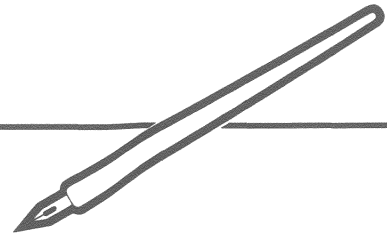




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Covenant and infant baptism

An important issue

In this issue of *Clarion*, the reader will find an article about infant baptism written by Rev. Cl. Bouwman. It is just a practical approach, showing the richness of baptism and its appeal, or, to say it with those well-known words, stressing both the promise and the obligation. Rev. Bouwman does not touch the problem of election in connection with the baptism of infants. He just writes from the point of view that God's covenant promise, given in His Word, is the basis for infant baptism.

The reader will also find the last installment of the paper of Rev. John Macleod on "The Doctrine of the Covenants and the Reformed Confessions." This last part deals, in part, with the covenant and infant baptism. Here the problem of infant baptism and election is briefly discussed. The remarkable opening sentence states, "This brings us to one of the most vital and also most difficult question(s) in federalism; the place of the Seed of believers in the Covenant."

We, who come from the Liberation of 1944 in the Netherlands understand the truth of this statement. The doctrinal controversy was on this point of the place of the children of believers in the covenant. The synodical stand was that infants must be baptized on the basis of God's promise and presumed regeneration. The covenant is in fact and actuality only fully and truly made with the elect who are regenerated. There must be the objective element of the outward promise of God, as well as the subjective, inward grace worked in the heart of the individual.

From our side, we said that the basis for infant baptism is not a combination of the objective and the subjective, but just the trustworthy covenant promise of the LORD, who says to the believers and their children: "I am the LORD your God," while this promise holds the obligation of faith.

Two different starting points and lines

Careful reading of what Rev. Macleod writes shows that the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort, speaking about the place of children in the covenant, have a different and more firm basis than the Westminster Catechism. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and also the Canons of Dort (1618/19) still reflect the thinking of the first Reformation; of Calvin and his direct followers and fellow reformers. The Westminster Standards (1647) have undergone the influence of the second Reformation ("nadere Reformatie") of the Puritans.

In this second Reformation of the Puritans great emphasis was placed upon the need for regeneration and the experience of it. This regeneration and its experience was strongly connected with the doctrine of election. Only the elect will experience the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

The Puritans, as the name indicates, stressed the need for a pure and holy life. They saw very clearly that a truly pure and holy life is only possible when one is regenerated by the Holy Spirit and ingrafted into Christ by a true faith, as a branch in the vine. As I see it, there can be a combination of two causes

for the shift from the first Reformation line of thinking to that of the second Reformation.

As is always the case with a reformation, after one or two generations, when hardship and persecution diminish or disappear, enthusiasm, dedication, and commitment to the cause of the Lord often will also diminish. Not every member of the reformation church shows then a full commitment of the Lord anymore. Unholiness of life creeps in, more than was visible in the beginning. It is understandable that in such a situation there comes a calling for holiness and purity, a stressing of the need for regeneration, and an asking for the signs or marks of regeneration and, the experience of it in the heart.

In my opinion, this stress on holiness and purity, and, in connection with it, on regeneration and its experience, can also quite well have been at the same time, because of the influence of Baptist thinking. The Baptist movement was strong, right from the beginning of the Reformation. In Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, and not less in England. But these Baptists did not think the same everywhere. In England and later on in North America, we see the rise of Reformed Baptists over against Arminian Baptists. They are Baptists insofar they reject infant baptism in conjunction with their emphasis on the necessity of regeneration and faith for a covenant life with the LORD, which newborn infants cannot yet have. And they are Reformed insofar they accept the five points of Calvinism as expressed in the Canons of Dort.

The second Reformation, Puritanism, and the Westminster Standards, take their starting point in God's election in Christ and in regeneration and its experience. It is understandable that this takes along subjectivism and individualism. A text that is often quoted as basis is Romans 9:6,7. "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants." The true Israel are then, the individual, elected children of God who are or will be regenerated. And those elected and regenerated individual believers, wherever they are, form together God's true people, His true and invisible church.

The line of this thinking of the second Reformation must, almost automatically, lead to, and work with, the concept of the pluriformity of the church and of an invisible church as total number of the elect or the born again. The line is there: God — the individual — regenerated believers — the covenant or church. God regenerates the elect; and the regenerated, elected, individuals form together the invisible true church, the people of God's covenant, the true Israel.

It is remarkable, and Rev. Macleod points it out that Calvin does not take his starting point in "secret election" and regeneration as basis for the baptism of infants. For Calvin, and for the Heidelberg Catechism, the basis for infant baptism is "an adoption manifested by the Word, which sanctifies infants not yet born." That "Word" is the Word of Scripture in which God declares that infants of believers are holy and have a place in His Church and covenant of grace. The covenant promises are for them not less than for adults.

Is the starting point here not "secret election" but God's promising covenant Word, the line and order is also different. The line is here not: God — individual — born again elect — God's people. The line is here: God — God's people — the individual believers with their children as members of God's people.

Over against the emphasis of the second Reformation like that of the Baptists, on the individual, born again, believer, with its subjectivism, stands the first Reformation with its emphasis on the covenant in its historic reality and development. God makes His covenant with Abraham and His descendants. That covenant is a reality for Israel as a people, as an entity in the history of the covenant and of redemption. This covenant is a reality, not only for the true believers, but also for the unfaithful. Israel as a whole are God's people. Israel as a whole has the promises of the covenant including the obligation of faith.

Although the national element of Israel as one specific nation has disappeared in the new covenant, nevertheless that aspect of God having a Covenant with His people remained. The New Testament church is the continuation of Old Testament Israel as people of God. The believers are called the children of Abraham. Addressing the churches in Asia Minor, Peter gives them the names of Old Testament Israel: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9). So God is there first, then His people. And the individual believers are born into it or added to that people, and thus partake in the promise as well as in the obligation of faith which God gave to His people.

When we take our starting point in the covenant as a historical entity, with its promises and obligations, and not in "secret election," we are in line with Articles 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession, where also the promises, as well as the norms and obligations for the church are expressed, and where is spoken about the contrast between the true and false church on the basis of these norms.

Must we not say, then, that Christ gathers those whom the Father has given Him, the elect? Must we not say that only those who are born of water and Spirit, who are born from above, can see and enter the kingdom of heaven? Must we not say with the Apostle Paul that "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants?" (Romans 9:6,7). Does Christ, then, gather also the reprobate? It is a matter of course that Christ gathers and preserves the ones whom the Father gave Him. And the church that will be His Bride on the new earth will be all the elect and these only. However, Scripture says that "the secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." (Deut. 29:29). This means that we have to follow the historical, covenantal line, of taking our starting point in God's promises and His obligations. It is the line of the first Reformation, the line of the Liberation. And we should not take our starting point in the secret things of the LORD, for instance in election, as the second Reformation did so much more.

J. GEERTSEMA

Pentecost fulfilled

Although we tend to associate Pentecost in the first instance with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost was of course first of all an Old Testament feast which found its fulfillment in the saving work of Christ. Indeed, the first part of Acts 2:1 which begins the account of the outpouring of the Spirit can probably best be translated as follows: "When the Day of Pentecost was being fulfilled." (Compare, for example, the note in the New American Standard Bible). The realization that this was an Old Testament feast can deepen our understanding and appreciation for the fact that it was this festival that was chosen as the time for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The Feast of Pentecost did not exist in isolation on Israel's calendar of special days. It was closely linked to, and dated from, celebrations connected with the Passover. The Passover feast was celebrated at twilight in the evening of the 14th day of the first month (Leviticus 23:5). It was followed on the 15th day by the beginning of the closely related seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6). On the next day, the 16th, the first fruits of the (barley) harvest had to be brought to the Lord (Leviticus 23:11, cf. vv. 6-7). Seven weeks and one day later, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) was celebrated, during which, among other things, offerings from the grain

harvest and two loaves of bread had to be brought to God (Leviticus 23:15-17). (The fact that this festival was on the 50th day, later gave rise to the name Pentecost, from the Greek word for "fiftieth.") Because the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread with all its different ceremonies and requirements was dominated by the Passover, it was known as Passover week. It is within the light of the Passover that Pentecost needs to be understood.

Pentecost was a day of joy for the harvest that God had given His people. Not surprisingly, it was therefore also known as Harvest Feast (Exodus 23:16) and Day of the First-fruits (Numbers 28:26).

This day, however, was not the first time that first fruits were brought. The first fruits of the barley harvest had already been presented three days after Passover. Why did the Lord require the first fruits on Pentecost?

The Passover celebrations reminded Israel that God had passed over the blood-sprinkled Israelite homes and had killed the firstborn of Egypt. So God had worked their exodus from Egypt's bondage and led them out into freedom as His people (Exodus 12). God's salvation

in Egypt (Deuteronomy 16:12) and so enjoy and celebrate the new life God had given them because of the Exodus. This new life also enabled them to live in holy service to God.

With this orientation to some Old Testament data we can appreciate something of the tension and anticipation surrounding the first Pentecost after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ lay down His life on the cross, He did so as our Passover Lamb (I Corinthians 5:7), fulfilling the Passover

Having effected the deliverance of His people from the bondage of sin, He continued His work of salvation by giving them His life-giving Spirit. The people whom He had redeemed as His possession on Golgotha and for whose justification He had been raised from the grave (Romans 4:25) were now invigorated with the newness of life in Christ and made a new creation (cf. II Corinthians 5:17). What a change that meant! Filled with the Spirit of the risen Lord, they shared in the first fruits of what life with God, on the basis of His accomplished salvation, was all about. In this way they were equipped for the service of the God of their salvation.

One of the immediate consequences of the outpouring of the Spirit was that the Spirit of Christ gave them new power and boldness. After the death of the Passover Lamb, they had been frightened, disheartened and had met behind closed doors. But now they received courage to speak openly of the mighty works of God (Acts 2:11). Peter, who a little over seven weeks ago had not dared to confess the Lord Jesus before a servant girl (Matthew 26:69-72), now boldly proclaimed the Christ before the "men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem" (Acts 2:14).

