparing properly for attendance at the Lord's table, and give ourselves to a week of spiritual self-examination.

The importance of coming properly to the Lord's table will be examined more fully in another article. But when we come hungering and thirsting for Christ and His righteousness, not clinging to our own righteousness, but in the spirit of repentance and humble submission to God's Word, Christ Himself feeds us by His Spirit.

We sit at the feast table of our Lord, eating and drinking with the mouth of faith Him who is our life. And we are assured that "we are as really partakers of His true body and blood (by the operation of the Holy Ghost) as we receive by the mouths of our bodies these holy signs in remembrance of Him" (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 79). 

The Deacons' Relationship to the Consistory (2) The Necessity of Such a Relationship

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In our last article we presented evidence from the Reformed confessions and from Scripture that there must be a working relationship between the deacons and the consistory. Some of the

work of the church requires the deacons to meet with the consistory in a body in which each pastor, elder, and deacon has one vote. With a right understanding of this relationship, we will better appreciate

the fact that the deacons, whose work is particularly that of caring for the poor, will at times be busy performing other tasks in the church.

In this article we note several reasons why such a relationship is necessary.



The fact that Jesus Christ is the only and complete Mediator of His church in every age, and that each of the three special offices in the church—pastor, elder, and deacon—manifests only one aspect of His saving work, is the first reason why the deacons must work together with the consistory.

This is the theological reason, and the fundamental reason.

As Mediator, Jesus Christ is our chief prophet, who makes known to us the will of God concerning our redemption. He is also our only high priest, who offered Himself a complete sacrifice to God, thus securing our redemption. As high priest He also intercedes for us (prays on our behalf) and blesses us in the name of God. He is also our eternal king, who rules and governs us as members of His covenant.

Christ performs this work while holding one office—that of Mediator of God’s covenant. An office in the church is a position to which God calls a man, authorizing and qualifying him to function in God’s name, with a view to the saving of the church. Simply put, we are saying that we have one savior, only one whom God called, authorized, and qualified to save us (Acts 4:12).

This savior is now in heaven in His human nature, while part of His church remains on earth, in many different localities, and manifest in countless congregations. To each congregation He manifests Himself as the only Mediator of the church by instituting and working through three offices—pastor, elder, and deacon. Through the office of pastor and teacher He mani-

festes Himself as prophet; through the office of elder, as king; and through the office of deacon, as priest.

Why did He institute and does He work through *three* offices in the New Testament church, when His own office is *one*? *Not* so that in the church there could be checks and balances. That is why our civil government has three branches. And *not* to provide three different viewpoints, or to represent three different segments of the congregation. *Rather*, to remind us emphatically that Jesus Christ alone saves His church; pastors, elders, and deacons do not.

So we come to the heart of the point that we are making: If the church is going to see that Jesus Christ is her one, only, undivided Mediator, these three offices must work together in harmony.

This does not rule out, but requires, that each office perform the work it has been particularly assigned. Our Church Order points out this distinction of work in Articles 16, 23, and 25. Briefly, the pastors are to be busy in prayer, in the ministry of the Word, in administering the sacraments, and in watching over the congregation with the elders (I Tim. 4:12-16, 5:17; II Tim. 4:1-5). The elders are to oversee the congregation, exercise church discipline, and conduct family visitation, as well as oversee the other offices of pastor and deacon (Acts 20:28; I Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17; I Pet. 5:1-4). The deacons are to gather and disburse the alms (Acts 6:1-6).

This distinction of work must not be forgotten. Neither elder nor pastor has been called to do the work of deacon; nor has the deacon been called to do the work of elder or pastor. The church needs each office to do its own work, in order that Jesus Christ may be manifest in her midst as a complete Savior.

But, in order that Jesus Christ may be manifest in the congregation’s midst as one unified Sav-

ior, her offices must work together. They must work for the same goal—the glory of God in His church. They must work for the same purpose—the edification and salvation of the body of Christ.

This requires cooperation between the offices. They are found, after all, in the same congregation; and their work regards the spiritual welfare of the same souls. Any division between the offices, any working at cross purposes, results in the division of the congregation.

The beauty of it—really, the *gospel* of it—is that such cooperation is possible. We are not speaking of offices in the civil sphere, but in the church! This means, first, that all officebearers have one clear standard by which to do all their work—the Word of God. Second, this means that the officebearers have the power to do their work to God’s glory and the church’s salvation, for by their own testimony, Christ lives in them! Any differences regarding doctrine and life will be resolved by turning to the Word. Any differences that are not major will either be resolved, and in a brotherly way; or, if they are not resolved, will not be obstacles to the men doing the work they were called to do.

Am I being too idealistic? Is it not realistic to suppose that the old man of sin that is found in each of these officebearers will cause them to seek themselves, and to get their own way, and thus to work against each other? Of course, this happens. But when it happens, the men have forgotten the standard by which to do their work, and the power in which they can do it. Remembering these again, such cooperation is possible.

For, at heart, each godly officebearer desires that he personally decrease, in order that Christ might increase, in his own life, and in the life of the congregation (John 3:30)!



Our second reason for the ne-

cessity of this relationship, a church political reason, follows from the first as a corollary: the authority of the deacons is equal to that of the elders. We do not mean that their work is the same work. But their authority to do their work is as great for deacons as it is for pastors and elders; it comes from the same God, with a view to the same salvation of the same people.

Although Article 84 of our Church Order does not teach this in so many words, it does imply it: "No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no minister over other ministers, no elder or deacon over other elders or deacons." The real point of this article is that every individual officebearer is on a par with every other individual officebearer, as regards his authority. If this is true, however, it follows that the authority of each office is equal to the authority of another office. "The ministry of the Word, the office of the eldership and the office of the Deacons all stand on a par. Only the work assigned to each differs. But a Minister is not a bishop over the Elders. Neither do the Elders function as bishops over the Deacons."*

It is true that the deacons are under the oversight of the consistory in two respects: their personal life as members of the congregation, and their work as deacons. The authority that God gives the elders is authority to *rule*: "The office of the elders...is to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow-elders and the deacons, faithfully discharge their office..." (Church Order, Article 23). The elders are called to rule the congregation; the deacons are part of the congregation. Just as the Old Testament kings of Israel were to rule the priests and prophets, to ensure that they were living in obedience to God and performing the duties of their office properly, so are the elders of the church of Christ in the New Testament required to do the same toward the ministers and deacons.

Even though the authority of the elders is to rule, the scope of this rule is also spelled out in Article 23—the authority of the elders over the deacons is *not* to tell the deacons how to do their work, but to see that the deacons do their work faithfully and conduct themselves rightly. Elders are to see that the deacons do their work faithfully.

As regards the nature of the authority of each office, it is equal. This means that, in any matter pertaining to the church that is not part of the work of the elders particularly, the deacons have as much authority as the elders to do that work.



A third reason why such a relationship is necessary—a more earthly, practical one—is the fact that a local congregation becomes an entity within society, recognized by the civil government as a legal corporation. Implied in this is the fact that a church must own or rent property, maintain that property, and manage its own financial affairs.

But who is to see to these matters on behalf of the church? The fact is that Scripture is silent in this regard.

Some would therefore assign this work to one of the three offices. This option is not good. Not only does Scripture not assign this work to any of the three offices, but it does emphatically make clear what is the work of each of the three offices. The danger of this option, then, is the very danger we are trying to avoid with regard to the office of deacon—that of forgetting what the real work of the office is, and thinking of the offices as the financial or administrative arm of the church.

A second option that some use today is that of appointing an administrative board in addition to the consistory and diaconate. In this case, the church has the three special offices, as well as other men

to administer her financial matters. This option we weigh and find wanting, particularly when this board is not answerable to the consistory. Because God has appointed the elders as the rulers of the church, all entities within the congregation must answer to the elders. It is true that the rule of the elders is primarily a spiritual rule over the souls of the people, but at the same time the elders rule the congregation as a whole in all matters, spiritual and temporal.

