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God's Sovereignty - The Free Will of Man

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Editorial

TRUE FRIENDS

by Bruce Jabaay

How do you best describe your friends. . .cool or neat, fun to be with, okay, or just someone to hang around with? Ever describe your friends as caring, dependable, thoughtful, or even go so far as to say loving? David said "my brother Jonathan. . .thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" II Sam. 1:26. Solomon states "a friend loveth at all times" Prov. 17:17. The dictionary defines a friend as "a person attached to another by feelings of affection or personal regard". If the people you "hang around with" are loving then they fit the definition of a friend, otherwise they are not "true friends".

How do you choose your friends? Do they need to be popular, rich, smart, good looking or at least "with it"? God told Samuel "man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" I Sam. 16:7. Those that appear not to be "with it" are all too often the only ones that are. We are so busy trying to please ourselves and the world that we have little time to please God Almighty! In I John 2:15 we read "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him". So let's get "with it" and chose our friends carefully to the honor and glory of God Almighty! Choose friends who are loving and caring. They can sometimes be the hardest to find but are the easiest to make friends with.

How do you know if someone is a caring person? Some examples of not caring are: 1) drinking to forget all your cares, come what may; 2) backbiting or gossiping; 3) swearing offensively in front of others and/or acting out in anger. Prov. 22:23-24 states "Make no friendship with an angry man. . .Lest thou learn his ways and get a snare to thy soul". But a friend or a caring

person is a helping person as Job tells his "friends" in Job 16:4-5, 21 "I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my stead, I could heap up words against you and shake my head at you. But I would strengthen you. . .plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbor!".

So what am I suggesting, disowning every friend who falls into sin? Of course not, unless your friend leads a life of unbelief. II Cor. 6:14 tells us "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers". But rather you must be a witness to your friend. Be frank, but tactful and remind your friend when he falls into sin that he too is to be a witness for his God and Savior Jesus Christ. If he tells you to get off it because you are just a big sinner yourself, tell him you know you are and would appreciate it if he would kindly and caringly counsel you when you fall into sin. If your "friend" is not repentant, you are "unequally yoked". You must "dare to be a Daniel and dare to stand alone". Don't let yourself be influenced by the peer pressure of your friends. You want to look good in God's eyes and those of your true friends.

How many friends does a person need? Rather the question should be, who are your friends? In Psalm 119:63 we read "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts". We all have our best friends and even those who "rub us the wrong way". But it is our Christian obligation to show Christian love through **acts** of kindness to **all** our brethren. Don't ignore or snub those who are different than you or just don't seem to "fit in". If someone is left out, try your best to include them and suggest ways to help them fit in if possible. And, if someone snubs you, forgive them. By returning good for evil to a fellow Christian, his conscience should be pricked into asking God and you for his forgiveness.

What can you do to gain closer friendships? For starters, smile a lot and don't be a complainer. Psalm 149:5 tells us "Let the saints be joyful". A person would much rather be uplifted than burdened with all our complaints. The Israelites were burdensome to the Lord as Num. 11:1 tells us. "And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord". Be concerned about others by asking about them and offering to help when there is a need. Don't talk continuously about yourself as this depicts a selfish and boring person who cares only about himself. Never say anything behind someone's back but always be honest, straightforward and never say something hurtful even if it is true. Best of all, pray about it. Pray that God gives you true friends and that you will be a true friend. Let us pray as Paul in Phil. 1:3-5 "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowhsip in the gospel".

"The vessels of mercy are first seasoned with affliction, and then the wine of glory is poured in. Thus we see afflictions are not prejudicial, but beneficial, to the saints."

Thomas Watson

Critique

WISE OPINIONS

by Mitch Dick

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of words.
Ecclesiastes 5:2, 3.

Guard Thou my thoughts, I Thee implore,
And of my lips keep Thou the door;
Nor leave my sinful heart to stray
Where evil footsteps lead the way.
Psalter No. 396, v. 4

In my last Critique I considered with you opinions. These, you recall, are not convictions of the truth God has given us in the Bible. Rather, they are judgments we make about whatever seems true to us. These "seem-like" truths are, as we noted, not a matter of the doctrines of the church concerning our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, nor are they of any matter concerning His judgment, mercy and faith.

The Profit and Responsibility of Making Wise Opinions

Taking heed unto our opinions can, however be profitable for us. We are, after all, always Christians, no matter whether we "talk spiritual talk" or talk baseball. And we believe, do we not, that the admonition: Let your light so shine that they (the whole world) may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven, (Matthew 5:6) applies to us always. We take heed, there fore, to good sound doctrine and to ourselves and words and deeds (I Timothy 4:16) in light of that doctrine all the time. We do this that we might, all week and in all of our activity, be faithful to and consistent with the Christian and Protestant Reformed Christian confession we make in church every Sunday.

In light of the above conviction, namely, that it is important for us to take inventory of all that we say (how we take inventory would be a matter of opinion), let us in this article look at opinions from the perspective of wisdom. This will mean that we deal with opinions as to their **content** and as to **when** we should make them.