Peter's sermon is a clear proclamation of the Christ, for the New Testament Pentecost can only be understood within the context of Christ's work of fulfilling the Passover. On the Day of Pentecost the Lord Jesus Christ who had brought about the deliverance of His people continued to provide for them. With His life-giving Spirit He made them a new creation (cf. Romans 8:9-11) equipped to serve Him with the prophetic proclamation of His salvation for the great ingathering of the harvest in the last age. That fact speaks of the abiding significance of Pentecost. Christ, the Passover Lamb and risen Lord, continues His work (cf. Revelation 5). The three-thousand who believed on the Day of Pentecost were but a beginning. The results of Christ's once-for-all salvation work continues to be evident as He gives new life to His redeemed people and as He harvests to the glory of the Father. The final result will be a new creation, not just as seen in the people whom He recreates after His image, but a new recreated world for them to dwell in. For Pentecost, coming after a fulfilled Passover, means that God's people may have a foretaste of the full life with God in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. That is what gives life, in this last age of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, a lustre of joy and festivity for those who confess the Lamb of God. They can live in the expectation of the coming, complete fulfillment of Christ's salvation work.

C. VAN DAM

HYMN 37:1

Come, praise the Holy Spirit!
The prophets He inspired;
They after our salvation
Unceasingly inquired.
They spoke of Christ our Saviour,
Of grace that was to be,
Proclaimed to us the wonders
Which angels long to see.

Book of Praise

is however a complete salvation. He not only delivered His people from Egypt, but also brought them into the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey. God will provide! For this reason God already told Israel in the wilderness that when they would come to Canaan, and celebrate the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the sheaf of the first fruits of the harvest would need to be brought to God three days after the Passover (Leviticus 23:10-11). Fifty days later near the end of the harvest season more fruits of the field, including two loaves of bread, were to be given (Leviticus 23:16-17), for Israel had to realize and give recognition to the fact that God not only delivered His people from certain death in bondage in Egypt, but He also provided life nourishment in the land of promise. The first fruits of the harvest, and indeed the entire harvest, was the result of His salvation as commemorated at Passover. Thus also on the day of Pentecost Israel not only had to give first fruits, but also had to recall their bondage

feast and setting His people free from the dominion of the evil one (cf. Colossians 2:14-15). Three days later He rose from the dead as the first fruit of the salvation He had accomplished for His people (cf. I Corinthians 15:20,23). He thus fulfilled the offering of the first sheaf of grain on that day and showed that God's salvation not only delivers His people from bondage, but also gives the new life (cf. Romans 6:5-11). Now Pentecost had come. With a fulfilled Passover and the fulfillment of the offering of the first fruits three days after Passover, what would Pentecost bring? Was this feast not closely related and did it not speak eloquently of the provision of a full harvest and the new life of service that God gave His people on the basis of the salvation He had accomplished as seen in Passover?

In Acts 2:1 we are told that "they were all together in one place." No one was missing. There was a sense of expectation (see Acts 1:4,5). They were not disappointed. The risen Lord poured out His Spirit as He had promised (Acts 1:8).

Prayer service General Synod 1986

This is the text of Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene's sermon on the eve of General Synod Burlington West, April 15, 1986. The liturgy is as follows: Psalm 20:2,3; Hymn 1A; Psalm 119:2,3,13; Psalm 90:1,8; Hymn 36:3,4,5; Reading: Genesis 3:8-22, 1 Corinthians 15:51-end. Text Ecclesiastes 10: 8-12.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ

There is little doubt about it that the work of our eleventh General Synod has been remembered in the prayers of the churches when they came together yesterday for the divine worship services. And it is not because we fear that the prayers of the churches were not general that we have come together for a special prayer service. We have come together this evening with the brothers who have been chosen to deal with the matters of the churches in general because we are well aware of the importance of the work that is going to be done by them in the course of the next few weeks.

It is correct to state that we should not overestimate the work and the position of a general synod. It is correct to maintain that the main life of the Church of Christ is to be sought in the local churches. It is a greater honour to be allowed to do one's work in these local churches and to do it faithfully, than to be delegated to a general synod. At times, when someone celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ministry or when he has been allowed by the Lord to serve for forty years, there are glowing reports in the press and it is mentioned that the man was a member of so many general synods. In some instances the most important thing is not mentioned: that he has been allowed in all humility and simplicity to do his daily work and to serve the Lord therein.

On the other hand, however, we should not underestimate the position and the importance of a general synod either. It IS quite a thing that there is a gathering at which all churches are represented and where decisions are made which affect each and every church.

It is not necessary to go back all that far in history to find examples of how decisions by general synods brought unrest and division into the churches. One wrong step, one wrong decision, and the effects

could be disastrous. They were disastrous in many instances. Unfortunately, these wrong and disastrous decisions brought some to the statement that general synods were no good at all.

It is a great thing, indeed, that the Lord allows us to have these gatherings and that the churches, in their delegates, may consult and help each other for the better edification of the Church of Christ. And it is an honour to be chosen to do this work on behalf and in behalf of the Churches of Christ.

Since the work of a general synod is so important for the churches, and since we are well aware that we are unable of ourselves to do any good and are inclined to all evil by nature, we do wish to ask for the Lord's blessing together with the brothers who have come to do this important work. We shall ask the Lord to endow the brothers with wisdom so that their work will be to the benefit and the edification of the churches and therein to the honour of His glorious Name.

When asking the Lord for wisdom, we have to let ourselves be guided by what He has told us about the wisdom that is so necessary. About this wisdom we are told in our text, too. And we shall listen to the Lord when He teaches us.

We see that THE LORD TEACHES US THAT ONLY BY WISDOM ONE'S LABOUR CAN BEAR FRUIT

- I. By wisdom one will be aware of the dangers coming with one's work;
- II. By wisdom one will see to the necessary preparation for one's work;
- III. By wisdom one will prevent the failure of one's work.

I. Although the word *wisdom* seems to occupy a very modest place in our text, it is the key to our understanding of it. According to many commentators, this place is one of the most difficult ones in the book of Ecclesiastes as far as the translation is concerned. I shall not weary you with all sorts of solutions. It is sufficient for us to follow the Revised Standard Version here. Whether one translates as the RSV does it or reads, "It is an advantage when wisdom accompanies diligence," or "the advantage that consists in success is to be sought in wisdom," it is clear that wisdom is taught to be the indispensable

condition for succeeding in one's work.

We can see this also when we look at the passages that precede and follow our text. There we find *wisdom* mentioned as well, in contrast to *folly*, *foolishness*.

Now we know that, in Scripture, *wisdom* is not just a good insight into matters, knowing how to deal with things and what to decide in certain cases and under certain circumstances. *Folly*, on the other hand, is not just what we would call foolishness. No, in the Word of God both *wisdom* and *folly* have a deeper background. Wise is the man who listens to the LORD who fears his God and who walks in His ways. Foolish, on the other hand, is the one who follows self-chosen paths, who continues in the way of sin and who mocks at the Word and the will of the LORD, the God of the covenant. Wisdom, in its deepest sense, refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, who was justified by His works, justified in His children, in those whom He obtained for Himself.

Are we not taught in the Scriptures that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom? Are we not told that every one who deviates from the path of obedience chooses folly?

When we are told, therefore, that wisdom is indispensable for the success in one's work, we are not to think simply of good insight, acquired skill and the good fortune of making the right decision at the crucial moment. No, when we hear about wisdom, we think of the fear of the LORD, of the guidance and illumination by the Holy Spirit.

This is also to be borne in mind when we read about the dangers that come with one's work. Here, again, we are not presented with some generally known truths and facts of life. God's Word never gives us general truths and never teaches us simple and commonly-known facts of life. Everything is always set within a certain framework.

Certainly, it is a fact that with all our work we run certain risks. When someone digs a pit either to reach the water table and so to be able to draw water or to put in a pole for a clothesline, there is the possibility that he will slip and fall into the hole that he dug. We are not to think here of what we read elsewhere, that someone digs a hole for someone else and then falls into it himself. No, what the Lord

refers to here is the danger which accompanies the labour of man all the time: you do something and there is always the possibility that something will go wrong.

You see the very same thing with the second case which is mentioned in our text. Someone is making a hole in a wall, perhaps in the wall around a vineyard; all of a sudden a serpent appears in that hole, having hidden between some rocks or stones from the heat or from the cold. The man making the hole is bitten — some of the risks of the job, one might say.

Again, we do not have to think of someone who tries to make a hole in order to break into a house. That would have been possible. Who does not think here of what the Lord Jesus said once about the treasure which should be kept and hidden somewhere where thieves cannot dig through a wall to steal it?

Here in our text, however, we should think only of the normal occupational hazards, for that is also what the Lord refers to in the next verse. When you quarry stones, there is the possibility of being hurt by one. And who has never had it happen that, as he was chopping wood with an axe, a piece of wood flew up and hit him either in his leg or even his head?

The rules of the compensation board are directed towards preventing all sorts of occupational hazards. It is in order to prevent occupational injury that hard hats are to be worn on construction sites.

There are dangers involved in our work; they accompany our work. Such dangers are present not only when one works in construction or on the farm where machinery is useful but also dangerous to work with. No, these dangers are present with any kind of work and with all forms of labour. Dangers are also present when one is busy with the things in and the matters of the churches. Not only can one get hurt himself, he can also easily hurt others and cause damage to the churches.

Are we taught here that there is an iron necessity that one experiences the occupational hazards to which everyone is exposed? Or is there more in the Word of God?

Why does one who digs a hole run the risk of falling into it? Why may someone who splits wood be hurt by falling or flying pieces or by the axehead which slid off the handle, causing a deep gash in his foot or leg? Is this one of the Preacher's methods of casting more gloom upon human life and of convincing people that life is not worth living or that one would do better to refrain from doing things because they are all useless anyway?

Is it not so, beloved, that in the book of Ecclesiastes we are shown life as it has become due to the fall of man? Is it not

so that here we are shown how terrible the effect is of our fall into sin?

Are we not reminded here of what the LORD God said to man when the fall had occurred: "Cursed be the earth for your sake?" Did the LORD not tell man that he was to earn his bread and butter in the sweat of his face? And is this not where all the occupational hazards and the accidents come from: from our disobedience of the LORD and from His displeasure because of our sins? With many difficulties we are to do our work and there is always the possibility that things go wrong. However, that is not a natural phenomenon; it is not an unavoidable fate. It is the punishment of God upon the sin of man. THAT is the deepest background of the troubles which we encounter and the difficulties with which we have to struggle.

It is for this reason that we are to be aware of the dangers which accompany our work, and it is also clear that only divine wisdom, that only the fear of the LORD, can make us aware of these dangers so that we can avoid them as much as possible. Only he that is instructed in the truth of God and seeks the path pointed out by the commandments of his God will see what the dangers are and what the pitfalls are that must be avoided.