The third option, then, is that all the officebearers of the congregation carry out this work in conjunction with each other. This has historically been the way in which Reformed churches have addressed this issue. It makes necessary a meeting of deacons with pastor and elders to carry out this work.

Using this third option does not forbid the consistory or council from appointing men to attend to these matters on the council's behalf. Many of our councils do this, by appointing a bookkeeper who is not an officebearer, or a building committee made up of other members of the congregation. But these work on behalf of the council, and are answerable to the council.

To summarize, the deacons must work with the elders and pastor, because all the officebearers together must carry out this earthly, temporal work in the service of the church's true calling to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, exercise discipline, and relieve the poor of their needs.



So how, practically speaking, does this relationship of deacons to consistory manifest itself in each congregation?

It does so in either of two ways.

In smaller congregations this relationship of deacons to the consistory is manifest in the consistory meeting itself. Remember that Article 37 of our Church Order designates a consistory as

being “composed of the ministers of the Word and the elders,” but also allows that “whenever the number of the elders is small, the deacons may be added to the consistory by local regulation.”

In congregations in which the deacons are not added to the

consistory, this relationship is manifest in the meeting of the church’s council. Remember that Article 30 of the Belgic Confession includes deacons in the church council: “...also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the church.”

In future articles, the Lord willing, we will examine in more detail these two manifestations of the relationship of deacons to consistory. 

* VanDellen and Monsma, *Church Order Commentary*, p. 343.

Special Article

Prof. David Engelsma

The Covenant of Sovereign Grace (10) or The Decisive Influence of the Reformation Gospel upon the Orthodox Doctrine of the Covenant in the Netherlands

A Preposterous Proposal

If it is preposterous to suppose that the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands at the time of the Reformation would have excluded God’s grace and salvation in the covenant from the gospel of the Reformation as taught especially by Calvin, it is still more preposterous to propose that Calvin himself did this. According to this preposterous proposal, whereas for Calvin the fact that “among those to whom it [the gospel] is preached, it does not gain the same acceptance either constantly or in equal degree...serves the decision of God’s eternal election,” in the covenant (Calvin is said to have taught) this fact does not serve the

decision of election, but rather serves the decision of the children. Whereas for Calvin “salvation flows from the wellspring of God’s free mercy [in] his eternal election,” in the covenant (Calvin is said to have taught) salvation flows from the fulfillment of a condition on the part of the covenant child. Whereas for Calvin God “does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others,” in the covenant (Calvin is said to have taught) God indiscriminately adopts all the physical children of believers into the hope of salvation, gives His covenant grace to all alike, and denies the hope of salvation to none. Whereas for Calvin predestination is “God’s eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he wanted to become of each man,” so that “eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others,” in the covenant, with regard to the physical children of godly parents (Calvin is said to have taught), God

has not eternally compacted with Himself what is to become of each of them, eternal life for some, eternal damnation for others, but rather has a gracious will of salvation for all of them alike.

In short, whereas for Calvin the grace of God in Jesus Christ is particular, unconditional, and efficacious, in the covenant (Calvin is said to have taught) grace is universal, conditional, and resistible, indeed losable.

This is the proposal of the Presbyterian theologian, Peter A. Lillback, in his book, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Baker, 2001). I can be brief in my criticism here, since I have written a lengthy critique of this book elsewhere (see “The Recent Bondage of John Calvin: A Critique of Peter A. Lillback’s *The Binding of God*,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 35, no. 1 [November, 2001]: 47-58); the interested reader will find the quotations that prove the analysis and criticism that fol-

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low in this “review article” in the journal.

Lillback contends, and attempts to demonstrate with many quotations from Calvin’s writings, especially his commentaries, that Calvin taught a bilateral, conditional, and breakable covenant. That is, regarding the children of Abraham and regarding the children of believing parents, Calvin taught that God makes His gracious covenant promise to all the children alike, establishes His covenant of grace with all of them alike, and bestows covenantal “redemptive benefits” upon all the children alike. According to Lillback, Calvin taught that the saving, covenant grace of God in Jesus Christ is universal in the sphere of the covenant, that is, God is gracious to all the physical children of Abraham, Esau as well as Jacob, and to all the physical children of believers, those who finally perish outside the new Jerusalem as well as those who inherit the celestial city.

For Calvin, however, Lillback would have us believe, the covenant is conditional. Whether the promise is realized in the final salvation of a child, whether the covenant bond continues with a child, and whether a child keeps the redemptive benefits bestowed upon him depend upon works the child must do, namely, believe, keep on believing to the end of his life, and obey the demands of the covenant. Covenant grace and salvation are conditional, that is, they depend, not on the electing God, but on the willing and working child. Therefore, they can be lost, and are lost in many cases. Many who were covenant saints in their infancy and childhood fall away to everlasting perdition.

From this presentation of Calvin’s covenant doctrine, Lillback draws the astounding (and slanderous), if logical, conclusion that Calvin, unlike Luther, taught justification by faith and by the works of faith.

This book meets with wide and enthusiastic acclaim in Reformed and Presbyterian circles. It is honored as part of Baker’s prestigious “Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought” series. Its author has since been appointed President of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

Lillback’s book is no unbiased piece of scholarship. It is part of a deliberate, massive effort on the part of Reformed Christianity worldwide to bury the eternal election of God, once and for all, in the tombs of the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confession of Faith (and the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Belgic Confession, and the Westminster Catechisms, and virtually all the other Reformation creeds). The instrument by which this is being accomplished is the doctrine of the covenant. The covenant is divorced from election, so that God’s covenant grace can be universal. The doctrine of the covenant becomes the wedge to dislodge every one of the doctrines of grace, beginning with justification by faith alone.

Now Calvin—*Calvin!* the Calvin who devoted his life to the teaching that all of God’s grace and saving work in Jesus Christ has its origin in, is governed by, depends upon, and is efficacious because of the eternal decree of election—is compelled to support a doctrine that flatly denies everything he gave his life for. The heart of Lillback’s book is his contention that “Calvin’s use of the covenant was not hampered (sic!) because of his belief in the doctrines of sovereign election and reprobation” (p. 229). In Calvin’s theology, election does not govern the covenant. If it does, this would be a “hampering” of the covenant.

In the use of the word “hampered” is indicated the radical difference between the spirit of John Calvin and the spirit of Lillback and all his multitudes of allies. It is the difference between a humble submission to and trusting reliance

on the sovereignly gracious will of God and a suspicious fear of and resentful hostility towards that will. For Lillback, to bring the covenant into close relation with God’s election, above all to allow election to govern the covenant, would be to “hamper” the covenant.

God’s will would “hamper” God’s covenant!

It is not far-fetched to imagine the earnest prayer of such as Peter A. Lillback: “O Lord, keep your eternal decree altogether away from my family, altogether away from my congregation, and altogether away from the universal, visible church over all the world! Be careful, O Lord, not to ‘hamper’ our work in the covenant by your election!”

Rejecting election as governing the covenant, the vast movement of which Dr. Lillback is a prominent member subjects the covenant to the will and work of the members of the covenant, particularly the will and work of the children of godly parents. The covenant is conditional. Drawing the logical implication of this terrifying notion, the movement, at the forefront of which today are the men of the federal vision, teaches justification by faith and works. Having made Calvin a proponent of universal, conditional covenant grace, Lillback must needs declare (or, can now safely declare) that Calvin differed from Luther in teaching justification by faith and by the good works that faith performs.

In other words (and this is what Lillback fully intends, even though he does not mention the names), Calvin was a sixteenth century Norman Shepherd, and the theology of John Calvin was the early version of the theology of the federal vision.

