

Risen With Christ

Thomas Vanden Heuvel

Christianity is the only religion which claims the resurrection of its leader. In fact it depends on it. If Christ was not raised, there would be no good news. If Christ was not raised, Christianity would be dead. His own claim to divinity and His claim to be the resurrection and the life would be utterly fraudulent if He was not raised from the dead. If Christ did not arise and is not alive today, the church would be without a head and would be only a social or a service club, but not the body of Christ. If Christ were not alive, there would be nothing to preach; there would be nothing worth saying. *The resurrection of Christ is the pivotal truth of Christianity.* Everything stands or falls with it. Tragically, there are some "churches" which deny the resurrection of Christ and become nothing more than a social club or a service organization. But on the glorious day of resurrection we proclaim for all to hear: "Christ the Lord is risen today, alleluia!"

Let us look together at the relevance of Easter.

OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

The Apostle Paul is working out a comparison in Ephesians 2: 6 between what happened to Christ in His resurrection and what happens to believers spiritually.

What happened to our Lord? He bore our sins in His body on the cross; He died and His lifeless body was buried in the tomb. He was in the grave three days. He had committed His soul to His Father. But on the third day He arose, He literally came out of the grave, but left His grave-cloths behind. It actually occurred. The Evangelists describe it in minute detail. He arose. He entered a different realm. For forty days He appeared to a number of people who didn't expect Him to arise and were startled to see Him. He who was dead is alive. The fact of the resurrection is a solidly substantiated fact as Luke says in Acts 1:3: "After His suffering, He showed Himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive."

Now Paul tells us that what happened to Christ, happens to us. Our salvation is comparable to Christ's resurrection and nothing less than that! There was a complete change in the realm of our Lord's existence. He was dead in the grave and now He is alive in a new way. This is true of a Christian. We have been raised together with Christ. Because of our union with Him, what happened to Him happened to us, not in the physical sense, but in the spiritual sense. (It will happen in the physical sense too, but later, when Christ returns.) But now the very same power which raised Jesus is working in us who believe.

What does this tell us about ourselves?

Negatively, it tells us that we are no longer spiritually dead. We were all dead in trespasses and sins. We were in a spiritual grave. But by God's grace we have come out of that grave. We are no longer in that realm. We are a new creation.

Salvation is the most profound change in the world. It is the difference between life and death. This means we are no longer under the wrath of God and no longer under condemnation. Because Christ arose, we are forgiven. We receive this by faith. Today is the day of resurrection. If you do not know the Lord as your Savior, today is the day He is calling you to follow Him. Confess your sins, repent and believe in Jesus Christ who was crucified for our sins and who arose again for our justification.

Furthermore, because we have been risen with Christ we are now *dead to sin*. Before we became Christians we were dead in sin, but as Christians this is no longer true. Before we were under the power of sin, in the realm of sin, under its dominion, controlled by lust, governed by the passions of the flesh and of the mind. This is no longer true for the child of God. We who have been raised with Christ are dead to that realm

of sin. We've been taken out of it. Sin shall not have dominion over you, says the Apostle Paul in Romans 6:14. The child of God does not spend his time there, doesn't walk there, doesn't belong to that realm. The child of God is a new creation, a new man because he has been raised with Christ.

Consider the *positive* relevance of the resurrection.

Having been raised together with Christ, we are *ALIVE UNTO GOD*. Before I was not. I was dead to God. This is the terrible tragedy of everyone who is not a child of God. He is living as if there were no God. He is not conscious of God. He has no living relationship with God. Being raised with Christ, we are alive unto God. We have an entirely new attitude toward God. We are no longer enemies but friends of God. We desire God. We love Him and want to be near Him. We don't try to hide from God like Adam did. The natural man does everything he can to avoid God. Not so the child of God. We sing: "As a deer panteth for the waters, so my soul panteth after thee, O God, my soul thirsteth after God, the living God." What a change! It is the change from death to life. Is there a bigger change in all the world? Now I desire the very One I feared. Can you honestly say that this is your desire? Is it your desire to know Him better? To realize and experience His presence?

But we are not only alive unto God, we also walk in *NEWNESS OF LIFE*. The child of God who was raised with Christ is living an entirely new life; he is governed by a new perspective. He has a *new mind, a new heart and a new will*.

What is the *new mind*? Paul tells us in Romans 12:2: "Be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The child of God looks at things differently. He doesn't look at things simply in terms of time, but also of eternity. What a difference this makes. He not only thinks in terms of the body and the mind, but now also in terms of the soul and the Spirit. He is conscious that he belongs to another realm. He judges everything in the light of this. He has a new standard of values. Because he is a new person, he sees the Bible as the unique revelation of God to man. The Bible is the final answer to the issues and problems of life. He stops to think. He thinks about himself, his God, eternity, the Spirit. He has a new mind. The natural man does not do this.

The child of God also has a *new heart*. He has new desires. "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." The child of God's greatest desire is now not for more pleasure and satisfaction for the moment; it is for righteousness and holiness. David prayed: "Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). The child of God wants to be pure, holy, righteous, and he grieves when he fails. He sees sin differently too. It is not simply an offense against the law; it is an offense against the love of God. He has a desire for prayer and fellowship with God and with the saints of God. "We know we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). He also has a real concern for the lost. He cares. He wants more than anything else that they come to know Jesus Christ. This is a changed heart.

The child of God also has a *new will*. He is determined to do the will of God. He wants to conform his life to the law of God. I was at a *Dad, the Family Shepherd* conference recently. We saw that "father power" is a God given ability that we as fathers were given to shape our children's lives for good or for evil. The key to effectiveness is to build on the foundation of the Word of God. The purpose of "father power" is to transfer God's truth down through the generations. We as fathers are transmitters; our children are the receivers. This requires a commitment. The resurrection power of Christ must empower us to use our "father power" for the glory of God and the coming of the Kingdom.

So on this Easter Sunday, let us ask ourselves: "Have I been raised together with Christ? Am I alive unto God and am I walking in newness of life?"

"But now the very same power which raised Jesus is working in us who believe."

The Living Legacy from Heidelberg

Thomas Vanden Heuvel

On a Tuesday at 4 PM I came to the home of Larry, Pattie, Lare John and Bailey. They were expecting me. They had been attending our church for some time. Pattie's oldest brother and his family, her youngest brother and his family and her father had all made profession of faith in our church. Now she and her family want to get ready to profess their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord in our church. They all came from the Roman Catholic Church. She said to me: "We're going to study the *Heidelberg Catechism*, aren't we?" "We surely are," I assured her. So I came with *Psalter Hymnals* for each of them. Her husband looked at it and asked, "Are we going to sing?" I answered, "We can, but look in the back of the book. That's where the *Heidelberg Catechism* is."

The *Heidelberg Catechism* is the living legacy of Heidelberg. It is one of the greatest treasures we as Reformed Christians have. In this issue of *The Outlook* we will look at the uniqueness of this treasure, its history and its pastoral use in preaching, evangelism, teaching and counseling.

Dr. Fred H. Klooster, Professor of Systematic Theology Emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI, has given us a very fine new book entitled: *A Mighty Comfort, the Christian Faith According to the Heidelberg Catechism*, published by CRC Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI.

As I deal with the *Heidelberg Catechism* thematically, I want to also give a review of Dr. Klooster's book.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

Its personal emphasis

The *Heidelberg Catechism* is unique among all the creeds and confessions of the Christian religion, first of all because of its intensely personal emphasis. It addresses the individual believer in its 129 questions and answers, using personal pronouns 350 times. We see this in the theme of **comfort** which runs throughout. Every one of the teachings of Scripture is looked at from the point of view of its *benefit to the believer*. For example: "How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?" (Q. 28); "How does the holy conception and birth of Christ benefit you?" (Q. 36); "What further advantage do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?"

(Q.43); "How does the resurrection of Christ benefit us?" (Q. 45). In its treatment of the Ten Commandments, the question is asked: "What is God's will for you in the fourth commandment?" We have the same for the fifth and sixth commandments. This personal emphasis makes the *Heidelberg Catechism* very practical and relevant to any age. This is one of the reasons it has remained the most used and beloved of the Reformed confessions. The catechism teaches "a mighty comfort." In Dr. Klooster's book we have an exhaustive description of comfort. Comfort means to stand in one's place, to die one's cursed death.



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This is how the death of Christ is taught in Q. 1: "He has paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil." In Q. 39: "He shouldered the curse which lay on me..." In Q.52: "...confidently await as judge the very One who has already stood trial in my place before God and so has removed the whole curse from me." Comfort means to stand at one's side even to dwell within them, to live one's life. This is how the *Heidelberg Catechism* describes the work of the Holy Spirit: Q. 1: "Because I belong to him, Christ by his Holy Spirit assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him." Q.86: "... we do good because Christ by his Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself, so that in all our living we may show that we are thankful to God for all he has done for

us, and so that he may be praised through us." Q. 53: "...The Holy Spirit has been given to me personally, so that, by true faith, he makes me share in Christ and all his blessings, comforts me and remains with me forever."

Its Biblical content

Second, the *Heidelberg Catechism* is unique because of its **Biblical** content. Although its questions and answers are not generally quotations from Scripture, the answers breathe the content of the very Word of God. We see this in the word "comfort" described in the *first* question and answer. This is one of the most beautiful and complete testimonies of what it means to be a Christian found anywhere. It is full of Biblical content. "I am not my own but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ" comes right out of I Corinthians 6:19,20. Every answer of the catechism is footnoted with many Bible passages which are either quoted in the answer, or the message of the text is found in the answer. The *second* part of the Catechism is an exposition of the *Apostles' Creed* which covers God the Father and our creation, God the Son and our redemption and God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. These great themes are powerfully buttressed with the Word of God. The *third* part of the Catechism includes an explanation of the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer.

Its unique structure

Third, the catechism is unique because of its structure. Catechisms generally (like the *Genevan Catechism* and *Luther's Catechism*) include the *Apostles' Creed*, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and a section on the sacraments. The *Heidelberg Catechism* weaves these things into the structure of the believer's experience of the knowledge of sin and its consequent misery, the knowledge of deliverance through the blood of Jesus Christ, and the knowledge of gratitude for such a great deliverance. (This is not only the pattern of the believer's experience; it is the basic structure of the most complete doctrinal book of the New Testament, the book of Romans.) It does so in the form of questions and answers originally designed for the instruction of the youth. The three parts of the Catechism can never be separated. They are, as Rev. Herman Veltkamp says in his book, *Zondag Kinderen*, the A B C's of the Christian life. The alphabet is used in all of speech and writing; so also these three parts of the Catechism are part of the whole of the Christian experience. The answers are not simply information, but as Dr. Klooster says, the answer is itself a confession of faith (p. 29).

Its unique Christological approach

The fourth unique aspect of the *Heidelberg Catechism* is its Christological approach to doctrine. We see this in the very first question and answer where the work of the Triune God is taught from Christ's point of view. *We belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who has fully paid for all my sins (the work of the Son); he also watches over me that not a hair can fall from my head (the work of the Father); he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready to serve him (the work of the Holy Spirit)*. The Catechism stresses the fact that we cannot make a confession of God the Father and our creation without faith in Jesus Christ. Our creator God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This guards against a general Fatherhood of God and a general brotherhood of man. This also guards against the idea that what a person believes about God the Father and our creation has nothing to do with our salvation. Dr. Klooster has a very helpful appendix on the Christology of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. He shows how the treatment of the natures and the states of Christ in the Catechism reflect the differences between the Lutheran and Roman view of the ubiquity of the body of Christ and the Calvinist view of the ascension of the body of Christ which does not partake in the omnipresence of the divine nature of our Lord. This has particular application to the presence of the Lord in the Lord's Sup-



Frederick III
Christian ruler of
Palatinate who lived in
the Heidelberg Castle.
Frederick instructed
Olevianus and Ursinus
to write a catechism, to
teach the people what
the Bible said.

per, whether the presence is spiritual (Calvinist) or physical (Roman Catholic), or in, under, and among the elements (Lutheran). The Catechism is so helpful for the people I am catechizing who are coming out of Roman Catholicism because it presents Jesus Christ as the *complete Savior*, who once for all paid for our sins on the cross. Q. and A. 80 of the Catechism which deals with the Roman Catholic Mass and says that it teaches that Christ is sacrificed all over again in the mass is especially helpful.

