

The Outlook

Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

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Desiring a “Clean Heart”

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10).

As these words are being written we, in our part of the world, are only haltingly entering into the spring season. As you, dear reader, read these words however, it will certainly be warm and the summer of the year of our Lord 2002 should be well upon us. Summer time is usually a time of holidays and relaxation for most of us. This is the time of year when the hustle and bustle of the school and church season are past. With fewer meetings to attend, fewer obligations upon us and more free time, our thoughts tend to turn to less intense things.

With this increase of free time

which follows the increase of daylight, perhaps we ought to take time to consider the state of our lives. We need to evaluate our progress in holiness and our growth in the grace of God in Christ. Let us do this by reflecting on these words of David found in Psalm 51: “Create in me a clean heart, O God.”

We all know the context of this 51st Psalm. David, God’s man, had fallen terribly into sin (cf. II Samuel 11 and 12). This man whom God had called from the menial task of shepherding his father’s sheep to become the King in Israel; this man whose heart belonged to God, had

allowed his heart to wander far from God’s ways. David’s sin makes very real the serious caution our children receive when we teach them to sing, “O be careful little eyes what you see.” David’s wandering eyes led his feet to wandering off the path of righteousness and into the way of wickedness.

While David’s fall into sin is a great warning for all of us who love the Lord, this record also provides us with an unspeakable source of gratitude. God did not allow His man to stay in sin! Nathan came! God’s Word, which alone is powerful to save, is also powerful to sanctify.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God,” David prayed. Oh, how great and gracious a God we have! Not counting against us our sins, but



Volume 52, No. 7 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) “And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, ‘The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon’ (Judges 7:20).

Journal of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Send all copy to:
Editor, Rev. Wybren Oord
7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.
Portage, MI 49024
Phone: (616) 324-5132 Fax: (616) 324-9606
Email: wyb.kath@juno.com

Board of Trustees

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Editor: Wybren Oord

Contributing Editor: Dr. Cornelis P. Venema

Production Manager: Peter Wobbema

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Cover Logo: Peter Hoekema

This periodical is owned and published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc., a religious and strictly non-profit organization composed of a group of Christian believers who hold to the Biblical Reformed faith. Its purpose is to advocate and propagate this faith, to nurture those who seek to live in obedience to it, to give sharpened expression to it, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess it, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Reformed churches and to encourage Christian action.

The publishers of this journal express their adherence to the Calvinistic creeds as formulated in the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Canons of Dort*, and the *Westminster Confession and Catechisms*.

All contributions represent the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Subscription Policy

The Outlook (USPS 633-980) is published monthly by Reformed Fellowship, Inc. (except July-August combined) for \$21.00 per year; (foreign rates: \$27.50 per year; Canadian rates: \$27.50 per year plus 7% GST Tax. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. Anyone desiring a change of address should notify the business office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Zip Code should be included. Periodicals postage paid at Grandville, MI and an additional office. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Outlook*, 2930 Chicago Drive S.W., Grandville, MI 49418-1176; OR in Canada to *The Outlook*, P.O. Box 39, Norwich, Ontario NOJ1PO. Registered as Periodicals mail under permit #0055786 at Norwich, Ontario.

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Editorial Office

7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.
Portage, MI 49024
(616) 324-5132 Phone
(616) 324-9606 Fax
wyb.kath@juno.com Email

Circulation Office

2930 Chicago Drive S.W.
Grandville, MI 49418-1176
(616) 532-8510 Phone

Circulation Office Hours

Monday, Wednesday, 9:00-11:00 AM
After Office Hours please call: (616) 455-1827

Business Mailing Address

2930 Chicago Drive S.W.
Grandville, MI 49418-1176
Email: reffellowship@juno.com



providing the way of redemption in the Greater King, Jesus. He saves us not only in the “sweet bye-and-bye,” but He also sanctifies us through the renewal of our hearts.

David’s heart, like ours, was wicked and filled with all sorts of unrighteousness. God will not permit such wickedness to live before Him. Therefore, the Creator God of heaven and earth, the same God who in the space of six days made all that is, of the heavenly realm as well as the physical, also creates, no, RE-creates in the heart of His people a new heart. Without His re-creating work we would fall eternally. But God saves and grants life to those who hear the voice of their Saviour and follow Him. They are granted grace to deny themselves and take up the cross of obedience to their King, Jesus.

The “New Heart” is the emblem of a new life. Our old, fallen heart of wickedness is removed and we receive, in His grace, a Holy Spirit heart transplant which begins the work of renewal in our lives. This is the New Covenant Promise of God given through the prophet Jeremiah:

“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ says the LORD: ‘I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the

greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jeremiah 31:33,34).”

This “New Heart” is enabled to do what the old, fallen heart could not and would not do. The rhythm of God’s will more and more resounds in this new heart. Before, the fallen heart could only will “obdurate disobedience” (cf. Canons of Dort, III/IV, article 1). The fallen will would and could only will rebellion. But the new heart is now enabled to will the will of God - though im-

The Creator RE-creates in the heart of His people a new heart.

perfectly because sin still lurks at our doorstep.

The Apostle Paul, in his Letter to Titus writes by the Holy Spirit:

“. . . according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and re-newing of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5).

When the Holy Spirit works the work of regeneration and renewal (the “New Heart”) in us, this work opens what were before sin-blinded eyes; unstops what were before sin-deafened ears; and awakens what was before a sin-darkened will - all of which had been fatally blinded by the ancient “Sneaky Snake.” A

true “New Life” begins. As with all of life, there is progress and growth, as well as regression and stumbling.

Have you ever wondered about the tendency, especially of little boys, to love mud puddles? It is almost predictable that if our little boys happen upon a mud puddle while riding their bicycles they will swerve to ride directly through its middle. If, while walking down a roadway, they see that puddle it is almost a sure thing that they will stomp their way through it. When MOST little boys grow up, however, they might find themselves still yearning for a romp through the mud but they will, most likely, avoid the mess. This is a good illustration of the way of the Christian life.

“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” (1 Corinthians 13:11).

When Christ has performed His heart-transplant operation upon us, we might find ourselves sometimes yearning for the “good old [bad] days” of the mud and muck of sin, but, our New Heart tells us that the old way is a messy and dangerous way, and we will, thank God, more and more avoid it.

So, if our New Heart is one that desires to avoid the mud and muck of sin, we have before us in this prayer of David a confession and a commitment. Here we find ourselves with one of the Holy Spirit’s given “check points” for our Christian life. We confess unabashedly and absolutely that our entire salva-

tion, beginning to end, including sanctification, is God's work and it is done for His glory. We cannot add one gram, not one ounce of righteousness to our own credit before God, for we have none worthy of Him.

“But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away (Isaiah 64:6).”

Contrary to much popular “antinomian” teaching today, we also confess that “He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4).” The God who

has given us a “New Heart” has Himself taken up residence in us. His life, in us, is not without effect. Our “good works,” that is, our faltering obedience to His will, cannot and will never save us, for while we yet live here in this world we are still beset with sin. However, He who is in us declares:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).”

This is, after all, a great “Indicative” passage in Ephesians which describes our new reality since the God-given Heart Transplant.

Therefore, dear reader, we encourage you to take time out during your times out this summer to reflect on your life in Christ. Have you, truly, received God's gift of the “New Heart”? Is your “New Heart” truly beating more and more in the rhythm of God's will?

Rev. Dennis W. Royall is pastor of the Cornerstone URC in London, Ontario.

Educating our Children

Part One

A Threefold Cord

A Reformed education is the strength of our covenant children. Solomon in his wisdom wrote in the last part of verse 12 of Ecclesiastes 4, “a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Have you ever seen one of those heavy ropes that are used to secure a large boat to a dock? If you examine it closely enough you will find that it is made up of several cords wound together for strength. This is what Solomon speaks of when he writes of a threefold cord. A rope that is made up of three thick cords is not quickly broken. It is strong. This figure we can apply to the Christian education we receive in a solidly Reformed Christian school.

The Bible speaks of two basic spheres where parents are called to instruct their children in the fear of the Lord. One sphere is the church. Covenant parents must see to it that their children are instructed in the things of the kingdom of God by bringing them under the preaching of the Word on Sunday and in the catechism room. This instruction in the church is as a powerful cord that works and strengthens faith in the hearts of our children. If we desire that our children be strong in the faith, then we as parents must see to it that from infancy on they come under the preaching.

The other sphere where we are called to instruct our children is in the home. All instruction of children

other than that received in the church is given by God into the hands of parents. All secular instruction, that is, education in the things of this world as well as religious instruction is given into the hands of fathers and mothers in the home. That instruction is as a second strong cord which, when wound together with the first cord of instruction in the church, makes our children strong in the faith.