Calvin Resisting the Proposal

Calvin resists this scholarly, audacious, monstrous reconstruction of his confession of the gospel of grace with reference particularly to the covenant.

When he defines predestination, in the final edition of his authoritative *Institutes*, as God's eternal decree by which He determined the eternal destiny of "each man," Calvin includes every child of believing parents. Children of believers are included in the category, "each man." For Calvin, predestination governs the covenant with respect to God's being gracious to some children, but not to other children; with respect to God's willing eternal life for some children, but eternal damnation for other children; and with respect to God's granting the communion of the covenant, with all its blessings of salvation, to some children, while withholding this union with Christ and the blessings of salvation from other children.

Similarly, when Calvin writes, in the final edition of his authoritative *Institutes*, that "our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy" having its source in "his eternal election," he includes the salvation of the children of believers. So closely is the covenant related to election that election is the source of the salvation of every one saved in the covenant, particularly every regenerated child of believers.

And when Calvin immediately adds that it is God's "eternal election, which illumines God's grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others," he includes God's dealings in the covenant. God's election governs the covenant in that He does not indiscriminately adopt all the physical children of believers into the hope of salvation, but gives to some children what He denies to other children. Thus, eternal election illumines God's grace *in the covenant* by this contrast.

Let Lillback, the federal vision, and all those today who like to portray Calvin as having taught that the covenant is not "hampered" by the eternal decree frankly tell the

Reformed public, if they dare, that whenever and wherever Calvin teaches predestination he intends to exclude the covenant, God's grace in the covenant, and the saving work of God in the covenant from consideration. Why, the ungodly world that has read Calvin would laugh them out of court. In the Reformed world, this now passes for lofty scholarship.

That Calvin certainly held that predestination governs the covenant is evident from the fact that, again and again, when Calvin is defending double predestination, election and reprobation, as the source of God's grace to some and of His withholding grace from others and as determining the salvation of some and the damnation of others, he appeals to Romans 9:10-13.

And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, THE ELDER SHALL SERVE THE YOUNGER. As it is written, JACOB HAVE I LOVED, BUT ESAU HAVE I HATED.

But this passage, concerning God's loving election of Jacob and His rejection of Esau in hatred, is not about God's grace and saving work on the mission field among the heathen. Rather, the passage concerns God's dealings with twin grandsons of Abraham, to whom God had made the covenant promise, "I will be the God of your seed." The passage teaches the extremely close relation of predestination *and the covenant*. It teaches that predestination governs *the covenant*. And Calvin appealed to this passage, more than to any other, in grounding his doctrine of the eternal decree.

One instance of such an appeal is found in Calvin's defense of eter-

nal predestination against his Roman Catholic opponent Pighius. Pighius denied Calvin's teaching that God's eternal election is the unconditional source and cause of salvation. Pighius maintained, on the contrary, "the fiction that grace is offered equally to all, but that it is ultimately rendered effectual by the will of man, just as each one is willing to receive it." Calvin responded: "Now let that memorable passage of Paul (Rom. ix. 10-13) come forth before us. This passage alone should abundantly suffice to put an end to all controversy among the sober-minded and obedient children of God" ("A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God," in *Calvin's Calvinism*, tr. Henry Cole, Eerdmans, 1956, pp. 50, 51, 55).

Calvin on Covenant and Election

But Calvin did more than merely refer to Romans 9:10-13 in support of a general teaching that predestination governs God's salvation of sinners. Gifted interpreter of Holy Scripture that he was, Calvin recognized that the passage teaches that predestination governs the *covenant*, *covenant* grace, the objects of grace *in the covenant*, and *covenant* salvation. Thus, he explained the passage to the confounding of Albertus Pighius—and Peter A. Lillback. Having called Pighius' attention to "that memorable passage of Paul" (Rom. 9:10-13), Calvin continued:

It was, indeed, a very great difficulty, and a formidable obstacle, in the way of the weak when they saw the doctrine of Christ rejected by nearly all these very persons whom God had appointed the heirs of His everlasting covenant. The apostles had all along preached that Jesus was the Messiah of God. But the whole of this nation, to whom the Messiah had been promised, opposed and rejected Him.... The apostle, therefore, enters into the battle with the Jews in this manner: he by no means makes the fleshly seed the

legitimate children of Abraham, but counts the children of promise alone for the seed. Now he might have counted the seed according to their faith. And that indeed would have been consistent, when, in reference to the promise, he was stating the difference between the genuine and the spurious offspring; and that, indeed, he had before done. But now he ascends higher into the mind of God, and declares that those were the children of promise whom God chose before they were born. In proof of which he cites that promise which was given by the angel to Abraham, "At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son (as if the apostle had added, before Isaac was conceived in the womb, he was chosen of God). And not only this (saith the apostle), but when Rebecca also had conceived by one (embrace), even by our father Isaac (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth), it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. ix. 10).

Calvin taught that election governs the covenant.

So does election govern the covenant that election determines which of the children of believing parents are children of the promise and the real seed of Abraham. Accordingly, Calvin added, election determines which children receive "the blessing of God and the covenant of eternal life." In the case of Jacob and Esau, Calvin wrote, "both the children could not be heirs of the covenant at the same time, which covenant had already, by the secret council (sic) of God, been decreed for the *one* ("A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God," pp. 56, 59).

The implication of the apostle's doctrine in Romans 9:10-13 concerning election's governing the covenant, Calvin observed, is that "the

vain fiction of Pighius concerning universal grace falls to the ground at once" ("A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God," p. 58). Likewise falls to the ground the vain fiction of the men of the federal vision, as of all who divorce the covenant from election, that grace is universal in the sphere of the covenant, bestowed by God on all the physical offspring of believers alike, but dependent for its "staying-power" and saving effect upon the will and work of the children.

Also in his sermons on Genesis 25-27, preached around 1560, shortly before his death, Calvin brought the eternal decree into the closest relation with the covenant. The relation is that predestination governs the covenant, determining with whom the covenant is established and who are saved in the covenant. Explaining Genesis 25:23, God's word to Rebekah concerning the violent struggle in her womb, "The elder shall serve the younger," Calvin preached to his congregation in Geneva:

Albeit God had established his covenant with Abraham, yet notwithstanding he would declare that this was not all, to have made offer of his grace: but that it behooved that he chose according to his liberty, such as he thought good, and that the rest should remain in their cursed state. And therefore Saint Paul allegeth this place to apply it to the secret election of God [in Rom. 9:10-13—DJE], through which before the foundation of the world, he chose those as seemed good unto him (John Calvin, *Sermons on Election & Reprobation*, Old Paths Publications, 1996, pp. 27, 28).

Of great significance in this quotation is the fact that Calvin used Romans 9:6ff., particularly verses 10-13, to explain the history of the covenant in the Old Testament. In theological terms, for Calvin Romans 9:6ff. was the "hermeneutical key" to the understanding of the covenant with Israel in the Old Testament. "They

are not all Israel, which are of Israel...Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Election determined who were the real "seed of Abraham" and the true "Israel" with whom God established His covenant. Election governed the covenant. If anyone challenges this reading of Calvin, I am prepared to demonstrate the truth of it with numerous quotations from Calvin's exposition of the Old Testament prophets.

By no means did Calvin find the truth that election governs the covenant only in Romans 9. He saw the close relation between election and the covenant also in Jeremiah 31:31-34, where God promises to make "a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah."