My friends commented to me that the re-sacrifice of Christ in the mass is exactly what they had been taught and now they see that it is so contrary to the clear teaching of the Word of God and robs them of comfort and eternal security. They rejoice in the discovery of the gospel of free sovereign grace.

Its unique emphasis on the Holy Spirit

Another unique quality of the *Heidelberg Catechism* is its emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Even though its treatment of the Holy Spirit is only one question and answer, the Catechism can be called, as Dr. Klooster says, the "Catechism of the Holy Spirit." The person and work of the Holy Spirit appear throughout. The articles of the *Apostles' Creed* which follow the article on the Holy Spirit, actually deal with the work of the Holy Spirit: the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. It is very interesting and helpful for the congregation and students in cate-

chism class to see that the resurrection of the body is really the work of the Holy Spirit, similar to His work of creation (Gen. 1:2). Dr. Klooster has two very useful appendices on the Holy Spirit in the Catechism, one arranged chronologically and the other arranged systematically. In the development of the Biblical teaching of the church and sacraments, the work of the Holy Spirit is seen very clearly. The emphasis of the Catechism is on the visible church gathered by the Son of God through the Holy Spirit and Word from the whole human race. Dr. Klooster points out a very helpful and interesting distinction in the Catechism between the church (*Kirche*) and the community or congregation (*Gemeinde*). This distinction comes out clearly in the sacrament of infant baptism. Children of believers are to be baptized because they and their parents are in God's covenant and are His people (*Gemeinde*) or community, congregation. But the sacrament is administered by the church (*Kirche*) and children are received by baptism into the Christian church (*Kirche*). Dr. Klooster has a very helpful appendix showing the interrelationship between the covenant, church and kingdom in the *Heidelberg Catechism* (p. 127).

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The Catechism, says Dr. Klooster, should have given more emphasis to preaching in the light of Romans 10:14-17. The sacraments receive much more attention and this is understandable given the day in which the Catechism was written.

Its unique treatment of the law

Another unique contribution of the Catechism is its treatment of the law. The place of the law in the life of the believer has been a subject of controversy for many years. On the one hand there are those who look at obeying the law as the way to become right with God. On the other hand there are Antinomians who claim to be free from the law. How are we to look at the law? The *Heidelberg Catechism* gives us a beautifully balanced Biblical view of the law. The law is the teacher of sin (Q. and A. 3,4,5). Here the Catechism does not give the Ten Commandments because it would be too easy to say with the rich young ruler: "All these things have I kept from my youth." But instead we find the summary of the law Jesus taught in Matthew 22:37-40 as the teacher of sin. Here Jesus goes to the heart of all the commandments and places us face to face with the command to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves. No one can avoid the penetration of this command into the marrow of the soul and the consequent confession: "God be merciful to me a sinner."

The Ten Commandments are explained and applied in the third part of the Catechism as the pattern of good works which we owe to the Lord in gratitude for such a great deliverance. In Lord's Day 32, Q. and A. 86, we have the transition between the deliverance from sin and the gratitude for such a great deliverance. The transition shows that justification by faith must be followed by sanctification. Good works are the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's heart. Dr. Klooster makes this important point: "Christians who do not learn to distinguish good works of gratitude from good works of merit will be trapped in legalism. The line between the two is razor-thin, but all-important. Understanding that there is absolutely nothing a believer can do for salvation because Christ has done it all, makes one truly free to live the life of thanks" (p. 95).

The Ten Commandments are seen as covenant righteousness which must characterize every citizen of the kingdom. Every aspect of human life is covered in the Ten Commandments. This gives the pastor a very important opportunity to address the pressing moral issues of the day. Obedience to God's commandments is not

presented as a legalistic, formal, outward conformity to a set of rules, but as the living expression of covenant faithfulness according to the standards God set already in creation. To see the commandments as the expression of gratitude reflects the teaching of the Bible where we read: "If you love me keep my commandments." "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only." The Reformed believer can sing: "Free from the law O happy condition," and mean that we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves, not of works, because it is a gift of God. But the Reformed believer can also sing: "Oh, how love I thy law," because it is the pattern God has given us for our happiness.

Its unique emphasis on prayer

Finally, the Catechism is unique in the importance it puts on prayer. Prayer is called the most important part of gratitude. It is this because by means of prayer we worship God to whom all glory belongs. By means of prayer we confess our sins and our depravity before God. By means of prayer we receive grace and the Holy Spirit unto salvation and renewal. By means of prayer we express our profound gratitude for such a great deliverance.

OUR CHALLENGE

The *Heidelberg Catechism* is a priceless document. The preaching of the Word of God following the Catechism according to its sequence must never be dull. In my experience of preaching "catechism sermons" for more than 30 years, I have found that the riches of Scripture are covered in a very practical way. Generally, I take the text of the catechism as the text for my sermon. I have found this to be profoundly Biblical and very enriching to both me and the congregation. I have found that in evangelism, the catechism is a tool which draws people to Christ and shows what it means to be Christian.

Dr. Klooster's book will prove to be a very valuable tool for the preacher and catechism teacher. We are living in a day in which the *Heidelberg Catechism* is not as familiar to the people of our churches as it ought to be or as it once was. We are indebted to Dr. Klooster for his pioneer work on the Catechism. He has devoted many years to its research and exposition. He is working on a much larger treatment of the Catechism which will be published later.

Other books that I have found to be helpful in dealing with the Catechism from Sunday to Sunday are: Professor B. Holwerda, *De dingen die ons van God geschonken zijn*, (Oosterbaan and LeContre: Goes, Netherlands); Rev. Herman Veltkamp, *Zondag's Kinderen* (T. Wever, Franeker, Netherlands); Rev. Herman Hoeksema, *Triple Knowledge*, (Reformed Free Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI); Dr. Louis Praamsma, *Before the Face of God* (Paideia Press, Jordan Station, Ontario).

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A Catechism Written In Heidelberg

W. Robert Godfrey

The city of Heidelberg is one of the most beautiful and charming in the world. Built in the Neckar River valley the city looks across the river to rising hills covered with green. Today the city itself has a very well-preserved Renaissance center dominated by the Holy Ghost Church where Caspar Olevianus preached. The University of Heidelberg where Zacharias Ursinus once taught still is very important to the city. Dominating the city visually is the great castle of the electors of the Palatinate, now partly in ruin, but still a magnificent sight.

The glories of Heidelberg were not damaged at all during the Second World War. The Germans did not make it a military center, and an American leader who had studied in Heidelberg urged that the city be spared. As a result a visit to Heidelberg allows one to experience something of a sixteenth-century city, an experience that is quite rare in modern Europe.

In the sixteenth century Heidelberg was an important city. It was the capital of a territory called the Palatinate. (In those days Germany was called the Holy Roman Empire. The Emperor had limited powers to control the hundreds of territories that comprised the empire. Each local territory had its own ruler, laws and customs.) The local ruler of the Palatinate was an elector. As elector - the most distinguished title a ruler could bear - he was one of seven rulers who voted in the election of a new emperor. The Palatinate was one of the most politically significant territories in the empire.

As the Reformation spread in Germany, it began to have an impact in the Palatinate as well. (Philip Melancthon, Luther's close associate, was born in the Palatinate.) In 1545, the story goes, so many had been attracted to the Reformation cause that the congregation in the Holy Ghost Church broke out into singing a Reformation song, "Redemption has come to us." Seeing the sympathy for the Reformation, the Elector Frederick II ordered an end to the mass being celebrated in the city and allowed the city to move more and more into the Protestant orbit. Shortly before his death in 1556 the elector became a Protestant.

The next elector was Otto Henry (1556-1559). Today he is best remembered for making some of the most beautiful architectural additions to the castle. He contributed to religious tensions in the city by appointing Tileman Hesshusius as superintendent of the churches. Hesshusius was a strict Lutheran and soon sharply alien-

ated other Protestants (Melancthonian Lutherans, Zwinglians, Calvinists).

After a brief reign, Otto Henry was succeeded by Frederick III, known to history as Frederick the Pious. Frederick was born in 1515 and raised a devout Roman Catholic. In his early years as elector he became a Protestant through the influence of his wife and the tragic drowning of a son. Frederick came increasingly to a Reformed theological conviction. He dismissed the troublesome Hesshusius and sought some effective Reformed leadership for his territory. In 1561 Olevianus became



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court preacher - he was only 24 years old. He had become a Protestant while studying in his teen years in France. Later he studied at Geneva and Zurich. He had known the son of the elector and had tried to save him when he drowned.

Frederick also appealed to the great Peter Martyr Vermigli, then at Zurich, to come to Heidelberg to teach. (Peter Martyr is not well remembered by the Reformed any more, but in the sixteenth century he was rightly counted a Reformed theologian equal to Calvin and Beza.) Martyr declined the invitation, but recommended Ursinus in his place. Ursinus arrived in Heidelberg in 1561 - he was only 26 years old. Ursinus had been born in Breslau in Silesia in 1534. From 1550-1557 he studied with Melancthon in Wittenberg and was deeply influenced by Melancthon. (Luther had died in 1546.) In 1557-1558 Ursinus traveled and met both John Calvin in Geneva and Peter Martyr Vermigli in Zurich. In 1560 he spent some time studying with Martyr who seemed to have helped Ursinus move to a more decidedly Reformed position.

Frederick certainly gathered remarkable young talent to lead the reform of the Palatinate church. He set out to move his church in a more Reformed direction. In 1561 Frederick agreed to what the Reformed called the "purification" of the churches. All crucifixes, pictures, altars, baptismal fonts and organs were removed from the churches that God might be worshiped without the distractions of human contrivances.

The elector also recognized the need of a Catechism for his churches. Many different ones were being used and he wanted greater uniformity of religious instruction for his people. He also wanted to oppose the growing influence in Germany of the strict Lutherans and their doctrine of ubiquity. (Ubiquity is the doctrine that the humanity of Jesus partakes of the divine attribute of omnipresence so that the flesh and blood of Jesus can be in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper.)

To write his new Catechism for the Palatinate Frederick appointed a committee which included both Ursinus and Olevianus. The recent work of Professor Fred Klooster has shown that it seems most likely that Ursinus was in

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fact the principal author of the Catechism. Ursinus had a special interest in catechisms, having written two before the *Heidelberg Catechism*. He also later devoted much of his energy to lecturing on the Catechism in his college teaching. It has also been suggested that Ursinus was a man of melancholy temperament and that the central theme of Christian comfort in the Catechism reflected his own spiritual struggles.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* followed the tradition of medieval catechisms by focusing on the *Apostles' Creed*, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. But it developed its exposition of these statements in a clear Reformed structure. Its division into sections on sin, salvation and service reflect a Protestant understanding of grace and its particular answers constantly draw the reader to the spiritual importance and relevance of its teaching.

Frederick was not entirely pleased with the Catechism initially. He believed that a strong statement was needed to contrast the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper with the Roman Catholic view of the mass. So in 1563 a second edition of the Catechism was issued with a new question (question 80) added. The new addition read: "The Lord's Supper testifies to us that we have a full pardon of all sin by the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which he himself has once accomplished on the cross. But the mass teaches that the living and the dead have not the pardon of sin through the suffering of Christ, unless Christ is also daily offered for them by the priests. So that the mass at bottom is a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ."

