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Do you ever look at the clouds? The clouds tell us things about God and His attributes. Can you remember seeing a thunderhead? Remember how it stretched far into the sky? Now think of a clear day with its fine wisps of cirrus clouds floating far above our heads. That is the figure God wants us to think of when we think of the vastness of His truth. His truth is higher than the highest cloud. His truth is so vast that it encompasses all of our lives. Do you live in awe of that truth?

Read the Devotional by Skip Hunter

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Speaking On God's Behalf

by Bruce Miedema

Suffer me a little, and I will shew you that I have yet to speak on God's behalf. I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker. For truly my words shall not be false: he that is perfect in knowledge is with you. *Job 36:2-4*

The author of these words is a little known young man by the name of Elihu. This young man was present when Job was visited by his well known "three friends" who came to encourage him when he was ruined and childless. Elihu heard the speech of Job and the responses made by the "three friends". Not satisfied with the self-righteous speech of Job nor with the inadequate responses of the "three friends", Elihu had chosen to step forward as a critic of both sides. Elihu is upright, sincere and by what he says, he means well.

Elihu thought it good to speak to men for God. He could not have been more correct. He had sat through the speeches of Job and of the "three friends" and no doubt had given considerable thought to the arguments they presented. It could well be that Elihu laid upon his bed at night thinking of the ruin of this great man. He may well have agonized over the loss of his friends (Job's children). And now his heart has the added burden of having heard these "men of wisdom" speak. There upon his bed, Elihu speaks with God. He pours out his heart in prayer with God for men. Now God touches the heart of Elihu and compels him to seek these men for himself. He could not leave the audience of these men without passionately speaking on God's behalf.

Do you speak with men for God? More important, do you speak with God for men?

Preparing Yourself To Give An Answer II

A speech given at Hope PRC's Conference

on Personal Witnessing - April 3, 1993

by Rev. Steven Key

Prepared With An Answer

The text speaks of an answer of your **hope.** That word "hope" encompasses the whole sum of our religion. It includes all our faith and practice as it focuses upon the promise God has set before us. And, indeed, what can better answer all exceptions against your godly life, than the hope that lives within you? If someone asks you, Why do you not live like the rest of the world around you; truly, the reason is this: You have eyes fixed on something beyond your earthly situation. You have the hope, the sure hope, of blessedness in the presence of God, where our Lord Jesus Christ is gone before us. And you know, as we read in I John 3:3, that "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself."

When your eyes are fixed on that city which is holy, into which no unclean thing shall enter, neither whosoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie (Rev. 21:27), then what reason have you to live as the worldly native? The hope we have cannot subsist in the way of the ungodly world; it cannot survive in that polluted air, but would be choked and stifled by it. And therefore we must take another way, we must walk a very different way from that of unbelief.

Don't you see? How much happier, how blessed is he, who is stricken with poverty in the things of this perishing world, who foregoes the pleasures and sins of the ungodly and forsakes fellowship with unbelievers - how much better off he is, than the one who only has this world. It is the comfort and joy of a Christian, to look beyond the abuse he suffers here, to look beyond earthly possessions and wants, and to fix his eyes upon and to answer his critics and questioners with that heavenly hope that lies before him in the way of obedience to the Word of God.

I find much trouble here, many strong assaults of temptations rising from within my sinful flesh as well as from outside. I find a law in my members rebelling against the law of my mind, so much strength of corruption in me, let alone the trials I face because of the infirmities of my dying body. Yet I have a burning, living hope that is unquestionably real! I lift up my head, because my day of redemption draws nigh! That I dare to proclaim to all! I am not ashamed to answer concerning this blessed hope.

But at the same time, let us understand, this apology, this defense of our faith and conduct, must be reasonable and intelligent. That is not to say it must be scientific. What I mean is that our defense must not be some vague and general rambling about some radical and legalistic views, incomprehensible to those who ask. We are not called simply to make some wishy-washy and sentimental testimony that causes unbelievers to think of us that we belong in some state hospital for the irrational and insane. Such testimony means nothing. Though there is indeed a proper level of emotion connected to being a Christian and living in the consciousness of this hope, that fitting emotion is encompassed by true spiritual knowledge.

Not with mere sentiment, but with **power** we give our defense. Again, not power of speech, not power of anger - certainly not that; for as we shall see presently, this answer must also be given in meekness and fear. But with **power** nonetheless, we give answer. For our answer comes from the Word. You and I must be in a position to appeal directly to the Word of God. We must be prepared to defend our conduct and our faith by a vivid demonstration from the Bible of what we believe and how we must live. That is our answer.

That means specifically that we must be prepared by knowing the Scriptures. Next to that **spiritual** preparedness necessary for a Christian witness, we need above all else to be strong in the Scriptures.

Maybe you sometimes get a little sick of this emphasis in the churches (And I trust I am not alone in emphasizing this). But it is a necessary emphasis. I

would like to see us all be more like the Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily. There are far too many among us who are spiritually weak Christians. Their devotional life is nil. Their Bibles are never studied. They seldom, if ever, lift up a fervent and meaningful prayer to Jehovah. Even coming to church they hear the Word read, immediately slap the Bible back in the pew, and give little attention to the preaching. Those things give a partial explanation why there is such a lack of readiness to give an answer to the world.