But these are only two cords of the rope. Solomon speaks of a threefold cord not being quickly broken. There is also a third cord of instruction: that received in the Reformed Christian school. Now, we need to be careful at this point because the education in the school is not something that stands in its own right. The Bible does not command us to send our children to a school. The

Wilbur Bruinsma



Bible teaches us of two spheres where instruction of children must be given: the church and the home. But we add this extra cord to the basic two because this third cord of covenant education in the Reformed day school, when wound together with the other two, makes for a solid rope of education that cannot be easily broken.

Christian Conviction

For that reason, Reformed Christian education is not merely a matter of preference. We do not send our children to a Christian school that is Reformed in nature because it is just a nice school which we prefer over others. We send them to this type of school because we are convicted in our hearts and souls of the necessity of an education in the secular things of this life from a Reformed perspective. We send them to a Reformed school because we believe it is for their spiritual welfare. We wish to use every strand available to give our children the best instruction in the fear of the Lord possible. We must take our calling as believing parents that seriously! Even if we must empty our bank accounts to send our children to a Reformed Christian school. We must be convicted of it!

Have you ever stopped to figure out how many hours of the day our children spend in school? I believe that the number is close to seven hours. That is a large share of our children's lives. If they sleep, let's say, another eight hours in that day, that means that we as parents are with our school-age children far less than half of their day. The reality we confront is: our children are outside of the home being taught - not by us - but by others a large

share of the time out of every day. Their hearts and minds are as sponges absorbing every bit of instruction they receive whether in the home or outside of the home. It ought to be of utmost concern to us as Reformed parents, therefore, to whom we entrust the care and instruction of our children. Who is it outside of the home that is teaching our children their values and goals in life? Surely, as a covenant parent and a believing parent, I am not simply going to entrust my children into

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the care of just anyone. I do not want just anyone to teach my children - even in the way of academics.

State Or Public Schools Not An Option For Reformed Believers

This is why we ought to be convinced that the public education that is given in our State schools is not a consideration for believing parents. There are two reasons that State education is not an option for our children.

The first is this: the goal, aim, or purpose of State or public education is wrong. We must not think that the education given in any school is simply random instruction that has no goal or purpose to it. Every

teacher well knows that the teacher does not simply come to school and start teaching without any aim or purpose to his or her instruction in the classroom. There are teacher's meetings and board meetings all of which determine the specific goals of education. It is not only simplistic but foolish to think that education whether private or public has no aim or direction. And the goal or aim of the education given in our public school system stands opposed to Christianity.

I know that is a bold claim to make: that the goal of State education has become anti-Christian. We might have friends or even family that are involved in this system of education - not only as students but as teachers too. These friends or family are good Christians and they try to make an impact where they can. Even in light of this, we must understand the goal or end of public education. For that reason, I want to make it clear that though this claim I make is bold, it is not rash. State education is not only funded by the government but it is the government who through its own educators, its own appointees develop the goals and standards for that education. One such well-known and well-respected educator in the sphere of State education is John Dunphy who wrote an award winning essay in the periodical, *Humanist Magazine*. In that article entitled, "A Religion for a New Age," he wrote:

"I am convinced that the battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom. By teachers who correctly perceive their role as proselytizers of a new faith: a religion of humanity

that recognizes and respects the spark of what theologians call divinity in every human being.”¹

Prof. Benjamin S. Bloom who in his various books has influenced the curriculum used in Michigan schools defines what good teaching is, and also what the purpose of the public school must be. He writes that good teaching is, “a teachers ability to challenge the students beliefs.”² Elsewhere, he writes: “the purpose of the schools is to change the thoughts, feelings, and actions of students.”³

Marilyn Ferguson has been a leading figure in New Age Movement since the 1980s. She is not associated, however, with that side of the New Age Movement that involves itself in the sensational, commercialized hype. She is an educator who has written text books for the public school system in California. She has been of much influence in the whole realm of education in our country. She writes in her book, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*:

Subtle forces are at work, factors you are not likely to see in banner headlines. For example, tens of thousands of classroom teachers, educational consultants and psychologists, counselors, administrators, researchers, and faculty members in colleges of education have been among the millions engaged in personal transformation. They have only begun to link regionally and nationally, to share strategies, to conspire for the teaching of all they most value: freedom, high

expectations, awareness, patterns, connections, creativity. They are eager to share their discoveries with those colleagues ready to listen.⁴

The perceptive reader ought not be fooled by the lofty and noble language that Ferguson uses in this instance. What she means by “freedom, high expectations, awareness, patterns, connections, and creativity” in education she defines later in that same chapter of her book.

This education is geared toward reshaping the values and behavior of children to fit the values and beliefs of the State.

A major ambition of the curriculum is autonomy. This is based on the belief that if our children are to be free, they must be free even from us - from our limiting beliefs and our acquired tastes and habits. At times this means teaching healthy, appropriate rebellion, not conformity. Maturity brings with it a morality that derives from the innermost self, not from mere obedience to the culture’s mores.⁵

Many more quotes can be cited from a whole host of writers involved in delineating the goals for State education and involved in the development of curriculum. No parent need take my word for this. There are plenty of books available on the market that can inform us of

the goal of public school educators.

Outcome Based Education

The State schools have also developed and are putting into place a certain method of education that achieves these goals. Perhaps you have heard of it already: it is called “outcome based education.” This type of education is not interested so much in imparting to students an objective body of knowledge to learn. This education is geared toward shaping and molding the student’s beliefs. It is geared toward reshaping the values and behavior of children to fit the values and beliefs of the State. Children are no longer viewed as the peculiar possession of parents. They are wards of the State and the State must see to it in its education that these children learn behavior that is acceptable to the State.

Here is an example of what is meant by outcome based education. Across the country teachers are using a “Developing Nurturing Skills” curriculum, which tells fifth-graders, “You are expected to keep confidential anything that is discussed in this classroom.” Then, children are given a handout called, “MY BELIEF - MY PARENTS’ BELIEFS.” Fifth graders dutifully fill in the blanks for the questions such as: “Women should stay at home to raise children. My belief: _____. My parents’ belief: _____.” And, “Religion should be an important part of everyone’s life. My belief. _____. My parent’s belief. _____.”⁶

This is just an example of what is being done in schools across the land - even, sad to say, in many Christian schools.



What types of values does the State attempt to instill in students by means of its outcome based education? Here are but a few: limiting the family to two children; Christianity is only one acceptable religion among many others; fornication is acceptable behavior as long as one is safe; abortion may be a necessity in a young woman's life; parent's rule is secondary to State rule. There are the humanistic goals of State education as well, such as, man must look inside of himself to fulfill all his needs since all men have in them potential that has no limitations. There are many other goals of State education as well. These are but a few. Again, a parent need not take my word in these matters. There are books that fill the

shelves of bookstores which expose the goals and the methods of public education in our country. To give our children to the public schools of today for six to seven hours out of every day is giving our lambs to the wolves. From that point of view alone State education of covenant children is not an option.

But there is another reason, a principal reason that State education of our Reformed Christian children is not an option. This we will consider in another article.

Endnotes

¹ John Dunphy, "A Religion for a New Age," *Humanist Magazine*, (January-February 1983): 26.

² Krathwohl, Bloom, and Mascia, *Taxonomy*: 55

³ Benjamin S. Bloom, *All Our Children Learning: A Primer for Parents, Teachers, and Other Educators*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981): 180

⁴ Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Controversy*, (New York: Tarcher/Perigee Books, 1987): 281

⁵ *Ibid*: 316

⁶ Peg Luksik and Pamela Hobbs Hoeffcker, *Outcome-Based Education*, (Louisiana: Huntington House Publishers, 1995): 20

Rev. Wilber Bruinsma is the minister of the Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Looking Back

Candidates for the ministry often have a tendency to push an agenda of their own making. They are going to fix what they think is wrong with the church. One almost gets the impression that the church has been waiting for exactly this moment when at last they are going have things set straight.

In his book, *Daylight*, Rev. Kuyvenhoven speaks from experience. As a candidate for ministry, Rev. Kuyvenhoven preached his classical sermon before the delegates of classis. In it, he had "some incisive things to say (he thought) about weaknesses in the church." He was going to give it to them (the church members). An older minister took exception to some of the things the candidate said. But the

candidate stood his ground and thought he won the debate. The minister's parting words were: "As long as you know that we must preach comfort." Kuyvenhoven said those words never left him. "He (the minister) won the debate."

Those are words every candidate has to hear. We must preach comfort to God's people (Cf. Lord's Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism). Yes, there are plenty of weaknesses in the church but we are not going to solve them all. We are not to condemn, but to comfort (Cf. Isaiah 40:1,2; John 3:17). The sheep need tender loving care from the shepherd. That includes rebuke and admonition. But it must all be given in the context of love for the sheep.