Certain is it that the gift of conversion is not common to all men; because this [the "new covenant" promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34—DJE] is that one of the two covenants which God promises that He will not make with any but with His own children and His own elect people, concerning whom He has recorded His promise that "He will *write* His law *in their hearts*" (Jer. xxxi. 33). Now, a man must be utterly beside himself to assert that this promise is made to all men generally and indiscriminately. God says expressly by Paul, who refers to the prophet Jeremiah, "For this is the covenant that I will make *with them*. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers: but I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb. viii. 9, 10). Surely, to apply this promise to those who were worthy of this new covenant, or to such as had prepared *themselves* by their *own* merits or endeavors to receive it, must be worse than the grossest ignorance and folly; and the more so, as the Lord is speaking by the prophet to those who had before "stony hearts" (Calvin, "A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God," pp. 100, 101).

... to be continued. 

The Fruit of the Spirit (2): Love

Some time ago we considered an introduction to the truth of the fruit of the Spirit, which is mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. At that time, we focused on the concept of the fruit of the Spirit itself. Now we will resume our meditative sketch of the fruit of the Spirit with an examination of each individual aspect as those aspects are mentioned in other parts of Scripture.

According to Galatians 5:22, the first of the nine parts of the fruit of the Spirit is love. Being first in the list does not mean that it is the first link in a long, loosely connected chain. Being first in the list means that love is fundamental to the whole fruit of the Spirit. Love is fundamental to the life of the justified and the sanctified believer. Because it is fundamental and vital to our new life in Him, Christ commands us to live in this love. In John 13:34-35, He said, "Little children ... a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." He who by the working of the Spirit heeds that command of Christ and bears forth that pleasant fruit of love will then also be energized to bring forth the sweet fruit of joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and temperance.



It is worthwhile to note that when Scripture speaks of the child

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of God and of love together, it frequently connects the two in the form of an exhortation. However, that is not so in Galatians 5:22. The Lord, through the inspired apostle Paul, does not exhort us to produce the fruit of love. The exhortation to love God and the neighbor may certainly be implied, but it is not explicitly stated.

What is the significance of the fact that Galatians 5:22 speaks of love as part of the fruit of the Spirit and as a spiritual reality in the sanctified child of God, but that Galatians 5:22 does not exhort us unto that love? The absence of the exhortation reminds us that the love that the redeemed and renewed children of God must express to God and the neighbor is the fruit of *the Spirit*. This love is not our work; and its existence in our lives does not have its source in us, nor is its continued existence dependent or conditioned on us, our faith, or any of our works. The Spirit of Christ is the miracle worker of the fruit-life in and through His people. The Spirit cultivates and nurtures the living branches, who have been ingrafted by Him into Christ Jesus. He is the agent of the Father and Christ to work by His sovereign, almighty, and irresistible grace in His elect regenerated people the fruit that God has foreordained that we must produce. When in this life we begin to learn and enjoy that fruit-life of love, that reality is not due to us, but it is the work of *the Spirit*. The Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit receive all the glory and the credit for this wonder of the fruit-life of love appearing and being exercised in us and by us.

How then does the Spirit cultivate and nurture that fruit of love

in and through us throughout our life? He cultivates and nurtures love by the means of grace: the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Powerfully and irresistibly the Spirit calls us unto newness of life. In the justified, He works by the means of grace to purify us unto the production of love. He turns us from the hatred of our old flesh and leads us forth into the love of our new nature in Christ Jesus.

Consequently, it is vitally important that we attend a church where the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is most purely preached and the sacraments are faithfully administered according to the ordinances of Christ. By the means of grace, the Spirit uses many passages in Scripture, including John 13:34-35, to work in us the fruit of the exercise of true love. By the living Word of Christ, the Spirit of Christ cultivates, fertilizes, waters, and rigorously prunes us unto faithful production of the sweet fruit of love.



What is this fruit of love? True love is first of all love towards God. "I will love Thee, O LORD, my strength" (Ps. 18:1). True love is the spiritual activity of knowing Jehovah and delighting in Him. It is the pursuit of fellowship and communion with the triune God in the knowledge of Christ Jesus. He that loves God desires to know Him in all His glory and truth, especially as the God of our salvation in Christ Jesus. This is evident from the psalmist's confession in Psalm 18, in which he not only declares that he loves Jehovah, but also declares the reasons for his delight in communion with Jehovah: "The

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LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower" (Ps. 18:2). For those glorious reasons, true love delights in God as our God in Christ Jesus and pursues blessed communion with Him.

As the apostle John reminds us frequently in I John 3-4, we must love God, and we must love our neighbor who is brought providentially upon our pathway. True love for God is demonstrated in our love for the neighbor. Therefore, in I John 3:23, the apostle John declares: "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." We learn that true love towards the neighbor seeks spiritual communion and fellowship in God and the Lord Jesus Christ. That is fellowship sought not in just anything, such as sin or false doctrines of men, but rather in a faithful confession of the name of Jesus Christ according to His Word and the truth. This we must exercise towards one another.



Now, to understand the quality and characteristics of this love that we must exercise, the Lord, in John 13:34-35, adds the sole standard of that love: "...as I have loved you." Do you want to know what this love is that we must exercise towards one another? Look at Christ's love towards you. Have you seen and tasted that love? According to the standard of the quality, sweetness, and beauty of Christ's love towards you, so love one another.

As a result, what this love should be and how it ought to be exercised is not to be determined against the standard of what we feel like doing or not doing. We often attempt, and then fail, to exercise love in that way. Often our standard of love is whether it feels convenient or seems right to us in our own eyes. But that is not cor-

rect. The true standard that we are called by Christ to follow is clearly stated: "as I have loved you."

How did Christ love us?

He gave Himself for us. He did not take anything from us except our guilt, in order to satisfy God's justice for our justification. In all His work for us, He gave Himself for us who by nature are nothing and totally unworthy. Even though while He died for us we hated Him, yet He gave Himself for us.

He loved us unconditionally. He did not love us because we loved Him. He does not love us now because we love Him. He will not love us tomorrow because we love Him. He will not embrace us in His covenant love only if we embrace or desire to embrace Him first. We are not required to meet certain conditions before He seeks us and draws us unto Himself. Christ loves us unconditionally.

He loved us entirely. He did not withhold from us part of Himself. When He redeemed us by His complete sacrifice on Calvary, He did not hold anything back. He gave His heart, mind, and strength for us and to us. He even poured out His soul unto death for us.

Christ loved us faithfully. He never gave up on us half way or near to the end of His work of our redemption. It is not true that He loves us today, but tomorrow maybe He will not. His love was, is, and shall be unswervingly faithful unto us.

Christ loved us to the greatest extent of self-denial required. He wanted not His will, but the Father's will to be done. Whatever was necessary for the salvation of His people, that was His will. Unto the fulfillment of that will of God, He denied Himself totally.

Christ loved us with a purpose. His purpose was always our salvation. He did not love, except unto the salvation of the objects of His love. Those whom Jesus loved were those whom the Father gave to Him from eternity. All those whom the Father chose in Christ, Christ loved unto the end of His

earthly life on the cross. And such alone He continues to love with the purpose of our eternal salvation in glory with Him.

Finally, Christ loved us with a holy love that was always consecrated unto the Father first. His love is pure. His love is sinless. His love was and always is in harmony with the glory of the Father. Because Christ loved and loves the Father, Christ loved and loves us whom the Father gave to Him eternally. In His love unto us, Christ always has one eye of delight upon the glory of our Father.



As Christ loved us, so now must we love one another.

This does not mean that we can love entirely as Christ did. After all, Christ is our Lord and Savior, and, as a result, it is impossible that our love could redeem ourselves or anyone else from sin and death. Furthermore, our love is rooted and totally dependent upon His redeeming love unto us. Although we may never attain to the glory and power of Christ's saving love, we must, nevertheless, pursue the standard of Christ's love in the new man of Christ. The love that is revealed in Christ must be a delight to us, and to imitate that love of Christ must also be our delight.