We do not have to point out the various dangers which accompany the work that is done at a general synod. There are dangers to the members of a synod themselves; there are dangers for the life of the churches in general or of one church in particular. Only the fear of the LORD, divine wisdom, will enable the brothers to recognize these dangers and to avoid them, to stay away from them. He who walks in the ways of the LORD and lets himself be taught at every step regarding the path to follow and the course to choose will avoid the pitfalls and will be a blessing for himself and the churches. That is the reason why we shall ask the LORD for this wisdom.

II. However, asking for and receiving wisdom from the LORD, the insight of faith, does not guarantee that then, automatically, everything will be alright or that no mistakes can be made or that no difficulties will be encountered.

Thorough preparation is also necessary. That's what we are taught as well.

Again we may say that the LORD uses very simple language. Who would not agree that you have to apply much more force if your saw or axe is dull? When the saw or axe has been sharpened, there is a sigh of relief: Now things go much better and more easily!

He who fears the LORD and walks in His ways is not careless and unconcerned. On the contrary, he recognizes not only the dangers by the wisdom which the

LORD provides, but he also sees the need of thorough preparation. He does not rush into things; he is careful and first listens to what the LORD has revealed in His Word.

We have the good rule that matters cannot just be presented to a general synod without the churches' knowing anything about it. A new matter may not be dealt with at a general synod, we say, unless it has been prepared in the midst of the churches: first it has to go the long way from consistory to classis, to regional synod. We have learned that it is not good to send in a request to a general synod, "Will you please look into this or that matter?" or "Would you please make a regulation concerning this or that point?" A good preparation is essential.

However, this does not mean that, once a matter has been prepared by the proper method in the churches, the members of a general synod can rely on that and are allowed to take it easy. Before they are to make a decision they must see to it that they have done their homework well. Hasty decisions, decisions on the spur of the moment, are detrimental to the Church of Christ. It is by divine wisdom that we are taught the necessary preparation. Dull axes require more strength and do not make a nice cut either. A dull saw rips through the wood and makes a ragged edge instead of a fine cut. Decisions which are made without sufficient preparation, hasty decisions which have not been considered carefully, cause damage in the Church of Christ. However much effort is then put into the work, it will not succeed; it will not be beneficial for the very churches that have entrusted this important work to the brothers who were delegated to serve the churches in this capacity.

And what is the most important preparation that is required? Is it not this: that we let ourselves be taught by the Word of God; that we ask for the wisdom which He has revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures?

Here in our text we are taught that wisdom is the indispensable condition for succeeding. In whatever way one translates these words, the connection between insufficient preparation and wisdom is clear: sufficient preparation is found only where the wisdom of the Lord is asked and received. Only then can one be assured of the success of his undertaking.

Wisdom of one's own is only folly, since by our fall into sin we have deprived ourselves of the possibility of making the right decisions and choosing the correct course. That is why we must say that no matter how much effort people put into their labour, no matter how much they rob themselves of sleep and no matter how much sweat it costs them to execute their

plans, their labour is vain. As a result of the fall in paradise, God's curse lies upon the labours of mankind. In vain do the watchmen watch and the soldiers guard the city. In vain do people rise up early and rub the sleep from their eyes, straining their muscles and causing every nerve in their body to be tense: all the labour which they undertake is vain.

It is only when we receive wisdom from the Lord that we may say that our labour is not vain. And thus we are pointed to, and taught to take refuge with, the Lord Jesus Christ who has been given to us wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

What do we read about Him in the Book of Proverbs? Let me quote a few of the verses we find there.

"Give heed to my reproof; behold, I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you."

"If you cry out for knowledge and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it like hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you; understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil."

This, beloved, is the way in which we all are to undertake all our labours every day and all the time. No, we do not get all sorts of texts and we cannot quote a certain passage for all our actions. The LORD our God has not given us His Word in order to provide us with a series of prooftexts. It is only via regular and diligent study of the Word of God that we shall receive the wisdom which is needed to prevent that, in spite of many hours of labour, our work does not yield the desired fruit. And when, after the conclusion of Synod, you receive the acts and study the decisions, do not expect that you will find all sorts of texts to prove the correctness of the decisions. Quoting texts in itself is no proof of true piety and true wisdom. True piety and true wisdom, good and thorough preparation for the decisions to be made, has to become evident from this: whether the brethren have done their utmost to learn the will of the LORD from His Word before sitting down to take the decision. If this wisdom is not there, then they will have a very difficult time, perhaps with sleepless nights and much sweat and headaches. Then all their efforts will cause ragged edges and tears, injury and harm, instead of benefit and blessing. It is only by divine wisdom that one can and will succeed.

III. The frustration of all who labour on their own and in their own strength is that

they see too late that they have not succeeded. All their labour is vain.

We all have seen drawings or pictures of men sitting there playing the flute and a serpent swaying back and forth before them. I do not know whether it is the music or something else that seems to hypnotize the serpent. Let us assume for the sake of argument that the music renders the snake harmless for the time being. And let us assume for the sake of argument that there are people who can utter magic formulas whereby a snake is rendered harmless for as long as the charm lasts. Even then it is clear that such charming and hypnotizing has to be done before any harm can come and before the serpent can bite. Once the venom has been injected into the victim's bloodstream, it is no longer of avail that the serpent is hypnotized and rendered harmless: the damage has been done.

If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage in a charmer, however rapid a tongue he may have and however experienced he may be in uttering magic formulas.

Is this a fatalistic statement? Are we told here that, once the harm has been done, there is no way of undoing the damage or of recovering the loss? Are we cautioned here to think well before we do something, because once the word has been spoken, once the deed has been done, there is no way of preventing the poison from spreading?


Of course, we are to bear this in mind and we are to realize that every word that we speak has effect and that every deed

which we do has consequences, consequences which we perhaps deplore but which we cannot prevent. It often happens in life that we regret having said or done a certain thing, because our word or action had consequences which we could not foresee. If we had known this, we would never have said it; if we had been aware that this would be the consequence of what we did, we would never have done it. But now it is too late; we cannot do anything about it anymore. That's how it often goes in life. And we had better bear it in mind.

The question, however, is whether that is what the Lord teaches us here in our text. And then we must say, "No, there is much more here."

And then we remember that our text speaks of those who are subject to the vanity of life without God, of those who proceed without asking for wisdom and understanding; in other words, of those who do not take refuge with the Lord Jesus Christ and who do not seek their wisdom with Him. They indeed must come to the conclusion that the consequences of what they have done cannot be undone. I think here specifically of Judas who betrayed the Lord Jesus. He did not seek his wisdom and forgiveness, the guidance for his life, with the Saviour. When he came to the conclusion that what he had done had consequences far beyond what he had envisaged, he knew of nothing better to do than to go and hang himself. The serpent had bitten: no charming helped any longer.

What we are warned against here,



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beloved, is: that we shall not proceed without seeking the wisdom which is from above. Christ, through His Holy Spirit, pours forth heavenly gifts into all those who seek them with Him. Only through HIM we are freed from the judgment of vanity which rests upon the life of all who continue in unbelief and disobedience. Only through Him has the curse of paradise been undone.

It is not without reason that the Apostle Paul begins by showing the importance of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ with respect to the forgiveness of sins!! If Christ had not risen, he says, you would still be in your sins. And then, at the end of that very chapter, he can comfort the church and point her to this satisfaction of the Lord Jesus Christ, assuring her that her labours are NOT vain in the Lord. Why are her labours not vain in the Lord Jesus Christ? Because He has suffered for all her sins and because He has freed life from the bondage to decay, as Paul writes in the letter to the Romans. The whole creation is subject to futility, he writes, just as the book of Ecclesiastes teaches us, also in our text.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Wisdom from God, has taken away the curse which lay upon us because of our fall into sin. He has freed us from the curse of sin and then also from the curse of frustration and of irreparable damage. HE has delivered us from the misery of having to work without fruits and having to exert ourselves without seeing any result. Therefore the apostle can comfort the weary Christians and the often-so-tired children of God with the assurance: your labour is NOT vain in the Lord, brothers!!

And even if we have made mistakes, even if we have done wrong things, even if we have neglected certain things, then, in His mercy, the Lord will yet forgive these shortcomings, as long as we seek wisdom with Him. For the forgiveness of sins is the guarantee that we no longer fall under the judgment of our text: once the evil has been done, there is no way back; there is no restoration possible. Through Christ all things are restored and also our weaknesses and shortcomings, also our mistakes and faults, cannot prevent Him from still causing our work to bear fruit. Seeking wisdom with Him will prevent our work from becoming a failure, however imperfect it may be, for by Him SIN has been overcome and taken away and thus the curse of sin has been removed. While others then drudge and slave and weary themselves in vain, to His beloved the Lord gives sleep.

Thus we go and pray, thus we go and work, thus we go and labour: the risen Christ stands before our eyes and the forgiveness obtained through Him. Asking wisdom from Him, we shall discover

that our eyesight has improved so that we see the dangers. Seeking wisdom from Him, we experience that therein we find the best preparation. Seeking wisdom from Him, we believe that our labour is not vain in Him, even though we may not see the fruits. It all depends on Him who is our refuge and will establish the works of our hands.

AMEN.

Prayer

God of all grace, God of all mercy, God of all wisdom,

In Christ, Thy Son we draw nigh unto Thee who art the Giver of all good and perfect gifts, from whom nothing comes which is not good and from whom no one has ever asked anything in vain.

Thou hast dealt with us according to Thy mercies in Christ, and we beseech Thee that also in the time ahead Thou wilt deal with us according to these same mercies, for we have no other refuge than Thee alone, and we refuse to go anywhere else because we know that no one can give what Thou art able to give and that no one is willing to deal with us as graciously as Thou dealest with us for the sake of Christ Jesus our Saviour.

Father, we thank Thee that through Him, Thy only begotten Son, Thou hast redeemed us from the curse of sin and from the judgment of vanity, which rested also upon our labours and our whole life. We give thanks to Thee for the immeasurable riches of Thy grace in our dear Saviour, through whom we have been set free from the bondage to decay and by whose resurrection we have been assured that Thou lookest down upon us in favour and that also our weaknesses and shortcomings cannot prevent Thee from receiving us into favour and from blessing us in all our endeavours.

We must confess before Thee that we often endanger the progress of salvation and that frequently, by our shortcomings and transgressions, we are the cause of much sorrow and grief, of much that could have been prevented if only we had listened to Thee and if only we had sought the wisdom which is from above. Forgive us our shortcomings and our weaknesses, our frequent unwillingness to surrender completely to Thee alone and not to seek ourselves but only the honour and glory of Thy Name.

Gracious God and Father of all wisdom, we have assembled together with the express purpose of asking Thy blessing upon the work of the general synod which will begin tomorrow. But we realize that, before asking Thy blessing upon this work, we have to ask something else.