Jelle Tuininga

I have known candidates who pushed for radical changes in the order of worship, changes which didn't sit well with the consistory or the congregation. The results were disastrous for both minister and congregation. All for the sake of an "agenda." Sad to say, the casualties are often not a few.

To have to preach is one thing, to love those to whom we preach quite another.' The trouble with some of us is that we love preaching but we are not always careful to make sure that we love the people to whom we are actually preaching. If you lack this element of compassion for the people you will also lack the pathos which is a very vital element in all true preaching. Our

Lord looked out upon the multitude and ‘saw them as sheep without a shepherd’, and was ‘filled with compassion’. And if you know nothing of this you should not be in a pulpit, for this is certain to come out in your preaching.

Preaching & Preachers
Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Young ministers ought not to make mountains out of molehills. In their youthful enthusiasm, young ministers have tendency to do that. They can’t wait to set in order that which needs fixing (they think). Later on in their ministry they will come to see that some of those things which once appeared so important to them are actually very minor. Proper balance is a great asset in the ministry. We are not the first to come on the scene with our great wisdom, and we won’t be the last either. Looking at this in the perspective of history has a way of deflating us and our ideals. “Its place remembers it no more,” says the Psalmist. And how true that is. “On that day their plans come to nothing.” (Psalm 103:16b; 146:4b).

So don’t needlessly trouble the congregation with “innovative” liturgical experiments. If changes must take place, they can be done later. Don’t come like a bull in a china shop. Once there is a trust-relationship between minister and congregation, then the time has come to discuss some of these secondary concerns. But by then we will often have come to other conclusions. What we thought were mountains now appear as molehills. We have matured. We have come to see things in a more balanced way.

Thank the Lord for that.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones speaks of another kind of balance:

This element of pathos and of emotion is to me a very vital one. It is what has been so seriously lacking in the present century, and perhaps especially among Reformed people. We tend to lose our

Proper balance is a great asset in the ministry. We are not the first to come on the scene with our great wisdom, and we won’t be the last either.

balance and to become over-intellectual, indeed almost to despise the element of feeling and emotion. We are such learned men, we have such a great grasp of the Truth, that we tend to despise feeling. The common herd, we feel, are emotional and sentimental, but they have no understanding!

Preaching & Preachers

A lot of unnecessary problems can be avoided in the church if the minister has a good dose of (sanctified) plain common sense. We must be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matth. 10:16). “The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor” (Prov. 15:33). “Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will

be wise” (Prov. 19:20). “A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.” (Prov. 19:11).

A colleague once said to me, “There are more crackpots in the ministry than in any other vocation.” That may be a bit of an overstatement, but we all know of such crackpots. They do untold harm to the church of Christ. Perhaps some of them were pushed into the ministry by a proud mother. Whatever the case may be, they don’t belong in the ministry. Common sense would make that clear. A good character and a balanced personality are essential for the ministry.

The preacher must be a godly man. But he must also have wisdom. And not only that, he must also have patience and forbearance. This is most important in a preacher.

Rev. Jelle Tuininga is an emeritus pastor in the URC living in Lethbridge, Alberta.

Rev. Jerome Julien

Stated Clerk of the United Reformed Churches in North America

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Needs Which Wives Need Met At Home

Part Three

Thus far in this series of studies concerning “*Needs Which Our Wives Need Met At Home*”, we have considered the fact that we must give to our wives the gift of **Time** - *Time which results in God-honoring, Christ-centered companionship and compatibility*. Secondly we considered the gift of **LOVE** which our wives also desperately need and well deserve from us; “*agape love*” - *spoken in a language which our wives will understand and appreciate*.

In this article, we look at a third need which our wives need met at home: “**C**”: **COMMUNICATION** - *Communication which defuses anger on a daily basis and edifies our wives*. Only when these needs are met will our wives be the blessed beneficiaries of the healthy, God-honoring doses of **T-L-C** which will abundantly bless our marriage relationships.

Why is such “communication” absolutely essential between a husband and a wife? Well, allow me to attempt to drive home the extreme importance of communication by posing a few of questions: Do you talk to your wives? Do you ever talk to them about subjects other than the weather or which bills are due or which clothes are clean? Do you ever talk with her about her thoughts, feelings, wishes, dreams or desires? And if you do, do you really listen and focus in on what she is saying in response?

Now, some of us may be thinking,

“Well, Pastor Kuiken, my wife’s attempts at conversation really annoy me! In fact, most often our conversations turn into quarrels, and you know what King Solomon says in Proverbs 27:15, namely, ‘A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day.’ Sometimes I think that the less my wife and I speak with one another the better!”

If you can identify with the above stated sentiment, please know that I sympathize what you are saying. Please also know that I am well familiar with the contents of Proverbs 27:15. In fact, I am also quite familiar with what King Solomon has to say in Proverbs 21:9 and Proverbs 25:24 where we read, “Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.” And remember: the Bible says that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. In fact, I have often wondered if King Solomon was the one who coined the expression, “*Honey, you’re one in a thousand!*”

In all sincerity, there is a lesson for all of us in the above mentioned verses. In fact, in nearly nineteen years of pastoral ministry, it has been my observation that when a wife is not given the opportunity to talk and/or her husband does not listen to her when she does, her tendency will be to talk louder and longer and louder and longer and louder and longer in a seemingly futile attempt to get her husband to hear and respond! The result? Well, as Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family fame says, “They

become a matched team: he works like a horse and she nags!”

Allow me to let you in on a little secret: we can pre-empt and prevent so much of that “nagging” simply by following the instructions in the Bible, the “Manufacturer’s handbook”, and by hearing and heeding what God’s Word has to say concerning happy, healthy, God-honoring, constructive communication.

For example, in Ephesians 4:25-27 God’s Word declares:

“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

In similar fashion, in James 3:3-6 the Sacred Scriptures state:

“When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

Think of the powerful implications and personal applications of these texts! Oh, how we must all pray and plead that our good and gracious God would increasingly enable and empower us by His Word and Spirit to watch what we say to our wives! For cruel, callous, critical words can cut sharper than a knife or a sword! And not only so, but we must also be constantly vigilant concerning how we say what we say! In one joint counseling session I held some years ago with a husband and wife, I heard the wife tearfully blurt out to her husband, "I know that you don't swear or curse at me, but you order me around like I am one of the guys on your construction crew! I'm your wife!" Ouch. Can you feel her pain?

You see, that is why the Apostle Peter (who, needless to say, often had trouble controlling his own tongue as well!) says in such sobering and succinct fashion, "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." Think about that! I don't mind sharing with you the fact that I have enough problems and pains and pressures in life without having Almighty God "*set His face against me*" because of the way I am treating or talking to my wife, Margaret; and I suppose that the very same thing is true for you and your wife.

I believe that it was Mark Twain who once said, "I can live for two months on a good compliment." Proverbs 25:11 puts it this way, "A word aptly spoken is like apples of

gold in settings of silver." Each and every day of our lives, we need to be giving to our wives whom God has so graciously given to us "apples of gold in settings of silver." Why? Because conversation which defuses anger on a daily basis and edifies our wives is one of the Needs Which Our Wives Need Met At Home.

I close this series of articles with the following illustration. On Thurs-

***I have enough
problems and pains
and pressures in life
without having
Almighty God "set
His face against me"
because of the way I
am treating or
talking to my wife.***

day, September 13, 2001, two days after the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City came tumbling down due to the hijacking of jet-liners by terrorists, I watched an interview conducted by Connie Chung on ABC News in which she was interviewing a man by the name of Howard Lutnick, CEO of Cantor Fitzgerald, reportedly the largest bond brokerage firm in the entire world. Mr. Lutnick had 950 employees working in the World Trade Center that day, and he lost approximately 700 of them, including his own brother, Gary Lutnick.

During the course of the interview, Howard Lutnick broke down sob-

bing, and I will never forget what he said. He said, "I am a changed man; I will never, ever be the same again. Our company did 54 trillion dollars worth of business last year ... and it means nothing! Absolutely nothing!" And then, looking straight into the camera, with tears streaming down his face he said, "*Go home and kiss your kids.*"

I would like to affirm and somewhat paraphrase Mr. Lutnick's words to each and every one of us. Because life is so short, so fleeting, and because only the Lord our God knows the number of the days which He, according to His sovereign will and good pleasure, has ordained for any one of us to live, *let us live life to the fullest for Him!* In our hearts, as well as in our homes, let us forsake the wisdom of the *world* and let us foster the wisdom of the *Word!* And so, yes, let us "*go home and kiss our kids*"; but let us also, Brothers, each and every day of our lives, give to our wives healthy, heart-felt, God-glorifying mega-doses of **T-L-C!**

Why? Because Time, Love and Communication are *Needs Which Our Wives Need Met At Home.*

Rev. Richard J. Kuiken is the Senior Pastor of the Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church.



