

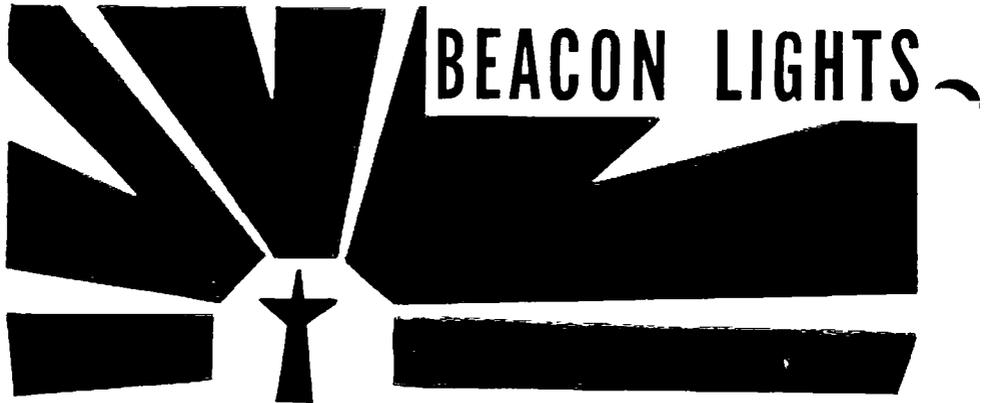
# BEACON LIGHTS

*FOR PROTESTANT  
REFORMED YOUTH*

May, 1974

IMPRESSIONS OF OUR SEMINARY





# BEACON LIGHTS

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SABBATH PLEASURES

*ED. NOTE: This article was originally given by Mr. Vink as an after-recess program in the Sr. Mr. and Mrs. Society of First Church. I trust that you will find, as I did, that although the examples are local, the concern expressed is universal.*

J. Huiskens

'If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot,  
From doing your own pleasure on My holy day,  
And call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord honorable,  
And shall honor it, desisting from your own ways,  
From seeking your own pleasure, And speaking your own word,  
Then you will take delight in the Lord, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth:  
And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

Isaiah 58: 13-14.

New American Standard Bible

I would like to look at two aspects of our public observance of the Sabbath - the liturgy and practice in our worship services and our own attitudes upon entering the Lord's House.

During the past several years, we have observed a number of changes in our public worship. Among these are:

- change in doxology
- several changes in the observance of the Lord's Supper- elders partaking in unison, minister serving the elders, wine poured from the cup, organ music during the serving of the bread and wine to the congregation
- deacons and now elders sitting with their families during the service
- nursery during the morning service
- change in the time of the evening service
- serving coffee in church after the evening service and before a program

More changes have and are being discussed - such as:

- silent prayer in unison
- Psalter revision and/or use of hymns in the service
- choir or special music in the service
- responsive readings or other means of vocal congregational participation in the service

The thing that struck me when I read Isaiah 58 was - for whose pleasure were these changes effected- ours or the Lord's?

Not too many years ago, it was common practice to have a "Sunday suit." One wore a conservative, dark-colored suit and white shirt with a starched collar or, in the case of the women, a conservative dress which pretty well covered the torso and its various appendages. It was practically unthinkable for a lady to go to church without a hat.

This sabbath practice, too, has changed. While I would readily agree that "clothes do not the man make", I do feel that what we wear and how we act and what we say are all revelations of our attitude toward and our respect of the Lord's House. I have observed, somewhat askance, turtlenecks, rather extremely tailored and vividly hued clothes which would do justice to a pereening rooster strutting about the barnyard, pants suits, hot pants, and other scanty attire in church. I wonder whether this "modern" practice represents rebellion, a spirit of independence, women's liberation, irreverence, disdain for things holy or what?

Would I like to legislate our church or school dress? No, but I do feel that all of this represents what Prof. R. Decker in a speech termed "creeping compromise." I would hope that as God's children we might exercise a "sanctified judgement" toward these things. We are doing our part to introduce the vanities of the world around us even into our worship service.

Think back to the time of Israel. The Israelites had to observe all kinds of rules with respect to their worship, prescribed dress, removing of shoes, cleanliness, even abstaining from the marriage relationship. While we are no longer bound by these laws, we might do well to examine our own attitudes toward our deportment in the Lord's House. In my observation, we are sometimes more concerned and more careful about our appearance and deportment when we attend a concert or some other public event than when we enter church. We would do well to remember in whose house we are and to what purpose, and for whose pleasure.

'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.'

Philippians 4: 8-9

## FEATURES

### IMPRESSION OF OUR SEMINARY

Ken Koole

Of late there has been a special interest in our school, the Protestant Reformed Seminary. A new professor was installed and a new building erected and dedicated. Both were occasions of great anticipation and joy and of much prayer and thanksgiving. It has been the center of attention for our denomination. And so the *B. L.* staff thought it would be a good time for an article by a seminary student to appear in the magazine. I agreed, and so I have been asked to give my impressions of seminary.

I have been asked questions like - What do you guys do here? What is your day like? Are the professors strict? Are the subjects difficult? What is the grading scale like? Do you like it? These questions are asked not only because the questioners have so little first hand information because so few people they know actually attend, but also because they have the notion that our seminary is somehow different and they want to know how it is different - the faculty, the student body, the subject material, the teaching method, the grading scale, and the guiding principles. And they are right. It is different.