Wisdom, we read, Proverbs 8:6-11 speaks excellent things, right things, and truth. If we are concerned always about wisdom, then we will be wise always. Then we will always be concerned, in church or on the beach, to speak the excellent and right truth of God. And at the same time, knowing the tongue is an unruly evil (James 3!) we will be concerned to hear, to think, to ponder **before** we speak. It is wisdom so to wait and consider before we say the sky is gray or the Church has one foundation. There is a wise time to keep silence, and a wise time to speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7).

Let me just underscore the importance of our making wise and truthful

opinions. The ninth commandment commands that we not bear false witness. We shall not bear false witness against our neighbor. We also may not bear false witness of anything. As Rev. Ron Hanko explains in the June 1st, 1987, issue of the Standard Bearer, "The ninth commandment means to forbid all forms of deception, lying, and evil speaking in forbidding the gross sin of lying under oath (Perjury) . . . .Obviously, the positive calling to speak the truth is something that applies in every area of life (in our making of opinions, too! MD) and not just in our civic responsibilities. We must, as Scripture teaches, **be of** the truth (John 18:37) and **walk in it** (II John 4)." Among the things the Lord hates is a false witness (Proverbs 6:19). Making wise opinions is crucial to keeping God's holy commandment. It is one of the many ways the Lord has given us to abide in His love and truth.

Opinions: Full of Wisdom

The excellent things that wisdom speaks are those things which are plain to all creatures, namely this: the LORD He is God and there is none else besides. The Hebrew of Proverbs 8 gives us to read literally that these excellent things are those things which are "out in front." Most of the time the expression is used in the Old Testament it refers to one who is out in front of others and/or a ruler of the people. When Wisdom speaks excellent things it is, therefore, speaking of none other that Himself, Jesus Christ, the ruler and captain out in front of and over His people.

Right things are truths of the righteousness and justice of God. Solomon would instruct his son in wisdom, justice, judgment and in right things, that is, in the righteousness of God.

And the truth which wisdom speaks is every word by which we live which proceedeth out of the mouth of God. We have all the truth of God written and preserved infallibly for us in the Bible.

That is the content of Wisdom, and so, of our conviction. But how can we apply this Biblical speech to our grocery or job or narthex or street or classroom talk?

Surely this application will have to do with what the Bible says: "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt. . ." (Colossians 4:6). In fact, if we look at the context of this verse we see that beautiful, graceful speech seasoned with truth (my opinion of one of the ways salt can be understood) is one of the means whereby we make wise use of our time. We are wise in our speech toward them who do not believe as we do. Also amongst ourselves ought we to guard our tongue that all might be done for edification (cf. Romans 14:9; 15:2).

So I tell Joe at work "I slept real well last night. . .I am truly thankful (aren't we?!) for God's gift of sleep" (SEE Psalm 127:2). And Mary tells her Mom "I dislike this rainy weather, but I trust that God is guiding each rain drop in His wonderful providence." Or the Christian-fighter-of-the-faith shopper will say to someone in the aisle, redeeming the time with her opinions: "Food prices sure are high nowadays. But I am sure it is all part of God's plan to make His people better stewards. The price of everything looked at from this perspective is just high enough so that I and my family might have what we need and not too little or too much (Our prayer: "Feed me with food convenient for me. . .Proverbs 30:8)."

Opinions: Wisely Timed

Wise opinions are made with an eye on excellent things, the right things, and the truth of God Who is sovereign over all creation and every situation in that creation. They are also made at the right time. Regarding the wise timing of our opinions, we ought to be discerning about **how often** we make them and on what occasions we make them.

Heaven, we know, is a place filled with the songs of angels and of men. And the new heavens and earth also will redound with songs of praise to God. Now, however, it seems (my opinion) that there is much more **noise** on this earth than there is beautiful song. The wise opinion-maker seeks not to add to this noise. His faucet, so to speak, is fixed by grace: he will not leak and drip his words all the time and all over the place. And all his water, even his opinions, is good to drink. One more use of the metaphor and then I will drop it before I get too crude. In a word, the wise and God-glorifying man always being more quick to **hear** than he is to speak (see James 1:19 where the context is being on guard against anger), is first busy in the faith-work of assuring that He is "tapped in" to the right source (the Word) and turned on by the right Spirit of God.

You and I want to speak wise opinions? We must then learn to be silent, to shut up before the LORD (Zechariah 2:13). It is a fact: we can not hear God and others right if we are often or always moving our jaws. Even if we are convinced that what we have to say is very important, let us try at least once a day to hear the other guy's very important or not so very important words first. We are probably wiser then, in general, if we work on cutting down **the amount**, the sheer amount of opinions we express. This, especially if it has been a while since we thought about or even studied a topic before we added, for our opinion's sake only, to the drivel of our opinionated and unconvicted society.