The Doctrine of the Antithesis

A Lost Doctrine

In Gen. 3:15 we read that God said “I will put enmity between thee (Satan) and the Woman, (God’s people - the church) and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

This is a most important doctrine pertaining to one’s salvation. Note first that God said; “I will put enmity”, meaning that he ordained it to be, and what God ordains will forever remain, and cannot be changed.

Secondly, by means of a modern illustration, we could say by ordaining the antithesis to be, God drew an invisible line across the face of time. This line would separate the regenerate from the unregenerate, the believer from the unbeliever, the righteous from the unrighteous, and the saved from the unsaved. It is between these two groups that God has drawn the line of distinction. It is between them that God said, “I will put enmity.”

The dictionary defines the word “enmity” as a deepseated and mutual hatred between two parties. That is exactly what God established between His people and the world. He did not want His people fraternizing with the world, as clearly set forth in the O.T. That is why the world hates the church. They cannot help themselves for God decreed it to be so.

A Biblical Doctrine

1 John 3:13 tells us, “Marvel not my

brethren, if the world hate you.” In John 15:18 Jesus said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.”

So we see that the doctrine of the antithesis is clearly identifiable throughout the Scripture. Every

Every person born on this earth will eventually be identified on one side of this antithetical line or the other.

person born on this earth will eventually be identified on one side of this antithetical line or the other. One’s very salvation is at stake! God who sees our every move and knows our every thought will be the judge.

Jesus confirms the antithesis as fact in a different setting, Matthew 7:13,14:

“Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

One side of the line or the other; one gate or the other, it’s the same difference. In either case we are admonished to make the right choice. We should also note that there is no middle ground; there is no third gate, no room for compromise. Entrance to the narrow gate leads to heaven and the other to hell.

Jesus rejects all forms of compromise with the world. This is what Jesus said regarding that matter:

“No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

Scripture would have us to understand the reality of this enmity. It is an ongoing battle between Satan and the church. We are warned by the Scriptures, to take the matter seriously:

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about (the earth), seeking whom he may devour”(1 Peter 5:8).

The apostle Paul describes the battle as a more personal one,

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

A Forgotten Doctrine

In former years the teaching of the antithesis held a respectful and

prominent place in the preaching of the Word. Today, by comparison, it is given little more than lip service. How did this come to pass?

As with all retrogression in the church, whether in liturgy or doctrine, it does not happen over night. Retrogression is more likely to be a gradual process over a period of years. So what happened over the years?

Years ago there was not an automobile in every garage, our people lived in closely knit neighborhoods. Then following the depression, and the end of World War 2, our people began to be more affluent. Now there is an automobile in every garage giving people more freedom to move about. With this new found freedom people began to leave their ethnic neighborhoods for the suburbs, and, as a result they began to mix with different cultures. Thus, they fell under the influence of more liberal views.

At about the same time the Christian Reformed Church Synod was pressured to disannul their stand on worldly amusements. After much discussion, and over a period of years, the synod acquiesced, giving as grounds that the church should not legislate sin. Thus, the flood gates to worldly pleasures were flung wide open.

Now the people could participate in all kinds of worldly amusements without having any guilty feelings. Soon, the pulpit was largely silenced regarding the antithesis, since they could not speak openly regarding particular sins. Given time, the church was certain to reap the fruits of that fateful decision.

A Lost Doctrine

Today, Sabbath desecration in its various forms is on the increase and becoming quite common. People think nothing of shopping or dining out on the Lord's Day. The theater has moved into our living rooms and sex and pornography can be ushered in through the Internet. The modern dance, together with its inherent evils, has entered the curriculum of many of our Christian schools.

In all this the pulpit remains silent and the church continues to hold out its hand to the world by its silence. It is not difficult to see that the antithesis has become a lost doctrine.

If our covenant children and young people are to grow up to be God-fearing Christians, we will have to return to the teaching of the antithesis. They must from a young age have this biblical truth drilled into their young minds. In this, the church seems to have failed miserably.

We live in a wicked and immoral nation. Already its tentacles have to some degree, entered the doors of the church and schools, as we have seen. The temptations of the evil one surround us as never before. If ever there was a time when the preaching of the antithesis was needed, that time is now. Let the reformed pulpit go back to its moorings, and once again fearlessly proclaim what God had intended for our lives when He ordained the antithesis into being. Ones very salvation could be in jeopardy, as the Scripture warns.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15).

Mr. Dow R. Haan, Sr. is a member of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.



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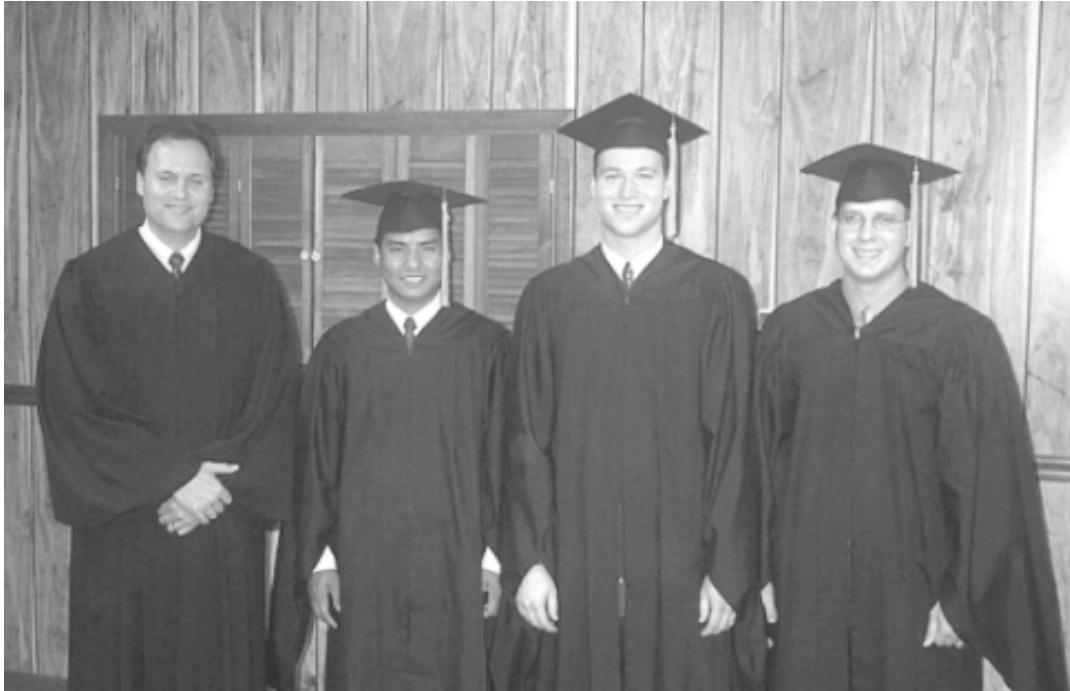
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Mid-America Reformed Seminary Celebrates Seventeenth Commencement



Mid-America Reformed Seminary celebrated her seventeenth commencement ceremony on Friday evening, May 17, 2002 at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Hammond, Indiana. The Rev. Alan Lutz of Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA) addressed the graduates with a sermon entitled, "From Sending to Saving." Rev. Lutz preached from Romans 10:14-15 and challenged the graduates to recognize the important role preaching plays in God's plan of salvation, showing how the sending of ministers of the Word is the primary means God uses in saving sinners

Seminary President Dr. Cornel Venema presented graduates David Khobal, Daniel Patterson and Kyle Sorensen to Board President Rev. Richard Kuiken who offered the graduates their diplomas. Dr. Nelson Kloosterman brought a charge to the graduates as they prepare to take up their minis-

tries in the church. A reception of cake, coffee and punch followed the commencement exercises in the church basement.

Graduate David Khobal and his wife Cing Pi are returning to their native Myanmar where David will take up teaching duties at the Reformed Theological College of Myanmar. Danny Patterson and his wife Skye will be moving west to Battle Mountain, Nevada, where Danny is preparing to be ordained and installed as pastor of Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Kyle Sorensen and his wife Danielle will be moving to Manitowoc, Wisconsin where Kyle has been called as pastor of Salem-Ebenezer Reformed Church.

Pictured are (from left to right) Commencement speaker Rev. Alan Lutz, David Khobal, Kyle Sorensen, and Danny Patterson.



Openness Theology:

What Shall We Think?