The questions are asked because the seminary has always been a focal point for our denomination. Our people are interested in it and concerned about its' welfare, as was testified by the whole hearted support in the financial drive, and by the overwhelming response to the recent installation, dedication and open house.

Its needs are a constant source of prayer. The needs of the professors as they instruct young men called by God to be His ambassadors and the needs of the students as they must give diligence to the things learned and persevere in their studies are continually brought as petitions to God. With willing

charitableness the churches support the school and the students financially. She does this because she is concerned about, almost anxious, and rightly zealous about her future well-being, which is so dependent upon the infallible word of God and its pure proclamation.

It is as a student that one begins to more fully appreciate the unity of believers and to realize that God gives clear evidences of His covenant faithfulness, that the church is the apple of His eye. It is necessary that a student be conscious of this and keep such a perspective for the sake of his own encouragement, in order that he remain diligent. When a student is in his last two years, not only is the normal load 18 hours, a heavy one by college standards, but usually he teaches a number of catechism classes and preaches a number of sermons, both of which are quite new and demanding. This is the stretch drive of his college education, and it makes or breaks him. There is a constant push forward, no time for breathers, and if the daily assignments are not enough to keep him busy, there are always synodical exams for filler material. A small student body means there is no sliding, because under the watchful eyes of the professors your sins will find you out quickly. But the real student does not shirk, complain, or ask for a break. He realizes that the professors demand both quantity and quality because they are aware of the great responsibility that is theirs' before God and His church. They cannot allow sloppiness or set a slow pace for the sake of good marks because such is not to be allowed in the actual ministry. They must graduate men who are capable intellectually, sound spiritually, and who possess stamina in body and mind. Once on their own the

graduates are thankful for the high standards demanded and maintained. As they are fond of saying in seminary, "God hates a lazy preacher", " And I repeat, don't fall behind."

In all of its years of existence, our seminary has been different. For years it was different even in a purely physical sense; a full three years seminary curriculum held in the basement of a church in two rooms. Even the enrollment was unique. Sometimes the student body could fit itself into one pair of pants, if they were his own, and found himself in the peculiar situation of being outnumbered by the faculty, two to one. Now of course, it has attained a greater degree of physical respectability; three professors, three sem. students, eight pre-sem. students, one grade school principle who keeps his ears open for news to put in the *Standard Bearer*, and a beautiful sunlit building which just might have the best scenic view in the whole of the Grand Rapids area. From its vantage point upon the bluffs overlooking Grandville a pleasant mixture of country side and city skyline greets the eye. Not only do the professors have to squint sometimes and shade their eyes from the glare coming off their notes, (so accustomed their eyes have grown to the dim caverns of the church basement), but everyone also has become somewhat of a bird watcher, attentively following the lazy circles of two hawks who regularly hunt the fields just below the seminary observatory. "Hey, did you see that thrush which just flew by? That was no thrush, you bird brain, that was a kildeer."

Although the new building has brought about new topics for discussions, rekindled interest in the weather to more than whether it was still raining outside, and has changed the focus of our attention from studying the flickering fluorescent lights to the watching of the sun as it rises and the sun's rays as they play upon the surrounding country side, there is still that which remains the same the students and professors are happy to say. Classes begin at eight o'clock and dismiss at noon, the assignments are handed out with frightful regularity and are received for analysis and exacting criticism (although, at times, first year Dutch language students who talk with a Yankee brogue are criticized by no more than hearty laughter), the lectures remain doctrinally sound, Biblically centered, and persuasively presented, the

subjects dealt with are thoroughly inspected, carefully taught, and must be effectively learned, and last but not least coffee break begins at 9:55 with its coffee stirring, pipe smoking and tobacco aromas. And though one professor was heard to mutter after a coffee break which extended a bit longer than usual that they were the bane of the seminary, yet they remain an important party of the seminary; some would say indispensable. It is a feature which distinguishes it from other institutions of education. Can you name another school in which the professors and students sit down for coffee and table talk daily? It is an indication that our seminary is a family like very few others, possessing a closeness which has direct result on the character and quality of the men who go out from it to take up their labors in one of the congregations. The student-faculty rapport which is a constant source of discussions, problems, and dissatisfaction in many other schools, (the elusive missing link), is a common, accepted fact. Walk in during break and you will be treated to such matters as the latest church news and related issues, the correction of someone's grammatical blunder, the humorous description of someone's character quirks, or the relating of some comical situation one found himself in. Did you hear about the time Professor Decker...? Well, probably it would be better if you asked him about it yourself. Although laughter dominates the scene at times, we do have our serious moments. The talk also ranges into discussion about items of latest ecumenical interest and controversy, questions concerning ethics (such as abortion), problems of correct Biblical interpretation, or further discussion on a question brought up in class. And all too soon 10:15 rolls around, causing a general disturbance. Classes part into separate rooms, where once again inspection of and preparation for the study of scripture and doctrine is carried on. If it is not one of those nervous Mondays reserved for the trials of practice preaching, at noon the class day is brought to a close with prayer, and the faculty and students leave to spend the major portion of their day preparing for tomorrow, next week, or next year's synodical examination.