As far as time goes, we are wise also in discerning **what occasions** are good ones for opinions. We are wise when we refrain, for example, from speaking opinions because we should be speaking our Christian belief instead. And we are wise also when we discern when it is proper to utter this opinion and not that or that and not this. For example, it may not be wise to talk about the Tigers if you know the one with whom you talk watches too many games to be called a "moderate" fan - he is a fan-addict, and ought to be led by your conversation to fill and enjoy his time in moderation in other pursuits than watching baseball.

As we can see, all kinds of considerations are involved when we consider even making a peep from our lips. If we are in our homes or with friends who are of the same faith in Jesus Christ, we speak in the love and knowledge of the fellowship of saints. If we are amongst unbelievers, or even amongst Christians who yet err in doctrine and walk, then we speak in the love of the **hope** of that fellowship of saints. We do not with our opinions seek to be "idle", simply to fill time, nor do we seek to argue with people. But there must be a height and breadth and depth even to our opinions which is wise in content and in every situation. And this speech of ours must be driven, compelled, "hurried along", and yet soberly paced by His love (Ephesians 3:17-19).

This leads to our next article

concerning our reasons for making opinions and the manner in which we make them. For we may be the wisest of opinion-makers, perhaps; we might say just the right thing at the right time. And yet if there is no love, there is no benefit, no glory given to God, and only tongues dripping poison.

God's Sovereignty - The Free Will of Man

by Rev. John A. Heys

Nowhere in our King James version of the Bible, young people, will you find the word sovereign or the word sovereignty. This does not mean that the truth of God's sovereignty is not clearly set forth in the Scriptures. From Genesis 1:1 through Revelation 22:21 the Scriptures teach emphatically that God is sovereign. His name Lord, which in the Hebrew is Adonai, and His name Jehovah, which means I AM, loudly declare that God is sovereign.

That God is sovereign means that He reigns in a most absolute sense over all creation and over every creature. It means that He not only rules over all things, but that He has the unquestioned right to rule as He pleases, and is not ruled in any way or at any time by anyone. He is the King over all kings, the Lord over all lords. He is the I Am Who depends on no one, but also may not be criticized or accused of doing anything wrong.

Often the word sovereign is used to mean that He has power to rule over all things. The word, however, means that He has the **right** to rule every creature. Look the word up in your dictionary. You will find that it means chief or highest; supreme in authority; independent of and unlimited in any way by any one else. Notice the word reign in this word sovereign. Take heed also to the fact that the first part, the "Sove" in this word, does mean super. God's is a super reign over all things physical and spiritual.

All that happens takes place because He willed it to happen. No creature decides what God will do, should have done or must do. No creature may even think that God made a mistake. No one decides what He will do, or has the right to judge what He did. He is King. He is Lord in the most comprehensive and complete sense of the word. And, young people, you cannot praise Him any more fully than to say that He is God and God alone.

Take heed to this truth and hold on tightly to it. For it was the defence of this truth that brought us into being as a separate denomination of churches. We in 1924 maintained God's sovereignty over against a doctrine that in its implication denied it. I say by "implication" because this doctrine of God's sovereignty was not openly and literally denied. Man's free will was maintained in a doctrine which maintained that man's will has power over God's will. In His grace God offers salvation to all who hear the preaching:

and man then determined whether God's will is carried out, so in this sense God is ruled by man's will.

In 1953 we were again confronted with a theory that denies God's sovereignty. By some it was taught that God promises us conditionally that He will give us salvation, if we will first save ourselves from our unbelief. It was stated that "God promises every one of you, that if you believe, you will be saved." We must act before God can and will. We must save ourselves from unbelief, and then He will save us from our sins and the curse. It was also taught that "Our act of conversion is a prerequisite" if we are going to enter the kingdom of heaven. We decide, not God. We rule Him, and He does not in the sphere of salvation rule us.

And remember that all this actually started with Adam. His first sin was that of saying that God had no right to rule him and tell him what he might eat, and what he might not eat. He set out in a foolish attempt to rule God rather than bow down before God's rule. He believed Satan's lie that man could be equal to God. He could be like God and not be under His rule. He could reign with God and not have God reign over him. In fact, he could reign over God, trample His law under foot and lift himself above God. Man must not let God be sovereign. Man must strive to be a god and rule his own life the way he pleases. And every time that we sin, we deny God's sovereignty. He remains sovereign, but we deny Him the right to it by our sinful deeds.

Now as far as the free will theory is concerned, this doctrine clearly denies God's sovereignty. And unless you young people reject that universally taught error, you will, when you take our places pretty soon as the fathers and mothers, ministers, elders or deacons in our churches, bring to an end the faithful defence of our churches to that truth of God's sovereignty. You will make our churches deny God's sovereign grace. And I would like to show this to you in this article.

In only one way can we say that the natural man has a free will. He is free to sin! He is freed from his love to God wherein man was created. The natural man is not free to fulfill the smallest condition to his salvation. Until God has already begun salvation in him, man cannot have the slightest desire for it. ALL of our salvation depends upon God's sovereign will. And He gives, to all those whom He eternally and sovereignly chose in Christ, the desire for salvation. There are no prerequisites to our salvation that we have to fulfill. A prerequisite is a thing required before something happens. The "pre" in this word means before. And our desire for salvation and faith in Christ and His cross comes **after** we have been born again and not before salvation has been begun in us.