It was on Pentecost that Peter proclaimed that Jesus was delivered over to crucifixion by the “foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). For centuries the church has rightly understood that God knows beforehand the things that will happen in history. Interestingly enough, the apostle also here refers to the basis of the divine foreknowledge: “Him, being delivered by the *determined counsel* and foreknowledge of God.” Again, the people of God have properly believed that God’s foreknowledge is based upon the foreordination of all things by His own will.

A New Approach

Both of these doctrines - foreordination and foreknowledge - are currently denied by evangelicals who espouse the so-called “Openness theology.” The future in this view is not determined, settled, or closed. Instead, they claim it is uncertain, open, and not entirely controlled even by God. In fact, the future is so open and so uncertain that not even God himself has a definite knowledge of what will occur: “Omniscience need not mean exhaustive foreknowledge of all future events” (Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God*, p.121).

This position, of course, is not in the mainstream of historical Christian

thought. Traditionally, it has been held that God’s omniscience includes free human actions in the future. In Openness theology, however, the most that God can do with respect to the future determinations of free agents is to make educated guesses: “God has a vast amount of knowledge about the *probabilities* that free choices will be made in one way rather than another” (William Hasker, *Ibid*, p. 15).

What is the engine that drives the Openness of God view? Openness theologians are primarily committed to a libertarian view of human freedom. Pinnock affirms that we are “significantly free.” He believes in “freedom in the strong sense.” Humans have not merely the power of *alternative* choice, but *contrary* choice: “People must be free to enter into that saving relationship with God” (*Predestination and Free Will*, pp. 147-148). Because of a fundamental pre-commitment to a radical version of human freedom, Openness thinkers reject divine foreordination and foreknowledge. If “the future is fixed and determined,” then “human freedom is an illusion” (Pinnock, *The Openness of God* p.121). “There are serious questions,” Hasker affirms, “concerning the logical compatibility of comprehensive divine foreknowledge and

libertarian free will” (*Ibid*, p. 147).

A Biblical Response

The Openness model appears to have at least three fundamental problems: an aversion to mystery and paradox, a selective use of the biblical evidence, and a failure to make hermeneutical distinctions. Does not Pinnock display a rationalistic bent when he writes, “Philosophically speaking, if choices are real and freedom significant, future decisions cannot be exhaustively foreknown” (*The Openness of God*, p. 123)? This is a different attitude than that displayed by James Packer who has long affirmed that the Bible teaches both the absolute sovereignty of God *and* human freedom, a mystery that human reason cannot fully comprehend. We must learn to accept such biblical antinomies. It is good always to remember the opening statement of Herman Bavinck’s *The Doctrine of God*: “Mystery is the vital element of dogmatics” (p. 13).

Unlike Luther (with his embrace of God as both hidden and revealed) and Calvin (with his espousal of God’s hidden and revealed will) and many others, Pinnock reflects an overreaction against divine transcendence in favor of immanence. Note that he believes that our conception of God must be an “either/or” rather than a “both/and”. With respect to the following propositions: “We may think of God primarily as ... an all-embracing and irresistible power, aware of everything

In Openness theology the most that God can do with respect to the future determinations of free agents is to make educated guesses.

that will ever happen ... or we may understand God as a caring parent with qualities of love and responsiveness, generosity and sensitivity” (*The Openness of God*, p. 103).

Why, however, may we not think of God as “both/and” in relationship to the propositions here set forth? What is wrong with paradox? Is it not better to affirm the biblical testimony? In the “hidden purpose” of God, “the reprobate are damned to their own ruin.” Yet, at the same time, there is the profound mystery of “His will as made known to us in the gospel.” As Calvin without embarrassment puts it, “So wonderful is His love towards mankind that He would have them all to be saved” (*Commentary on Second Peter*, on 2 Peter 3:9). As Luther likewise taught, Scripture presents God as the one who foreordains some to hell, but who also is revealed in Christ as the friend of sinners, full of compassion and goodness, seeking the salvation of all.

Selective Scriptural Citation

A second problem in Openness theology is a selective presentation of the biblical evidence. Passages like Genesis 22:12 (“Now I know that you fear God”) are cited, while classic texts which are the basis of the foreknowledge doctrine are not brought into the discussion. Where, for example, do Openness thinkers seriously interact with the discussion in Isaiah 46, a passage in which the God of Israel is contrasted with the Babylonian god Marduk and his son Nebo? Here the LORD is presented as being in a class by Himself. There is no one who is comparable to Him. Whereas the Babylonian idols were carried away literally by their Per-

sian conquerors, the LORD is the God who will ever carry his people (vss.3-4). In addition, the LORD is unlike all the gods of the nations in that He alone has the attribute of foreknowledge: “I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done” (vss.9b - 10a). The point of the text is that foreknowledge is the distinguishing characteristic of God. If foreknowledge is removed

Pinnock reflects an overreaction against divine transcendence in favor of immanence.

from the LORD, then it really means that He is not God. For it is of the very essence of the divine nature to possess the attribute of foreknowledge. The passage furthermore instructs us that God’s foreknowledge is based upon His foreordination. He is able to know and to declare the future because of His unchanging plan: “I am God, and there is none like me ... saying ‘My counsel shall stand’” (vss.9b, 10b). Cyrus the Persian, the “bird of prey from the east,” is viewed in terms of foreordination—the LORD refers to him as “the man who executes my counsel, from a far country” (vs. 11a).

A Failure in Hermeneutics

Finally, proponents of Openness theology fail to make the rather elementary hermeneutical distinction

between proper and metaphorical descriptions of God. Biblical passages which teach foreordination (Proverbs 16:33; Matthew 10:29; Luke 22:22; Acts 4:28; 17:26; Ephesians 1:1 1) and foreknowledge (Psalm 139:4; Isaiah 42:9; 46:10; Matthew 20:17-19; John 21:18-19) are summarily dismissed (because they are judged to be inconsistent with libertarian free will), while texts which are metaphorical descriptions of God are taken to be proper statements of the divine nature.

The “Now I know” texts (such as Genesis 22:12) are affirmed as straightforward, proper descriptions of God showing that he comes to learn new things over time. Again, the only reason for dismissing the foreordination/foreknowledge passages is due to a prior philosophical commitment that comprehensive divine foreknowledge and real human freedom to choose are rationally incompatible. This is the basis for taking metaphorical, texts as being proper descriptions of God. Now since Openness theologians insist that God literally learns new things, one might suspect that in the interest of hermeneutical consistency they would take Jeremiah 31:34 quite literally: “Their sin I will remember no more.” Pinnock though is apparently willing to take such a statement metaphorically, since he affirms that “God ... is free from our inability to remember” (*The Openness of God*, p. 120).

Surely, if we have a commitment to maintain a biblical theology, we dare not just dismiss the host of foreordination and foreknowledge texts. Such passages ought to be recognized for what they are—



proper descriptions of the divine nature! They clearly are not metaphorical statements in which the qualities of man are attributed to God! Likewise, the traditional hermeneutic will continue to take seriously texts like Jeremiah 36:3 (“*It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin*”), recognizing them for what they are—metaphorical statements, which as Calvin notes are “common in Scripture,” passages in which “God transforms Himself, in a manner, into what man is” (*Commentary on Jeremiah*, on Jeremiah 36:3).

The Divine Accommodation

The church for centuries has recog-

nized that Scripture makes metaphorical statements about God. Why, however, does not the Bible

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merely confine itself to proper descriptions of God? Would not this be far less confusing? Actually, the use of metaphorical speech is to our benefit. John of Damascus makes the point that metaphorical state-

ments about God “teach us what is above us by means of something familiar to ourselves” (*Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, XI). Calvin with customary skill provides this memorable explanation: “For who even of slightest intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is want in a measure to ‘lisp’ in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of Him to our slight capacity. To do this He must descend far beneath His loftiness” (*Institutes* 1.13.1).

Rev. Mark J. Larson is pastor of the Providence Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Lenoir, North Carolina.

Cecil Tuininga

The Cost of Disobeying God’s Word

In the book of 1 Chronicles we read some interesting history. In Chapter 13 we read that King David gathered all Israel together to bring the Ark of God back to Jerusalem. They put it on a cart and proceeded to go to Jerusalem. But on the way something went wrong. One of the oxen stumbled and a man named Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark. This, we are told, angered the Lord and He took

Uzza’s life. This angered King David and made him very afraid of the Lord. They stopped the procession and the ark stayed at the home of Obed-edom.