Now to return to those questions once again, which I may not have answered directly enough. "What do you do all day?" Well, to be very specific, we study a lot, although,

at times we do eat and sleep. What is your day like? Sometimes it's sunny and sometimes it's cloudy, and almost always not long enough. Are the Professors strict? Let me put it this way; they encourage more than they rebuke, guide more than they pressure, and chuckle more than they frown. Are the subjects difficult? Only those which are taught before noon time, and Hebrew grammar especially. What is the grading scale like? Judge for yourself. Anything below a C is considered failure, and as for an A, well, who is perfect? Do you like it? Yes, very much and thank-you for your interest and concern.

There is, however, one more important question which should be asked, the answer of which is almost taken for granted. Yet, it is, without a doubt, the most important

because it is our seminary's greatest distinguishing feature, the most important reason for its existence. The question is, "What impresses you the most about the seminary?" That it is founded upon the Word of God and dedicated to the instruction in, preservation of, and submission to its infallible, authoritative message, applicable to faith, walk, and doctrine. Thanks be to God that our professors remain committed to the reason and purpose of its establishment. In these days which give such ample evidence of falling away, of apostacizers who not only underemphasize the Holy Word of God but who unashamedly attack directly its infallible inspiration and its authority, the seminary must continue to be the object of your interest, concern, support, and prayers, as it has in the past.

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## "THE CHRISTIAN AND PATRIOTISM"

Ken Kuiper

You know, "patriotism" is an extremely relative term. Some of us feel that patriotism is waving "Old Glory" on the Fourth of July. Others feel it is serving in the Armed Forces or buying Federal savings bonds. Many people felt that the draft-dodgers who fled to Canada during the Vietnam war were very un-patriotic. But some of those very individuals who fled felt it was more patriotic to leave than to fight what they believed to be an "unjust" war. And do you remember how a very few years ago people were getting so upset because the American flag was showing up on purses, sweatshirts, and as patches worn on the seat of your pants? These people thought that was very un-patriotic. So on and on you can go. And we must decide where the *Christian* fits into all of this? It will be difficult. I think we must first look at patriotism and decide what it really is, and then try to discern what a Christian's approach to it should be.

Patriotism is basically a feeling of love or devotion to one's native or adopted country. Flag waving or joining the military is not patriotism, but simply an outward show of patriotism. It is the feeling that lies within a person that is really patriotism. A patriotic person loves his country and feels devoted to it. It is not an American institution, either. When we look at patriotism, we

should be looking on a world-wide scale, one that encompasses all of time. We are not merely asking whether American Christians can be patriotic. We are asking if German Christians could be patriotic during the Hitler years, or if Chinese Christians can be patriotic in Communist China.

The answer to that question is a very definite "yes" and also a very definite "no". On the one hand, only we as Christians can truly be patriotic, but on the other hand we must not allow ourselves to be overly patriotic. It sounds like a paradox, but is it really?

We as Christians must bow before our nation in humble obedience as we are called upon to do in Scripture. The Spirit says through the apostle Paul in Romans 13, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God... Wherefore ye must needs be subject... for this cause pay ye tribute also." Paul makes it plain that leaders in a country are placed there by God. And we must love these people. This the non-Christian can simply not do. And that is why I say that only Christians can be truly patriotic, for we only can truly love. We are exhorted by the Spirit that "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men: for kings and

for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior" (1 Timothy 2: 1-3)

Only the Christian can pray for the leaders of his country, whether American or German. I feel that we should hear more prayers for our leaders, both at our homes and from the pulpit on Sunday. We are perhaps guilty of not praying enough for these people as we are directed to do in the passage quoted from Timothy.

We in America can also be patriotic in that we are thankful to God for blessing us with such a beautiful land. The beauty and diversity of America is awe-inspiring. Certainly we can feel great affection for this land flowing with milk and honey.

And we in America can also praise the Lord for the religious freedoms we have here. We must not fool ourselves into believing that this is a Christian nation. But we in America have been blest with the freedom to worship the Lord as we see fit and to broadcast the truth we love to others also.

It is not wrong either for us to feel a sense of devotion to America. We must certainly be willing to answer the call of our draft board during time of war. This is our duty. Some would say that this is the only time we should serve in the Armed Forces. I do not agree with that view. I feel that the Christian should be able to serve his country even if he is not drafted.

Our country is always in need of servicemen, and I don't feel that we should think it to be unnecessary for us as Christians to do our part in the defense of our country. I am nearing the end of a tour of duty with the Navy and I feel that not only have I helped to serve America in a small way, but in many ways the experience has been good for me also. The service is a very maturing experience in which a young person is forced to look at life realistically. He is forced to evaluate his relationships with his family, his church, and God.

Many feel that we should refrain from joining the service because we separate ourselves from our churches by doing so. That is a valid argument. For this reason I feel that making a career out of the service would be unjustifiable. It would simply be too hard to maintain a good church life. But it is different when dealing with one tour of duty-

say two, three, or even four years of active duty. First of all, the Services try to provide the opportunity to worship, and although these services are often rather shallow, they do help. It is also possible to supplement ones spiritual food by reading. The "Standard Bearer" and the "Beacon Lights" are excellent helps as are the printed copies of the Reformed Witness Hour broadcasts, which are available for the asking. There are also many other Christian publications, books, and soon. There are other Christians in the service also that we can associate with and share with. Remember, "where two or three are gathered in My Name..."