These words were still not strong enough for Frederick and so a third edition of the Catechism was produced in 1563 with the wording of the Catechism that is now familiar. Question 80 concludes of the mass that it is a "cursed idolatry."

This eightieth question has been subjected to a great deal of criticism in the twentieth century. Critics charge that it is out of character with the positive spirit of the rest of the Catechism and is unnecessarily severe to the Roman position. Neither of these criticisms is entirely fair. We must remember that to this day the priest at a Roman mass holds up the consecrated bread, declares:



Olevianus
pastor of the Church of
the Holy Spirit and at
age 26, co-author of the
Catechism.

*"The strengths
of the Catechism
remain needed
by the church
today more
than ever."*

"Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world," and the people are expected to worship the consecrated bread. Our Reformed forebears properly called this idolatry and all idolatry is cursed.

Also the Catechism is critical of other view points, even if usually that criticism is implicit rather than explicit. The strict Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity is criticized in questions 47 and 48, and a Baptist view of baptism is criticized in question 74. Examples of this implicit criticism could easily be multiplied.

Those responsible for the preparation of the Catechism were attacked severely in their own day and at great risk defended the Catechism. In 1566 some princes attacked Frederick at the imperial Diet of Augsburg insisting that the Catechism taught doctrines that were illegal in the empire. Frederick replied that he upheld the Augsburg Confession and therefore was in conformity with the laws of the empire. He also stated that he would rather die than abandon his Catechism. His position was upheld by the diet.

Others also suffered for the Catechism. When Frederick died in 1576 he was succeeded by his son Lewis. Lewis was a strict Lutheran and began to exile from his territory the Reformed leadership of the church. Olevianus was dismissed early and Ursinus was the last to go in 1578. Ursinus withdrew to the city of Neustadt, under the protection of Prince Casimir. There he spent the last years of his life teaching theology and lecturing on the Catechism. After his death in 1583 his student David Pareus gathered and edited his lectures for publication as *Ursinus' Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*. This commentary remains an invaluable resource for the study of the Catechism.

From the beginning in 1563 the Catechism was appointed not only for the instruction of the young, but also to be preached regularly in the churches. The preaching of the Catechism has remained important in the churches that treasure the Catechism. The profound insights and summaries of doctrine found in the Catechism continue to build the faithful up in the truth, generation after generation.

Philip Schaff, the great German Reformed church historian, offered high praise for the *Heidelberg Catechism* when he wrote: "It combines Calvin's strength and depth without his severity, Melancthon's cordiality and warmth without his indecision, Zwingli's simplicity and clearness without his cool sobriety and aversion to the mystics." The strengths of the Catechism remain needed by the church today more than ever. In an age that is often opposed to theology, the *Heidelberg Catechism* is a clear, warm, attractive presentation of the great truths of the Reformation, which are the great truths of the Gospel.

The Pastoral Necessity of Preaching the Catechism

J. Mark Beach

In his recent commentary on the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven calls the Catechism “the best confessional and teachable summary of the will of God for the life of the church.” That’s quite a compliment for a document over four centuries old. What a beacon the *Heidelberg Catechism* remains in our anti-theological age, with its disdain for creeds and confessions. Indeed we live in times that consider theological precision old-fashioned. But confessions, the *Heidelberg Catechism* among them, serve an immensely useful purpose. Not only do confessions clarify what the church believes, they identify who we are. They remind us what we hold dear. As a matter of fact, they serve a doctrinally pastoral purpose. This is especially true of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, and specifically the public proclamation of this Catechism in the life of the church.

I believe a steady diet of Catechism preaching is more necessary now for the health and vitality of the church than perhaps in any past generation. I know that is a bold statement. But look at the times! We live in a doctrinally poisoned age. Consider the following:

1. We live in an age of doctrinal ignorance. Not only are many Christians without a rudimentary knowledge of the faith; a high number of them show little interest in attaining such knowledge. “What is relevant?” has displaced the question “What is true?” And of course “what is relevant” isn’t Scripturally defined but derives its meaning from our secularized context. Pragmatism reigns supreme in such a question. It pushes the theology of the Bible aside.

How ought the church to respond when its own members lose their appetite for doctrinal knowledge? Must it acquiesce and serve up the spiritual blather people crave? Or ought pastors and elders help the Lord’s people acquire (anew) a taste for the deeper things of the faith? Certainly the antidote to doctrinal superficiality and the psycho-babble that passes itself off as Biblical preaching isn’t more superficiality. Biblically driven preaching, especially Catechism preaching, has proven an effective antidote for ignorance. The *Heidelberg Catechism* asks Biblical questions and provides Biblical answers. It shows us our three most important needs (cf. Q/A 2). And it shows us how each of those needs are met in the Gospel. Rather than falter in duty, the church should give its members what some think they don’t need and others are sure they don’t want—like good medicine. The Catechism is just the medication for an anemic church.

Rev. Beach is pastor of the First CRC in Pella, IA.

“...pluralism, wedded to secularism, accepts no truth claim as absolute.”

After all, if a malnourished teen has an appetite for “cotton candy” and little else, the responsible parent doesn’t stop insisting upon healthy meals. A proper diet is in order, along with some vitamin pills perhaps? Similarly, the church must hold firm by teaching the threefold truth which alone enables its members to live and die in the joy of belonging to Christ. The Catechism sermon is a pastoral necessity and should not be consigned to a by-gone era. The church should reaffirm it with renewed vigor.

2. We live in an age of psychological theology or therapeutic religion. In many evangelical and Reformed churches today, one finds a shift in accent from God to the self. Where this happens, the questions shift away from a person’s relationship to God to a person’s relationship with himself. In other words, although the question may remain the same: “What is your only comfort in life and in death?,” the answer has changed. The believer belonging to Christ is flipped-flopped—now the focus is on Christ belonging to the believer. In such a scheme, how quickly God becomes our “gopher” whose task it is to make us religiously satisfied and materially blessed.

Psychological theology is a therapeutic religion, deliberately (and hopelessly) human-centered, looking for God to meet needs and satisfy personal goals, whether those be psychological, social, sexual or economic. Therapeutic religion is long on good feelings and short on doctrinal content. It welcomes inner experience and testimonies about “what works” but fidgets impatiently in the pew as the law of God is read. Psychological theology, since it is man-centered, grows bored with the story of redemption which centers on God and His works. Indeed feelings about God become more important than the truth of God. The self is the hinge around which religion turns.

Preaching the *Heidelberg Catechism* is pastorally beneficial for modern believers because the greatest needs in a person’s life remain the knowledge of sin, the deliverance from it, and the life of love lived out in gratitude to God for that deliverance. The Catechism beautifully unveils the God-centered gospel with its comforting assurance for believers in the saving work of Christ. No superficial theology of self-esteem or positive thinking is pawed off on the church here! The Catechism nurtures God’s people in the truth of sin’s corruption and pollution, with its treachery and misery. The Lord’s terrible anger and justice are not snubbed as topics too distasteful for the pure in the pew (cf. Q/As 3-11, 87). The Catechism depicts God in both His justice and mercy, His love and anger, His grace and judgment (Q/As 9-15). Here we find a true vision of God and a true vision of ourselves.

Moreover, the *Heidelberg Catechism* addresses the heart of the gospel message as it explains Christ’s person and

work (cf. Q/As 16-18; 29-52). It clearly exhibits for us the way of salvation. That message is not muffled or side-tracked; nor is it lost in a maze of therapeutic mumbo-jumbo. The gospel, far from being obscured as it is so often in the user-friendly religious market today, is beautifully exhibited and personally applied.

This confession of the church also lays out effectively the struggle of the Christian life and the grace of God that prevails for us—a grace that prods us forward in service of the kingdom of God (e.g., Q/As 86-91). The Catechism takes the Christian life seriously, a healthy counter to the milk-toast messages of today. We are children and servants. Our commission is rooted in Christ's (Q/A 32). The believer's task is comprehensive in being directed to God and neighbor. We meet the God of Scripture in this document—a God who cares enough about humans to call them to life in His Son. He is a God who teaches His children how to love and to pray (cf. LDs 32-52). Indeed this God is not a "god" of therapy but the sovereign Lord of salvation.

3. **We live in an age of theological plurality and error.** Pluralism places all religious ideas on a level (equally irrelevant) playing field. Biblical truth becomes a casualty, since pluralism, wedded to secularism, accepts no truth claim as absolute. In other words, no claim of certainty is permitted except the claim that we cannot be certain. Thus in our age of theological plurality, ecumenical interests are superseding previous denominational distinctives. It is now considered a breach of etiquette to let one's theological slip show. It is unkind and unfriendly, maybe even unchristian, to point out the differences that exist among churches. The new evangelical ecumenicity serves up a "Christianity" that promises wholeness and happiness, while staying mute about godliness and righteousness. The piety practiced is rice-paper thin: superficial stories displacing the history of redemption, pep-talks masquerading as sermons, entertainment posing as worship. User-friendly religion is the new motto. Everything is upbeat and simple. Hard issues are ignored. Deep questions like original sin, God's providence, justification by faith alone, or the nature of sacraments are all carefully and conspicuously avoided.

Meanwhile, error grows. Traditionalism and mysticism flourish. Legalism and licentiousness thrive. As God summed it up through His prophet long ago: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

Proclamation of the *Heidelberg Catechism* cuts against the grain of our secular times—which is exactly what's needed. Catechism preaching brings seriousness to an age of frivolity, restores historic Christian-

ity in an era of theological fads and fetishes, and shows Biblical/Calvinistic orthodoxy (where God is sovereign and at the center of things) to a generation infatuated with itself. Catechism preaching keeps the church on course by teaching the whole counsel of God.

Admittedly, the *Heidelberg Catechism* is not the only means to achieve this end. Careful, painstaking, expository preaching through Paul's letter to the Romans, for example, might serve as an effective remedy too. But the Catechism provides a *united* witness for Christians lost

in individualism. It gives the answers for a church failing to ask the right questions. The *Heidelberg Catechism*, with its theme of the believer's comfort, steers the church through the hazards of doctrinal ignorance, therapeutic religion, and theological plurality and error. The Catechism is a pastoral necessity. The church needs this treasure more than ever.

FOOTNOTE

1. Andrew Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort and Joy: A Study of the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 11.



Heidelberg Catechism
title page of the
first edition.

Mid-America Reformed Seminary Bids Farewell

Mid-America Reformed Seminary is hosting an evening of reminiscing and reflection marking the Seminary's farewell to our friends in Northwest Iowa, on Tuesday, May 2, 1995 at 7:30 p.m. in the Faith Christian Reformed Church of Sioux Center, Iowa. All are welcome to attend. Refreshments will be served after the evening's program.

For more information, contact the seminary office at (712)-737-3446.