Listen to Jesus rather than to those who do not understand His teaching. He said in John 3:3 that "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." How then can he will to be one of its citizens? That he does not see the kingdom means that he knows nothing about it and cannot see any advantage to being in it. Tell me, What child was ever born because he wanted it? Who is born again, that is, who is born spiritually because he had the spiritual life to see it? That is nonsense! If a man already has spiritual life before he is born again, how can you even speak of him being born again? He is spiritually alive. No,

we must maintain that truth of Scripture that man is born totally depraved, that is, completely, entirely, one hundred percent depraved! A child that does not yet exist cannot desire to be born. One who has not yet been born with the life of the kingdom of heaven cannot want to become alive as one of its citizens. As surely as it depends upon God's sovereign will whether a child will be born to a certain man and woman, so it depends completely upon God's sovereign will as to who will be born again with the life of the kingdom of heaven. If salvation depends upon a spiritually dead man fulfilling a condition or prerequisite, there just will be no man saved.

Not only was man created to be a servant of God, but he became a slave of sin. Did God not tell Adam that the **day** that he sinned, he would die? Well, he did die spiritually that day. He did want to escape the punishment of sin that he deserved; but he did not want to be freed from his sinful nature, and from the power of sin that was over him. He did not want his will to be completely under God's will. Why, when God asked him, whether he had sinned, he tried to lay the blame on God. He said that the woman that **God gave him** gave him of the tree. It was all God's fault. He did not give him the right kind of wife. He questioned God's sovereignty, finding fault with what God did to protect himself in what he willed and did. He did not ask for mercy and grace to forgive him and deliver him from his sinful will. He did not say: Rule me and make me able to bow before Thy sovereign will.

Do you not see how wrong the whole idea is that fallen man has a will that is free to "accept" Christ? Do you not see that God's will must decide who is going to believe, and therefore to whom it is that He will give a new spiritual life that can believe and want salvation? God's sovereign will must and does decide which spiritually dead men will believe when they hear the gospel preached. Man's will is not free to decide whether a change will come over him. God's sovereign will must change man.

Turn to Ephesians 2:8-10. How can one, in light of this passage, teach that faith is a condition, and conversion is a prerequisite man must fulfill to be saved? Plainly God says here that faith is His gift to us, not our gift to Him that fulfills the requirement of our salvation. What is more, plainly God says here that we are **His** workmanship and have been created in Christ Jesus. What creature in the beginning asked to be created? Before it is created the object does not exist. And what does not exist has no will, and surely not a free will, to want to come into being. Still more, here God tells us that we are created UNTO good works, and thus unto believing; and turning from evil works is not because we believed or performed the act of conversion.

Man does not have, before God begins salvation in him, a will that is free to "accept" Christ but a totally depraved will that can only reject Christ. Men willed Christ's crucifixion and mocked Him. But take note of Acts 2:37. During Peter's preaching some **were** pricked in their hearts. God pricked them by the Spirit of Christ. They did not prick their own hearts Something happened to them. It was not what they happened to do that brought such a tremendous change over them. God's sovereign will decided who would believe Peter's words.

There can be no gospel invitation, an offer which the sovereign God makes and whereby he asks spiritually dead sinners to let Christ come into their hearts. God is sovereign not foolish. Who would go to a cemetery and invite those in the graves to accept life?

The sovereign God with His super reign over all creatures does not have a grace that depends upon spiritually dead men to get it to work. God does not depend upon us in any way and to any degree. And if God invites and pleads with men to let Him save them, then His sovereignty stops right there, and He does not have absolute rule. He does not get His way but is ruled by dead men.

This is a very serious matter, young people. Insist that those not yet born again have a free will, and you place the sinner above God. God depends upon man. The philosophy of man having a free will is free from glorifying God and instead glorifies man.

Current Events and Comments

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR HIS UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

by David Rau

Ah yes, another Thanksgiving Day. A couple of days off from school, a huge meal, maybe some shopping, or just a nice little break of our routine. Is this what we are giving thanks for? Could it be for the many, many material blessings the Lord has given us? Why do we set aside one day each year to give thanks, and what are we giving thanks for?

Each year the world around us celebrates Thanksgiving. They are not quite sure who they are thanking, but they know what they are thankful for. They are thankful for their possessions, their health, and their wealth. In short, they are thankful only when they receive the things that they want. Does this characterize our thankfulness? Are we thankful especially when we get what we want?

Our thanksgiving must not rise out of anything as shallow as that. We would surely have no hope when the Lord sends adversity upon us. Our thanksgiving must rise from the joy in our hearts because God has called us, wretched sinners, out of the darkness of sin, into his marvelous light. We have not earned or deserved this — it is the gift of God. Through the suffering and death of Christ we are rescued from the hell of our sins. What a reason to give thanks! Material possessions should fade into obscurity in the light of God's great gift: His son, Jesus Christ. It should not matter what we do or do not have. Riches, social position, clothes, and cars all are absolutely nothing when compared to salvation through Christ.