There is another area of service that the Christian can involve himself in. That is the area of politics. There are many in our churches, I'm afraid, who feel that politics is too corrupt for a Christian to involve himself in. Personally I feel that is a bad attitude to take. We should not be willing to sit back and give also this sphere of life over completely to the non-Christian. Aren't we to be the "salt of the earth"?

There is a place for Christians to serve in politics; I am sure of it. Especially in local levels of government. It is possible to do so without sacrificing our principles. It should be no more difficult than working any other job where there are non-Christians involved. There are temptations and pitfalls in all professions. Serving in the government is a way to show patriotism in a positive sense.

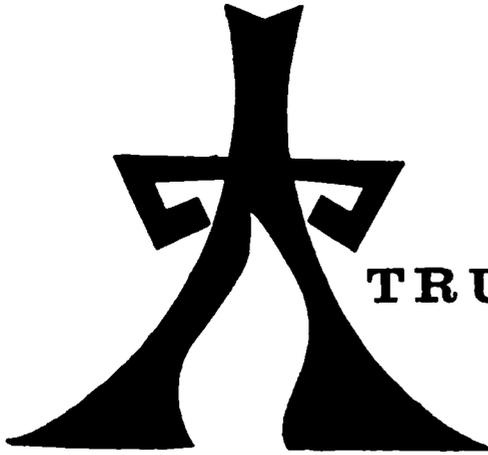
Yet at the same time we must not be patriotic to an extreme. We must not tie our souls to this or any other country. We must remember that we are "in the world but not of the world". And that means America, too. I wonder how many of us would be willing to leave America like Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees to be led by God to a land strange to us? Would we be willing to move to Australia or India or Africa if God wanted us there? If we would not be willing to go, then something is wrong.

We must be like the heroes of faith about whom we read in Hebrews 11, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth....But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their

God: for He hath prepared for them a city."

Let us remember then, that although we are required to love and pray for our leaders; although we can enjoy and appreciate the beauty of our land and the freedoms we have here; and although we can serve

America in positive ways; yet our citizenship is nevertheless in heaven. May our lives reflect that citizenship in a Godly, peaceable life, owing "no man anything but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." (Romans 13:8)



## TRUTH vs. ERROR

REV. ROBERT C. HARBACH

### OLD HONEST OF STUPIDSVILLE

Four degrees south of the city of Destruction lies the town of Stupidity. It is a worse place than even that city of Destruction. It is turned more obliquely from the sun, making it darker and colder than most places. Surprising it was, then, to learn that Old Honest was from this town. He had been a mountain of ice, but the Sun of Righteousness had thawed his frozen heart. Mr. Fearing, too, was from this town. These two, while citizens in that town, were slow on the uptake in matters of religion. "O fools! and slow of heart to believe!" This had to be said of them. Here in our city, known as The-Place-of-the-Boiling-Pot, you may meet men and women with the best university education, but who, in everything pertaining to true religion, are as stupid as they can get. These intellectuals react quickly to correct the inefficiency of the occupant of a university chair, but they understand nothing of a pulpit bearing the mark of the true church. They may be church members themselves, but know neither the creed, the doctrine of their church, nor the fact that their church is fast totally apostatizing from that doctrine. In this city, we have experts in science and research, scholars in every field of learning,

leaders in political and municipal life, yet stupid in the things of the Protestant and Reformed faith and life.

Is stupidity a sin? That's a humbling question, for we had better be careful, lest we come up with a stupid answer. According to the modern behaviorist philosophy, which greatly colors and conditions the thinking of university education, stupidity is a personal defect, an intelligence inferiority, and if not due to physical or organic causes, is brought on by poor adjustive habits and forms of behavior acquired by trial and error. (Trial and error is the testing out of one error to exchange it for another.) This means that stupidity is not an innate, but an acquisitive condition resulting from unstructured habit patterns. The individual develops stupidity. He becomes a stupid person. Stupidity is the result of learned behavior under the slavery of a wrong-habit process. The stupid fellow got into the habit of being stupid. Instead of learning to be smart, he learned to be stupid. He did learn something: he learned how to learn nothing. Oddly enough, that is exactly what some of the courses at the university are all about-- how to learn nothing. According to behaviorist thinking, man is just an

animal, which, in the evolutionary advance, is but a shade above his dumb animal ancestor, and, where he turns out to be a stupid ass, there is a reversive and retrogressive trend to the lower (dumb) animal level. Man, therefore, to begin with, is neither smart nor stupid. His nature is in equilibrium, neutral, capable of tipping the balance in either direction. If he turns out stupid, that condition being capable of objective scientific explanation and correction, is not sinful. In some circles it is socially unacceptable, and everywhere regrettable, but never sinful. But according to the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions, man was originally created righteous, holy and in perfect knowledge. Yet by his own wilful sin, he fell, losing these excellent gifts, including the perfect knowledge. He became unrighteous, actually wicked, and unholy, really ungodly, and ignorant. He became stupid. Looking at the matter in this proper perspective, then, stupidity is a sin, and a very deadly sin. For this is eternal life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. But not to know Them is deadly stupidity. Such ignorance is bogged down in spiritual death. So, since it is true that "we have not (yet) perfect faith," nor perfect knowledge, when we ask the Lord to forgive all our sins, we must also individually plead, Lord, forgive me my stupidity!