We come before Thee to humbly beseech Thee that Thou wilt grant the brothers who have been delegated to,

and will constitute, this synod the wisdom which is from above. Wilt Thou prepare their hearts through Thy Holy Spirit, that they may have a good understanding of the Holy Scriptures, that they may see and grasp what is Thy will regarding every point. Grant them eyes that have been illumined by Thy grace and that have been enlightened by Thy wisdom. May the Holy Spirit pour forth into them the heavenly gifts which have been promised to the church by the Saviour, and may they then be enabled to do their work well, without seeking themselves, without giving themselves to preconceived ideas, but willing and prepared to listen to convincing arguments from Thy Word and to submit themselves fully and unconditionally to what Thou hast taught us in the Holy Scriptures.

Gracious God and Father, we all are sinful people and of ourselves we are not able to fulfil any task in life in such a manner that it is not subject to vanity and decay. Thou, however, hast established for Thyself through Christ Jesus our Lord a lasting monument in this world: Our Saviour is gathering for Himself a church, chosen to everlasting life, and He has promised that the powers of destruction shall never prevail against her.

In His Name we pray Thee that Thou wilt endow the brothers who will form the general synod with wisdom which comes from thee, wisdom by which the dangers are recognized, by which the threats are overcome and by which the progress of Thy work in this world may be promoted.

Remember Thou the brothers from step to step and from second to second. Give them strength and health to do their work without hindrance. Grant them a good night's rest when it is time to sleep, and fulfil to them Thy promise that, however much others have to drudge and slave, Thou givest sleep to Thy beloved. May they be free from headaches and other ailments, so that they can do the work to which they have been sent. Grant them the willingness to listen to each other, and give them Thy grace, that they may come to unanimous decisions. Permit not the evil one to cause factions to come into existence and schisms to arise, but may the unity of faith and purpose be evident in all aspects of their work, and thus also cause their work to be fruitful for the churches which Christ has purchased with His own blood.

Thou God of grace, Thou God of all mercy, compassionate Father, only Thou knowest all the wiles of the evil one. Open the eyes of Thy servants that they may see the path they have to follow and the roads they have to avoid in order that the promise that their labour certainly is not vain in the Lord be fulfilled to them personally and to the Church of Christ.

Remember their families insofar as they had to leave them behind, and grant that they do not have to be concerned about their families, nor their families about them.

Take care of the congregations that have to live for some time without the care of the office-bearers that are serving all the churches in this capacity, and remember that neither the local churches nor the

synod of the churches are out to promote our own cause but that it is our sincere intention to promote Thy cause, which is the cause of our Lord and Saviour.

Hear Thou the prayers that have been offered up for this broadest assembly; hear Thou also the prayer that we offer up at this very moment. And make us all proceed in faith and in humble submission to Thee and to Thy Spirit, that the

evil one be put to shame. May the world see that Thou art with us and, to this end, hold us close to Thee, for with Thee alone is salvation, with Thee alone is wisdom, with Thee alone there is a future.

Hear us, Father of all mercy, for the sake of Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord, who with Thee and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns for ever.

AMEN.

Dealing with grief¹

1. How to approach the problems

Recently I received requests from readers to publish some articles on the issue of dealing with grief. People who had experienced problems in their life and still were trying to cope with the aftermath of grief and sorrow, asked me to pay special attention to certain questions in this respect, and to deal with specific problems they had experienced. Although in cases like these the names of the people are never mentioned, and the circumstances are referred to in such a way that privacy is guaranteed, they themselves will undoubtedly see their specific questions answered. Many others, although they might not have formulated these questions in the same way, may have the same problems. One of the letters to the editor shows that these things are in the minds of many. It appears that these feelings and problems are shared by more members of the church. In this way they can support each other, and by dealing with these matters publicly via this article, also others can benefit from it.

The main question is: How do we cope with the loss of a beloved one? How do we react if something happens in our personal life? Do we have to be still, knowing and believing that it comes from the hand of the Lord, without any questioning? Or may there be a lasting scar and continuing grief? Is it a lack of faith or unbelief if the pain remains and the memories keep coming back? Or can such pain also be felt by true Christians?

An important point, in the letter I received, was the way the community, in this case the Communion of Saints, reacts and supports those who are grieving. Some attention will be paid to the task of the office-bearers in this respect. The sender of the letter struggles with the question why some apparently never face

tragic situations, while others have so much with which to cope. Those who have never experienced such difficulties are less able to understand what it means, to talk about it, and to support others. Such people often avoid the subject in conversations, because they feel uneasy and do not know what to say. Some office-bearers are not even able to handle these situations. Someone who lost a beloved one wrote me: "O, how I do want to talk about it, especially the little things which I cherish, and which show me that others still remember my beloved one." The sender of the letter asks and is puzzled. Does someone first have to go through grief to be able to help and to understand others? If that would be the case, it would be very difficult for young ministers to fulfill their task in the proper way. The sender of the letter points out that a lot of comfort and support can be given by little things, like just mentioning, during a visit, that the late mother, husband, son, or daughter, is still remembered because of what he or she did, and why he or she was appreciated. It certainly does not hurt when these things are brought up in a

discussion. It does not open old wounds, which are in the process of healing. On the contrary. Instead it is felt as balm on a sore scar.

In what follows I will try to deal with all these questions in an orderly way. Don't expect a perfect and final answer. The intention of these articles is not to solve all the questions, but to make people aware of the existence of problems, to analyze them, and to give some guidelines, in order that the readers themselves can work on solving the problems in their own environment. It might also give some food for thought for those who have never kept themselves busy with the problems of these brothers and sisters. It may encourage them to use their gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members (cp. L.D. 21, A. 55).

2. Is sadness always wrong?

One of the main questions in the whole matter is whether it is always wrong to speak about sadness when a beloved one has died. Are we allowed "to dissent" with such an event? Can we say



that it pleases the Lord to take a beloved one out of this life at His time? In this respect we have to be careful that we do not get wrapped up in confusing terminology. Some words can be used in different ways. The meaning depends largely on the context in which it is used and on the intention of the person who is using it.

In a recent announcement, in a newspaper, a church expressed its sadness about the fact that their minister had passed away and stated that the membership was "very sad and dissenting." This is certainly not the way a congregation should publicly announce the death of their minister. When we say that it all depends on *who* uses the expression and in which contexts it is used we have something else in mind.

The expression "it has pleased the Lord," has to be used in the right context. Let me use an example to explain how it can be done, and how it should not be done. When a policeman is killed in the line of duty, his believing widow may say, and feel it as a comfort: "It has pleased the Lord to take to Himself at His time my beloved husband." She sees the hand of the Lord in everything in her life. She knows that He will take care of her and that nothing happens without His direction (cp. Art. 13 B.C.). That is one side of the story. We recognize the hand of the Lord in everything in our life. But the murderer, who shot the policeman, may not talk about the pleasure of the Lord and about "His time." He is responsible. His action did not please the Lord. He is a murderer, and he will be called to account as a murderer.

That everything is in the hand of the Lord, and that nothing happens "without His direction," can be a comfort, but it can never be used as an excuse. There certainly can be sadness and dissent towards the man who caused the killing, but at the same time there can be the comfort that the Lord is in charge and can use everything to our benefit. Joseph's brothers were certainly not excused when they sold Joseph, to let them go to Egypt, but the Lord used this sinful move to keep His people alive during the famine. Article 13 of the Belgic Confession says it beautifully: "In this world nothing happens without His direction. Yet God is not the Author of the sins which are committed nor can He be charged with them. For His power and goodness are so great and beyond understanding that He ordains and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even when devils and wicked men act unjustly. And as to His actions surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire farther than our capacity allows us. But with the greatest humility and reverence we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden for

us, and we content ourselves that we are pupils of Christ, who have only to learn those things which He teaches us in His Word, without transgressing these limits." That is the way and the contexts in which we can say that something "pleases the Lord" and that it happened "at His time."

3. The Bible about grief and sorrow

Let us now first turn to the Supreme Book, to be taught how to handle grief and sorrow, and to hear what is behind it, or what can be behind sorrow and grief in human life. What is the purpose of it? Does it have a purpose? Is the purpose always the same in all cases? Or is the purpose sometimes hidden from us as human beings, as long as we are in this life? The meaning may become clear afterward, when we will see the Lord face to face in His heavenly glory.

The Bible gives us many examples of people who suffered grief and sorrow in many different ways, and it is quite clear that the purpose was completely different each time. Let me mention a few cases and later discuss these cases more in detail, in order to see the differences.

In the book of Job we read about his suffering, and about the way his friends tried to comfort him in accordance with their traditions and philosophies. From what follows in the last chapters of the Book of Job we learn that they were wrong in their evaluations and conclusions, and they only made Job's suffering more difficult to carry. In the end the Lord gave the correct explanation.

In John 5 we read about a man who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years and who was finally healed by our Lord Jesus Christ. In his situation the purpose of his illness was completely different, as we will see later on.

In II Corinthians 12:7 we read that the apostle Paul suffered because of what he calls: "a thorn in the flesh." Regardless of what nature this "thorn" might have been, (we don't know exactly what it was), it caused him a lot of sorrow and suffering, but again with a different and very specific purpose.

In Hebrews 12:5 we read in general

that "the Lord disciplines him whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives." Also here an indication of what the purpose of suffering and grief might sometimes be.

Still all these texts leave a lot of questions unanswered, and we must have a closer look at each of them, to find comfort in them, and to understand the message of the Word of God to each and everyone personally. With respect to Hebrews 12:5, where it says that the Lord chastises every son whom He loves, a brother who suffers much hardship and pain in his life, once said to me: "A little less 'proof' of God's love in my life would not hurt." The meaning is clear. Why do some never have any serious problems in their life, and still they complain all the time? And why do others have to suffer so much, while they are still cheerful, grateful and spiritually thankful all the time? The Lord does not give account of His works. He does not always explain why He deals with a certain person in a specific way, but the Bible does give us a lot of information, which makes it easier to understand and accept God's dealings with His children. He can give, in His divine good pleasure, what He knows is good for us. In Matthew 20:1-16 we read about a householder who hired labourers to work in his vineyard. He paid those who came at the eleventh hour the same as those who had worked all day long. And asked why he did not pay the early workers more, he answered: "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" This parable shows us that the Lord cannot be called to account for what He is doing. He knows what He is doing and He is supremely fair in all His doings. He knows exactly what we need, although we do not always understand His purpose. In Romans 9:21 the apostle Paul uses the example of a potter. "Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?" The Lord certainly has a purpose with everything that happens in our life, and sometimes we are used in His hands as a vessel for beauty more than we are aware of. At least, if we accept and acknowledge the hand of our heavenly Father in our whole life and if we let Him guide us in every respect.