Is that what characterizes our

Thanksgiving Day? One day set aside to truly thank God? It is not wrong to set aside one day to thank God in a special way. It would be wrong, however, to thank God on this day, and this day alone. Our very lives should be a Thanksgiving Day to God. The world should be able to see the joy in our souls bubbling forth. Our thanksgiving should show in everything we do. Then, no matter what the Lord sends us, we can give thanks.

God may try us, send us poverty, or touch our lives with death. It may hurt us, but we can still give thanks through our tears, because our thanksgiving is based on something that can not be taken away from us — the rock of Jesus Christ. Then we can pray with the apostle Paul, "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift" (II Cor. 9:15).

The Lord has given unto us many material blessings. We probably have more than any generation in history. We must thank and praise the Lord for these gifts. We must use them tc further honor and glorify God. But if material possessions alone comprises our Thanksgiving Day, what would happen if God would remove them tomorrow? We would be crushed. Daniel faced such a thing (Daniel 6). He had position and wealth in the kingdom. The king passed a law that all people must pray only to him for 30 days. Daniel knew he was facing certain death, yet he, "kneeled on his knees three times a day, and prayed, and **gave thanks** before his God as he did aforetime" (verse 10). That is true thanksgiving. That is thanksgiving that arises from God's unspeakable gift. Ephesians 5:20 charges us, "giving thanks always for **all things** unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ".

We give thanks so imperfectly here on this earth. So often we give thanks for the wrong things for the wrong reasons. We must keep our minds and our lives based on God's unspeakable gift to us. If we do that, we will be blessed on our Thanksgiving Day. We will have a very small foretaste of heaven. That is what heaven will be like: a perfect eternal Thanksgiving Day where we will thank and honor God. Base your Thanksgiving on God's unspeakable gift. THANKS BE TO GOD!

Grant, Almighty God, that as Thou seest us laboring under so much weakness, yea, with our minds so blinded that our faith falters at the smallest perplexities, and almost fails altogether, -O grant, that by the power of Thy Spirit we may be raised up above this world, and learn more and more to renounce our own counsels, and so come to Thee, that we may stand fixed on our watch tower, ever hoping through Thy power, for whatever Thou hast promised us, though Thou shouldst not immediately make it manifest to us, that Thou hast faithfully spoken; and may we thus give full proof of our faith and patience, and proceed in the course of our warfare, until at length we ascend above all watch towers into that blessed rest where we shall no more watch with an attentive mind, but see face to face, in Thine image, whatever can be wished, and whatever is needful for our perfect happiness through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Calvin on Habakkuk 2:1

From The Pastor's Study
THE ANTITHESIS

by Rev. C. Hanko

Antithesis is a very important word to remember. What is meant by it is even more important. And its application to our lives is of immeasurable importance.

You will not find the word itself in the Bible, but the idea runs as an unmistakable thread throughout the Scriptures.

The word is derived from two words: thesis and anti. The word thesis comes from the Greek word that means: to place, to set. It is the reality that is an essential part of our lives. Anti, as you know, means: overagainst, opposite, in contrast to, or in conflict with. Thus life has its realities, but also that which is opposed to those realities. God has set the **thesis** in our lives, and has also set overagainst the thesis the opposite, the antithesis. As a result we live an antithetical life in this world.

God called into being the thesis and the antithesis already on the first day of creation.

He created the light, but He also made the darkness. The light is the thesis; the darkness, the absence of light, is the antithesis.

God created the day, but He also made the night.

He called into existence the color white, the combination of colors, and He made the black, the absence of all color.

God made the warmth, the presence of heat, but He also made the cold, the absence of heat.

Scripture teaches us that God is light. In Him is no antithesis, no darkness whatever. He is life, death is foreign to Him. He is the Holy One, Righteous, far removed from all that is evil. God experiences an unmixed joy of intimate covenant life as the three persons within the divine trinity. From Him radiate only light, life, blessedness, grace and beauty. It is in His light that we see the light. In Him alone is true communion of life, true fellowship, true joy, which is unspeakable and full of glory. God is the THESIS.

From whence, then, the opposite? From whence the darkness of sin and death? Is the devil another power that rises up next to God to oppose and dethrone Him? Are there two powers at work, independent from each other, one to bless and one to destroy? Is the course of history a struggle, a dualism between God as the good power and Satan with his host as an evil power? The very thought is dishonoring to God!

We know from Scripture that God created the devil and his host as good angels, who fell. When they fell God did not immediately destroy or annihilate them, but even as their fall serves God's purpose, so also throughout history Satan and all the powers of darkness serve toward the coming of God's kingdom and the glory of His

Name. God declares: "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." (Isaiah 45:7) Again in Amos 3:6: "Shall there be an evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" See also Prov. 19:21, Isaiah 46:10, Acts 4, 27, 28, etc.