Putting a Staff in the Shepherd's Hand

John R. Sittema

Using the Heidelberg Catechism in Pastoring, Training and Evangelism

When the editors asked me to write on the pastoral uses of the Heidelberg Catechism, I was grateful for the opportunity for two reasons. *First*, I love the old Catechism so very much. It is a tender yet strong articulation of the Biblically Reformed faith, and my use of it and appreciation for it have both grown immeasurably over the years of my ministry. *Secondly*, I was eager to try to put on paper some specific thoughts about the value of the Catechism in certain target areas of the life of the Lord's church such as *pastoral work by the elders, education/training for the people of God, and in the work of evangelism.*

Originally, I had planned to write a separate article about each of these topics, but the overlap was so great that I'd inevitably say some of the same things in each of the articles. To avoid redundancy, I offer some words of testimony and encouragement in a single article, but with several sub-sections. I would only add encouragement to the reader to read carefully J. Mark Beach's article on the Catechism and preaching, which appears in this issue. You will find that it fits alongside this article in calling for a thoroughly pastoral use, never merely theological veneration, of this tool known as the *Heidelberg Catechism.*

But first, a couple true stories:

George (not his real name) is a psychologist with a Ph.D. from a State University in Texas. He is seminary trained, but his training was in a thoroughly Arminian theological school, and was dispensational to boot. I met him when researching Christian counselors in the area (it's important to find one that actually deals with sin as sin, and not merely as disease!). During the course of our visits together, he inquired about our church, never having heard the name "Christian Reformed" before. One thing led to another, and we began to talk about creeds. He was critical at first, of course, because he had been trained to be. Then I brought him a copy of the Heidelberg Catechism. A week later he called. Not only was he reading it and learning more about Biblical teaching than he ever had in seminary, but he was also using it as an outline for family devotions with his wife and young teen-aged children. It's been many months now, and the family is still learning and growing. He still says it's the best thing since sliced bread.

Bob and Billie (names changed to protect from the nosy) came to our congregation not too long ago. Both had been very involved in discipleship ministries in a previous congregation, having been instrumental in teaching and nurturing inquirers to the faith, and training new believers unto mature faith. But only recently had they themselves become Reformed. And, with the disorientation of someone who has recently "had their theological pins knocked out from under them," they were trying to grasp the depth and breadth of Reformed theology and covenant living. Every new insight brought smiles of joy, as they began to lay hold of the marvelous heritage so many Re-

formed believers take for granted. But when they saw the Heidelberg Catechism, first in worship, then in a booklet we gave them, they marveled. They were already devoted students of Scripture. (In fact, when they had been converted, as mature adults, the discipler who took them under his tutelage had required them to outline each book in the Bible without helps, identifying its major theme and teachings. They spent 3 years in this effort, learning much and profiting greatly from the experience.) But never had they grasped as clearly the unifying principle of all sound doctrine as when they laid hold of the Heidelberg Catechism and came face to face with LD 1. Bob said it well: "If I'd studied this years ago when I first was saved, I would have been able to avoid so many problems. It would have saved me and some of my subsequent disciples, so much confusion, sloppy thinking and resultant sloppy living!"

I could tell you enough stories like these to provide encouraging and inspirational reading for months. I tell these two because we live in an age in which it is very easy for the people of God to take for granted their creedal heritage, an age in which Reformed believers will even be heard to say aloud that such creeds as the *Heidelberg Catechism* are outdated, irrelevant and ought to be kept in the unused back pages of the hymnbook. The stories dispute that attitude. In fact, it is my contention in what follows that the *Heidelberg Catechism* is a wonderful tool Reformed people can and should use for a wide range of pastoral care and nurture within the body of Christ. By it, we can open the door for our people to know the depth and breadth and height of the Scriptural truths we hold dear.

THE CATECHISM AND PASTORAL CARE: SOME SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS

LD 1: This Lord's Day is so rich isn't it? I marvel at its wisdom and depth every time I confess it anew. I find it provides such a great overview of the daily worldview of the believer, that I encourage all Reformed people to commit it to memory. And it is, accordingly, very beneficial for elders and ministers in pastoral uses. First of all, consider how it serves as an unshakable foundation for



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pastoral care. By suggesting that the touchstone for understanding Biblical doctrine rightly is *comfort*, the Reformed churches have avoided the extremes of a faith that exhibits cold intellectualism on the one hand and pure emotionalism on the other, and aimed Scriptural truth directly at the *heart*. In the real world of sin and misery, of brokenness and failure, of hurt and pain, we confess that we are *comforted* by our relationship to Christ. What an encouraging truth in an increasingly secular and hostile world, a great starting point for an elder visit to an individual or family that has recently struggled with the pains of life.

Further, think of the *content* of the comfort we confess: that I belong *totally* to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. Several immediate pastoral crises our churches face today are addressed in these Biblically-shaped words. Think first of the *reductionism of religion* to a corner of life that this secular world foists upon us. Here is full-blown, all-of-life faith, a totalitarian surrender of the person to the sovereign majesty of our God! Then, note that wonderful word *belong*. In a world infatuated with self-image and self-esteem, we confess that our very existence and purpose arises apart from ourselves in Christ. That's a great corrective for people wrestling with such issues. Finally, notice the verb tenses: "He has fully paid for all my sins...has set me free...." That is wonderful stuff for the ongoing struggle of the Christian life: the desperate quest for *assurance of salvation*. LD 1 opens the curtain to a wonderful Biblical perspective on that issue.

Before leaving LD 1, take a quick look at Q. and A. 2. Don't miss the threefold structure established there. Now, without overemphasizing the neat alliteration we sometimes use (sin-salvation-service, guilt-grace-gratitude), please note how *honest* to life such a breakdown really is. This is truly the experience of everyone who believes in Christ! It's not artificial, merely academic or intellectual. *All of us* who are in Christ have come to know our sin and the resultant misery; *all of us* who are in Christ have found in Him all things necessary for our salvation; *all of us* who are in Christ understand that living the Christian life is ever and always only a *response of gratitude*, never a means to obtain anything. And simply by keeping the proper order, the sensitive elder will help God's people to avoid a whole host of chronic pastoral problems surrounding the issues of works-righteousness, legalism, spiritual laziness, and the like.

LD 2 and 34: While I want to comment only very briefly on these Lord's Days, I do want to call your attention, as elders, to the importance of being accurate on the use or *role of the law* in the life of the community of believers. I believe, with all my heart, that the error of the Pharisees is alive and well among us: we still deal with many people

who are convinced that salvation is a fruit of obedience, rather than the other way around. Being able to use the Catechism as a tool for the maintaining of pastoral balance—both for yourselves and for your people—is an inestimable blessing that enables us to avoid both *legalism* and its ugly stepsister, *antinomianism*.

LD 7: The definition of *faith* contained in these words is most helpful to people wrestling with the vitality of their own. Additionally, it is most helpful for elders who must deal with stubborn and rebellious individuals who are under discipline, but who claim faith, and thus thrust and parry with you. Herein we're reminded of that crucial Biblical connection between *faith* and the *Word*. In other words, one cannot claim faith if that faith makes any break with "everything God reveals in His Word...."

LD 9-10: Can you think of a more beautiful way to assist God's people to express their deep-seated trust in God's providential care? These words are a precious confession with which you can join voices with the suffering; they are a rock-solid foundation to set beneath the fearful and timid as you seek to be an encouragement; and they are a strong corrective to those who dabble in games—and attitudes—of chance or gambling. Possible uses could include reminding or reciting these words with believers who are struggling with bitterness because of financial reverses. I love the idea of one pastor, who has Q. and A. 27-28 complete with textual support, drawn up in calligraphy (or perhaps on a computer and a laser printer), then framed and presented to every couple he unites in marriage. Hang it on the walls of your house....

LD 12: These days, the word *Christian* is cheap. I watched a documentary on used car sales procedures the other night. A crook in Atlanta was pawning off lemons onto the buying public, and he knew it. But he was so sincere and convincing, in part because he told his potential pigeons that he "was a born-again Christian." In a world like this, what a great tool LD 12 is to shape our use of the word. A comprehensive and thoroughly Biblical view of life as *office*, life lived under the commission and the mandate of the One who is our Lord and Master. And that truth is absolutely essential to set before your high-school and college-aged young people, wrestling as they are with the overwhelming issues of vocation and career choices at the ripe old age of 18 or so.

Of course, I could go on and on with Lord's Day after Lord's Day, developing the pastoral/eldership uses of this wonderfully pastoral confession. Perhaps someone will commission just such a work. But for now, allow these few references to stimulate you to do your own further study and exploration. Let me reiterate my basic point: we who are Reformed believers live within a confessing



Ursinus
brilliant professor at the University (theological seminary) in Heidelberg, and at age 28, co-author of the Catechism.

community of believers to whom God has entrusted a rich faith heritage. The *Heidelberg Catechism* is central to it. It would be foolish for those of us who are elders not to use this tool:

- as a means to help our people give articulation and daily shape to their Biblically founded faith in Jesus Christ
- as a corrective to the chronic struggles of the faith long ago addressed by our spiritual ancestors, and
- as a pastoral tool with which to encourage faith, confidence and comfort for people who live in a world hostile to the Kingdom of God.

THE CATECHISM AND THE EDUCATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

In his excellent high school (and adult!) catechism textbook entitled *Before the Face of God: A Study of the Heidelberg Catechism* (2 volumes. Available from Paideia Press, PO Box 1000, Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada), Louis Praamsma summarizes well the reasons for the church to have and use creeds:

- (a) a brief, concise summary of what the church believes; (b) a refutation of all heresy; (c) a teaching handbook for children and young people.

But is the Bible not sufficient? Certainly! The Bible has everything we need to know. The need for confessional writings can perhaps be best explained through an analogy. The Bible is much like a huge country through which we travel. It is so large, in fact, that it is useful to have a map that shows direction to the most important places.

Many faulty maps have also been made of the Bible. Each false teaching has its preaching. Confessional writings warn of these dangerous teachings. The Catechism, then, has no other purpose than to mirror the main points of Holy Scripture (p 9).

These words provide a good understanding of how creeds have historically been viewed among many confessionally Reformed churches. Consequently, I don't expect that I need to convince you that the Catechism is useful for education and training, both for children and adults. Nor do I expect that readers of *The Outlook* will need much of a reminder of the value of thorough indoctrination in the Catechism as a crucial means of developing faith within our youth. (A careful look at the advertising in the magazine reveals that you already know that!)

However, I want to make a couple of practical points in this section. First, I want to make the observation (based on rather subjective criteria, I'll acknowledge) that the most spiritually mature young people I've met are young people who know well and can formulate their faith according to the concepts and themes of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Several college professors I know who teach at

Christian colleges tell me the same. The freshmen who enter their Bible (or philosophy) courses who have been thoroughly trained in the *Heidelberg Catechism* are head and shoulders above the majority in both comprehension and integration of faith and life. (And contrary to popular belief, the professors and I agree that students who are well-versed in the Catechism are the rare exception, not the general rule.) These students already know the fundamental life-principles of Scripture, because the Catechism is based upon them. They already know the underlying fundamentals of a Christian worldview, because the Catechism builds upon such in LD 12. These students grasp the spiritual principle that all of life is religion, in contradistinction to modern dualism, because the *Heidelberg Catechism* articulates a Biblical faith that is as broad as life itself. In short, the *Heidelberg Catechism* is a wonderful and hearty confession of a Calvinistic worldview.

"These students grasp the spiritual principle that all of life is religion..."

Second, a thorough knowledge of the *Heidelberg Catechism* provides students with a *working apologetic*. That is to say, it equips the students to articulate, explain and defend the Reformed faith over against challenges, opposition and questions. Where I live (in Dallas), the Reformed faith is always on the defensive against the aggressive challenges of anti-Calvinistic Arminian Dispensationalism; and Biblical Christianity of any confessional formulation (and especially Calvinism) is always on the defensive against the unbelieving challenges of modern post-Christian secularism. In my 20 years of ministry, the only Christians I've known who have been genuinely effective apologists for the Reformed faith are men and women who have been thoroughly shaped by the *Heidelberg Catechism* or a similar Reformed creed. And by that, I mean that they have been, on the one hand, articulate and persuasive in convincing non-Reformed Christians of the Biblical basis of Calvinism, and, on the other, they have been effective in explaining in a clear, concise, and unified way the Biblical Christian faith to those outside the faith.