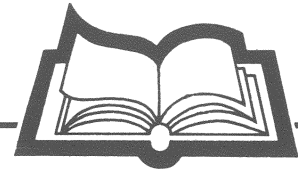
To come to a better understanding of the different purposes of grief and suffering in the texts we have mentioned above, we will have a closer look at some of them in the next article.

— To be continued
W. POUWELSE

OUR COVER

Lake Michigan Shore Line
Leeland

Photo courtesy:
Travel Bureau, Michigan
Department of Commerce



“So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand”

II Peter 3:15, 16

Rivalry or Chivalry?

The Apostle Peter has been writing about the certainty of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, urging his readers to await the Lord with faith and perseverance. Peter stresses the Christ is not unnecessarily delaying His return, but is working for the full gathering of His Church. When this major work has been completed, Christ will return without delay.

Peter has in this chapter twice emphasized this point of Christ’s forbearance with respect to the salvation of all God’s children. And in order to drive the point home once more, he refers to another source, quite unexpectedly, namely, the Apostle Paul, “So also our beloved brother Paul wrote you”

This is a somewhat surprising reference which helps us better to understand the situation in those days. It shows us that Peter knew of various, if not all, letters of the Apostle Paul. Perhaps the letters of Paul had been sent around to the various churches, and also Peter in the course of time had read these letters. In any case, the apostles appear to be aware of each other’s work and efforts and are able to refer to each other’s works as well. From this we learn that they have maintained their unity and mutual responsibility as apostles and office-bearers.

This text clearly refutes the suggestion sometimes brought forward, that the churches (and the apostles) in those days had little or no contact with each other. Some modern explainers like to speak of “free churches,” with very loose ties and no federation of any kind. But it appears that there is a very close bond between Peter and Paul. Peter has carefully read the letters of his colleague and is in full, joyous agreement with them.

Peter even (in the next verse) *defends* the writings of Paul. He admits that sometimes the letters of Paul are not so easy to understand (“there are some things in them hard to understand”) but this does not detract from their truth and value. Peter fully accepts the letters of Paul as the Word of God! He has great respect for the work which the Lord Jesus Christ is doing also through the ministry of Paul.

We notice this in the words, “our beloved brother Paul.” They are united in a brotherly relationship and bound by the love of Christ. Peter has learned to love his brother Paul. Some have tried to show that there was a deep and on-going conflict between Peter and Paul in the early Christian Church and that this conflict surfaced at Corinth where certain groups favoured Paul, or Apollos or Cephas. The origin of this conflict would be found in Antioch where Paul and Peter came into public controversy. Paul has written about

this in his letter to the Galatians, “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned” (2:11). Strong language, no doubt. It was a public confrontation of no small consequence, for it kept the church from becoming Judaistic. So Peter is referring here perhaps to letters in which he himself is being described as once having been completely wrong! But this does not restrain Peter from now calling Paul “our beloved brother.” In that particular struggle in Antioch, Peter let himself be convinced by Paul; apparently no ill feeling or any grudge remains.

Peter could have criticized Paul’s character, his method of operation, his “forceful” letters, and even questioned the right of his apostleship (as did some in Corinth). Peter could have pointed to Paul’s background as one who persecuted the Church of Christ. But he does not do any of the above. There is between the two no rivalry, no struggle to be recognized as the most important. Rather there is a good measure of chivalry: a measure of respect and a code of honour which goes far above earthly admiration. We find here a respect and love which is rooted in the love of Christ, a unity in the truth of the gospel, and a full acceptance of one another.

Peter heartily recognizes the work which God is doing through Paul. Everyone has his own gifts and talents. And Paul is a very talented brother, with great wisdom and insight. Maybe that is why some of his letters go so deep. But Peter is not jealous or envious. For it is the Lord who gives to everyone as He wills for the benefit of all.

We discover here an exemplary respect between two office-bearers with important functions in the Church of Christ. An accepting of one another with the given talents and abilities. There is no trace of bitterness, no hint of friction. Peter does not “knock” his brother, but stands with him on the same foundation, doing the same work to build up the Church of the Lord.

We can learn from this. In church history there were many necessary battles for the sake of the Truth. But there were also many *personal* fights and rivalries between office-bearers, brothers, and believers. Personal conflicts have driven entire congregations apart. Often people oppose each other out of anger, envy and jealousy, for the sake of one’s own name and supposed right. Then there is no chivalry, but everything goes. Then it is no longer a true spiritual struggle in the Lord for the upbuilding of His Church.

Peter teaches us a different attitude. We should not break down the faithful work of fellow office-bearers or fellow

believers, when this is done in truth according to the Scriptures, but commend such work to the church. We must have an open eye for the work which the Lord is doing through others! This is true for professors, ministers, elders, deacons and other members of the church. If we stand together on the same foundation, our relationship must be characterized by mutual respect and recognition.

This does not mean that we cannot have our battles! Peter and Paul at one moment publicly opposed each other. And the one had to submit to the word of the other. But it could be done, and the Truth in Christ triumphed. We

must let ourselves be convinced in the church by the Word of God and our accepted confession, especially as office-bearers who work together in the midst of the churches.

We should not “spare” each other at the cost of the truth. Neither should we operate out of personalistic motives. We must learn to deal with each other in a spiritual manner. This will benefit not only the office-bearers in their work together, but will build the church and reap glory for the Name of Christ.

CL. STAM

Baptism and the covenant

The promises of God are incredibly rich. Instead of wrath and hell there is the promise of grace and life.

Exactly because these promises are so rich does each Christian pause at some time or another to think about the question of whether or not these promises are for himself personally. This counts all the more so when one remembers that the grace of God is not applied to all men; there are both the elect and the reprobate. So the question becomes: “How do I know whether or not I really am a child of God?” “How can I be certain that I will inherit eternal life?”

The Lord God would not have us doubt whether or not we belong to Him and are heirs of His promises. It is to prevent doubting that the Lord has granted to His Church the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Through this sacrament the Lord God assures those who receive it that they really are children of God, that they really have salvation. In this article, I wish to demonstrate the truth of this thesis.

Baptism and circumcision

To understand how the Lord God uses baptism for the strengthening of faith, we could look through the New Testament for information. The New Testament would seem a logical choice because baptism was not known as a sacrament in the Old Testament. We shall find, however, that the New Testament, though it says much about baptism, does not give us a full-orbed understanding of the sacrament. The reason for that is — and this, too, I hope to demonstrate presently — that the sacrament of baptism, as instituted by Christ, takes the place of the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision. The content of the sacrament of

baptism is essentially the same as the content of circumcision, with this difference that one looks forward to the coming of Christ, while the other looks back to a Christ that has come. So it is to circumcision that we must turn if we wish to understand what baptism is.

Content

The Old Testament sacrament of circumcision dates from the time of Abraham, Genesis 17. There came a day when God appeared to Abraham with the following message: “I will make my covenant between Me and you,” v. 2. That message is repeated in v. 7: “I will establish My covenant between Me and you.”

God did not leave ambiguous the content of these words to Abraham. This covenant meant that the Lord would “. . . be God to you and to your descendants after you,” v. 7. God, in other words, tells Abraham that He is Abraham’s God, and Abraham is God’s child. That is the content of the covenant.

The implications of this content of the covenant can be better understood when we recall that the human race, through the fall into sin in Paradise, allied itself with the evil one. The fall implied that mankind severed his bond with God and joined himself to Satan. Remembering that fact underscores the significance of this covenant which God makes with Abraham. For with this covenant God says nothing other than this: by nature you belong to Satan, yes, but I lay claim on you, Abraham. I declare that you are no longer Satan’s property but Mine.

With that, the richness of the covenant comes into sharp relief. Belonging to Satan, as consequence of the fall, had

implied that the anger of an offended God rests upon the betrayer, man. And if the anger of holy God rests on someone, who can escape it? Well does Scripture record that reality: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” Heb. 10:31. Yet this offended God makes a covenant with Abraham, and in that covenant, God *lays claim* on Abraham; God issues a *declaration*: you are Mine, even though you offended Me, even though you are sinful. The implications of such a declaration from God can only be that Abraham no longer belongs to Satan, God is no longer angry with Abraham, Abraham has life. And that in turn means that the content of the covenant implies forgiveness of sins; covenant people are heirs of salvation, heirs of eternal life.

Obviously, then, this covenant made Abraham by far the richest man on earth. From being Satan’s property, He is claimed by God and made to be God’s possession.

Certainty

God did not wish Abraham to question whether or not God actually meant what He said. Yet God knew His servant Abraham, knew that he was but a weak and sinful human. Reckoning with this weakness in Abraham, God graciously gave to Abraham a *sign* both to remind him of what He had said and to spell out that He really meant it. Said God: “You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you,” v. 11.

Reading of this sign that God gives to Abraham, one would be inclined to say that if ever anyone should not have needed a sign, it would have been Abraham. God spoke very personally to him, and

after a conversation such as this from God there surely should have been no reason for Abraham to question whether or not he belonged to God. Abraham's own ears had heard God's words. Yet even to Abraham God gave the command to circumcise himself as a sign of that covenant! Though God spoke face to face with Abraham, God wished Abraham to carry in his body, to his dying day, a sign to remind him of what God had said to him on that particular day, a sign to spell out beyond all doubt that God actually did make His covenant with this sinner. Never was Abraham to doubt it; each day

have the assurance that he had forgiveness of sins and salvation. Each had that assurance simply because God had once spoken.

But again, God knows the heart of man, that the children of Abraham, insensitive and infirm (Art. 35, Belgic Confession) as they were, were likely as not to question whether God really meant for them what He declared to Abraham in Genesis 17. For that reason God instructed Abraham to make sure that every male child of him was to be circumcised as a sign and seal of the reality of the covenant. They should receive that sign just

he went; he was circumcised. Daily he could see that sign, and so daily he could assure himself that yes, it was really true, God had made His covenant also with him, he was a child of God just as much as father Abraham was, he too had forgiveness of sins and life eternal. Circumcision was the evidence.

Doubt

But suppose now that Isaac doubted whether or not the promises of redemption really were for him, doubted even though he had in his body the sign of the covenant. If he chose not to believe that sign, he would implicitly be saying that he did not believe God. Although God said that He claimed not only Abraham but also his descendants to be His, saw to it even that each would receive the sign, if then there was still doubt with Isaac, then he would in fact be calling into question God's truthfulness. It would essentially imply that Isaac would refuse to accept God's Word at face value. But that is the same as suggesting that God is a liar! God had said in no uncertain terms that He made His covenant with Abraham *and his descendants*. So there is no room for wondering here, for doubting, unless one is prepared to say that God is a God who would pull the wool over someone's eyes.