No doubt King David reflected on this event wondering why this had happened. He came to see that *he* was the cause of Uzza’s death. I suspect he got a cart to carry the ark because they had seen how

wonderfully this had worked for the Philistines. They had hitched untrained cows to a cart. While lowing for their calves those very same cattle took the cart to the place the Philistines wanted it to go. In this way the Philistines would know the God of the Hebrews was guiding the ark. David evidently judged that if it worked so well for the world why not for the Lord’s people. No doubt he came to see that his mis-

*If it worked so well for the world why not for the
Lord’s people?*

take was a very serious one. He had forgotten and disobeyed the Lord's command that only Levites were to carry the ark.

This event certainly has a lesson for us. We, too, are called to serve the Lord in obedience to His will. That is the only way we can expect His blessing. One song expresses this beautifully, "When we walk with the Lord, in the light of His Word, what a glory He sheds on our way. While we do His good will, He abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey." (*New Christian Hymnal*, edited by Rev. H. J. Kuiper)

There is a similar event in Scripture where two of God's children are severely rebuked and corrected by the Lord. Aaron and Miriam said to Moses that they had as much right to speak for the Lord as he did. No doubt there was some jealousy as family members were involved in this complaint (Numbers 12:1) The Lord reminded them of Moses' very special calling and communion with the Lord. It was a very sinful mistake they made and Miriam especially paid dearly for it.

Are conditions any different today? Scripture clearly reveals to us that the whole Bible was written only by men, and that only men were officers and instructors for God's people. Jesus only choose men to be his disciples. As if this evidence isn't sufficient the Lord spells out clearly and emphatically that elders (bishops, overseers) should only be men able to be both instructors and rulers over God's people. Similar requirement are given for deacons (1 Tim.3). We read in Acts 6:3 that seven men were appointed to serve the needs of the widows. It is im-

portant that only men are to be officers in God's church. As if this were not clear enough it is repeated in Titus chapter one.

Very unfortunately this clear revelation of Scripture has been set aside by many in recent years. We have many Reformed churches who have decided that woman can also be ministers, elders, and deacons in the church. This follows a similar reasoning like Aaron and Miriam used. They maintained they had as much right to speak as Moses.

We visited the Netherlands for the first time in 1985. We saw how far the Gereforemerde Kerk had fallen in those years.

They were rebuked by God and as mentioned before, Miriam was severely punished with leprosy. Will the Lord punish us today, too? He most decidedly will and does.

In the 1960's the Gereforemeerde Kerk (Christian Reformed Church) in the Netherlands introduced the practice of ordaining women as office bearers in the church. We visited the Netherlands for the first time in 1985. We saw how far the Gereforemerde Kerk had fallen in those years. They had introduced special stories for the children before they left the church service for some kind of service of their own. The sermons for the adults were

rather dead and the church attendance very low. It was very regrettable to see. Our relatives realized what was taking place. What could one do in such a case?

Ten years later we went back to the Netherlands. Conditions in the churches were most pathetic. We attended one church which still held two services on Sunday morning when we had attended ten years earlier. It was no longer being used. We were instructed to attend an Herrforde Kerk (Reformed Church) on the same block. The service was attended by both Gereformeerden and Herrformde members. This was part of the program called "Samen op Weg," which in English is "Together on the way." The church was packed full but was about half the size of the Gerefermeerde Kerk.

There were, if I remember correctly, four female deacons and one male deacon. The people stood up when the minister came into the sanctuary. I saw only two women leading in the minister. The first woman opened the service. The sermon the minister had was clearly spoken but was a very liberal message. It was said that God is the father of all mankind and we are therefore all brothers and sisters. There was no service in the afternoon. Very, very sad indeed

How about the Churches who have introduced this same practice among us? Do we see this same thing taking place in them? We certainly do! We not only see women serving as ministers, elders and deacons, we also see the sad decline in attendance. Most evening services are very poorly attended. In the summer some of the larger

churches join services so as to have enough for a decent service. Young people are especially missing. Some churches have only one service, others have Bible study instead of a service.

Yes, many of these churches are concerned about this. They realize something must be done to save the church. Many seek to make the service more appealing, especially to the young people. One colleague said to me, "We are in competition with the entertainment of the world. If we fail to have entertainment in our services we will lose our young people." So some add songs by choirs, or solos, or numbers by various musical instruments, or even plays by children or young people. Beside this, children can leave a service before the sermon begins. Then, so it is reasoned, they get something that at their age they can understand and benefit from.

The introduction of these practices are completely contrary to God's Word and most destructive. Any church that sets God's Word aside is headed for destruction. We see this happening in many churches today. They are playing church. Everything seems to be done to please the members while everything should be done in obedience to God's Word.

We sing a beautiful song in our church services at times, that is number 324 in our Psalter Hymnal, "God Himself is with us, let us now adore him, and in awe appear before Him. God is in His temple, all within keep silence, prostrate lie with deepest reverence."

As mentioned the reason for letting children out of the service is to give

them something they can understand on their own level. This is an insult to the Holy Spirit! On the one hand we are called to gather as covenant families. On the other we must trust the Holy Spirit to give our children a real blessing while in church. Dr. A. Kuiper emphasized how the Holy Spirit would instill in children a due reverence for God's service by observing the church at worship. In my early years I experienced this and am happy our parents took us to church to attend the whole service. In our early years

***Everything seems to
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God's Word.***

most of the services were led by elders. Some were good readers others poor readers. All the sermons were long and we did not like sitting still that long but the Holy Spirit blessed it and used it for His glory.

What are we saying to our children when we remove them from the worship service? What will the impact on them be in future years? Can you blame young people when they only come once to church, or not at all? Have we not left the impression that going to church is not that important? And have we lost the wonderful and great blessing of being gathered in the presence of and under the great blessings that our heavenly Father bestows on us as covenant families?

When we fail to instill this wonderful truth in our children we lose the beauty of being united as covenant families. Jesus rebuked the disciples for considering children as not belonging in the circle of those who met with Him. He said to them, "Suffer the little children and forbid them not to come to me. For of such is the Kingdom of heaven." (Math.19:14). That holds true the same way today. Where God's people meet in worship there the children belong as members of a covenant family.

How wonderful it would be to see all churches return in obedience to God's demands for meeting as covenant families in our Sunday services.

Rev. Cecil Tuininga is an emeritus pastor in Edmonton, Alberta where he is an active member of the United Reformed Churches in North America.

**2002
Men's Conference
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Reformed Church**

Sept. 27 & 28, Bethany United Reformed Church, 5401 Byron Center Ave. S.W., Wyoming, Michigan (616.534.0006). This year's theme: "An Everlasting Foundation."

*For more information
contact*

Craig Baker
ca7baker@triton.net;
Phone: (616) 795-8842

Reformed Evangelism

“Election and the ‘Free Offer’ of the Gospel”

Part Five

A Contradiction in Terms?

One of the common objections among some Reformed believers to the free offer of the gospel is that it violates the norms of consistency and coherence. To affirm simultaneously the teachings of unconditional, particular election and of the well-meant gospel offer flies in the face of logic. How can God sovereignly decree not to save a lost sinner, and yet desire his salvation? This is tantamount to saying that God has two contrary wills or impulses: to save and not to save, to love and to hate. This introduces, so far as God’s will with respect to the salvation of sinners is concerned, a kind of duality or schizophrenia into God’s purposes. Such a position is hopelessly illogical and contradictory. To say that God expresses good will toward all lost sinners in the preaching and call of the gospel is tantamount to saying that “God is frustrated in His desire to save certain persons.”¹

This is undoubtedly a difficult question. In our earlier treatment of Calvin’s view, we noted that he acknowledged the difficulty while admitting that he had no easy solution to it. Because Calvin was convinced that the Scriptures taught unconditional election and the well-meant offer of the gospel, he affirmed both of these teachings.

However, he also insisted upon their ultimate harmony within the will and purpose of God. Though Calvin readily admitted that he was unable to show fully and clearly how this was so, he insisted that God’s will is ultimately harmonious. Since the Scriptures distinguish between God’s revealed will and His will of decree, we must employ this kind of distinction as well in dealing with the gospel-call. But at no point, according to Calvin, may we admit that God’s will (however complex in relation to us) is contradictory.