Man by his original sin fell helpless to an extreme degree of folly and stupidity. In plain words, man by nature is a stupid fool. It all began when he listened to that stupendous Fool, the Devil. Throughout the ages, in all nations and in all parts of the world, the entire world of mankind has been taken in by the blinding policy of Satan, to become sunken prone in terrible stupidity, except for one small, insignificant people, delivered by divine grace.

The evidence for this stupidity is seen in men and nations everywhere in their forsaking the knowledge and worship of the true God for the most stupid idolatry. The whole human race, shortly after the flood, "because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge," had committed two evils: they had forsaken the Lord, the Fountain of living waters, and hewed out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Rom. 1:28; Jer. 2:12f). The invisible things of God, even His eternal power and Godhead, from the creation of the world, are

clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. The reason why knowing God they did not glorify Him as God was because they became vain in their imaginations, and because their foolish heart was darkened by their sin and idolatry of changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man. Certainly then, this is inexcusable stupidity. (Rom. 1:19-21).

When the nations came to their greatest height of intellectual, scientific and esthetic development, as in the ancient Greek civilization, they nevertheless, as to religion, plunged to the depths of stupidity. For that great civilization still clung to the absurd gods which first arose in Egypt, their deified dumb animals and deified stupid men.

Now, today, look at Africa and Asia. Have they appreciably advanced over the darkest idolatry of their notorious history of heathenism? Look at North and South America. Since the peoples of the British Isles and of Europe came here, have these areas triumphed in any degree over the grossest delusions of paganism? No, rather the total depravity of human nature is revealed in their most glaring idolatry and worse than brutish stupidity. For "the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times, and the turtle (dove), and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the judgment of the Lord" (Jer. 8:7).

Stupidity is sinful. For stupid fools are sinning fools. Since "they have rejected the word of the Lord... what wisdom is in them?" (8:9). This same prophecy also says that the wise men of the heathen, because they are idolaters, are altogether stupid and foolish (10:7,8). Though they are ever so wise, yet they are (lit.) *in one thing* stupid, i.e., in their idolatry. Every man of them is stupid! How did they get that way? They are (lit.) stupid from science (v. 14), i.e., from their science, of making and using idols and images (physically, materially, mentally and spiritually). Their knowledge is a kind of ignorance, a form of stupidity, very much so, when they believe in such gods, practicing base idolatry and deep in image-worship. The use of images in worship reveals the grossest stupidity and lack of understanding.

Wise men stupid from their science (philosophy)! That's exactly it! This was true of Kant. "Who can read without indignation of Kant," remarks De Quincy, "that at his own

table, in social sincerity and confidential talk, let him say what he would in his books, he exulted in the prospect of absolute and ultimate annihilation; that he planted his glory in the grave, and was ambitious of rotting forever! The King of Prussia, though a personal friend of Kant's, found himself obliged to level his state thunders at some of his doctrines, and terrified him in his advance; else I am persuaded that Kant would have formally delivered Atheism from the professor's chair, and would have enthroned the horrid ghoulish creed, which privately he professed, in the University of Konigsberg. It required the artillery of a great king to make him pause. The fact is, that as the stomach has been known by means of its natural secretion, to attack not only whatsoever alien body...introduced within it, but also...sometimes to attack itself and its own organic structure, so... with the same preternatural extension of instinct, did Kant carry forward his destroying functions, until he turned them upon his own hopes, and the pledges of his own superiority to the dog,

the ape, the worm."-- Geo. B. Cheever, in "Voices of Nature," 1852. (Quoted in *The Treasury of David*, IV, 274).

But never mind the wise men of the heathen. What about the wise men of the church? Surely that means the pastors, doesn't it? If they are not wise, then you have the blind leading the blind; or the stupid leading the stupid. When *the pastors are become stupid*, they ruin the religion of Jehovah. They do nothing to repair and reform it. They are stupid because they have not sought the Lord. They are all stupid people who do not seek the Lord. (Jer. 10:21). The pastors are become brutish, boorish, boarish. They do not feed the people with true knowledge and understanding, for they themselves are stupid. When the pastors are stupid, the people are dead. Like Old Honest in the story, we must confess our humiliating origin, and just as honestly leave it forever behind. The Christian walk, being antithetical to all moral and spiritual stupidity, is more an *escape* and *flight* from it!



Vi Van Den Top

## GOD – ALWAYS THERE WHEN WE NEED HIM

A beige, rose colored casket stood open and to the left as we entered the room. Soft, downy puffers and a silken fluffy pillow filled in around the corpse. The mortician had done his work too - very well, some said. But all the multi-colored flowers and all the silkiness and paint on his face could not dismiss the coldness of death. I stood in awe as I was struck again with the finality of that last enemy which we must all face.

"In my Father's house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you." This passage came to mind and I felt a reassuring sense of hope.

Strange, is it now, how God is always there just when we need Him? I was thankful that through faith I could cling to the promises of God in this time of sorrow. God is so close in a time of death.

Yes, God is there when we need Him and *that* is all the time!! God is not just a place to which to run when death strikes and we feel at a loss. Feeling a deep need, we throw ourselves on the mercy of God. Whether we admit it or not, God is always present. He is there when we are in the depths of sorrow *and* when we in a moment of weakness are cursing and swearing. "God is always there

when I need Him" is not a complete truth for this statement presupposes that at times (when things are going well and I do not feel need for God) we do not need Him. God is like a handy tool; He is there when needed but conveniently tucked away when not. What a foolish, blasphemous idea of Almighty God!