An impossible standard for us to obtain? It certainly is for us. However, that forces us to see that Christ is not only the standard of this love, but Christ is also the perfection of that love that we must exercise to one another. Furthermore, Christ is the only and never failing fountain of that true love. Since we are living branches united to Christ, our Root and Tree, in Him we receive this love. Therefore, our desire must be that we produce this fruit of love out of Him by the working of the Holy Spirit in and through us.

In that hope, we must love one another. We must love our spouses and our children, even in their most undeserving behavior. We must love

our parents in spite of their weaknesses and faults. We must love our brothers and sisters in the Lord. In fact, we must love our neighbor, who can vary from time to time in God's providence. To such there must be exercised the fruit of love.

Our love must give. It must not take and abuse for carnal and selfish motives. It must not give and expect that it be returned. It must forget self and deny self. As Christ gave Himself for us, so must we give ourselves for the sake of the other.

Our love must not be exercised to one another only after certain conditions regarding the personality of the other person, and how well he has treated us, are first met. As Christ loved us, even when we were the least deserving of His love, so must we exercise the love of Christ towards one another.

Our love must be holy. Our love must not be carnal or motivated by lust or sin. True love cannot be enjoyed in the fellowship of sin and separation from God. Our love must be consecrated first to God and then to the neighbor according to God's Word. As a result, true love will not compromise and stray into paths of sin, but, in contrast, it maintains a clear view of the beauty and glory of our holy

Father and the spiritual salvation of one another.



Oftentimes we face the difficult and practical question of how to love someone who does not live in daily repentance but walks in a sin. How do we love those who by their walk of life or their denial of the truth show that they hate God and Christ? How can we love such?

It is true that we cannot love the wicked in their sin. There can be no communion with the ungodly, and there may be no attempts for the godly to have spiritual fellowship with the ungodly (II Cor. 6:14-18). There can be no true fellowship with the impenitent in his sin. Unrepented sin remains a barrier over and around which the ebb and flow of true communion cannot pass. Until sin is forsaken and there is reconciliation, there can be no true fellowship of love in Jesus Christ.

Hence, to love the wicked means that we may not tolerate their sin. We may not let the impenitent have the satisfaction of a soothed conscience in the thought that we no longer are offended by what they consider to be just another way of life. In one way or another, we must address sinners

and their offense, which divides and separates them from full communion. The influence of our example, our conversation, or our attempts to call them to repentance should irritate and prick their conscience and force them to think about their sin and their duty to repent in the light of God's Word.

In that way, our love is both holy and purposeful. It is holy as God is holy. And it has the purpose to seek the repentance of the impenitent and their escape in Christ Jesus from spiritual ruin.

If the Lord so wills that the barrier of the offense is removed through the way of repentance and reconciliation, then communion and friendship may ebb and flow between two hearts joined in the Lord and in the peace of His shed blood. Therein will be enjoyed the sweetness of the fruit of true love as Christ has so loved us.



Let us seek the Lord earnestly in prayer for His grace and Spirit, in order that we may have this fruit of love more and more. What a delightful life and privilege it is to be the blessed recipient of the love of Christ and to love one another as He loved us. 

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Defining Missions

The task of writing about missions for the *Standard Bearer* is not some new enterprise. Upon examination of the index of past issues of the *SB*, one is able to read more than a few excellent articles written by Rev. Cornelius Hanko in early issues of

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this periodical. Prof. Robert Decker, professor of missions in the Protestant Reformed Theological School from 1973 to 2006, wrote extensively on the principles and methods of mission work. Also, Rev. Ron VanOverloop, home missionary from 1979 to 1989, has contributed his fair share to this subject. What I intend to write in this article and others will therefore not be in many respects new. There are fundamental principles of mis-

sions that always remain the same, because they are scriptural. These principles may not be called into question, and when they are again presented they are not new. I do intend in my articles, however, to offer my own perspective as a missionary on various subjects relating to missions—a perspective that will, I hope, challenge everyone's ideas on missions and stimulate some good, healthy, spiritual discussion.

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There seems to be a resurgence of discussion among some in the Protestant Reformed Churches about the mission work we perform. That is good! That is the way it should be: everyone taking an active interest in sharing the gospel of grace with others! But there are two extremes that have presented themselves in this renewed discussion. Both of these extremes must be avoided.

The first is that of open and, at times, even adversarial criticism of the mission methods of our churches. The criticism can be heard that our churches do not know how to do mission work. Then, with that criticism, any number of modern methods are suggested that are not measured over against Scripture, but that seem to work for other churches. I have served on the Domestic Mission Committee of our churches for about eighteen years. During those years I worked with men who, though they admit that they continue to learn about the work of missions, have sought diligently to establish solidly Reformed mission methods. This is not something that happens overnight. For example, certainly we do not wish to fall into the error of those who maintain that the only way to do mission work properly is by proclaiming that God sincerely desires to save everyone who hears the preaching. That error alone has caused many a church's mission labor to go spiritually shipwreck. We must carefully develop a distinctively Reformed way of performing mission work. This, I believe, is being done.

A second extreme swings in the opposite direction: a kind of half-hearted interest in the work of missions. This kind of interest is a result of the attitude that mission work is a luxury that the church of Christ may engage in only when it has enough money and preachers. Mission work is a secondary work of the church. This was expressed to me not so long ago when I was

told, "I really do not give much money to missions. Most of my giving is directed to the Christian schools, because that is how God builds His church." We will learn (once again) in our articles that mission work is an *essential* part of the work of the church of Jesus Christ.

Closely related to this extreme is the attitude of separatism among some. These maintain that if people with whom we come into contact do not believe the doctrines of Scripture the way we do, they are not worthy of our efforts. These critics are always suspicious of our mission work, and oftentimes of the missionary, that the work of missions may lead the church into the way of apostasy. Such an attitude precludes any kind of effective mission work.

These extremes regarding mission work have always revealed themselves in the church. One extreme claims a zeal for mission work, the other claims to be a solid anchor that guards our mission work from leading the denomination astray. But both are guilty of the same error: they do not present a healthy, well-balanced approach to missions that will result in Christ's blessing and be used by Him for the gathering of His church out of the nations. It is my desire that the articles I submit may provide such an approach to the work of missions in our churches.

What is mission work?

Many Reformed writers have offered a definition of mission work. Most of them are sound, usually emphasizing different aspects of missions. The Protestant Reformed Churches have their own definition of missions that was adopted by their synod in 1962: "Mission work may be defined as that work of God in Christ whereby, through the official ministry of the Word by the church beyond the confines of the church, He gathers His church in the new dispensation from all the nations of

the world, both Jew and Gentile."¹ This definition emphasizes several scriptural givens regarding mission work.

1). Missions is a work of God in Christ. "The Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to eternal life...."²

2). Christ performs this work through the church institute and its office of the ministry of the Word.

3). It is a work that is performed by the church institute outside of the confines of that particular church.

4). The church is gathered from all nations of the world, both Jew and Gentile.

We will have opportunity to write about all of these elements that serve to define missions. Before we do, however, I also submit my own definition of missions – not because I believe the one given by synod is deficient in any way, but because there is a certain aspect of mission work that needs to be emphasized in our day. Mission work is that work of our ascended Lord by which He, through the church, proclaims the gospel to all peoples of the earth, without distinction, calling them to repentance and faith, by which call the Spirit works salvation in the hearts of God's elect, adding them to the number of His church. This definition includes the following:

1). Missions is a work of God in Christ through His Spirit.

2). Christ performs this work through the church institute and the preaching of the gospel.

3). The gospel must be preached to all peoples of the earth without discrimination.

4). It is a general call to everyone to come to repentance and faith, but a call by which God sovereignly fulfills His desire to save unto Himself only His elect people in Christ.

Again, the various elements of our definition will be addressed in future articles. But before we begin we ought to establish first the bib-

lical foundation for the work of missions. After all, if missions is such an important task of the church, if it is not a secondary but an essential aspect of the labors of the church, the Bible will reveal that to us.