And what counted for Isaac as first generation descendant of Abraham counted also for Esau and Jacob as second generation descendants, as well as for David and Daniel so many generations later. They wore the sign of the covenant *in* their bodies, a sure sign that God meant exactly what He had said long ago to their grandfather Abraham about his descendants to endless generations. For the reality of Psalm 105 endures: "The steadfast words He did command, a *thousand* generations stand." God's covenant is forever, because God is God. Those to whom God sovereignly gives the sign have no grounds for doubt.

Baptism

The Apostle Paul calls baptism "the circumcision of Christ," Col. 2:11ff. That would mean that the content of the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision is essentially the same as the content of its New Testament replacement: baptism.

That baptism has, for the New Testament, the same content as circumcision had for the Old becomes clearer from Acts 2. Peter preaches his Pentecost Sermon, concerning the significance of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The result of his preaching was that the audience was cut to the heart and they wondered what they should do, v. 37. Peter's reply was that they should repent

"I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you."

Genesis 17:7

anew, he was to be confronted with the assurance that he belonged to God, had life. In His wisdom God did not consider memories, of what He had once said to His covenant child, to be sufficient assurance; in his own body Abraham had to wear the visible proof that this covenant was real. What the Lord in His goodness wanted to prevent was that Abraham should ever doubt concerning whose possession he was, whether he actually did belong to his faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, or still in fact belonged to the evil one. Hence this visible sign underlining the spoken reality.

Children

Abraham was not the only one to be circumcised. For God made His covenant not only with Abraham — God did not adopt for Himself only one child — God made His covenant also with the children He would give to Abraham. v. 7: "I will establish My covenant between Me and you *and your descendants after you*." In fact, "throughout their generations" Abraham's children would be children of God.

That meant for the children of Abraham that they, too, should have no doubt as to their identity. They belonged to God and not to Satan, because God had claimed them to be such. So each descendant of Abraham could appeal to Gen. 17:7 and say: "Look, there it says what God once said concerning us: we belong not to the evil one but to God Most High, He is our God." And so each might

as did Abraham, and they should receive it for the same reason: to their dying day they should carry in their own bodies, throughout their generations, the mark that they really belonged to God, the assurance that God had truly claimed them. For God did not intend to have to speak to each child of Abraham individually to assure each one that he really belonged to God. God spoke once to Abraham, and that one declaration was comprehensive; it included all the children of Abraham. God claimed ALL as His own; none belonged to Satan anymore.

To be specific, this meant that Isaac — to mention him by way of example — was not allowed to wonder whether or not he actually was a child of God. He was not to doubt whether or not salvation was for him, whether or not God's wrath still lay on him. True, he had not himself received a special revelation, a special communication from God that he actually was an heir to salvation, delivered from the severe wrath of God to which he was subject. There was no voice, no dream, no inner assurance of such redemption for Isaac personally. Yet he was a child of God, and he was an heir to eternal life, simply because that word which God had spoken to Abraham did not count for Abraham alone; it counted for his descendants also: "I will establish My covenant between Me and you *and your descendants . . . to be God to you and to your descendants after you*." That included Isaac. And the reminder of that covenant Isaac carried in his own body wherever

of their sins, they should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour sent by God. With that command to repent comes also an encouragement to be baptized, v. 38.

We would wonder why this audience should bother to be baptized. Peter mentions the ground for this injunction in v. 39: “For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off.” To come to grips with the question of which promise Peter refers to here we are to note that the apostle describes this promise as having been made “to you and to your children.” The promise which God had made to each Israelite and his children was that promise of the covenant, the covenant which God made with Abraham and his seed. Because that covenant has been made with every descendant of Abraham here present, Peter enjoins his whole audience — after repentance — to be baptized. For circumcision pointed forward to the Saviour that was to come. Now that the Saviour has come that sign of circumcision has become defunct. In its place has come baptism, a sign that points backward to the cross. Baptism does not embody a new promise; it contains the same promises that the sacrament of circumcision signified, be it that this promise comes now in a new dispensation. So it is that all with whom God makes His covenant — believers and their seed, Romans 4 — are no longer to be circumcised but baptized. The content of the two sacraments is the same.

Heidelberg Catechism

The *Heidelberg Catechism* supports the thesis that baptism as the sign of the covenant is the proof to Christians that the Lord has indeed made us His children; we have salvation. I think of Lord’s Day 26: “How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits YOU?” The answer reasons that one may be certain about the benefits of baptism simply because the sign of baptism has been given to a person, and the sign is not hollow because God does not lie. In that sign God gives the promise that the blood and Spirit of Christ wash away sins. Nor is this a promise that one cannot be sure about, it is not a maybe. No, the promise is fixed, because God is God. Sins are washed away, present tense. Now the recipient of the sacrament has the benefit that comes from the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Today, that child is God’s child. That is also why “God-fearing parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in their infancy,” Canons of Dort, I, 17. It may sound great, it may sound too great to believe (and that is

basically beside the point!), but this is the content of the promise of the covenant nevertheless.

Rich

It’s all so wonderfully rich. Almost too rich to believe. Yet this is what the Lord says in His Word. And if God says it, we may not doubt it; God does not deceive.

**“God-fearing
parents ought not
to doubt the
election and
salvation of their
children
whom God
calls out of this
life in their
infancy.”**

Baptism is God’s sign and seal that He saves the recipients from the power of the devil; each belongs to God and not to Satan, each has forgiveness of sins and life eternal, each has a Father who cares for him day by day. Baptism does not symbolize a delightful dream, a pleasant thought. Baptism rather signifies an indescribably rich *reality*. It is undoubtedly because baptism is so incredibly rich that the evil one does whatever he can to spread distortions about this sacrament.

As church people, the readers of this magazine, we are all baptized, older and younger alike. That means that we may apply to ourselves all that is written above. In baptism, each of us receives the assurance, from no one less than God Himself, that God saved us from the power of the devil. In baptism, God Almighty says to each of us individually: you are not Satan’s property; you are My possession. And we know that God is no man that He should lie. So there is for us no reason to question whether or not we have salvation. God told us quite clearly.

No free ride

But that does not mean that all who are baptized are now free to act as they

please under the pretense that they are saved anyway. Scripture makes amply clear that a covenant has two sides.

The covenant begins by stipulating a reality based on God’s decree: not Satan but God is our Father. Once that covenant is established, both a promise and a demand enter the picture. The promise is that God will *continue* to keep us as His children, with all the benefits and privileges that come with that position. Yet this promise is not a blanket promise, something unconditional. For God added also a demand. God decreed that His promise of continued faithfulness should hinge on the attitude of God’s covenant people to His covenant. The demand that the Lord tied into His covenant was none other than that His people should *believe* that God actually did claim them, did deliver them from the power of the devil. If they would believe that, would believe that the content of their baptism was a *fact* — they really were God’s children — why, then the benefits of being God’s children would be showered on them as well; the *promise* is made *reality*. On the other hand, if they should refuse to believe the reality spelled out in the sacrament, then the benefits of these promises would not come to them and the covenant would *not profit* them.

The existence of this covenant gives to covenant people, then, the responsibility to *believe* the promises inherent in that covenant. There is only one who can prevent a covenant child from receiving the blessings of the covenant, and that is *that covenant child himself*. Each must choose: do I believe what God said, or do I believe that God deceived me? That is the question that the reality of our baptism places before each one of us. So it is WE who have to work with the reality of the covenant in order to receive the benefits that are promised in it. That is the mandate that is implied in the sacrament of baptism: *believe* what God did.

Conclusion

It may be hard for us to believe the riches of that covenant made with believers and their seed. God would not have us doubt. For that reason He gave that sign of baptism to spell out to us that we are His, to reassure us that we have forgiveness of sins and life. The water has dried from off my forehead years ago, but I can dig out of the cupboard that certificate, duly signed and recognized by Ottawa, that, yes, I really am baptized, *God really did make His covenant with me*.

May I doubt that God is MY God, that I belong to Him and not to Satan, and therefore *have* salvation? I may not, because GOD DOES NOT LIE.

C. BOUWMAN

The Doctrine of the Covenants and the Reformed Confessions⁵

All our Confessions emphasize the SOLE FIDE and in covenant theology “faith” in Christ Jesus receives its due place. There is not a hint of a suggestion in either the confessional documents or in the writings of federal theologians, that anything other than faith in Christ, is the means of our appropriation of Covenant grace. This is so incontestably the case that it requires no cited attestation. James Walker in his work on Scottish Theology and Theologians says that some complained against federal theologians that they thrust Christ into the background and doctrine into the foreground and thus interposed a system of theology between the sinner and Christ. His rebuttal that those who made such a charge must have been ignorant of the passion and clearness with which the likes of Gillespie and Boston proclaimed Christ is more appropriate and sufficient. In the above section it was emphasized that the sinners attention must be focused on the “Outward Means” of Covenant administration, this is of course to obviate either an unhealthy mysticism or a paralyzing prying into the secret things of God. The danger of resting in external administrative means must not be ignored. In these means we are to seek and appropriate the “Lord our Righteousness” who was given “a covenant for the people.” Union with Christ by faith is the only way of participating in covenant life and favour. As the Belgic Confession states it, “And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.”⁴⁵

One of the most controverted of issues in federal theology was whether faith must be seen as a condition of the Covenant. The issue of course is not exclusive to federal theology because no matter what system of doctrine is adopted it is incontrovertible that without faith (so far as people capable of a right use of God’s appointed means are concerned) there is no salvation. “He that believeth not is condemned.” John 3:18. But in covenant theology this tends to become more prominent because of the tendency to think that “Covenant” has the notion of con-

dition inherent in it. It would be expanding this paper beyond desirable proportions to deal with the history of this controversy. Various ways of solving the issue were put forward by some of the most eminent theologians and whilst it is fair to say that all can be faithful to the truth from the perspective adopted it is difficult to put forward a solution, in short compass, that takes all aspects of the problem into account. It should not be seen as being either a condition or not a condition. Faith must be considered from a two-fold perspective. As a believing act it is the deed of the sinner, as to the capacity to believe it is of God’s grace and power. As the Belgic Confession puts it, “We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost.”⁴⁶ Always remembering that God’s work is prior to, and the efficient cause of, man’s working. The Covenant as made by God with the Elect in Christ secures for them the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit to enable them to appropriate Christ as the summation of Covenant promise. Nothing less than this is assured them in the promises of God’s Word as noted above concerning Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36 and Hebrews 8. And it must be said that however carefully the idea of condition is defined even as a SINE QUA NON yet there is always the danger of introducing an element of legalism, as Boston so clearly saw. It must also be borne in mind that the idea of conditionality has tended to open a door for universalism in respect of the Atonement as John Owen makes clear in his “Death of Death.”