God has sent His Holy Spirit to be our Comforter but His work is not limited to comfort as we feel we need it. God knows what is best for us and that is why He is always everywhere present. We need the omnipresence of God for our very existence and He knows this in a perfect way. God is there to hear our cries of sorrow in the black of night and God is there to hear our heart commit murder.

You experience God's faithfulness in a special way when crying out in your sorrow, He comes by His Spirit saying, "Fear not. I

have overcome death and the grave." Then, with a renewed heart you vow to live a life of thankfulness to God but mere moments later you find yourself walking in sin again. We have a constant need for the cross and the forgiving power of God through Christ. This struggle is the constant mortification of the old man which the Heidelberg Catechism speaks about. Impressed with God's gracious omnipresence one moment; we are shaking our fists in His face the next. We leave the graveside and we soon forget all about death, God, and our need for a Saviour. Let us be thankful that He does not forget us in like manner!

God is always present wherever we may be. May this truth be an encouragement to us as children of God; in life with its constant fight against sin and in death with its sorrow and joy born in hope. God is an *ever present Help*.

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# FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

REV. M. KAMPS

## REPENT!

Thus far in our discussion of the doctrine of repentance we have asked and given an answer to several questions. In our first article we asked: What is repentance?, Is repentance obligatory for all men? In relation to that we asked the question does God confront every man who ever lived with the demand to repent. In our last article we treated the question is the demand of God that all repent just or not.

In this article we are going to treat the question: Is the demand of God that all men everywhere repent expressive of His determinate will? You recall that I warned, in our first article, that the going could get a little rough at this point. So, let us go slowly.

Maybe I could take this same question and putting it in different words ask: "Does God will that which He demands of all those who come under the preaching of the gospel?" Or, "Does God will the repentance of all

those who hear the preaching of the gospel, repent and believe?"

Thorny questions. Yet questions which have often times troubled my soul. Maybe you too have been troubled with similar questions.

In answer to the question then we say, first of all, that the demand of God that the sinner repent is *seriously* made. God's call to repentance is *unfeignedly* made. God does not address the sinner through the preaching of the gospel "with tongue in cheek!" God does not mock the sinner. It is not so that if one repents that God will not receive such a repentant sinner. God in the preaching of the gospel brings a just demand, in all seriousness declared, to the guilty sinner and assures him that the repentant sinner is pleasing in His sight. God is serious. He means what He says. Jesus Christ, The Preacher, (Mark 1:14) assures the repentant sinner of just this seriousness of God in Hi:

demand that the sinner repent. Jesus said, "and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out!" (John 6:37b) In the Old Testament we read: "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee." Psalm 86:5. In the demand that the sinner repent God is serious and He reveals what is pleasing to Him. Listen to the fathers of Dordrecht; "As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly (seriously) called..." Canons III and IV, article 8. Those that repent God will graciously receive into the sphere of His love and fellowship. God does not mock the sinner.

In the second place we can look at this question, does God will what he demands, from another view point. We must not forget that the preaching of the Word and the demand that the sinner repent stands in a definite relationship to the sovereign, unchangeable counsel of God. What is that relationship between God's counsel and the demand that the sinner repent? It is one of *means*! There is a means and there is an end or goal. The preaching of repentance is the means to the realization of the decree of predestination including election *and* reprobation. God wills the salvation of some persons through Christ Jesus and He wills eternally the damnation of others to be accomplished in the way of their own sin and rebellion. The preaching of the demand of repentance is the means whereby God, on the one hand, infallibly saves His people chosen in Christ unto salvation. On the other hand, the same preaching of repentance is a means whereby God's purpose of reprobation is accomplished in some persons who are hardened in their sin in the rejection of the truth of the Word of God. God's just demand they refuse to heed.

Let me pause a moment to give scriptural proof for the doctrine of predestination. With respect to the doctrine of election I will just sight the classical passage of Eph. 1:3-5a, where we read; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children .." We could sight many more passages that teach explicitly the doctrine of election.

But what about reprobation, is there scriptural warrant for the doctrine of unconditional reprobation sovereignly determined by the just, most holy God of the heavens and the earth? Note, first of all, that wherever in scripture election is taught *there* reprobation is implicitly taught. But scripture also explicitly teaches the doctrine of reprobation. The apostle Peter, when describing the disobedience of some persons who refused to heed the demand of the gospel, says: "but unto them which be disobedient the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: *whereunto also they were appointed.*" (1 Peter 2:7-8) They were appointed unto a present stumbling and in the way of their own disobedience. And note Jude 4, "For there are certain men crept in unawares, *who were before of old ordained to this condemnation*, ungodly men, turning the grace of God unto lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." Compare also Romans 9:10-13, 20-22 and read article 15 of the first head of the Canons. We conclude that the Scripture and the Confessions teach the doctrine of the sovereign, unconditional, election and reprobation of persons all of which are dead in sin sinners by nature. So much for the pause in our discussion.