The scriptural foundation for missions.

When considering the necessity of mission work, attention is usually focused on the command Christ gives the church in Matthew 28:19, 20: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”³ These verses are commonly called “the Great Commission.” They are the command of the Head of the church to His church to preach the gospel to all nations and peoples of the world. This command, it is said, must be what motivates the church to do mission work. Christ has commanded it; the church must obey! Although this may be true, a mere command in itself is not what motivates the church to go out and preach the gospel to all nations. *Why* did Christ give this great commission to the church? If we can understand that, we will find true motivation. The answer lies in the blessed truth of God’s covenant. The truth of God’s covenant is the foundation of, and therefore the motivation for, all mission work.

God’s *covenant* must be the incentive behind our mission work? Does not the truth of God’s covenant explicitly teach that God will gather His church from one generation to the next out of the children that are born to believers? Genesis 17:7 teaches, “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*” (emphasis

mine—W.B.). The truth of God’s covenant teaches us that God will cause His church to grow from within the confines of that church by means of the generations born to believing parents. Does not the very idea of the covenant as taught in Genesis 17:7 and elsewhere contradict the whole idea of preaching the gospel to others? How then can the truth of the covenant be incentive for missions? Our churches have always placed heavy emphasis on the rigorous training of our children in the truths of God’s Word in order that the church can grow from within. Believing parents have pumped millions of dollars into Christian schools because they take seriously the truth of God’s covenant with His people. How then can the truth of God’s covenant be the motivation behind missions?

There is another marvelous truth revealed in Genesis 17 that too often is overlooked. We read these words of God to Abraham in verses 4 and 5: “As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.” Not only did God promise to establish a relationship of fellowship and friendship with Abraham and his seed, but God also told Abraham that in him all the nations of the earth would come to share in that fellowship and love of God. That is what the apostle Paul confirms in Galatians 3:8: “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed.”

Reformed churches must be fully aware that there are two distinct, yet interrelated, ways that the Son of God gathers His church in the new dispensation of the covenant. The one means is the faithful nurturing of the children of the church by believing parents and by

the church itself. Parents are duty bound to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. They vow this at the time of baptism. The church, too, in her offices, diligently instructs the children and youth of the church. Where this is done faithfully, God blesses the efforts of the church, and the church grows from within.

But the church may never ignore the other command of God’s covenant: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Equally important to the gathering in of the church in the new dispensation is diligent labor in the whole area of missions. The church must search out opportunities wherever they may arise to preach the gospel to all creatures. The members of the church are to be living witnesses of the gospel in their lives and in their speech. Why? In order that God through the faithful witness of the church to others might “add to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). How often Reformed churches cite Acts 2:39 as proof for the doctrine of infant baptism: “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” But do we overlook in this passage who else receives the promise other than we and our children? The promise is also “to all that are afar off,” that is, to all the peoples of the world. Surely, there is a qualifying factor that enters in: “even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” God does not choose to call everyone that is afar off. Nevertheless, God’s promise is still to be proclaimed to all those that are afar off. God establishes His covenant

1. 1962 Acts of Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Supp. 9, p. 74.
2. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 21, Q & A 54.
3. The parallel passage to this command is in Mark 16:15, 16, where Christ commands His church to preach the gospel to every creature.

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in Christ from one generation to the next in two distinct ways: by means of caring for the church itself and its children *and* by means of mission work. By means of missions, others are called out of darkness and grafted into the vine of God's covenant.

That is incentive! How won-

derful a blessing to see little children of the church grow up and take their place in the church. The church and its members must continue to work hard at that! But the church and its members must work equally as hard to share the gospel with others. How wonderful a blessing to behold the fruits of the

preaching beyond the confines of the church! To see the zeal, the first love, of those called out of sin and error serves to remind the church and its members of what Christ has done for them too. What a wonderful gift God has given us in His Son! 

Translated Treasures

Not Anabaptist, But Reformed*

By Rev. H. Danhof and Rev. H. Hoeksema

I. Once Again: The Covenant with Noah (2)

The second argument we raised against the idea that the covenant with Noah was a covenant of common grace established with all men without distinction,¹ was that the expression “thee and thy seed” in Scripture is always understood in an organic sense and never pertains to every person among that seed. The Scripture speaks not only in Genesis 9, but commonly, about an establishing of the covenant with “thee and thy seed.” However, this “seed” by no means refers to every individual of that seed head for head. Thus in Genesis 3:15 we have a designation of the seed of the woman in the most general sense. And yet it is clear that not every seed of the woman according to the flesh is meant. The same is true in Genesis 17:7. God says to Abraham, “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.” In the case of Abraham it goes so far that even all those born in his house and all bought with money must receive the sign of the covenant.

This “thee and thy seed” may never be explained in any other way than the organic sense. The organic line of the covenant in history does not do away with the lines of election and reprobation. See especially Romans 9. Hence the expression “thee and thy seed” never refers to all descendants without distinction with regard to having the essential part in the blessings of the covenant. Ishmael and Esau fall away. Later, even entire multitudes fall away from Israel, so much that it seems justified to ask, “Has God disowned His people?” But all of this is explained by the fact that within the sphere of the historic-organic development of the covenant, it is always the remnant according to the election of grace that is meant.

Well then, we have applied this entirely scriptural idea to Genesis 9:9 as well. When we read there, “And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you,” we have no business im-

mediately drawing the conclusion that this will soon pertain to all men head for head. Now this sentiment does include the entire human race, for God is speaking to Noah and his sons. But the organic meaning of “you and your seed” must not be lost sight of here either.

Rev. Van Baalen thinks he has to criticize that too. However, his criticism is quite deficient. He first says, “But it does not now follow from that fact that this notion [i.e., the organic meaning of ‘thee and thy seed’—DJH] must come into play in the Noahitic covenant as well.” From this he concludes that we knock down our own position. And how? We had shown that God first establishes His covenant of grace with Abraham in the line of Abraham's seed in general, but that this covenant is subsequently limited to the line of Isaac and Jacob, so that Ishmael and Esau immediately fall away from this “seed.” Rev. Van Baalen says, “That is exactly the point.” With Abraham, the Lord Himself limited the seed. “But in the covenant with Noah there is no mention of such limitation. That indicates that this is a completely different covenant.”

Now it offends us that one of our ministers will appear in public

* *Not Anabaptist, But Reformed* was a pamphlet written by Danhof and Hoeksema in 1923 as a “Provisional Response to Rev. Jan Karel Van Baalen Concerning the Denial of Common Grace.” Translated here from the Dutch by seminarian Daniel Holstege.

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2007, p. 465.

with such an argument. And on top of that, he writes in a tone which clearly shows his firm conviction that he has refuted someone's positions so that there can no longer be any doubt that the striving brethren have grossly erred and that a call for repentance is in order! For what does this argument mean? In the first place, even if it were true that no limitation was given with respect to the covenant with Noah, this would neither settle nor conclude anything. Do we read anywhere of the limitation that runs through all history? Does not Israel soon fall in the wilderness without our ever reading of such a limitation in the establishment of the covenant?² And when the ten tribes, and even a great part of Judah, soon fall away, so that there remains only a small fraction according to the election of grace, was that announced beforehand in the establishment of the covenant? No, Van Baalen, this whole way of reasoning is unbecoming of you. "Thee and thy seed" in Scripture never means every person head for head. That is certain. We have never knocked that down, and you still less.

But moreover, is there truth in the assertion that in the establishment of the Noahitic covenant we do not right away read of a limitation? No. In fact, already in the same chapter of Genesis (9:25-27) we read of such further limitation. There one of the sons of Ham is cursed, while it is remarked that the Lord is the God of Shem, and Japheth is given the blessing that he will soon dwell in the tents of Shem. Thus, only if we remove Genesis 9:9-17 from its context and go on to explain it entirely by itself, without paying attention to what precedes and follows it, can we come to the conclusion of Rev. Van Baalen.