God also placed this antithesis in the garden of Eden, as is evident from the two trees that God made. The tree of life was the thesis, the tree of knowledge of good and evil was the antithesis. Adam stood as God's friend-servant in paradise, capable of knowing, loving and serving God with his whole being. He was king of the earthly creation, lord over all he surveyed. But his kingship required that he devote himself and the entire kingdom to the praise and glory of his God. This became evident in the two trees. The tree of life was God's yes. freely Adam and Eve might eat of that tree as living out of God's hand. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was God's no, in obedience and self-surrender to his God Adam might not eat of that tree. Therefore the tree of life required of our first parents the response: "Yes, I will freely eat from the hand of my God." And the other tree demanded the response, "No, I will not eat of that, for it is my joy to do Thy will, O God." It was the calling of Adam and Eve to do this even in the face of temptation.

You know what happened. Satan, God's antagonist, introduced the lie into paradise. He accused God of not meaning what He said; Adam and Eve would not die even though they ate of that tree. He accused God of suppressing His servants, knowing that if they ate of the forbidden tree, they would be like Him, to distinguish for themselves the right and the wrong, to be independent from God as to their personal choice of what they would do and not do. Adam and Eve, well aware of the deception, listened, experienced the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes aroused within them, proudly rebelled against their God and joined in friendship with the devil. They sinned and died.

This brought out the thesis and the antithesis even more sharply than before.

Overagainst God's sovereignty stands man's rebellion.

Overagainst God's holiness stands man's unholiness, sin.

Overagainst God's justice stands man's injustice.

Overagainst God's truth stands the lie.

Overagainst the love of God stands the hatred of man against God and his fellow man.

Overagainst God's blessing stands the curse upon man and all creation.

This thesis and antithesis stands out even more sharply when God comes to paradise, seeks out his rebellious servants, calls them by name, and assures them that, in spite of their unfaithfulness, He keeps covenant forever, promising them the Savior Jesus Christ, to be born as the Seed of the woman, the Head of His elect, given to Him of the Father.

Thus we have the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

There is the elect church, and the world of reprobation, evident already in Cain and Abel.

There is the church as a shining light, testifying of God's sovereign power, as God above all, blessed forever, and at the same time a witness against the world of unbelief that

rejects God and worships Satan

That characterizes the battle of the ages!

Not as if Satan works apart from God, an evil power fighting beyond God's control. So that Satan gains a victory by killing Abel and deceiving the world before the flood into all forms of evil, but that God has a victory by sending the flood. Not as if Satan repeatedly wins a victory, but God must counteract, reaching its climax at the cross. Then the outcome of the battle is still a doubtful issue. That is dualism, but not the antithesis. Perish the thought!

No, in the battle of the ages Satan can only carry out the counsel of God, in spite of all his wicked schemes and maneuverings. The devil is foolish, but exactly as a sinner is foolish in surrendering himself to the power of sin. The devil tries in vain to wipe out God's Name and cause from the earth. He does his utmost, even until the Man of sin, the Antichrist exalts himself as if he were God. But the fact is, God is the Thesis, the devil forms the antithesis. Nations may rage, and people may imagine vain things, but through all their efforts they only serve God's purpose to reveal to the full His power and majesty, His sovereignty and glory, His mercy and His grace in Christ Jesus, world without end!

We stand, as it were, in the battle field where the battle of all ages is being fought. The lines are sharply drawn. You are of the party of the living God, or you belong to the forces of darkness. You are either fighting the battle of faith, or you are opposing God and His cause upon the earth. You are fighting the battle of faith, or you have joined the ranks of the forces of darkness. It is either. . .or, there is no gray area! None whatever! You are for the cause of the living God, or you are against it. Make up your mind where you stand!

God teaches us in His Word, "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness (lawlessness)? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (II Cor. 6:14-18)

The apostle Paul expresses his personal conviction by saying: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. 1:21)

Suppose you say: For to me to live is money, prosperity, riches. Then to die is what? "For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26)

Suppose you say: For to me to live is to be a success in the world, to make a name for myself even after I am gone. Then to die? "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue forever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names, nevertheless man being in honor abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish." (Psalm 49:11, 12)

Suppose you say: For to me to live is to have a good time, attend dancing,

enjoy movies, even some that are X rated or PG rated. Then to die? As a man sows, so shall he reap. How can you feel at home in heaven, since there is nothing like that there?

Suppose you say: I need the approval of my peers more than I need the approval of God, even when that involves experimenting with liquor or drugs. Then to die? Jesus says: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 10:32, 33)

Antithesis is a very important word to remember. What it means is even more important. And its application to our lives is of immeasurable importance.

The Calling of a Minister/Teacher to Instruct in Light of Hosea 4:6

by Mitch Dick

In a sermon once our minister included as port of his text Proverbs 9:10. We read there that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." Our minister noted that it is evident in this passage that knowledge, understanding, and wisdom are closely related. And yet, he said, we must note the subtle and not so subtle distinctions among them.