To get back to our material, we were discussing the relationship that exists between the preaching of the demand for repentance and the counsel or decree of predestination. We said that the preaching of the demand for repentance is the means for the gathering of the Church of Christ from among men. The elect in Christ are being gathered by the preaching of the gospel of repentance. Let me point out emphatically that the gathering of the Church of Christ is the *primary* purpose for the preaching of the demand for repentance. It is to the accomplishment of that glorious purpose that the Church of Christ at any one time in history preaches the gospel through its lawfully called and ordained ministry. In obedience to the command of Christ that the Church is to teach all nations, the Church busys itself in its primary if not sole work. But we must add, that the gathering of the elect is not God's sole purpose with the preaching of the demand for repentance. There is a subordi-

nate purpose, but more about this later.

To proceed, we have not yet fully answered the question confronting us which is, is the demand of God that the sinner repent expressive of His will. We have pointed out that God is serious in His demand and will certainly receive the penitent sinner into His fellowship. We have shown too that God's will is two-fold including election and reprobation. That will is not hidden but expressed. Scripture declares God's will and it reveals that God's will is that some persons are elected unto salvation while others are rejected which rejection is accomplished in the way of their own sin.

We are now ready to go to the third part of my answer to the question, is the demand of God that the sinner repent expressive of His will. God knows who is elect and who is reprobate of those who constitute the audience that hear the demand to repent declared to them in the preaching of the gospel. Human preachers do not know who of their audience is elect or reprobate. They need not know. It is best that men do not know. With respect to all the hearers of the gospel the preacher simply declares the serious demand of God in which God justly demands repentance of all and promises salvation and all the benefits of salvation to those only who repent.

But God knows who it is that hears the word. And God has two different purposes to be accomplished through the means of preaching, of the demand of repentance. That demand serves as the means to the salvation of the elect in Christ, in the first place; and in the second place, that demand for repentance declared in the preaching of the gospel serves the purpose unto the hardening of the reprobate sinner and in the way of such hardening God accomplishes His sovereign, just, and most holy will in the reprobate. God wills the repentance of the elect and, therefore, He causes the gospel to be preached to them that hearing they may by the irresistible power of His grace repent and believe. But God does not will the repentance of the reprobate even though He causes the demand for repentance to be preached to them. God's will is always in perfect harmony. We must say this *re* the reprobate: God wills that the reprobate be hardened in his sin and rebellion, which is accomplished by his rejection of the demand to repent.

God does not will the repentance of the reprobate and yet He causes it that the demand of repentance is preached to them. Why? Why does not God so work that only the elect hear the gospel. Are not the elect in Christ those who are and will be gathered by the Son of God through His Spirit and Word? Why must the reprobate hear the gospel and in particular the demand of God that he repent and believe? How are we to understand this?

First of all, there is the formal reason that God gathers His Church *organically*. That is the elect live in physical and societal relationships with the reprobate in this world. Not so in the world to come. An believing father can, and often times does, have an unbelieving son. Out of one family God draws some to salvation by the irresistible power of His grace, but in others of the same family God accomplishes His sovereign will of reprobation in the way of their own sin and rebellion. This figure of the family can be expanded to be the family of the whole human race. God deals with His people chosen in Christ as they organically live with the reprobate in the world. God gathers the elect out of the fallen human race. Christ gives us a picture of that organic character of God's work in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). The tares and the wheat are to live side by side in the same field under the same watering, and under the same sun light. The tares were to be pulled up and burned when they have reached full maturity as tares. The wheat (kernel) was to be gathered into the barn. The wheat are the elect believers, and the tares represent the reprobate. The same thought of organic unity is even more directly taught in scripture when the elect and the reprobate are considered as the wheat kernel (the elect) and the chaff (the reprobate). Confer Psalm 1:4, and Matthew 3:13. The farmer cannot realize a full bin of grain except in the way of growing wheat consisting organically, for a time, of wheat and chaff. So also God gathers the elect unto Himself through the preaching of the demand of repentance; elect who live for a time in this world in organic unity with the reprobate unbeliever. It is this organic character of God's work in the gathering of His people which I call the formal reason why the reprobate must of necessity hear the demand of the gospel. The farmer in his work is a

picture given by God to us of God's own work in the gathering of the elect in Christ.

We can say more in answer to the question, why must the reprobate hear the gospel and in particular the demand of God to repent. Then secondly, we would say that there are *material* reasons that can be given in answer to this question. By material we mean that God has a definite purpose re the reprobate himself as to why he must hear the demand of the gospel. As to the material reasons we would say, first of all, that God has the demand of repentance preached to reprobate persons in order that the depravity of man's nature may be revealed in all its horrible depths in the rejection of the Son of God, who declared the truth of God's Word. The depth of the depravity of man's fallen nature is revealed in the unbeliever's love of the lie and his rejection of the cross of Christ as the cross of the atonement for those chosen in Christ. (Confer Is. 6:8-9, Acts 28: 24-27, Mark 4:10-12) I will quote just one passage of scripture for your consideration: "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, and hardened their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (John 12: 37-40). Secondly, by his conscious, deliberate rejection of the truth the reprobate aggravates his judgement. It will be less tolerable for those who refuse to repent though they have heard the gospel of God's demand for repentance, than for those who never heard the gospel (Mt. 1:-20-21).