More importantly the emphasis on the SOLE FIDE excludes any notion of a mechanical communication of covenant grace by way of sacramentarianism. This is why the Confessions are so insistent on the fact that the Sacraments do not confer grace but rather confirm it. As Pierre Ch. Marcel so aptly puts it, “The object of the Word is to engender and strengthen faith, while the sacraments contribute only to its strengthening.”⁴⁷ So the Reformed doctrine of the SOLA FIDE is prominently set forth in covenant theology emphasizing that to God alone be-

longs the glory of salvation. This again is not something that is mechanically brought about but rather as something achieved through the consciousness of the redeemed sinner. This becomes apparent in the way that our Confessions treat of “the life of God in the soul of man,” to borrow Henry Scougal’s description. The Gallican Confession says, “We believe that by this faith we are regenerated in newness of life, being by nature subject to sin. Now we receive by faith grace to live holily and in the fear of God, in accepting the promise which is given to us by the gospel, namely: that God will give us his Holy Spirit.”⁴⁸ The Second Helvetic Confession says, “And surely this is true repentance — namely an unfeigned turning unto God and to all goodness, and a serious return from the devil and from all evil. Now we do expressly say, that this repentance is the mere gift of God, and not the work of our own strength.”⁴⁹ Nowhere is it more clearly stated than in the section on Effectual Calling in the Westminster Standards. Speaking of those who are made partakers of this calling it says, “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his word and spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ, enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone and giving them a heart of flesh, renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.”⁵⁰ This statement on “Effectual Calling” has been subject to kindly criticism by the late Professor John Murray but this does not affect the point being made that in federal theology God’s redemptive grace was seen as enlisting all the faculties of man and in no way did it present a view of things in which man was to be inactive either in seeking his salvation or “working it out.” The quickening of the soul was God’s work alone, all synergism at this

point was anathema but where God did a creative work in Christ it was in order that the sinner might with all his energy "work out his own salvation" and "bring forth fruit unto God."

Covenant Theology not only knows the blessings of God's grace in Christ in our justification, creation anew in Christ and our adoption into God's family, it also knows of a "Sealing of these things to the covenant people. There is a twofold sealing." "Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace."⁵¹ Already we have drawn attention to the fact that sacraments do not confer grace but confirm it. A general doctrine of the sacraments is not necessary here. In the work of confirming grace there is no mechanical strengthening through the mere physical participation. Their sealing is linked up with their being "signs" and as signs their true spiritual intent is only discerned by faith. In this respect they are not different from the Word, indeed as our Confessions uniformly state they presuppose faith — the case of infant baptism was never thought of as prejudicing that position. We only add that faith is principally directed to the Word of Institution and Interpretation; and by means of the Word, faith discerns the heavenly reality in the earthly sign. Far from any tendency to disparage these seals of God's Covenant of Grace, on account of the apparent weakness, they are desired by faith as powerful in the hands of omnipotence and therefore are ardently desired. But the Reformed faith and especially Covenant Theology knows of a Sealing of the Spirit. The importance of referring to this matter here is that a balance is maintained between subjectivity and objectivity. There is always a danger where the emphasis on the Covenant is strong that the Covenant bond will be over externalized. The recognition of and giving due place to the sealing of the Spirit obviates the danger and irradiates the life of communion between God and His covenant people with warmth that only His own love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit can impart to it. In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 53, "What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost? Answer: "First, that He is co-eternal God with the Father and with the Son. Secondly: that He is also given unto me, makes me a true faith partaker of Christ and all His benefits, comforts me, and shall abide with me forever."⁵²


This brings us to one of the most vital and also most difficult question in federalism; the place of the Seed of believers in the Covenant. The Reformed Church, in large measure followed the historic position in the church on this matter. The baptism of the infant children of believers is not peculiar to federal the-

ology. But when the validity of the practice was challenged by the Anabaptists it was in the doctrine of the Covenant that they found a defence against the attack on the practice. This does not mean that the doctrine of the Covenant was invented as an expediency to justify the practice. The doctrine of the Covenant is Biblical first and foremost. Also there was an inchoate federalism in the church since the days of the "early fathers." But with the clear vision that characterized the spiritual perception of the reformers they recognized that the doctrine of the church was locked into the idea of the Covenant. And the Scriptures clearly stated God was in Covenant not only with Abraham but with His seed. Also the New Testament Scriptures made it explicitly clear, that however accentuated "Individuality" was in the light of the right of access of each believer to God through Christ by the Spirit, yet the organic aspect to God's building up of his

congregation was not discontinued. The place of infant children in the Covenant as the seed of believers was not abrogated as a result of the fulfillment of the promise in Christ. And so the reformers held that inasmuch as they were in the Covenant by the express declaration of God, that consequently the Seal of the Covenant belonged to them. Baptism as a sign signified precisely what circumcision has previously signified, allowing for the fulfillment in Christ and subsequent cessation of the Ceremonial Law. It was thus the sacrament of initiation into the Church for the Covenant people. So far there is more or less full agreement on the part of the Confessions and Reformed Theologians. The real difficulty comes with the attempt to determine the relation of the infant children to the Covenant. In what sense do they belong to the Covenant? or perhaps better in what sense does the Covenant belong to them. In considering this point we may begin where we have a consensus if not complete unanimity.

We have already stated that all are agreed that God's Covenant is not only with believers but with their seed. Detailed Scripture affirmation of that point is not needed. Anyone who knows his Bible and especially even a little of the Scripture evidence constantly adduced in support of this will be familiar with the relevant Scripture data on the point. An example of Confessional statement may be taken from the Belgic Confession: "Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received and moreover condemn the baptism of infants of believers who, we believe ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the Covenant, as the children of Israel formerly were circumcised upon the same promises which are made unto our children. And, indeed, Christ no less shed his blood for the washing of the children of the faithful than for adult persons; and therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that which Christ has done for them."⁵³

— *To be continued*
JOHN N. MACLEOD



CHURCH NEWS

DECLINED to the Church at Calgary, AB
REV. D.J.G. AGEMA
of Hamilton, ON

* * *

CALLED and ACCEPTED to the Church at Attercliffe, ON
REV. D.J.G. AGEMA
of Hamilton, ON

* * *

ACCEPTED to the Church at Armadale, W.A.
REV. W. HUIZINGA
of Hamilton, ON

* * *

The congregation of
WATFORD, ON
will meet for their worship services in the United Church building in the village of Watford from Sunday June 29 until Sunday Aug. 31, 1986
Services 9:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

⁴⁵The Belgic Confession Art. XXII

⁴⁶Ibid Art. XXVI

⁴⁷Pierre Ch. Marcel. The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism p.57 trans. Philip E. Hughes, James Clarke & Co Ltd (Cambridge, England)

⁴⁸Gallican Confession Chapter XXII

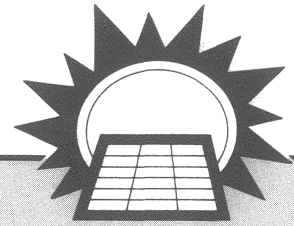
⁴⁹The Second Helvetic Confession Chapter XIV para. 3

⁵⁰Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter X para. 1

⁵¹Ibid Chapters XXVII para. 1

⁵²Heidelberg Catechism Question 53

⁵³The Belgic Confession Art. XXXIV



“When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth”
John 16:13

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

Soon it will be Pentecost, the feast of the Spirit of Christ.

Having finished His atoning work on earth, the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven and was there exalted at the right hand of God. He received the Holy Spirit as the Father had promised Him. Christ did not keep this Spirit for Himself but on the day of Pentecost He poured out that Spirit on the church and each member thereof.

God the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life, as we profess in the Nicene Creed. The whole of creation exists through the Spirit and He renews the face of the ground. We can read that in Psalm 104:30. We see the work of the Holy Spirit in every budding tree, in every flowering plant. He is much closer than you often realize. He dwells in your heart to strengthen your trust in God, but it is also due to the power of the Spirit that the daffodils bloom.

Since our fall in Paradise the whole creation became subject to the powers of death. Also God's children are daily confronted with these powers in one way or another. Our form for Baptism describes our life here on earth as a “constant death.” Left to ourselves we would be without future, without hope! But God is faithful and full of mercy. God the Holy Spirit not only gives life, but also renews it!

On the day of Pentecost the Spirit was poured out on Christ's congregation to apply Christ's saving merits to the lives of those who truly believe in the Lord. That Spirit guides and leads God's children and reveals to them the complete salvation, which Christ obtained for them. He makes them share in Jesus Christ and all His benefits.

The Holy Spirit works in our lives through the gospel. He is the Spirit of truth. Some have called the Holy Scriptures the voice of the Holy Spirit. When we read and listen to the Word of God, we are in the “school” of the Holy Spirit.

That's the way He teaches, strengthens, admonishes and renews us.

He is also the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory. We read that in Ephesians 1:13,14.

Walking in the fear of the LORD we are comforted by the Holy Spirit. Through Him we can rejoice, even in times of trouble. We are sure that our body shall dwell secure, for the LORD does show us the path of life and in His presence there is fulness of joy. (Psalm 16:10,11)

Our birthday calendar:

For the month of June we have two birthdays coming up and we ask you to remember them.

June 17

JOAN KOERSELMAN

Box 624

Coaldale, AB T0K 0L0

Joan hopes to celebrate her 29th birthday, the LORD willing.

June 30

BEVERLY BREUKELMAN

Box 666

Coaldale, AB T0K 0L0

Beverly helps around the house and also enjoys working in the community thrift shop. She will be 24 years old, D.V.

Both girls belong to the Church at Coaldale and I still remember them and their families from the time we lived there. Girls, I hope you have an enjoyable birthday!

Praise the Spirit who, proceeding
From the Father and the Son,
In the truth the Church is leading.
Let us praise Him, everyone!

Hymn 36:2a

Wishing you all the Lord's blessing,

MRS. J. MULDER

1225 Highway 5, R.R. 1

Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

Praise to the Lord

In 1984 the *Book of Praise* of the Canadian Reformed Churches was finished. It was a nice idea of *Audiocraft Productions* (Harper M. VanderWel) to introduce a recording of improvisations on six Psalms and seven Hymns from this *Book of Praise* (Psalm 22, 75, 86, 103, 116 and 130; and Hymn 19, 35, 48, 51, 56 and 60). Seven of the nine different modes of the Genevan tunes of the Psalms are recorded, so there is much variety. As far as the Hymns are concerned, the recorded melodies are from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.