Knowledge is the broadest term of the three. It is, basically, all facts which our renewed minds take in. Knowledge is the raw material, so to speak, of life. Understanding goes a step further. Having taken in some facts, gained a little knowledge, the man of understanding will do something **right** with that knowledge. A fanatic, on the other hand, who may have a little or a lot of head-knowledge (not spiritual knowledge), but who has no understanding, will always do something **wrong** with the knowledge he has. Of the three: knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, wisdom is that spiritual gift which puts a heart into all this. Wisdom in a man causes that man not only to know God and to understand God, but it causes him to **love** God. One grows in this wisdom by grace and in the light of God's eternal and living Word Who has come in the flesh. The wise man, therefore, is the man who, with whatever knowledge he has, uses that knowledge to do what is right out of love for God.

I introduce this essay on Hosea 4:6 with these distinctions of certain terms. As pointed out, however, we must remember the close relation of the three. All three are spiritual fruits of the Holy Spirit of God working in the heart of man. And knowledge of the holy is also understanding and wisdom. And if one fruit is lacking it is seen that all are lacking. When there is no true knowledge of God, therefore there will be no understanding or wisdom. And when God says in Hosea 4:6 "My people are destroyed for lack of

knowledge'' also lack of understanding and wisdom are to be seen as the reason for destruction. For lack of knowledge, for nothing less than lack of **everything** spiritual, the axe is laid to the root of the tree.

Israel in the days of Hosea was no better off than when it first followed Jeroboam to escape the purportedly severe yoke of Rehoboam, the then king of Judah. For Jeroboam II, who was one of the kings in Hosea's days, ''departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin'' (II Kings 14:24). And the other six kings of Israel to whom Hosea prophesied were all evil as well. Only Hoshea, the last of the kings of Israel (after whose reign Israel was led into captivity by the Assyrians) had the less than honorable distinction of doing less evil than the kings before him (II Kings 17:2).

The first Jeroboam, we recall, had set up a system of idol worship; his, and all Israel's was calculated and organized idolatry. Instead of obeying the second commandment of Jehovah God, Jeroboam and Israel would obey their own gods and make golden calves of them and claim that in **them** was deliverance (I Kings 12:28). And to avoid any kind of doings with Judah and true temple worship, Jeroboam set up convenient places of worship at Dan and Bethel. To retain popularity perhaps, the evil king and also those of Hosea's day who continued in his ways made priests out of those who were not of the sons of Levi, changed God-appointed feast dates, and took it upon themselves to offer sacrifice and to burn incense.

Outwardly then in Israel there was form of worship (II Timothy3:5). There was a form even of the worship which God had required in His law. But inwardly the worship of Israel under the first evil king and also through Hosea's days of prophesy was the worship of false gods (Notice Hosea 2:16 Israel was calling upon Baal and setting aside days to observe their idols!). No wonder, though it **is** a wonder, that God would say through Hosea that He desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings (6:16).

This spiritual apostasy of Israel led, throughout its sordid history, to political alignment with heathen nations. And so, having made friends with the world, moral corruption of every sort crept in. Indeed, seeing it no evil thing to split with their brethren of Judah and Benjamin, Israel was also herself full of strivings and swearing and lying and killing and stealing and committing adultery and blood touching blood (4:1, 2). Having forgotten the love of God, none remembered either the love of the neighbor.

Clearly, the knowledge Israel was lacking was not a knowledge of camels, or tent-making, or astronomy. They lacked the knowledge of **God** (v. 1). For this reason their ignorance was **sin**. God does not judge people upon the basis of their basket-weaving virtues or lack thereof. On the contrary, people are judged upon the basis of their clear sight of the invisible things of him, even upon the basis of the clear sight of God's eternal power and Divinity (Romans 1:20). Because people suppress that knowledge, because all of us are as in Adam and as those of Peter's day, **willingly** ignorant of the Word of God (II Peter 3:5), therefore they and we are without excuse. One might well adapt the definition of ignorance which the Dictionary of New Testament (ed.

Colin Brown) renders: ignorance is the guilty turning away from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (vol. 2, p. 407).

Sinners do not lack knowledge for nought. On the contrary, they are very good at lacking knowledge! In fact, emptying themselves for God's law (which Israel knew in their heads so well), that is **forgetting** His law, the people will gladly fill themselves with the poison of a rejecting spirit and at the same time set their hearts on their iniquity.

Judgment is sure to come. Israel **is** destroyed now in Hosea's day and shall be soon by the captivity. Israel is destroyed, or cut off. They are like the beasts **that perish** (Psalm 49:12, 20). They are like Isaiah the prophet who **is undone** because he and the people in the midst of whom he dwells have unclean lips which are not acceptable to God the King and Lord of Hosts (Isaiah 6:5); the Hebrew verb in each example is the same as in Hosea 4:6. This is what has happened to Israel, and this is what shall be their portion: "The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof: because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. . . . And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him. The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the Lord hath spoken his word." (Isaiah 24:5, 2, 3)

God shall tolerate less the sinners of today than those of Sodom and Gomorrha, and than those also of Hosea's day. Iniquity in the twentieth century abounds. And it is such a damnable age because people now know, more than in Old Testament times, the God of heaven and earth. They know He is the God come in the flesh. They know God in light of the preaching of the Gospel which preaching is a savour of death unto death and of life unto life.