Why is that? I suspect it is so because of the inner strength of the Catechism, namely, a simple reproduction of Biblical basics. As you know, the *Heidelberg Catechism* is an extraordinarily simple document, linking explanations of the *Apostles' Creed*, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. These explain the *content of saving faith, the shape of covenant living, and the focus of Biblical piety*, respectively. But the educational genius of the Catechism also lies in the *introductory questions* to these main sections. LDs 1-6 are indispensable to lay open a person's heart *prior* to any discussion of real faith and what it believes. LDs 32-33 are a penetrating articulation of the whole matter of the relation between faith and works, and of the nature of true conversion, both essential prerequisites to any instruction in obedience to God's

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presentation dynamic and interesting, and will enliven student interest to the living relevance of the material.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM AND EVANGELISM

The final component of this article is the use of the *Heidelberg Catechism* in evangelism. Immediately, I hasten to reiterate that the *Heidelberg Catechism* is not the Bible, nor does it directly share in Scripture's character

as the living Word of God, God-breathed in its very words. Only God's Word, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is said to create faith (Rom. 10:14-17); only God's Word, proclaimed faithfully, is called the "seed of regeneration" (I Pe. 1:23-25). Only God's Word is called the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17), and is even said to be "sharper than any double-edged sword" as a living and active power to lay bare the secrets of the heart (Heb. 4:12-14). Only God's life and faith-giving Word can be the foundation upon which evangelism (literally, the work of the gospel, or "gospelizing") is built; only it is the source and possesses the power to convert sinners.

And yet, the *Heidelberg Catechism* is not in any way inimical to this "gospelizing" work. In fact, it has been my own pastoral experience, and it is the theme of these paragraphs, that the *Heidelberg Catechism* is a most effective tool for evangelism. This is so for several reasons.

First, the *Heidelberg Catechism* serves as a *checkpoint* for the church in her evangelism efforts to reach the unsaved. That is, its threefold experiential structure (*sin, salvation, service*) stands as a constant reminder of the essential components of any genuine conversion, and therefore holds the church focused on Biblical priorities in an age of evangelistic gimmickry. Evangelism methods abound (think of Evangelism Explosion, Campus Crusade's Four Spiritual Laws, etc.), and churches spend fortunes learning variations of each. Many of these are helpful, indeed. But the core teaching of the *Heidelberg Catechism*—that to enjoy truly the comfort of belonging to Jesus Christ, one must truly know his sin and its misery, that his salvation is only by grace through faith in Jesus, and that his life is to be lived in self-conscious response as covenant service to this great Lord and God—provides us with a consistent and Biblical standard. Conversion experiences vary greatly: some are radically converted out of paganism, others experience the grace of the Holy Spirit as they grow up in a Christian home, still others are converted from non-Christian cults. Yet all *who are genuinely in Christ* share the "triple knowledge" of which the *Catechism* speaks. And that serves as both a teaching tool for inquirers (as

law. And LD 45, though pithy, is nonetheless pregnant with meaning as it explains *piety* from a distinctively covenantal perspective, opening the door to the Lord's Prayer as a living model and method for our praying, and not just as a memorization exercise. Any student who truly knows and deeply believes the foundations of the Christian faith contained in these three formulas will be unalterably shaped by them, and will have sufficient ammunition with which to respond to the challenges and accusations of naysayers.

In this regard, allow me to tell you of a Mid-America Reformed Seminary student I know and admire named Randy Jackson who teaches *Heidelberg Catechism* in a NW Iowa church as part of his apprenticeship. He, with a military background himself, has challenged his young students to become "Christian Commandos," prepared at a moment's notice to defend the faith, articulate the Reformed Faith, and thus bear witness to their Lord and His Truth. The military-type discipline he weaves into his coursework not only establishes a disciplined learning environment, but it makes learning fun for the students! I commend him for his creativity; I hope he's willing to write it up so others can learn from him.

So, allow me to appeal to you to do two things: 1) Renew your commitment to teach the *Heidelberg Catechism* in your church. Recent trends in many denominations are much more generic, with topical or ethical studies called "church school." Some even argue that teaching *Catechism* isn't a legitimate component in a Bible-based curriculum. I have already explained (in a recent issue) how I believe, in fact, that it is an essential component of such a curriculum. Nothing can surpass the use of the *Heidelberg Catechism* as the principal teaching tool to shape the doctrinal knowledge and depth of mature and effective Reformed believers. Make sure your church uses it! 2) Challenge the *Heidelberg Catechism* teacher in your church (your pastor? one of the elders?) to teach it with an intentional focus upon apologetics, upon *equipping students to articulate and defend the faith*. That focus, in and of itself, will help keep the teacher fresh, will keep the

well as new converts) and as a checkpoint for elders, who must ascertain the presence of genuine faith as they open the table of the Lord to true believers. And, not to be missed is the Catechism's insistence that genuine religion is *of the heart*, that marvelous Biblical emphasis of Calvin which will not allow for the mere construction of a religious formalism, but lays claim to all that a man or woman is, does, thinks, feels, and says. Indeed, keeping that point central in the Catechism forces elders to keep it central as they pastor people *from the heart, to the heart, for the heart*.

Second, I find the *Heidelberg Catechism* to be a wonderful *tool* for training new disciples. As I suggested in the previous section, I believe its *comprehensive doctrinal scope*, as well as its *apologetic usefulness*, equips new disciples to know and to defend their newly confessed faith. (As you no doubt know, new disciples of Christ face inordinate challenges from their former unbelieving life—including friends, relatives, and sometimes even immediate family members. Careful training in the Catechism equips them to answer these doctrinal challenges, and, at the same time, bear careful witness to these beloved people to the faith in Christ that now lives within them.) I have used it to train people one-on-one. A class in the *Heidelberg Catechism* for adults is a high-priority of our local church ministry, which has an aggressive evangelistic setting and focus. It is simply a marvelous tool!

Furthermore, the Catechism *confronts head-on the main idol enthroned in the heart of every human*: the self (see LD 2:5; 3:8; 5:12-14). By so doing, it serves as an effective tool to penetrate and transform people who have been locked in the loop of their own unbelieving way of thinking (cf. the importance of this in Rom. 12:1-2).

Finally, the Catechism provides thorough grounding in the *Biblical basis* for the doctrines confessed. And, make no mistake about this, the citations of Scripture printed as footnotes to the Catechism are crucial for those being discipled. It establishes the fact that the clear basis of doctrine is Scripture rather than the Church, this particular church, this particular minister, or anything else.

Third, the Catechism provides a careful articulation of the proper *place and role of the law in the life of the Christian*. So many people first hear the "good news" of Christ with ears accustomed to hearing the "legalism" of counterfeit Christianity. They've lived their entire lives hearing how they must "become better" in order to get right with God. They've agonized, as did Luther, over the curse of God upon their sins, and even come to hate the God they view as so horribly unfair. How remarkably fresh and liberating the true gospel must sound! And to be able to point them to a carefully worked out confession that is nearly half a millenium old is of great comfort, because it assures them that they are not, in fact, wandering *from* the faith (even if they've been in a church), but are, in fact,

just now tasting the *joys of life in Christ* which true believers throughout all the centuries have celebrated!

Fourth, I must say a word about teaching and learning *language and hermeneutics*. Those of us who grew up in Christ learned the "language of Zion" in our homes. That is, we learned to speak of faith, of unbelief, of sin, salvation, the gospel, conversion, justification, sanctification, the Law, the means of grace, Christian piety, prayer, etc. For those who did not grow up in such an environment, such language must be learned somewhere else. It is,

frankly, difficult to learn a coordinated and unified theology from the straight reading of Scripture. It is also difficult to read Scripture without a theological vocabulary. Learning the language of God's Word from such a tool as the Catechism *aids greatly in learning how to read the Bible*. Again, learning how to approach the Bible as the Catechism approaches it and uses it *aids greatly in teaching a method of reading and approaching the Bible*, thus teaching a Reformed

hermeneutic right from the start.

Finally, we must understand the critical role the *Heidelberg Catechism* plays in forming a *consciousness of the church* within the heart and mind of each disciple. Remember, the "church consciousness" of most North American people is thoroughly unBiblical. They view the church as optional, a human invention, a voluntary association. How spiritually invigorating it is to shape a new disciple's faith with an understanding of the church as the living body of Jesus Christ which He is gathering according to His Word and Spirit and equipping with His gifts to accomplish His mission on earth! The confessional material set forth in LDs 21 and 48, for example, develops a deep commitment to Christ in and with the local body of believers, and, at the same time, an abiding love for the Church universal of which every true believer is a living member. And that's a fresh component of the transformed mind of all who are new in Christ.

"...the citations of Scripture printed as footnotes to the Catechism are crucial ..."

Teachers Needed

The board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association is inviting applications for a full-time teacher position (grades 1-4) which will begin in August of 1995. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, Biblical inerrancy, 6-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Applicants should send a letter of application and resumé to: David Kloosterman, 5630 Powderhorn, Kalamazoo, MI 49009. For more information phone: (616) 375-5751.

Cultivating Holiness (II)

Joel R. Beeke

Last month Dr. Beeke treated the Biblical command to "Be holy, for I am holy." He now addresses the subject of cultivating holiness.

THE CULTIVATION OF HOLINESS

Concretely, then, what must you cultivate? Three things.

1. *Imitation of the character of Jehovah.* God says, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). The holiness of God Himself ought to be our foremost stimulus to cultivate holy living. Seek to be like your Father in heaven in righteousness, holiness and integrity. In the Spirit, strive to think God's thoughts after Him via His Word, to be of one mind with Him, to live and act as God Himself would have you do.¹⁷ As Stephen Charnock concludes:

This is the prime way of honouring God. We do not so glorify God by elevated admirations, or eloquent expressions, or pompous services for him, as when we aspire to a conversing with Him with unstained spirits, and live to him in living like him.¹⁸

2. *Conformity to the image of Christ.* This is a favorite Pauline theme, of which one example must suffice: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who... made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant... and... humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8). Christ was humble, willing to give up His rights in order to obey God and serve sinners. If you would be holy, Paul is saying, be like-minded.

Do not aim for conformity to Christ as a condition of salvation, however, but as a fruit of salvation received by faith. We must look to Christ for holiness, for He is the fount and path of holiness. Seek no other path. Follow the advice of Augustine who contended that it is better to limp on the path than to run outside of it.¹⁹ Do as Calvin taught: Set Christ before you as the mirror of sanctification, and seek grace to mirror Him in His image.²⁰ Ask in each situation encountered: "What would Christ think, say, and do?" And then trust Him for holiness. He will not disappoint you (James 1:2-7).

There is room for unending growth in holiness because Jesus is the bottomless well of salvation. You cannot go to Him too much for holiness, for He is holiness *par excellence*. He lived holiness; He merited holiness; He sends His Spirit to apply holiness. "Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11)—holiness inclusive. As Luther profoundly set forth, "We in Christ=justification; Christ in us=sanctification."²¹

3. *Submission to the mind of the Holy Spirit.* In Romans 8:6 Paul divides people into two categories—those who let themselves be controlled by their sinful natures (i.e. the carnally minded who follow fleshly desires) and those who follow after the Spirit (i.e. those who *mind* "the things of the Spirit," Rom. 8:5).

The Holy Spirit was sent to bring the believer's mind into submission to His mind (1 Cor. 2). He was given to make sinners holy; the most holy increasingly bow as willing servants under His control. Let us beg for grace to be willing servants more fully and more consistently.

How does the Spirit work this holy grace of submission to His mind, thereby making us holy? *First*, He shows us our need for holiness through conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn. 16:8). *Second*, He implants desire for holiness. His saving work never leads to despair but always to sanctification in Christ. *Third*, He grants Christlikeness in holiness. He works upon our whole nature, molding us after Christ's image. *Fourth*, He provides strength to live a holy life by His indwelling and influencing of our soul. If we live by the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of our sinful nature (Gal. 5:16). To live by the Spirit means to live in obedience to and dependence on that Spirit. *Fifth*, through humble feeding of Scripture and the exercise of prayer, the Spirit teaches us His mind and establishes an ongoing realization that holiness remains essential as being worthy of God and His kingdom (1 Thes. 2:12; Eph. 4:1) and

for fitness for service (1 Cor. 9:24-25; Phil. 3:13).

"Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Thomas Watson writes: "The Spirit stamps the impression of his own sanctity upon the heart, as the seal prints its likeness upon the wax. The Spirit of God in a man perfumes him with holiness, and makes his heart a map of heaven."²²

HOW TO CULTIVATE HOLINESS

That believers are called to holiness is indisputably clear. But the cardinal question remains: How does the believer cultivate holiness? Here are seven directions to assist us.

1. *Know and love Scripture.* This is God's primary road to holiness and to spiritual growth—the Spirit as Master Teacher blessing the reading and searching of God's Word. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). And Peter advised, "Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2).

If you would not remain spiritually ignorant and impoverished, read through the Bible at least annually. Even more importantly, memorize the Scriptures (Ps. 119:11), search (Jn. 5:39) and meditate upon them (Ps. 1:2), live



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and love them (Ps. 119; 19:10). Compare Scripture with Scripture; take time to study the Word. Proverbs 2:1-5 sets before us several principles involved in serious personal Bible study: teachability (receiving God's words), obedience (storing God's commandments), discipline (applying the heart), dependence (crying for knowledge), and perseverance (searching for hidden treasure).²³ Do not expect growth in holiness if you spend little time alone with God and do not take His Word seriously. Plagued with a heart prone to be tempted away from holiness, let Scripture teach you how to live a holy life in an unholy world.

Develop a Scriptural formula for holy living. Here is one possibility drawn from 1 Corinthians. When hesitant over a course of action, ask yourself:

- Does this glorify God? (1 Cor. 10:31)
- Is this consistent with the lordship of Christ? (1 Cor. 7:23)
- Is this consistent with Biblical examples? (1 Cor. 11:1)
- Is this lawful and beneficial for me—spiritually, mentally, physically? (1 Cor. 6:9-12)
- Does this help others positively and not hurt others unnecessarily? (1 Cor. 10:33; 8:13)
- Does this bring me under any enslaving power? (1 Cor. 6:12)

Let Scripture be your compass to guide you in cultivating holiness, in making life's decisions, and in encountering the high waves of personal affliction.

2. Use the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper diligently as means of grace to strengthen your faith in Christ. God's sacraments complement His Word. They point us away from ourselves. Each sign—the water, the bread, the wine—directs us to believe in Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. The sacraments are visible means through which He invisibly communes with us and we with Him. They are spurs to Christlikeness and therefore to holiness.

Grace received through the sacraments is not different from that received through the Word. Both convey the same Christ. But as Robert Bruce put it, "While we do not get a better Christ in the sacraments than we do in the Word, there are times when we get Christ better."²⁴

Flee often to Christ by Word and sacrament. Faith in Christ is a powerful motivator for holiness, for faith and the love of sin cannot mix. Be careful, however, not to seek your holiness in your experiences of Christ, but in Christ *Himself*. As William Gurnall admonishes:

When thou trustest in Christ *within* thee, instead of Christ *without* thee, thou settest Christ against Christ. The bride does well to esteem her husband's picture, but it were ridiculous if she should love it better than himself, much more if she should go to it *rather than to him to supply her wants*. Yet thou actest thus when thou art more fond of Christ's image in thy soul than of him who painted it there.²⁵

"...prayer and work...are like two oars..."

3. Regard yourself as dead to the dominion of sin and as alive to God in Christ (Rom. 6:11). "To realize this," writes Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "takes away from us that old sense of hopelessness which we have all known and felt because of the terrible power of sin... I can say to myself that not only am I no longer under the dominion of sin, but I am under the dominion of another power that nothing can frustrate."²⁶ That is not to imply that because sin no longer reigns over us as believers, we have license to forego our duty to fight against sin. Bridges rightly admonishes us, "To confuse the *potential* for resisting sin (which God provided) with the *responsibility* for resisting (which is ours) is to court disaster in our pursuit of holiness."²⁷ Westminster's *Shorter Catechism* balances God's gift and our responsibility when stating, "Sanctification is the work of

God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness" (Question 35).

Seek to cultivate a growing hatred of sin *as sin*, for that is the kind of hatred against sin which God possesses. Recognize that God is worthy of obedience not only as the Judge, but especially as a loving Father. Say with Joseph in temptation, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9).

Believe that Christ is mighty to preserve you alive by His Spirit. You live through union with Christ. Live unto His righteousness. His righteousness is greater than your unrighteousness. His Saviorhood is greater than your sinfulness. His Spirit is within you: "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Do not despair: you are strong in Him, alive in Him, victorious in Him. Satan may win many skirmishes, but the war is yours, the victory is yours (1 Cor. 15:57; Rom. 8:37). In Christ, the optimism of divine grace reigns over the pessimism of human nature.

4. Pray and work in dependence upon God for holiness. No one is sufficient to bring a clean thing out of an unclean but God (Job 14:4). Hence, pray with David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Ps. 51:10). And as you pray, work. John Owen wrote, "God works in us and with us, not against us or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself."²⁸

The *Heidelberg Catechism* (Question 116) points out that prayer and work belong together. They are like two oars, which when both utilized, will keep a rowboat moving forward. If you use only one oar—if you pray without working or you work without praying—you will row in circles.

Holiness and prayer have much in common. Both are central to the Christian life and faith; they are obligatory, not optional. Both originate with God and center upon Him. Both are activated, often mutually, by the Spirit of

Banner of Truth

The 1995 USA Ministers Conference sponsored by Banner of Truth will be held at Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania, May 23-25, 1995.

Speakers and their Subjects are as follows:

Irfon Hughes	Christ's Comforts and Christ's Challenge
Sinclair Ferguson	The Ministry of the Spirit
Ray Lanning	Application in Preaching
Iain Murray	C.H. Spurgeon and Hyper-Calvinism
Jocely Pipa	The Work of Ruling Elders
	The Training of Ruling Elders

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Conference Secretary, P.O. Box 621, Carlisle, PA 17013
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God. Neither can survive without the other. Both are learned by experience and through spiritual battles.²⁹ Neither is perfected in this life, but must be cultivated lifelong. Both are easier to talk and write about than to exercise. The most prayerful often feel themselves to be prayerless; the most holy often regard themselves as unholy.

Holiness and work are also closely related, especially the work of nurturing and persevering in *personal discipline*. Discipline takes time and effort. Paul exhorted Timothy: "Exercise thyself rather unto godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7). Holiness is not achieved sloppily or instantaneously.³⁰ Holiness is a call to a disciplined life; it cannot live out of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called *cheap grace*—that is, grace which forgives without demanding repentance and obedience. Holiness is *costly grace*—grace that cost God the blood of His Son, cost the Son His own life, and costs the believer daily mortification in exercising holiness, such that with Paul he dies daily (1 Cor. 15:31).³¹ Gracious holiness calls for continual commitment, continual diligence, continual practice and continual repentance.³² If you "sometimes through weakness fall into sin, you must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since... we have an eternal covenant of grace with God" (*Baptism Form*). Resolve with Jonathan Edwards: "Never to give over, nor in the least to slacken, my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be."³³

These two things, *fighting against sin* and *lack of success*, appear contradictory but are not. Failing and becoming a failure are two different matters. The believer recognizes he will often fail. Luther said that the righteous man more often feels himself to be "a loser than a victor" in the trial of and struggle against sin, "for the Lord lets him be tested and assailed to his utmost limits as gold is tested in a furnace."³⁴ This too is an important component of discipleship. Nevertheless, the godly man will persevere even through his failures. Failure does not make him quit; it makes him repent the more earnestly and press on in the

"Luther said that some of his best friends were dead ones."

Spirit's strength. "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief" (Prov. 24:16).

Let us never forget that the God we love, loves holiness. Hence the intensity of His fatherly, chastising discipline (Heb. 12:5-6, 10)! Perhaps William Gurnall says it best: "God would not rub so hard if it were not to fetch out the dirt that is ingrained in our natures. God loves purity so well He had rather see a hole than a spot in his child's garments."³⁵

5. Flee worldliness. We must strike out against the first appearance of the pride of life, the lusts of the flesh and eye, and all forms of sinful worldliness as they knock on the door of our hearts and minds. If we open the door and allow them to roam about in our minds and take foothold in our lives, we are already their prey. "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (Dan. 1:8; emphasis added). The material we read, the recreation and entertainment we engage in, the music we listen to, and the conversations we have, all affect our minds and ought to be judged in the context of Philippians 4:8: Whatever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, "think on these things." We must live *above* the world and not be *of* the world while yet *in* the world (Rom. 12:1-2).

6. Seek fellowship in the church; associate with mentors in holiness (Eph. 4:12-13; 1 Cor. 11:1).³⁶ The church ought to be a fellowship of mutual care and a community of prayer (1 Cor. 12:7; Acts 2:42). Converse and pray with fellow believers whose godly walk you admire (Col. 3:16). "He that walketh with the wise shall be wise" (Prov. 13:20). Association promotes assimilation. A Christian life lived in isolation from other believers will be defective; usually such a believer will remain spiritually immature.

Such fellowship, however, ought not exclude the reading of godly treatises of former ages which promote holiness. Luther said that some of his best friends were dead ones. For example, he questioned if anyone could possess spiritual life who did not feel kinship with David pouring out his heart in the psalms. Read classics that speak out vehemently against sin. Let Thomas Watson be your mentor in *The Mischief of Sin*; John Owen, in *Temptation and Sin*; Jeremiah Burroughs, in *The Evil of Evils*; Ralph Venning, in *The Plague of Plagues*.³⁷ But also read J. C. Ryle's *Holiness*, Octavius Winslow's *Personal Declension and Revival of Religion in the Soul*, and John Flavel's *Keeping the Heart*.³⁸ Let these divines of former ages be your spiritual mentors and friends.

7. Live "present-tense," total commitment to God. Don't fall prey to the "one-more-time" syndrome. Postponed obedience is disobedience. Tomorrow's holiness is im-

purity now. Tomorrow's faith is unbelief now. Aim not to sin at all (1 Jn. 2:1), asking for divine strength to bring every thought into captivity to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5), for Scripture indicates that our "thought-lives" ultimately determine our character: "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7a). An old proverb says it this way:

Sow a thought, reap an act;
Sow an act, reap a habit;
Sow a habit, reap a character.

FOOTNOTES

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20. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.14.4ff.; cf. Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, D.D., ed. John C. Miller (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 6:220.
21. Quoted in John Blanchard, *More Gathered Gold* (Welwyn, England: Evangelical Press, 1986), p. 147.
22. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (1856; repr. Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1970), p. 173.
23. Bridges, *The Practice of Holiness*, p. 52.
24. Robert Bruce, *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper*, trans. and ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1958), p. 82.
25. Quoted in Joel R. Beeke, *Holiness: God's Call to Sanctification* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), pp. 18-19.
26. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6—The New Man* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), p. 144.
27. Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, p. 60.
28. Owen, *Works*, 6:20.
29. James I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1992), p. 15.
30. Cf. Jay Adams, *Godliness Through Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 3.
31. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (London: SCM Press, 1959).
32. Bridges, *Practice of Holiness*, pp. 41-56.
33. For Edwards' seventy resolutions to promote holiness made in nineteen years of age, see *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 1:xx-xxii.
34. *Luther: Lectures on Romans*, trans. and ed. William Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 189.
35. Quoted in I. D. E. Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 140.
36. See *Belgic Confession of Faith*, Article 28.
37. Thomas Watson, *The Mischief of Sin* (1671; Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994); John Owen, "Temptation and Sin," in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 6 (1851; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967); Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Evil of Evils; or The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin* (1654; Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992); Ralph Venning, *The Plague of Plagues* (1669; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965).
38. John Charles Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (repr. Greensboro, NC: Homiletic Press, 1956); Octavius Winslow, *Personal Declension and Revival of Religion in the Soul* (1841; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960); John Flavel, "Keeping the Heart," in *The Works of John Flavel*, 5:417-507 (1820; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968).