Calvin’s unwillingness to attempt a full resolution of this apparent conflict between the teaching of unconditional, particular election and the free offer of the gospel is exemplary. Though it is always tempting to embrace the simple solution, which seems to accord most obviously with the dictates of logic, sometimes we have to follow the Scriptures wherever they lead, even when we are left with perplexing and even intractable problems. No doubt, the simplest position would be one that either affirms unconditional election at the expense of the free offer of the gospel, or affirms the free offer of the gospel at the expense of unconditional election. One or the other, so this approach would argue, must be true: either God elects to save some

sinners and therefore expresses no good-will or favor toward them in the preaching of the gospel; or, God expresses His good-will or favor toward all sinners in the gospel-call and therefore He has not purposed in love to save some and not others. Either of these views has the attraction of being simple and apparently consistent. *The problem is that neither view accurately reflects the whole teaching of Scripture, however difficult it may be to see the consistency of all that Scripture teaches on this subject.*

The best and wisest course at this point is to admit that, though the tension or inconsistency here is *apparent*, it is ultimately not *real*. Though the mystery of the full harmony and coherence of God’s will and purpose may finally lie beyond our grasp or reach, we must be content to follow the teaching of Scripture wherever it leads. If the Scriptures teach unconditional election, we should affirm this teaching. If the Scriptures teach the well-meant gospel offer, we should affirm this teaching as well. That we are unable to see through the consistency of these things says something about the limits of our grasp and understanding. But it is conceit on our part to insist that, because we cannot fully comprehend it, it is not true. As is often the case, Calvin offers us wise counsel in this area: “Although, therefore, God’s will is simple, yet great variety is involved in it, as far as our senses are concerned. Besides, it is not

We have to follow the Scriptures wherever they lead, even when we are left with perplexing and even intractable problems.



surprising that our eyes should be blinded by intense light, so that we cannot certainly judge how God wishes all to be saved, and yet has devoted all the reprobate to eternal destruction, and wishes them to perish. While we look now through a glass darkly, we should be content with the measure of our own intelligence. (1 Cor. 13:12). When we shall be like God, and see him face to face, then what is now obscure will then become plain.”²

There are, however, two additional observations that may be made regarding the consistency of the teaching of election and the free offer of the gospel.

First, contrary to the insistence of the hyper-Calvinist that it is a real contradiction to affirm both of these teachings, we must remember that the well-meant offer has to do with the *revelation of God’s will or desire in the preaching of the gospel*. To go back to a traditional distinction mentioned in my first article, when we speak of the gospel-call we are in the arena of what Reformed theology calls God’s *revealed will*, not his *decretive will*. Though this distinction may only seem to be a convenient attempt to “paper over” the apparent contradiction between the free offer of the gospel and God’s decree of election, it does remind us that the divine desire and good will expressed in the gospel do not describe God’s sovereign intentions or purposes of election. This is the reason I have consistently spoken of God desiring *in some sense* the salvation of all lost sinners. This desire, which is presented in the preaching of the gospel, is not to be confused with His sovereign purpose of elec-

tion. Therefore, it is an unfortunate confusion when the language of God’s “will” to save the lost, when it relates to the free offer of the gospel, is regarded to have the same meaning as the language of God’s “will” to save the lost, when it relates to His decree of election.

Second, it is at least conceivable to imagine a circumstance in which God might desire something that He has not simultaneously determined to effect. Robert Lewis Dabney, who was an influential theologian in

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the southern Presbyterian tradition, addressed this point in his remarkable essay, “God’s Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy, As Related to His Power, Wisdom, and Sincerity.” In this essay, which is an extraordinarily complex handling of our question, Dabney maintains that we can imagine circumstances in which a person might harbor a strong desire or “propension” to show mercy but at the same time, for reasons sometimes unknown to us, determine to effect something quite different. He mentions, for example, General Washington’s decision to sign a death-warrant during the Revolutionary War for Major André. Though Washington felt deep and

genuine compassion for Major André, he resolutely fulfilled his obligation in bringing him to justice for his treason during war-time. While admitting that this and other analogies drawn from human experience are inadequate to account for the harmonious, yet complex, ways of God in dealing with lost sinners, Dabney maintained that it might help us see how God could be simultaneously and sincerely compassionate toward lost sinners while, for reasons known alone to Him, be resolute in His sovereign determination not to save them. Though God’s complex will toward lost sinners would not involve the kind of tension and disharmony that often accompanies human motives and purposes, His will with respect to lost sinners is undoubtedly an infinitely complex one, which could accommodate at the same time a propensity to show mercy to lost sinners while sovereignly determining not to save them. Only an “overweening logic,” Dabney argued, would insist that God could not simultaneously reveal a sincere desire to show mercy to lost sinners and yet harbor in His secret and sovereign designs a purpose to save some and not others.³

I mention Dabney’s treatment of this objection because it confirms the point made in the previous section. Reformed theologians, while recognizing the difficulty of harmonizing the Scriptural teachings of a sovereign decree of election and a well-meant gospel offer, have generally sought to affirm both, to insist upon their ultimate harmony, and to admit that the “ways of God” in this and other respects lie beyond our capacity fully to comprehend.

Implications for Evangelism

To conclude our treatment of the gospel-call, we need to return to the question with which we began: does this have implications for evangelism and missions?⁴ As I have noted, it is often argued that the Reformed view of election inhibits a rigorous pursuit of evangelism and missions. Reformed believers are hesitant, even reluctant, to preach the gospel indiscriminately and vigorously to all lost sinners, since they fear any approach that would compromise the sovereign and electing grace of God. Those who argue against the Reformed view of election allege that the error of hyper-Calvinism, which denies the legitimacy and sincerity of the gospel call, is an inherent and inescapable feature of Reformed teaching.

This is not any easy argument to answer for several reasons. Since Reformed believers and churches are often delinquent in the area of evangelism and missions, it is certainly legitimate to ask whether its teaching may account for this delinquency. We may not brush aside too quickly the question whether the distinctive teaching of the Reformed churches may not account for their failures in this area. Furthermore, there are Reformed believers and churches who may hold to what I have called a “soft” hyper-Calvinism but whose interest in and energetic pursuit of the church’s evangelistic calling are commendable. It would be a cheap and inappropriate criticism to allege that all those who deny

the free offer of the gospel are guilty of an unbiblical indifference toward the task of preaching the gospel to lost sinners. Likewise, proponents of the teaching of a well-meant gospel offer may easily comfort themselves that, by virtue of affirming this offer, they have absolved themselves of any responsibility to act. Remarkably, it is often the case that believers whose teaching is sound betray that teaching by their lives. Others whose teaching falls short of the biblical norm may nonetheless exhibit more faithfulness to the biblical norm in their conduct.

However, the question still needs to be pressed whether a denial of the well-meant offer of the gospel has any impact upon the work of evangelism. To that question, I am convinced, the answer has to be a guarded “yes.” Where the teaching of sovereign election leads to a denial of the free offer of the gospel, the work of evangelism will generally suffer. If believers are not permitted to desire the salvation of all those to whom the gospel is presented, their gospel presentation will lack the passion for the lost that might otherwise be present. To say the least, the preaching of the gospel will lack that heartfelt compassion toward all lost sinners that should belong to biblical evangelism. When the well-meant offer is denied, the gospel can no longer be extended to sinners as a *gracious* offer, as an earnest and heartfelt invitation, which seeks the salvation of all those to whom it is addressed.

Even though the motives for evangelism are several—including the principal motive of advancing God’s glory and name—one of the most important is *a genuine compassion for all lost sinners*. As Dabney rightly grasped in his handling of this subject, the paramount issue is whether there is *any heart* in our preaching of the gospel. If the gospel preacher is not permitted to express his heart’s compassion toward all lost sinners, then what remains of the message of “good news?” How can it be a gospel word any longer, if the preacher must beware of extending the gospel promise in an inappropriate manner to non-elect persons?

Hyper-Calvinism’s denial of the free offer of the gospel cannot but constrict and restrain the open display of God’s mercy and compassion in Christ toward the lost. It can only present the gospel as an exhibit, but not as an invitation. It can only present the gospel as general truth, but not as a personal summons. And it must ever live in fear of presenting the message in an openly conditional form (“if you believe . . . then you will be saved”). But if the gospel may not be preached conditionally, as an invitation to believe and to repent and so be saved, then how can it be preached at all?

The debate about the free offer of the gospel is, accordingly, an important one for Reformed believers and churches. Failure to embrace as biblical the teaching of the free offer has inhibited and will inhibit the work

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of evangelism. Unless those who minister in Christ's name can say, "my heart's desire and prayer to God is that they may be saved," they will not be as free and unfettered in seeking the lost as they ought to be.

Endnotes

¹ Cf. David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: The Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1964), p. 6: "The well-meant offer teaches that God is frustrated in His desire to save certain persons." Engelsma insists (and cites John Gerstner to the same effect) that proponents of the well-meant offer teach that God both "wills and intends" to save all sinners and "does not will and intend" to save some sinners (the non-elect). No doubt proponents of the

well meant offer (myself included) have not always stated their position in a fully consistent and clear manner. But I know no Reformed proponent of the offer who would use the terms "will" and "desire" to mean the same thing with respect to the well-meant offer as he means with respect to God's decree of election. This is a misrepresentation of the well-meant offer that serves to buttress the claim that the idea of the free offer is a real contradiction.