Yet **knowing** this **and rejecting this** knowledge of God sinners today more than ever **lack** knowledge. These know **about** God, yes. But true, heart-felt knowledge, understanding, and wisdom of God through **faith** in God sinners lack. Like Israel, whose glory God would turn to shame, sinners today are raging waves of the sea, foaming out **their own** shame, wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 13).

In light of this past and present distress of lack of knowledge, we who would be teachers and/or ministers tremble. For ministers and teachers are like the priests of Hosea's day in this respect: their calling is to teach the knowledge of God. Levites were not only to put incense before Israel and burnt sacrifice upon the altar, but to teach her God's judgments and law (Deuteronomy 33:10). And like such priests of the Old Testament ministers/teachers should keep knowledge and speak it as messengers of the LORD of Hosts (Malachi 2:7).

"Messengers of the LORD of Hosts" — teachers and ministers are nothing less. This is reason enough for such teachers/preachers to fear. For these shall receive, according to James 3:1, "the greater condemnation", or judgment, according as they bring or do not bring the right message of the true LORD. How frightening it is for God's instructors to know that in the

way of false teachers and lying preachers God destroys and cuts off whole generations of people (Hosea 4:6b: He **forgets** children, seeing the fathers have forgotten the law of God)!

Those who hope to instruct, in the formal, academic sense, but also and especially in the spiritual sense of the word, God's covenant people, must now, therefore, be diligent. If there is any word by which a Protestant Reformed minister/teacher should be characterized in our days it is **diligence**. We must be diligent **in working out**, first, **our own salvation** with fear and trembling lest we think that our instructing will exalt us above others or somehow merit our place in heaven. We must be diligent **in giving** and not begrudging time and energy and counsel, **in serving, in growing** in knowledge, **in communicating** the weighty matters of the law, and above all **in loving** God and the neighbor which is the fulfilling of the law. "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand, let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." (Romans 13:11, 12)

Diligent to teach God's law for the glory of His name and the edification of His people, we who will be so take comfort. For God works in spite of our sin and through the faithful diligence of teachers/ministers instructing God's people. For their instruction is that covenant generations might know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Through **this** instruction the spiritually dead are born again to life eternal. And they are kept in that life in the knowledge and understanding and wisdom of their loving Father. God's children shall lack nothing!

What's Happening

by Nancy Van Baren

THE LORD BLESSED:

-Mr. & Mrs. Ken De Jong of South Holland with a daughter, Melinda Jan.

-Mr. & Mrs. Peter Brummel of Hull with a son, Matthew James.

-Mr. & Mrs. Jim Reitsma of Grandville with a daughter, Charlyn Marie.

-Mr. & Mrs. Ken Smith of Faith with a son, Jason Loren.

-Mr. & Mrs. Leo Meyer of Faith with a daughter, Rori Leigh.

-Mr. & Mrs. Gary Bylsma of Faith with a son, Ryan Mikol.

-Mr. & Mrs. Keith Van Drunen of South Holland with a daughter, Emily Ann.

-Mr. & Mrs. Dan Zandstra of South Holland with a daughter, Michelle Dawn.

-Mr. & Mrs. Wes Koops of Holland with a daughter, Ginelle Ann.

-Mr. & Mrs. Ron Koole of Loveland with a son, Kevin Timothy.

-Mr. & Mrs. Robert Van Baren of South Holland with a son, Bruce Robert.

-Mr. & Mrs. Charles Zandstra of South Holland with a daughter.

-Mr. & Mrs Larry Meulenberg of Hope (Walker) with a son, Joshua David.
-Mr. & Mrs. Tim Tamminga of Randolph with a son by adoption, Jordan Daniel Lee.

MEMBERSHIP TRANSFERS:
-The membership papers of Mr. & Mrs. Gord Lubbers were transferred from Hudsonville to Byron Center PRC.
-Membership papers of Pam Hoekstra were received by Hudsonville, from Hillcrest CRC.
-The membership papers of Mr. & Mrs. David Peterson were transferred from Faith to Byron Center PRC.
-The membership papers of Mr. & Mrs. Peter Boer and three baptized children were transferred from South Holland to Faith PRC.
-Membership papers of Mr. Robert Ensink were transferred from Holland to Wycoff, N.J. PRC.
-Membership papers of Mr. Robert Drnek were transferred from Holland to Hudsonville PRC.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH:
-Dave Holstege, Dave Miedema and Bruce Miedema of Hudsonville made public confession of faith on May 24.
-Sue Ondersma. Bonnie Moelker, Greg Holstege, Keith Noorman, Dan Hanko, Jay Kalsbeek and Bob Moelker of Faith made public confession of faith on June 28.
-Jeff Schmidt of Loveland made public confession of faith on June 14.
-Sharon Hanko of Hope made public confession of faith on June 7.
-Kathy De Vries of Randolph made public confession of faith on June 21.

The three convention speeches are on cassette tapes. These tapes may be ordered at a cost of $4.00. Orders should be sent to the church:

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