This applies also to the following. We read in Genesis 6:18, "But with thee will I establish my covenant." And yet again in Genesis 9:9 and 11, "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and

with your seed after you." Now our argument was that the expression "establish my covenant" in Scripture has its eye on the one covenant of grace. Rev. Van Baalen was pleased to describe this expression as follows: "that He would go on to conclude a certain kind of covenant with him as soon as that great Flood was past." But Van Baalen fails to supply proof that this description is correct. "Establish my covenant" is an expression that occurs again and again in the Scriptures that never gives rise to "a certain kind of covenant" (see his pamphlet, p. 20), but to the one covenant of grace that takes on a different form again and again throughout the course of history and comes to a fuller revelation. But the covenant in Paradise, and with Noah, and with Abraham, and with Israel, and soon also in the new dispensation, remains essentially the same. That is what Rev. Danhof meant when he wrote that in the covenant with Noah we have the covenant of grace in its second phase of development. And that is what Rev. Hoeksema meant as well. But Rev. Van Baalen simply does not reply to that. He simply says that things are as he writes. Up until now, proof fails to appear. And when Rev. Van Baalen writes, "The idea, though, that the covenant of particular grace, that is to say, of saving grace, should be established with all men, yea with all flesh, as we heard Rev. Hoeksema say, is truly something new to the Reformed tradition!" (p. 21), then our answer is:

a) That Rev. Van Baalen has never heard us say that. The brother surely knows that we have never taught that the covenant of grace should be established with all men. How could he then attack us later for pushing the doctrine of election too strongly if that were our view? We do contend, though, that the covenant of grace includes all races of the earth, and that this is actually promised already in the covenant with Noah.

b) That Rev. Van Baalen truly does not need to write with an indignant exclamation mark that something new has been introduced into the Reformed tradition. As a progressive Reformed man he should have been thankful for that.

c) That it is, after all, a thoroughly Reformed idea that God's covenant of grace blesses all the generations of the earth which proceed from Noah, and includes the whole creation as well. Not of course in the sense that even the dumb creation is a conscious party in this covenant. Not even Rev. Van Baalen will want to make that claim with regard to his universal covenant of common grace. But it is true in the sense that in and through that covenant of God all flesh is upheld in time, and soon also every creature shall take part in the liberty of the glory of the children of God. See Romans 8:19-22.

Also, we pointed out that in every passage of Scripture outside of Genesis 9, where the rainbow is mentioned, this everlasting sign concerns the covenant of grace as it embraces the whole creation. Now Rev. Van Baalen makes little of this point, and then treats it as such. He readily admits that in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4 and 10, where the rainbow is mentioned, the reference is to the covenant of grace (pamphlet, p. 22). But he sees therein the symbolic description of the unity of the Mediator of Creation and the Mediator of Redemption. Now we had eagerly looked for Rev. Van Baalen to develop this notion of unity somewhere, but this he does not do. Nowhere does he develop

1. Translator's note: The first argument was "that nothing can be built on the different use of the names God and Jehovah in this connection" (paragraph 2).

2. This falling away from Israel is indeed so strong that Paul says concerning Israel in the wilderness that God was not well pleased with many of them. Yet they all belonged to "thy seed" (I Cor. 10:5).

the idea. He simply offers criticism with ideas taken from others. But apart from this, we may certainly still expect the brother to provide proof for his contention that, in the passages mentioned, the rainbow is a sign of that notion of unity or a symbolic description of it. In the Scriptures, the rainbow is a sign of the covenant. We know of no place in Scripture that gives us the impression that it is also a symbolic description of the unity between the Mediator of Creation and the Mediator of Redemption. The brother, however, does not give proof here either. He simply says that that is the way he explains it. He forgets that this is not an explanation, but simply a contention. We have demonstrated that in every passage outside of Genesis 9 where the rainbow is mentioned, it is given as a sign of the covenant of grace. The bow is a sign of the covenant. As it bends through the clouds and stretches over every creature, so also God's covenant encompasses and upholds all things, in order shortly to glorify all things. Therefore, let Rev. Van Baalen provide exegesis and demonstrate why ours is incorrect. Then we will believe him.

That is the extent of Rev. Van Baalen's criticism in his second chapter. The brother himself will undoubtedly realize that his criticism nowhere holds good. We have demonstrated:

a) That nothing can be built on the use of the names God and Jehovah with regard to a universal covenant of common grace in Genesis 9:9-17.

b) That Rev. Van Baalen's view that the name Jehovah would never have been used before the days of Moses, and that God would never have called Himself by that name, is in glaring contradiction with the Scriptures. God reveals Himself as Jehovah. The saints of those days called to Him as Jehovah. They even named places with His name.

c) The organic conception of "thee and thy seed" is thoroughly

scriptural. This is not at all refuted by Rev. Van Baalen.

d) The expression "establish my covenant" appears in Scripture again and again in connection with different forms of the covenant, but always essentially the same covenant of grace. This is not refuted by Rev. Van Baalen either.

e) The rainbow appears in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4 and 10 as a sign of the covenant of grace in its all-inclusive meaning. Rev. Van Baalen must still explain and prove his view of these facts.

Once again, Rev. Van Baalen, acknowledge that you have erred!

However, we want to go a step further here and, just in passing, touch on the fact that our view of the covenant with Noah is actually very scriptural, and that our Reformed fathers described it thus during the time that our confessional writings were being drawn up.

Therefore, we point you to this biblical idea, that the Flood is a type of baptism. See I Peter 3:31—"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The idea is clear, insofar as the text relates to our subject. It is evident from the context that the Scriptures here speak of the Flood, of which baptism is the antitype. Baptism is a picture of our going under in the blood of Christ in order then to rise up out of that blood with Him, purified to be a people unto the Lord, free from sin and guilt. Through baptism we enter into covenant fellowship with God. The Flood is a type, a picture, of it. Noah and his family go into the Flood typically in order that, cleansed of the wicked husk of the ungodly world, they might yet come out of that Flood a covenant people unto the Lord. In the Flood, God causes the human race to perish in order to preserve the new core in Christ. Now, how would you ever have a type of baptism in the Flood

and a type of God's church as it passes through baptism and arises with Christ in the ark, if you make all of this universal? Or, if you agree with all this, but insist that we must dissociate Genesis 9:9-17 from this entire context, what gives you the right to do that? In any case, Scripture is on our side if we maintain that even in the covenant with Noah God establishes His covenant of grace with His people, Noah and his seed taken in an organic sense. That which God saved out of and through the Flood was His covenant people. And the people with whom He establishes His covenant after the Flood is His covenant people, always taken in an organic sense.