The third material reason is that, with respect to God, He has His demand preached to the reprobate in order that He may be vindicated when He casts the reprobate unbeliever into Hell for having despised God's mercy and grace revealed at the cross. And in the fourth place, God, by having the demand of repentance preached to many reprobate as well as the elect, all of whom are dead in sin and guilty before God, creates the circumstance wherein He reveals His sovereignty in the bestowal of "grace unto repentance" (Acts 11:18) unto some but not unto others. Of all men it is justly demand

that they repent and believe, but God in his sovereignty and wisdom gives by the power of His grace the will and the spiritual ability necessary unto repentance and faith to some (the elect) and not to others (the reprobate) who being dead in sin love the lie and despise the good. For by grace are we saved through the way of repenting and believing which is a gift of God to the elect alone. A gift withheld from the reprobate. The God of Scripture is the sovereign God of Heaven and Earth, who will perform all His good pleasure.

Finally, God is pleased to have the demand of repentance preached to reprobate persons, who live organically in the world with the elect, in order that the elect believer may learn humility. Was not the believer by nature involved in the same ruin with the unbeliever? Who made the believer to differ from the unbeliever a difference which consists of repentance and faith? Who did that? You? No, you and I did not make ourselves to differ from the reprobate. God freely gives to us and all the elect of all ages grace unto repentance and the faith unto believing. We have nothing of ourselves wherein to boast! (Eph. 2:8-9) But we have so much for which to be thankful. Thanks be to God, our sovereign and most gracious God, who saves some of the unworthy in order that His name may be glorified in and through them. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him..."

But do you know that you nor I can really swallow this doctrine of the sovereignty of God! I mean now, that this doctrine is repulsive to our sinful nature. It leaves no room for man to boast of himself. This doctrine of God's sovereignty will continue to be repulsive to my carnal flesh till the day I die. And yet we love that truth of the infallible scriptures, that God is sovereign and that He performs all His good pleasure in a most holy and just manner; we love, by the grace of God, that which by nature is repulsive to us sinners. Therefore, our prayer must be "God grant us the grace to confess, teach and preach as individuals and church of Christ the truth of thy sovereignty."

"O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

# CURRENT EVENTS AND COMMENTS

## REOCCURRING MIRACLES

Rachel Lubbers

Pitter-patter, pitter-patter. As the gentle rain falls steadily tonight, your mind drifts off to a peaceful sleep. The white blanket of snow has left for another year and the earth once again is being refreshed and renewed by the welcomed, warm spring rain. When you awake tomorrow and step through the door you will find again the air carrying the good smell of wet soil, reminding you of the arrival of a new season. As you look about now you see a constant growing change. Flowers are beginning to peek through the ground and others already have a beautiful bud ready to open with the next ray of sun. Much time and activity is spent with flowers by people all over who cherish dearly such fascinating beauty. As your eyes travel from the ground and take a quick glance above, your eyes are instantly caught by the sight of budding trees clothing themselves with green leaves which will provide shade from the heat of summer. Moving on a little further, you find the old favorite apple tree in full blossom! Pink and white blossoms open wide in all their glory leaving an unforgettable elegant fragrance that floats through the air. Yes, along with all this you return to musical mornings. In early morn, greetings are heard outside your window from cheer-filled birds who faithfully fly back each spring with this song;

“For, lo, the winter is past,  
The rain is over and gone;  
The flowers appear on the earth;  
The time of the singing of  
birds is come”

As morning runs out, the day is overtaken by the afternoon which oftentimes carries with it a beautiful warm wind that blows across the earth to dry the land after its long wet season. It is a new wind which accompanies the birth of this new season, a wind that thoroughly impresses even the smallest child's mind. It blows a new smile upon your face and makes you bounce with enthusiasm and joy. It brings you a clean fresh ambition and beginning. When white clouds gather in

the blue sky the wind pushes them on so that the warm sun can break through suddenly for a short time. On the water the wind causes waves to move in and out endlessly and lets the sail boat drift on for miles. It lifts the kite high in the sky and makes pools of sand to spin. It has no beginning, it has no end; you cannot see it; not even once; yet it is great with power and only and whenever we listen does the wind speak.

“I believe in the whispering wind,  
For they teach me to listen to  
the still small voice within my  
feverish soul.”

Now as the day slips away you are awed again and again with the fascinating, most beautiful sunsets. Colors wing out in the western sky, leaving a touch of pink even on the remain-scattered clouds. The sun with the sunset gives its last bow to the earth and then makes room for the night to move in. As much strife and as much worry that each day may carry, the evening leaves us in a state of peace, thankfulness, and hope. The setting sun somehow takes hold of you and hugs you with an overwhelming power of security. It leaves you silent, it spreads beauty over your mind, it touches you with a relief of success and releases a glow of a bright tomorrow.

“I believe in the golden hush of the  
sunset, reflecting a momentary  
glory of that great world beyond  
my little horizon.”

As the night edges its way in, the black sky becomes dotted with thousands of shining stars. The orange moon moves slowly across the sky changing its color as it rides and growing in size as you see it from night to night. Croaking frogs are heard in the distance while the rest of the world lies at a rest and time seems to tick loudly in such vast stillness. Hours pass and the night fades away. The stars become fewer and the

moon shows only a faint outline which in minutes will be gone. Shortly the sun rises and there is another new day, a day which has not been seen before and one different from anyone you have ever seen! You awake with a refreshed spirit and then, yes, you teach and train your senses to see and feel those small parts of each day, from the beginning to the end, as the greatest reve-

lation of God which no man can understand. This is our calling as children of God - to look and watch, touch and feel that everywhere the earth is flooded with reoccurring miracles!

"To me, every hour of the day and night is an unspeakable perfect miracle."

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