(To be continued next month)

The "Signs of the Times": Preaching the Gospel to the Nations (III)

"And So All Israel Shall Be Saved"

Cornelis P. Venema

One of the important signs of the times, as we noted in a previous article, is the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations. This sign confirms the biblical teaching that Christ is the promised seed of Abraham, the One in whom all the families and peoples of the earth will find blessing and salvation. It is also a sign that be-



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lies the common prejudice of many believers that the signs of the times are chiefly characterized by opposition to Jesus Christ and the coming of God's kingdom. Not all of the signs of the times are portents of the world's opposition to the gospel. Some rather show the certain victory of God's saving purpose to give the nations to His Son as His rightful inheritance (Psalm 2).

There is a further aspect of this first sign, the preaching of the gospel to the nations, that remains for us to consider. This aspect concerns what might be termed the salvation of the "fullness" of Israel. What does the Bible teach regarding God's purpose, in the preaching of the gospel to the nations, with respect to His peculiar people, Israel?

Admittedly, this question raises a host of related questions regarding the future, and cannot be completely disassociated from divergent views of the so-called millennium. Pre-millennialists and dispensationalists have an answer to this question that fits comfortably with their general conception of the future and the unfolding of God's purpose for Israel and the church. Since we will be considering these differing views of the millennium in several future articles, we will refrain from entering into a discussion of them as much as is possible at this point. However, the specific question of God's saving purpose regarding Israel cannot be avoided or put off at this juncture. For it relates directly to the way in which the preaching of the gospel to the nations in this present period has implications for the salvation of Israel.

To address this question, I will begin with a brief review of some Old Testament promises regarding the restoration and salvation of Israel. These passages provide a context within which to consider the most important New Testament passage which addresses God's purposes regarding Israel, Romans 9-11. Our main concern, therefore, in what follows will be to consider what this passage teaches about God's saving purpose for Israel.

THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

The Old Testament background which provides the biblical context within which to consider this question, includes, as we noted in our previous article, the promise of salvation for all the peoples of the earth. However, this promise that in the latter days God would grant salvation to the Gentile nations and peoples, always included *the continuance and fulfillment of His saving purpose for Israel*. The promise was not that God would forsake His people Israel, substituting the nations as the object of His saving love, but that He would include all the nations under the canopy of His saving mercy. The Lord's promise to Israel was that *through her and not apart from her* the promise would extend as well to all the peoples. This promise was already confirmed throughout the history of the Lord's dealings with His old covenant people, whenever non-Israelites or "aliens" were gathered into and numbered among the people of God. However particular and limited the Lord's dealings may have been with a special nation, Israel, it was never the case that His purpose was limited to this nation.

It should not surprise us, therefore, that the Lord's promise regarding a future gathering of the Gentile nations was joined to His promise of the salvation of Israel. At the center of the future realization of the Lord's purposes of salvation remained His purpose for His people, Israel. When, for example, Psalm 22 speaks of the future day in which "[a]ll the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will worship before Thee" (v. 27), this will be in the company of all the "descendants of Jacob," the children of Israel. The blessing that falls upon Israel will be the means whereby the Lord's salvation will be made known among all the nations (Ps. 67). The announcement of salvation to Zion will take place "in the sight of all the nations, that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God" (Isa. 52:7,10). In the future day of the Lord's coming to save His people, the nations are described as coming to the light of Zion, and kings are said to come to the "brightness of [her] dawn" (Isa. 60:1-3).

The Old Testament promise regarding the salvation of the nations is, accordingly, always joined with the realization of the Lord's purpose through Israel. The story told in the book of Acts, which traces the gospel's testimony as it is preached, first in Jerusalem and then "to the remotest part of the earth" (1:8), was already promised in the Old Testament. The apostle Paul's well-known declaration, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek" (Rom. 1:16; emphasis mine), corresponds perfectly to the promise of the Lord that salvation for the Gentile peoples would be effected through Israel and not apart from her.

In addition to these general promises of the salvation of the nations as they are joined with Israel in receiving the Lord's mercy and grace, there are also many direct promises of a future restoration that will come to Israel. These promises, often receiving earlier and initial fulfill-

ment in the restoration(s) of Israel that occurred in the Old Testament history of redemption, point forward to a great restoration yet to come.¹ Frequently, in His dealings with His Old Testament people Israel, the Lord spoke of how He would restore them to favor and salvation after a period of judgment and disfavor, provided they turned to Him in repentance and faith (compare, for example: Deut. 10:10; 1 Kings 8:46-52; Jer. 18:5-10; Jer. 31:31-34; Jer. 29:12-14; Ezek. 36:33; Hos. 11:10).

Therefore, the future held for Israel the prospect not only of the gathering of the nations and peoples to Zion but also of her restoration to renewed fellowship and favor with the Lord.

"AND SO ALL ISRAEL SHALL BE SAVED"

All of these promises of the Old Testament regarding the future of Israel, her place in the unfolding of God's purposes of redemption, bring us to the great question that is posed nowhere as poignantly

as by the apostle Paul in Romans 9-11. This passage, which is the primary passage addressed to the place of Israel in God's redemptive purpose and in the context of the preaching of the gospel to the nations, can only be understood within the framework of the Old Testament promise that we have been considering.

In order to answer our question regarding the place of Israel in God's purpose through the preaching of the gospel to the nations, then, we have to take a careful look at this passage.

The problem

To understand the argument of Romans 9-11, at least that part of it addressed to God's redemptive purpose for Israel, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the problem posed by the apostle Paul in Romans 9:1-6. That problem, in brief form, is: *has the Word and promise of God regarding Israel failed?*

This problem arises within the setting of the apostle Paul's resounding conclusion and confident affirmation in Romans 8. Having set forth the mercy and grace of God in the salvation of His people in Christ through faith, the apostle sings of his confidence that nothing will be able to separate us, those who have been called according to God's purpose and electing grace (Rom. 8:28-10), from God's love in Christ Jesus. This song of confidence in God's grace and redemptive purpose seems almost to be the conclusion to which the entirety of the argument in Romans 1-8 has been leading. Though all men are by nature sinners, deserving of the wrath and judgment of God, there is a way of salvation provided to believers through faith in Jesus Christ. Though the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18ff.), and though there is "none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3:10), the grace and mercy of God in the free justification and salvation of sinners is the hope of all believers. The conclusion of

"...has the Word and promise of God regarding Israel failed?"

Romans 8 is a kind of climactic affirmation of the victory of God's grace in Christ for all who believe.

However, this raises an inescapable problem for the apostle Paul. How can the believer exult in the triumph of God's grace in Christ through faith, when this grace seems to be of no effect among the people of Israel? If God's purposes and promises regarding Israel have terminated in failure and unbelief, how can we say that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation "to the Jew first and also to the Greek"? Indeed, if God's Word has failed with Israel, who dares to be so confident that it will not terminate with a like failure in regard to the Gentiles? This is the kind of problem that presses in upon the apostle at the outset of Romans 9-11, as the opening words of chapter 9 eloquently attest:

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. But it is not as though the Word of God has failed. (Vv. 1-6a)

The question, then, to which the entire argument of Romans 9-11 is addressed, is whether the Word and promise of God have failed, due to the apparent apostasy and unbelief of many of the children of Israel at the preaching of the gospel.

The general resolution

To this troublesome question, the general answer of the apostle Paul, developed at some length in Romans 9:6-11:12, is a resounding "No"! The Word of God has in no wise failed. Rather, just as had been the case in the history of redemption previously, God's "purpose according to election" has been and is being realized (9:11). Just as that purpose of election discriminated between some who were children of Israel only according to the "flesh" and others who were true children according to the "promise" and purpose of God, so that purpose of election continues to be realized in the salvation of some and not others.

Thus, the apostle Paul answers generally the question regarding the supposed failure of God's Word and promise by appealing to the doctrine of election and reprobation, by arguing that throughout the whole history of the Lord's dealings with His people Israel, some were brought to salvation and others were hardened in their unbelief according to God's purpose of election. At no time in this history was there any instance in which God's purpose failed or fell short of being realized in any way.

Though, for our purposes, it is not necessary to trace out all of the steps in the apostle Paul's argument in this passage, it is evident that he wants to address the question of Israel's apparent unbelief and apostasy in the course of the history of redemption from the standpoint of God's electing grace and purpose. Consequently, he cites in chapter 11 the history associated with the name and times of the prophet Elijah. Though there were many among the children of Israel who disbelieved and fell away during the days of Elijah, this in no respect meant that God had "rejected" His people. Even during this relative low point in the history of the Lord's dealings with His people, there remained "a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (11:5), a number of those in whom God's purpose of election was being fulfilled.

Despite this rather abbreviated statement of the general resolution to the question presented in this passage, it is not difficult to capture the gist of the apostle's answer to it. In the whole course of the history of redemption, God has been working out His electing purpose. This purpose is the only basis for the salvation of some from the entire number of the children of Israel in the past. This purpose is also the only basis for the salvation of any, whether Jew or Gentile, in the present and the future. Of one thing, the apostle is insisting, we may be certain: God's purpose of election has not failed in the past, is not failing in the present, and will certainly not fail in the future. All those whom God has chosen to save in Christ will unfailingly be saved!

The specific resolution

However, that is only the general resolution to the question that the apostle Paul offers in this passage. His specific resolution of the problem, dealing with the particular circumstance of the apparent unbelief and apostasy of many of the children of Israel at the preaching of the gospel, remains to be stated.

This specific resolution takes the form of the apostle Paul's inspired understanding of the "depth of the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of God" (11:33) in His respective purposes for Israel and the Gentiles. The main lines of the argument are as follows. In God's redemptive purpose, the unbelief and apostasy of many (though not all) of the children of Israel has been the *redemptive-historical occasion for the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles*. As many of the children of Israel disbelieved and took offense at the preaching of the gospel, the preaching of the gospel has been extended to the Gentiles who, in the purpose of God, are being brought unto salvation. The apostle Paul describes this in terms of the "cutting off" of the children of Israel, the "natural" branches, and the "ingrafting" of the Gentiles who believe (11:17-24). The unbelief of Israel, accordingly, has been within the purpose of God the occasion for the gathering of the Gentiles and the realization of God's electing purpose. The "poverty" of Israel has thereby in God's wisdom been the occasion for the "riches" of the Gentiles (11:12).

"The 'poverty' of Israel has thereby...been the occasion for the 'riches' of the Gentiles..."

But this is not the end of the story. By no means! According to the further argument of the apostle Paul, the riches of the Gentiles, their response by God's electing purpose to the preaching of the gospel, *will be the further occasion by which Israel will be provoked to jealousy and her "fullness" be saved!* Rather than state the matter in my own words, listen to the climactic conclusion of the argument in Romans 11:25-26:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and *thus all Israel will be saved*; just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob" (emphasis mine).

The specific answer, therefore, to the question whether the Word of God had failed with respect to Israel is that, in God's electing purpose as it is being worked out in the history of redemption, the salvation of the Gentiles will serve to provoke Israel to jealousy and so the "fullness of Israel" will be saved. The "gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (11:29), the apostle concludes, and therefore the unbelief of Israel will not be permanent and universal. The time is coming when the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles will occasion the turning of Israel in faith to Christ.

THREE VIEWS

If this is the specific answer to the question regarding the place of Israel in God's saving purpose — that "all Israel" will eventually be saved — then the one issue that needs yet to be considered is the precise meaning of this phrase. How are we to understand the language, "all Israel"? There have been primarily three views of this phrase in the history of the church.