Our fathers also understood it this way, as may be seen in the prayer before baptism. Nowhere in all our confessions is there mention of the all-important doctrine of a covenant of common grace. But in the prayer before baptism, the Flood and the passage through the Red Sea are put on a par. Both are, according to our baptism form, types of baptism. That which passed through the sea was the covenant people of the Lord. That which passes through baptism is also the covenant people of the Lord. That which passed through the Flood is that same covenant people once again, and unto that covenant people, always taken in the organic-historic sense of the word, the Lord says, "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you."³

One can also understand in this way Hebrews 11:7, which says, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." By faith he built the ark. By faith he condemned the world. By faith he was saved. By faith he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. You must focus your attention especially on this last point. This of course

cannot mean that Noah inherited righteousness, for, in the first place, this would not fit. But in the second place, he was already righteous by the faith with which he also built the ark. But the meaning is evidently that he inherited as a man who was righteous by faith. He received the inheritance by faith, and that inheritance was the second world, which came out of the Flood. The ungodly lost that world through unbelief. Noah, who lived by faith, received it as his inheritance. Thus that entire history is also a picture of the end. Just as God once caused the first world to perish, so shall He also cause this second world to pass through the fire, and cause the form of it to vanish. But then too shall the people of God be heirs of the new world in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, brother, our think-

ing lies entirely in line with Scripture and the confessions. However, you find no sign of a universal human covenant in the confessions. What right do you have, then, to attack us and declare us un-scriptural, un-Reformed, and Anabaptist in this respect? And publicly to call us to repentance? Had you given a thorough treatment of the subject, or produced anything new, and then demonstrated that our view does not hold up, there may have been a basis for bold language which no other view could possibly allow. But your arguments are much too weak. We fully agree, although perhaps in a somewhat modified sense, with that which you write on page 22: "And thus our investigation into the criticism of Rev. H. Hoeksema concerning Dr. Kuypers' conception of the cov-

enant with Noah has ended in disappointment." Certainly, brother, your investigation ended in a disappointment. We were bitterly disappointed by this investigation.

With that we should be able to conclude our criticism, for as a matter of fact the notion that the covenant with Noah is not the covenant of grace but a covenant of common grace must form its foundation from what follows. And if the foundation is not good, then that which is built on it will not stand firm. But we will demonstrate that this is actually so. Hence the following the chapters. 

3. The close connection between type and antitype with respect to baptism, the passage through the sea, and the Flood, may be derived from I Corinthians 10:2, where the apostle literally says that the children of Israel were baptized in the sea.

News From Our Churches

Congregation Activities

Our denomination of churches grew by one congregation in October. Calvary PRC, the daughter church of the Hull, IA PRC, was organized on Thursday evening, October 11, thereby becoming our denomination's twenty-eighth congregation. Rev. S. Key, pastor of Hull, and the moderator for Calvary, addressed the saints gathered together at Hull on the theme "God's Holy Temple," from Ephesians 2:19-22. Calvary has three elders and two deacons; 43 families and 7 individuals, for a total of 180 souls. With thanksgiving to God we rejoice that the labors of many months came to fruition in that worship service. We are certain that we echo the prayers of the readers of the "News" when we add that it is our prayer that Calvary be a clear light of God's grace and salvation in the darkness of this sinful world. May they be a blessing to our churches as they live as a manifestation of the glorious body of Christ.

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

The core group of the daughter congregation of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI met on September 5. A decision was reached that they intend to pursue a location in the southern Jenison area for a possible future church.

Members of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to their church's annual Fall Fellowship Dinner on September 26. After the meal, Rev. J. Slopsema, pastor at First, gave a ten-minute talk to encourage the congregation in their Bible and catechism studies for the year.

Congregations in the West Michigan area were asked to reserve Friday evening, September 28, for the yearly Special Needs Program at Faith PRC in Jenison. On that evening, over fifteen special needs children and young adults throughout our churches presented a program in song and word, proclaiming their love for Jesus Christ. They sang in groups, performed individual numbers and along with the Faith Young People's Society, and provided a truly spiritual and God-glorifying hour for us all to share together.

Friday and Saturday, September

21 and 22, the men of the First PRC in Holland, MI, along with their sons and daughters, enjoyed their annual Fall Camp out at P.J. Hoffmaster State Park.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI welcomed guests from their neighborhood and surrounding churches to a very timely "Seminar on Depression" Friday evening, October 11, and Saturday morning, October 12, at Faith. Friday evening Dr. Brian Decker spoke on the questions, "What is depression, and what can the doctor do?" This was followed the next morning by Prof. R. Decker speaking on the question, "I am depressed: what can I do?" Then at 10:30 Rev. J. Slopsema spoke on the subject, "I know someone who is depressed: what can I do?" The seminar came to a close with a time for the three speakers to answer various questions concerning the whole subject of depression. We were reminded that man's depravity is fully revealed all around us, and our weakness and in-

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ability to serve Him faithfully outside of His grace should certainly humble us. Thanks to Faith Church for helping to inform us about the Christian's response to a topic that is ever present in today's society.

The Evangelism Committee of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL recently invited their congregation to a Discipleship training class. This class, led by Bethel's pastor, Rev. J. Mahtani, was intended to better equip Bethel's members with the necessary tools to aid in their witness to others. Rev. Mahtani planned on making this a "hands-on" course, by bringing members with him every fifth week when they will hand out flyers, visit the elderly in nursing homes, hold discussions with newcomers, etc.

Mission Activities

On Saturday, October 6, Rev. W. Bruinsma, our churches' missionary to Pittsburgh, PA, attended the first meeting of the Heidelberg Reformation Association in Bedford, PA. The HRA is an organization attempting to renew interest in Heidelberg Catechism preaching in those churches that traditionally used the

Catechism. The Council of Southwest PRC, the calling church for Rev. Bruinsma, and our churches' Domestic Mission Committee gave Rev. Bruinsma permission to be part of this association. Rev. Bruinsma was the keynote speaker at this meeting.

The Heritage PR Fellowship in Sioux Falls, SD, hosted an evangelism conference entitled "Ready to Bear Witness of Christ," on Saturday, September 22, at the Oaks Travelodge Hotel and Convention Center in Sioux Falls. Speakers for this one-day event were the Revs. J. Kortering, R. VanOverloop, S. Key, and D. Overway.

Mr. Jim Regnerus, an elder from the Doon, IA PRC, and Rev. A. Spriensma, former missionary in the Philippines, planned to serve on the annual delegation from Doon PRC and the Foreign Mission Committee to visit the Berean PRC in metro Manila and to observe the other parts of the mission work there. The delegation planned, the Lord willing, to visit from October 17-31.

Sister-Church Activities

Did you listen to Rev. A. Stewart, pastor of our sister church in

Northern Ireland, the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, debate with Pastor David Antwi of Kharis Ministries on the topic, "The Charismatic Gifts and Cessationism," on Revelation TV in London, September 27? It dealt a lot with faith healing and the biblical truth of God's sovereignty over evil. The debate can be seen in the archives of www.revelationtv.com.

Denomination Activities

The annual meeting of the RFPA was held September 27 at the Byron Center, MI PRC. Mr. Mark Hoeksema gave a speech entitled, "Redeemed with Judgment: A Reformed Perspective of Isaiah," which helped to introduce a new RFPA book of sermons on Isaiah by the late Prof. H. C. Hoeksema, Mark's father. Mark is the editor of this book.

Minister Activities

Rev. David and Rebecca Overway, of the Doon, IA PRC, were blessed October 11 with the birth of a baby boy, Benjamin Elliot. We give thanks to God, with the Overways, for His covenant promise to us and our children. 

Announcements

ADDRESS CHANGE

Rev. and Mrs. Allen Brummel (and family)
3210 S. Fernwood Ave.
Sioux Falls, SD 57110
(605) 271-3692

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Faith PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mike and Crystal Kooienga and family and Terry and Lavonne Kooienga and family in the death of their father,

ROGER KOOIENGA.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

Rev. Lanning, President
Peter VanDerSchaaf, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 22, 2007, with gratitude to God for His covenant faithfulness, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. JIM WIERENGA,

celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary. We, their children and grandchildren, appreciate their godly example to us and covenant instruction. We are thankful to God for the many blessings He has given to them, and to us through them. May our heavenly Father continue to bless them in His care for years to come. "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).

◆ Rachel and Kevin Buchholz
Emma, Brooke
◆ Leah Wierenga
◆ Andrew Wierenga
◆ Daniel Wierenga
◆ Rebecca Wierenga
◆ Joshua Wierenga (in glory)

◆ James Wierenga
◆ Aaron Wierenga
◆ Adam Wierenga
◆ Samuel Wierenga
◆ Levi Wierenga

Lacombe, Alberta