² *Calvin's Commentaries* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843-55), vol. 12, pp. 247-8.

³ Robert Lewis Dabney, *Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney* (1891; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 282-313. Cf. John Piper, "Are

There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved," in *The Grace of God and The Bondage of the Will*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 107-32.

⁴ Cf. Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free. A Balanced View of Divine Election* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1999, 2001), pp. 141-2.

Dr. Cornel Venema is the President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary where he also teaches Doctrinal Studies. Dr. Venema is a contributing editor to *The Outlook*.

Sound Bites

Torch and Trumpet 1964

January 1964

"It is oversimplification to contend that the government teaches only the 'secular' - it teaches one of several controversial views of the secular, namely the secularist or man-centered view."

* * * * *

"Excluding, by de-emphasis, traditional attitudes from so much of life only holds the probability of eventual disappearance of such attitudes."

* * * * *

"...government cannot avoid establishment of belief or values so long as the government insists on prescribing the school with humanistic education, rather than the student, as an object of tax aid."

Freedom in Education
William D. Valente

March 1964

"The doctrine of a limited, but nevertheless definite atonement is the proper antidote to the cold universalism of Arminianism."

Christ's Particular Love
Martin LaMaire

April 1964

"The Bible is human enough so that it deals with our experiences and not an angel's, and it is divine enough so that we have a complete surety as to the trustworthiness of the answer."

Does a Human Bible Mean a Fallible Bible?

Edwin H. Palmer

"While the titanic movements in church and state are whittling away

at our liberties today, we lull ourselves to sleep with the pleasant thought that at least tyranny won't threaten us in our time."

Are There Winds of Change Within Rome?

Peter Y. De Jong

"Today we are indeed witnessing an all-out pursuit of happiness on the part of Americans. In the worst sense of the word we have become a 'pleasure-mad' people. Billions are spent on gambling, vacations to far off places and luxuries we could well afford to forgo. Securing status symbols of one sort or another has become our mode of life. In this mad pursuit too many who name the name of our Lord Jesus Christ also seem to be swept up. And when their lovely little world - erected on the things which self has so selfishly acquired - tumbles in, they wonder why it is so hard for them to reach out and touch the healing hem of our Savior's blessed promises and pres-

ence. Too long have they been majoring in the minors of life. They have cultivated fun at the expense of faith. Therefore they will fail to experience the blessed joy of possessing Him who never fails or forsakes.”

Solid Joy
Peter Y. De Jong

May - June 1964

“Remember Jonah? The threatening storm did not come upon the ship because of the wickedness of the sailors; it came as a judgment upon a recalcitrant prophet who refused to preach the Word of God.”

Let's Go Promiscuous
Christian Huissen

“How are we to deal with complementary truths, whether paradoxical or not, in the Word of God? The supreme principle to be observed is that we must subject our logic to the divine Logos.”

“Never may we uphold one of these truths so as to deny the other. To do that constitutes outright heresy. But neither may we stress one of these truths to the minimizing of the other.”

“...heresy often begins with an erroneous emphasis.”

Some Conclusions as to The Love of God
R. B. Kuiper

September 1964

“Teaching that which is false is hardly a good method by which to gain devotion to that which is true.”

Is This Sound Pedagogy?
Edward Heerma

“No one has the right before God to appropriate the blessings of living

in a democratic order while considering it a bore to assess candidates and platforms and a waste of time to cast his vote.”

The Christian and the Coming Election
Peter Y. De Jong

“Today various voices, all the way from the World Council of Churches down to the misinformed and ill-advised members of the church, call for such things as youth Sundays and youth services and young peoples’ and children’s church. All of these serve to create in the congregation of the people of God a division and separation which our covenant God never made nor intended. Such methods create a class inside of but yet separate from or even alongside of the church. When this artificial and false division is introduced, the church is divided and children and young people are placed in a class by themselves instead of in the church where they belong, for they as well as adults are members of the covenant and church of Christ.”

Are Catechetical Classes Obsolete?
Rein Leetsma

“When it comes to the matter of screening all knowledge through the Word of God, pupils will become no more proficient in the practice or persuaded of the principles than their teachers before them.”

“Weakness on the authority, infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible in the college classroom or private conference session must inevitably vitiate the effectiveness of the Christian school, so that it will miss its destiny and no longer be worth the cost. Whether that weakness be the result of enchantment with

modern ‘biblical theology’ and criticism or whether it be the result of liberal thinking in other realms that rejects the idea of objective authority, it is poison in the system of Christian education.”

The High Destiny of Christian Education
Ronald P. Brown

November 1964

“Who determines what is extreme? Surely, no one believes he is an extremist! If a person has strong views regarding a certain matter he considers himself to be a man of conviction. Those who do not agree with these convictions brand such a person an extremist.”

What Is Extremism?
Henry Vander Kam

“...the rediscovery of the Bible, and through it the rediscovery of salvation by grace alone through Jesus Christ, required the reformation of the church not only, but the reformation of all of life and not least the reformation of theology as well.”

The Reformation and Theology
Fred H. Klooster

“No wonder much preaching...is about the most irrelevant influence in the lives of countless church people. It no longer strikes home. It so seldom speaks about man’s personal relationship and responsibility to God. It only skims the surface of people’s lives. It misses the depth-dimension of the Bible. And what could possibly be more irrelevant than that?”

The Christian and His Guilt Complex
Peter Y. De Jong

December 1964

“It is certainly true that one’s



relationship with the Lord will determine what kind of spiritual life he will have. And it is also true that the only way in which one can cultivate spiritual life is through the Word of God. Therefore, by the study of the Word, one displays his interest in maintaining a strong and personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ.”

A Spiritual Thermometer
Henry Vanden Heuvel

“The music of the church should be liturgical. In spirit, form, and content it must be a positive expression of Scripturally religious thought

and feeling. It should serve the ministry of the Word.”

* * * * *

The music of the church should be beautiful. Its religious thought or spirit should be embodied appropriately in the poetry as poetry, in the music as music, and in the blending of these in song.”

Of Men and Angels
Henry A. Bruinsma

“Verbal inspiration does not imply that God gave the human writers all knowledge. It does imply that they wrote what God desired them to write, so that the Bible can

be called God’s Word.

What Verbal Inspiration Is Not!
Edwin H. Palmer

“Somehow the illusion has crept in that love for God and our fellow man can only grow in proportion to our lack of doctrine from the pulpit. Doctrine is supposed to be good for the head but kills the heart. Whether this fallacy accounts for our surge of spineless preaching, I do not know; certainly it has influenced it. However, any sincere Christian knows the error of such thinking.”

Clowns in the Pulpit?
Simon Tuininga

Art Besteman

God’s People, My Parish

‘Tegenspoed is beter dan voorspoed’

I met Mrs. L. in the early years of my ministry. She was a widow who had already passed the fourscore mark. In her modest home she was caring for her two developmentally challenged children. The son, Piet, was terminally ill with cancer, the daughter, Johanna, was severely crippled with arthritis. Mrs L.’s formal education consisted of a few years of grade school training in the Netherlands. Her knowledge of the Scriptures and Reformed theology, however, was profound.

I often called at this home on Monday. Many times we discussed the sermons of the previous Lord’s Day and many times I entertained the wish that I had preached them to Mrs. L. on Saturday so that I could have incorporated her observations, especially her insights from

the Old Testament, into the sermons so that the entire congregation could have benefitted from them.

Her godly influence was reflected in the childlike faith of her son and

***In their minds there
was no doubt about
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prayer.***

daughter. Piet’s understanding was severely limited. However as we visited he would often say, “dominee, danke” thereby expressing his desire for prayer. Johanna

knew severe pain because of her arthritic condition. After our devotions, in which we always included a petition for the lessening of pain, she would declare, “The pain is getting better already.” In their minds there was no doubt about the fact that God hears and answers prayer.

Sometimes I would express my concern for Mrs. L. because of the heavy responsibilities which were hers at her advanced age. Each time she responded by quoting in her native language, “For by you I can run against a troop, by my God I can leap over a wall.” Psalm 18:29.

Upon my departure from that home Mrs. L. would often say to me, the young pastor, “Vergeet niet dominee. ‘Tegenspoed is beter dan voorspoed’” (“Don’t forget, pastor, ‘Adversity is better than prosper-

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ity”). When her words resound in my ears after these forty or more years, I am reminded that she had learned the lesson of Job 23:10 “When he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.” I am still learning that lesson.

Rev. Art Besteman is a emeritus minister who lives in Caledonia, Michigan. He is a member of the Bethany United Reformed Church of Wyoming, Michigan.

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