Almost all the preludes to and harmonizations of the Psalms and Hymns are by *Mr. John Knegt*, organist of the Canadian Reformed Church at Guelph. Mr. Knegt began his music studies almost

forty years ago with the well-known organist, Dirk Jansz. Zwart. He was music director of several choirs, and he also served the churches as a deputy of the Committee for the English Psalter for more than ten years. His improvisations were recorded at Brant Avenue United Church, Brantford, Ontario, on the three-manual Keates-Geissler Organ. (It is interesting to know that Mr. Knegt has worked for many years for Keates-Geissler Pipe Organ Ltd. of Acton, Ontario.) He also plays his own arrangement of J.S. Bach's choral, "O come sweet death."

The record starts with the introduction to and first stanza of Hymn 60, played by *Sidney John Vanderwoude* and was recorded three years before the rest, in 1982, on the organ at St. George's Ang-

lican Church in Guelph, Ontario. Sid also worked at Keates-Geissler Pipe Organs Ltd. as Mr. Knegt's co-worker. In 1983 he successfully completed his Grade 8 piano examination, but in 1984 he was suddenly taken up to the Lord at the age of 19.

Sometimes the registration is rather sharp, but that, of course, is a matter of individual taste. Besides, there is no pretention that this is a professional concert. The recording is good and one receives a nice impression of the possibilities of this big organ.

I hope that this record will find its way into our Reformed homes. It would be nice if the next record would include instrumental and vocal music as well!

K. DEDDENS

PRESS RELEASES



Board of Governors, Friday, January 24, 1986 at the Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario.

The Chairman, the Rev. J. Mulder, opened the meeting in the usual Christian manner. He welcomed all the brethren present, with the exception of the Rev. J. Geertsema, who was hindered from attending.

The agenda was established. Consideration was then given to a letter from the Senate in which certain proposals were made regarding the nomination of a new professor for the New Testament disciplines. After an extensive discussion, a unanimous decision was made to submit the name of a certain person to General Synod 1986.

Next, the By-Laws 4 and 5 dealing with Senate and Academic Regulations were adopted, after minor amendment.

The report of the Executive Committee was dealt with. It was followed by the reports of those Governors who had visited the lectures during the previous academic year. With thankfulness, it could be noted that the professors work diligently, in full harmony with Holy Scripture, as

well as the confessions of the church.

The meeting noted that the retirement of Prof. L. Selles was drawing near. On April 23, 1986 he will celebrate his 45th year as a minister of God's Word and on May 2, 1986 he will hold his last lecture at the College. His official retirement date is on Aug. 31, 1986. Suitable attention will be paid to these events.

It was a joyful moment when the meeting could be told next that Prof. C. VanDam will receive his doctorate on June 5, 1986 D.V. in Kampen, the Netherlands. Prof. L. Selles was designated as the official representative of our College at this important occasion.

The Convocation Committee was re-appointed. Prof. Dr. K. Deddens was made an alternate member of this Committee. A preference was expressed to once again have the convocation in the Bethel Gospel Church, Hamilton.

Thereafter quite some attention was paid to a letter received from the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry of the Word from the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. It pertained to the possibility of their becoming formally involved in the support and affairs of the College. A

proposed draft was discussed, amended and adopted.

Matters relating to the salary, tenure, and re-location expenses of the new professor for the NT department were dealt with and finalized.

The Finance and Property Committee was instructed to review the salaries of the professors in the light of their tax and housing situation.

It was agreed that the Press Release would be adopted by the Executive.

The Principal, Prof. Dr. J. Faber led in thanksgiving. The meeting was closed.

For the board,
J. VISSCHER, Vice-Chairman

"Anchor" Canadian Reformed Association for the Handicapped, held on Friday, April 4, 1986.

The meeting was opened in a Christian manner. All members were welcomed especially Br. K. Spithoff, who represents the Church of Burlington East.

The minutes are accepted as presented. The director's report was read.

The home is running smoothly. A 1983 Dodge Ram Van is now being used for transportation. D. Kooiman also transports other children to the workshop.

The building committee reports that the rezoning of the Tinturn Road property has not been approved. The committee is looking into different properties in the Lincoln Beamsville area on the advice of the board.

Br. P. Feenstra reads the annual building committee report.

Br. B. de Vries follows with the annual Summer Camp committee report.

Br. G. Lodder reports on the condition of the above mentioned 12 passenger van. This van was purchased for \$3,162.04.

The budget was presented and accepted.

Since Sr. L. de Jong is leaving the board, Br. K. Spithoff is appointed corresponding secretary.

The press release is read and approved.

After the singing of Hymn 32:2 the meeting is closed with prayer.

E.J. DE JONG

New Address of Corresponding Secretary:

Klaas T. Spithoff
276 Pine Cove Rd.
Burlington, ON L7N 1W2
Telephone: 639-7452

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE



Hello Busy Beavers,

What do you think is prettiest in Spring?
How about pink cherry blossoms?
Or pure white pear blossoms?
Or how about a bright gold forsythia bush?
Don't they make you feel happy and thankful it's Spring again?

You Spring detectives have been watching those buds get

bigger and fatter and stickier.

You know that soon leaves and flowers will pop out of those buds!

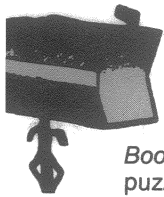
But did you know those buds grew last summer already?

Isn't it wonderful to think God made those buds grow for Spring before winter even started!

Here is a Bible text from the Song of Solomon about Spring. Fill in the blanks and make a pretty border around it. Try to use "pictures" you "see" in the text!

. . . For lo, the _____ is past,
the rain is over and _____.
The _____ appear on the earth,
the time of _____ has come,
and the voice of the _____
is heard in our _____. The
_____ tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in _____;
they give forth _____.

Song of Solomon 2:11-13



From the Mailbox

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club *Kim Vander Boom*. You're a Busy Beaver already sending in a puzzle for the other Busy Beavers! Thank you. Keep up the good work, Kim. Write again soon and tell me your birthday, OK?

And a big welcome to you, too, *Randy Dykstra*. Of course you may join. Thank you for the riddles. Will you write again and tell us about yourself and your family and hobbies, Randy?

Welcome to the Club, *Linda Stam*. We are happy to have you join us! Thank you for the wordsearch. I'm glad you had a nice birthday, Linda. Bye for now.

I see you're a real Spring detective, *Pauline De Ruiter*. Good for you! Thank you for the puzzle. I think the Busy Beavers will enjoy doing it. Write again soon, Pauline.

Thank you for a long chatty letter *Betty Bergsma*. It sounds to me as if you had a good holiday, Betty. And Spring isn't catching you by surprise either, right?

I'm glad you enjoyed your spring break so much, *Joanne Visscher*. What do you do to help with the calves, Joanne? Will you write and tell us? Bye for now.

You're a good typist already, *Mary-Lynn De Boer*! I'm glad you had such a good birthday. How is your dog, Mary-Lynn? Doesn't he sound a little dangerous? And how is your plant doing?

Hello, *Tanya Hansma*. It was nice to hear from you again. Yes, you're right. It's a good spring and summer puzzle. Thank you, Tanya. Write again soon.

You are a lucky girl, *Heidi Siebenga*, to be going to Ontario all the way from B.C.! I'm sure you will find friends no matter where you are. Keep up the good writing, Heidi!

Hello, *Quirina Bikker*. It was nice to hear from you again. I hope you had a happy birthday! Next year your name will be on the list, too. Thanks for the wordsearch, Quirina. Bye for now.

How did you enjoy your holiday, *Emily Moes*? I'm glad you had a good time with your Grandma over. Thank you for an interesting puzzle, Emily. I'm sure the Busy Beavers will like it!

Thank you for a very pretty letter, *Sheryl Linde*. And I know the Busy Beavers will enjoy your wordsearch. You sure mean to keep them busy, don't you? Bye for now, Sheryl. Write again soon!

Quiz Time!

UNSCRAMBLE THIS TEXT!

by Busy Beaver *Mary-Lynn De Boer*

"UTSRT NI HET RDLO TIWH LAL UROY ARTHE, DAN OD ONT NEAL NO RUYO NOW ADRUNDIENNGST. NI LLA OUYR SAWY DANLEWKCOEG IHM, DNA EH LILW KMEA UYRO TSAHP STIGARTH."

MAGIC SQUARE

by Busy Beaver *Kim Vander Boom*

	1	2	3
1	H	a	t
2	a	t	e
3	t	e	a

1. you wear it on your head
2. after you eat
3. a drink

SCRAMBLED INSTRUMENTS

by Busy Beaver *Pauline De Ruiter*

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. OHRN _____ | 7. JAOBN _____ |
| 2. LVINOI _____ | 8. IOANP _____ |
| 3. GARON _____ | 9. LUFTE _____ |
| 4. ELAICTNR _____ | 10. DLEDIF _____ |
| 5. UTRGIA _____ | 11. PARH _____ |
| 6. RPEMTUT _____ | 12. CRDEORRE _____ |

WORDSEARCH

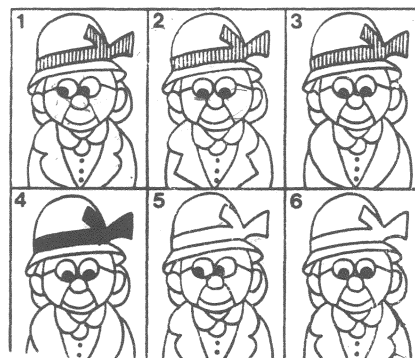
by Busy Beaver *Linda Stam*

B	A	T	H	C	O	M	B	X	Y	Z	Look for:	
H	S	O	A	P	H	A	M	P	E	R	bath	hamper
S	A	W	A	S	H	C	L	O	T	H	soap	washcloth
U	B	E	C	K	N	I	S	D	E	A	comb	brush
R	G	L	T	O	O	P	M	A	H	S	shampoo	sink
B	F	J	K	N	O	P	M	L	I	H	towel	

PICTURE PUZZLE

from Busy Beaver
Emily Moes

Which of these fits into the square with the ?



Answers: Scrambled text: Prov. 3:5 and 6

Magic Square: 1. hat 2. ate 3. tea

Scrambled instruments: 1. horn 2. violin 3. organ 4. clarinet 5. guitar 6. trumpet 7. banjo 8. piano 9. flute 10. fiddle 11. harp 12. recorder

Picture Puzzle: Number 3

I hope you enjoyed our puzzle, Busy Beavers! Have you sent in your entries in our *Fantasy Garden* contest, already?

Bye for now.

Hope to "see" you next time!

Love
Aunt Betty