The *first view* takes this phrase to refer to the *people of Israel as a totality* (though not necessarily every individual Jew) who will be converted at some time after the fullness of the Gentiles has been gathered. Among those who take this view, there are three distinct forms of it that are defended: first, dispensational interpreters link this conversion of Israel as a totality with God's special program for the Jews in the future millennium; second, premillennial interpreters who are not dispensationalists understand it to refer to a future conversion of the Jewish nation; and three, some interpreters who are neither dispensationalists nor premillennialists take it to refer to a future conversion of the people of Israel, not as a separate nation or people, but as a large company of those among the Jewish people who will turn in faith to Christ at the preaching of the gospel. In all of the various forms of this view, it is maintained that the "fullness of Israel" must refer to the special people of God who will be converted at some time in the future, as they are provoked to jealousy by the salvation of the Gentiles.²

The *second view* takes this phrase to be a reference to the salvation of *all the elect*, Jew and Gentile alike, gathered through the preaching of the gospel in the whole course of the history of redemption. John Calvin, for example, took this position and argued that "Israel" here refers, not to a distinct people among the peoples of the earth, but to the "people of God" in the general and comprehensive sense, embracing Jew and Gentile alike.

The *third view* takes this phrase to be a reference to the *total number of the elect from among the people of Israel*. According to this view, the "fullness of Israel" refers to the sum total of all elect Jews who constitute the "remnant" of believers gathered throughout the history of the church until the time of Christ's second coming.³

Though the arguments, pro and con, for these various views are quite diverse and, at times, complicated, I would like to summarize briefly the considerations that lead me to adopt the first view. In my judgment, these considerations, taken cumulatively,

suggest that the best understanding of this phrase is one which takes it to refer to the totality or fullness of Israel as a people, who will be brought to salvation subsequent to or after the gathering of the fullness of the Gentiles. The "fullness of Israel," therefore, refers to the salvation, not necessarily of every individual member of the people of Israel, but of the greater number or totality of the people of Israel at some time in the future, prior to the return of Christ. These considerations are as follows:

- "Israel" in this phrase must refer to the special people of God, not all the elect whether Jew or Gentile gathered throughout the entirety of redemptive history. In Romans 9-11 this term is used no less than eleven times, and in every instance refers to the special people of God, the people of Israel. It is hard to see why Rom. 11:26 should be taken as an exception.
- To take "all Israel" as a reference to the total number of the elect among the people of Israel throughout all of the history of redemption would be anti-climactic and unrelated to the apostle Paul's interest in Romans 9-11. In these chapters, as we have seen, the apostle is dealing with "this mystery," that is, the mystery of God's will for the salvation of the people of Israel, a people who have largely disbelieved the gospel but whom God has not forsaken nor cast off irrevocably. Were the reference only to all the elect of Israel, the entirety of the remnant according to God's purpose of election, it would not answer to the argument that the apostle Paul specifically develops in this passage.
- The argument of this passage is that the hardening of the people of Israel will eventually come to an end, and this will occur after the people of Israel have been provoked to jealousy by the conversion and "riches" of the fullness of the Gentiles. Through their being provoked to jealousy, the "fullness" of Israel (11:12)

"...Israel will be provoked to jealousy and her 'fullness' be saved!"

will come to salvation. This "fullness" is the equivalent in Romans 11 of what is variously described as the "acceptance" of Israel (11:15), the "grafting in" of Israel (11:23-24), or the "all Israel" of this phrase (11:26).

- Though the expression, "and so" that is used in Rom. 11:26 refers primarily to the manner in which "all Israel" will be saved — it will occur as Israel is provoked to jealousy by the conversion of the Gentiles — it also has a temporal aspect that cannot be suppressed. There is an obvious sequence of events in the history of redemption that the apostle Paul is describing in Romans 9-11: the unbelief of the people of Israel leads to the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles; the faith and conversion of the Gentiles thereupon leads to the jealousy and subsequent conversion of the fullness of Israel. Within this sequence of events, the phrase, "and so all Israel shall be saved," most naturally seems to mean that, after the fullness of the Gentiles is ingrafted, the time will come when the people of Israel, provoked to jealousy, will be converted and God's purposes of redemption be accomplished in them.
- The main point of Rom. 11:25 seems to be that the "hardening" of Israel will come to an end and thereupon Israel will be restored. This point would actually be undermined, were we to understand the "all Israel" of Rom. 11:26 to be only a reference to the total number of the elect people of Israel who comprise only a remnant throughout the history of redemption.

Though these considerations could easily be elaborated upon and various objections answered further, this should be enough to show that perhaps the most likely reading of this passage is one which takes it to teach the future in-gathering and conversion of the totality of the people of Israel. This does not mean necessarily that every individual member of the people of Israel will ultimately be saved, or that all members of this people will be converted at some future time. The "fullness of Israel" need not mean the salvation of every member of this people any more than the "fullness of the Gentiles" means the salvation of every Gentile. However, it does suggest that the apostle Paul taught that through the preaching of the gospel to the nations the time will come in which there will be a fullness of Israel converted, an ingrafting again of Israel as a people, a restoration of this special people of God to gospel favor and blessing.

CONCLUSION

If this understanding of the future salvation of the fullness of Israel through the preaching of the gospel is correct, then there are two corollaries that I would like to mention briefly by way of conclusion.

The first corollary is that there is but one way of salvation for Jew and Gentile alike, and that is the way of faith in response to the preaching of the gospel (compare Romans 10). The burden of the argument of the apostle Paul in Romans 9-11 is that all who will be saved will only be saved as they are grafted into the *one olive tree*, in fellowship

through faith with the one and only Savior whose righteousness answers to the need of Jew and Gentile. Nowhere in the Word of God do we have a clearer repudiation of any teaching that suggests that there are different pathways to salvation for Jews and Gentiles. Today this idea is often taught in the form of what is termed a "two covenant" theology, the one covenant unique to the people of Israel, the other covenant unique to the Gentile nations. Though Romans 9-11 suggests that God's purposes of redemption include a purpose uniquely addressed and suited to the special people of Israel, it stands wholly opposed to any such two covenant position. All who will be saved will be saved through faith in response to the same gospel and within the fellowship of the *one people of God* (compare Eph. 2).

The second corollary is that *Reformed believers should have a keen interest in the work of evangelism, the preaching of the gospel, to the people of Israel*. Rather than concluding that God's purposes have somehow been concluded with His special people Israel, we should preach and evangelize expectant that, because the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, His gifts and calling to Israel will not terminate in her wholesale unbelief but rather in her fullness being saved. This should be a stimulus and encouragement, then, to the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. Any presumption that God has wholly abandoned Israel to her unbelief is just that, a presumption that is without biblical warrant.

And so let the gospel be preached, *to the Jew first and also to the Gentile*, for God's purposes of salvation will not fail!

FOOTNOTES

1. For example, when the children of Israel returned from their exile in Babylon, their restoration was an initial fulfillment of promises like those recorded in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. However, it is evident from subsequent history that this initial restoration was itself but a type of an even more glorious future restoration (cf. Hebrews 8).
2. Only the third of these forms of this first view is consistent with the classic Reformed understanding of the Bible's teaching about the future. Though a few Reformed believers in the history of the church have attempted to defend a premillennial eschatology, the predominant number of Reformed believers have rejected premillennialism (the teaching that Christ will return before, "pre-," a literal period of one thousand years in which He will reign upon the earth) in all its forms, especially more recent dispensationalist premillennialism. All believers, Jew and Gentile alike, are saved through faith in Jesus Christ in response to the preaching of the gospel; and all believers will be gathered into the church during this present period of history prior to Christ's return, at which time the eternal state of God's kingdom will commence. Cf. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 91-103, who defends the third form of this view. I will defend this view in its third form as, on balance, the best view, in what follows.
3. Cf. Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 139-47, who provides an able defense of this view. The weakness of this view is that it does not answer to the structure of the apostle Paul's argument in Romans 9-11. The salvation of all the elect of Israel, the sum total of what is only a remnant throughout the history of redemption, does not fit with the sequence of unbelief and subsequent conversion that this passage suggests.

Church & World

Classis Rejects Overture Banning 'Non-deliberative' Delegates from Advisory Committees

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. RBPS — After completing its deliberations on women in office, Classis Grand Rapids East rejected a proposal from Neland Avenue CRC to exclude "publicly outspoken proponents and opponents on a controversial matter" from the synodical advisory committees studying such matters.

However, according to Neland Avenue council president Dr. Andrew Bandstra, the church will be sending the overture on to synod with one change from the form in which it was presented to classis — deletion of a paragraph noting that "a delegate whose adamant opposition to ratification [of women in office] was shown in public, speeches vividly reported in the public press, was not only appointed to that advisory committee, but was permitted to become an advisory committee reporter, and to use the leverage of that power position to heavily influence the direction of what may have been the most divisively polarized synod in our history."

The reporter for the Synod 1994 advisory committee on women in office was Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, president of Westminster Theological Seminary in California, who has been widely credited in the conservative media with persuading Synod 1994 not to ratify women in office.

After recounting the history of the current advisory committee system in which the officers of the previous year's synod propose "tentative appointments" to advisory committees, the overture argues that placing "publicly outspoken proponents or opponents of controversial positions" on advisory committees has the result of "virtually assuring quick polarization and the death of the deliberative process."

"While a healthy deliberative process could bring healthy consensus building, quickly polarized advisory committees tend to leave synod with only a choice between highly partisan and divisive positions," the overture said. "Then synod looks more like a shootout than a body of believers seeking the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Among its four recommendations, the overture asked Synod 1995 to "review the process by which delegates to Synod are assigned to advisory committees, noting especially the importance of maintaining the deliberative character of advisory committees" and "adopt a clear guideline for the Program Committee that requires the committee to promote and protect the deliberative character of advisory committees by selecting, to the best of their ability, delegates open to the deliberative process on the items assigned."

Ironically, two delegates from churches with women elders voiced the strongest opposition to the Neland Avenue overture.

"I think we had a problem at the last synod, but I'm not able to favor this overture," said Rev. Roger Van Harn of Grace CRC. "This overture asks someone at synod to decide who is deliberative and who is not. I think we ought to assume that deliberative people get elected to synod."

Elder Dave Schuyler of Madison Square CRC went even farther. "The prophetic gift is not necessarily very cooperative all the time," said Schuyler. "A Jeremiah, an Isaiah, an Amos might not make people comfortable on one of our consistories."

Speaking in defense of his church's overture, Neland's elder delegate argued that the overture "wouldn't appoint someone to be God to decide who is deliberative, but simply exclude those who have been so publicly adamant that they couldn't possibly be deliberative."

In the end, Neland's reasoning was unconvincing. Classis Grand Rapids East voted down the overture by a wide voice vote margin, leaving Neland Avenue with the decision on whether to send the overture to synod on its own.

"To the extent that I am the one example offered, I am very much offended because as a scholar I believe one must remain deliberative on all the arguments brought forward and I've worked very hard to do so," said Godfrey, who noted that he makes a point of reading each new theological defense of women in office as it appears.

According to Godfrey, "the central problem [of the overture] is that it assumes that those who have studied an issue and taken a public stand cannot be of service to the synod and listen carefully and thoughtfully to arguments on the other side."

"I would also note that there was at least one publicly outspoken advocate of women in office on the committee, but the overture doesn't mention him, which would lead one to believe that their objection is only to outspoken conservatives," said Godfrey. "I think George Vander Weit had every right to be on that committee, and I do think it's ironic that for many years when conservatives complained that synodical committees and study committees were stacked with people who were not open to conservative views, such overtures were not coming from churches such as Neland Avenue."

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