To be ready with an answer is not to be ready with an **opinion.** To be ready with an answer is to be ready with an answer from the Bible! And for that we must **live out of the Scriptures.** We should all be able to explain **from the Bible** our doctrinal positions to a certain degree. But what about certain positions of life style? Are you able to show from Scripture why such and such an activity is out of place for us, even when that activity may be widely practiced in Christian circles - movie watching, dancing, labor unions, divorce and remarriage, and so on and so forth? Why do we bring children into this world? And why so many?! Why do mothers devote themselves to their calling at home to care for the needs of their children? Many are woefully unprepared to give such answers. Others make clear by their walk of life that they don't **want** such answers. Still others do harm to the truth of Scripture and the cause of Christ when they give the **wrong** answers which are only answers of opinion and not of the Word.

We must be those in whom the Bible lives. Don't misunderstand, I do not expect, nor does this text require, that every one of you reach the level of an Apostle in your knowledge. There are different degrees of gifts, different levels of knowledge, differing abilities. But what is required is that we are able to wield the sword of the Scriptures against unbelief according to the gifts and opportunities God has given us. That is not an option to you. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer."

Finally, there must be preparation also in our **attitude** toward those who may be unbelieving, those who would question us.

Prepared With A Proper Attitude

I Peter 3:15 speaks of giving our answers with meekness and fear. Although not readily seen in our King James Version, this is a matter that receives emphasis in the text. Be ready with an answer, **but** do so with meekness and fear. In a sense, the meaning here is much the same as what Paul writes in Colossians 4:6, when he says, "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

This requires prayer before speaking. The idea, obviously, is that we usually would not answer with meekness and fear. Especially when the questions come in the form of mocking and taunting, it would be quite natural for us to become defensive and to answer with indignation and defiance. As when debating any subject in which we know in our minds that we are right, there is always the danger of becoming proud and boastful in our defense. Maybe even a subtle pride is revealed by our expressions and the way we speak. We might be inclined to take a "better than thou" attitude towards those who ask us, as if our walk and our spiritual understanding was a matter of our own accomplishment rather than the fruit of God's mercy and grace. Peter admonishes us to guard ourselves against such an attitude. For such an attitude is sure to destroy the very answer we are giving.

. . . what is required is that we are able to wield the sword of the Scriptures against unbelief according to the gifts and opportunities God has given us. That is not an option to you.

Far different from an attitude of pride, meekness is that attitude by which we point our questioner **beyond** ourselves to our God Who is the Author of all our faith and godly life, and Who alone is worthy of all praise and glory.

Fear, also, is required of us in our answer. That does not refer to a fear of our questioners, you understand. Rather, in answering those who question us, we give our answer in the consciousness of God's presence. Fear is used here, as many places in the Bible, in the sense of reverence. Divine things are never to be spoken of in a light, half-hearted way; but with reverence and sincerity. To fear God in our answer is to have in our minds an earnest desire to honor God, and to walk before Him in the truth and to the glory of His name. For in the consciousness of His fellowship, we are assured that He is also with us accomplishing His purpose in the answers we give.

There is one other matter to which I must call your attention in connection with this idea of the preparation of a proper attitude. This is not a matter set forth in I Peter 3:15, although certainly implied;

but a matter taught us in other settings in the New Testament. I speak now of the fact that personal witnessing or giving an answer of our hope must be given with a genuine concern for the spiritual welfare of the one to whom we witness.

We speak the things of salvation, the good news which is the gospel. We speak as those who have been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light. We do well to consider those profound words of the Apostle Paul in this connection, the words found in Romans 9:1ff: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

That God has saved us is certainly not a matter for pride and self-exaltation, but for deep humility. Our attitude needs drastic change, if we look at those whom God places in the pathway of our life and have some sort of cold-blooded "who-cares" attitude toward their spiritual state. The attitude expressed by the Apostle Paul, though profound beyond description, is the expression of the love for the neighbor which is second table of the law. This attitude, which is only proper and necessary in personal witnessing, involves a sharp God-consciousness and a sensitive sin-consciousness. It is practical Christianity - which is sensitive to God's glory and the spiritual needs of the neighbor. This is true love for God, and for the neighbor.

Be ready always - also with this spiritual attitude - to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you. For so God is pleased to accomplish His purpose in our personal relationships with those who are at present unbelieving.

We must understand that for all our testimony and witnessing to those who are unbelieving, the response of that person is outside our control. Our heart's desire, as was Paul for his fellow Israelites, is that they might be saved. But God's purpose is sovereign and His wisdom immeasurable. He saves those upon whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth. That is the clear truth of Romans 9:18.

When a person comes face to face with the Word of God, whether under the preaching of that Word, or the testimony of the Word by the saints in their daily walk, that person is moved to respond. Some will respond negatively, fulfilling God's sovereign purpose. But there are also others. There are others who are also unbelieving, and yet whom God has chosen as objects of His love. There are elect who have not yet been called out of darkness. And for them the preaching of the Word is the power of God unto salvation. But the preaching does not occur in a vacuum; it doesn't occur alone. In the power of the preaching you are given the call and the power to walk as pilgrims and strangers. In such a way, and only in that way, will you be questioned for the hope that lives within you. And by those means, the preaching and the living witness of the power of preaching in **you**, God is pleased to gather His Church.

Your personal witness is crucially important to our churches. Do you stand in the service of God's cause and purpose? Then live in the power of Christian hope, as a Christian pilgrim and stranger. And be ready always to give an answer in meekness and fear to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.

Rev. Key is the pastor of Randolph Prot. Ref. Church.

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Watching Daily At My Gates

by Skip Hunter

March 1 — **I Kings 18:1-6** Could we stand as Obadiah did? Do we stand as Obadiah did? Are we willing to do whatever is needed for the cause of God's kingdom? Obadiah risked his life to save one hundred prophets of God. Would we risk anything at all to defend God's name in the world or even among our friends? We may never be put in Obadiah's position, but we all have the calling to defend the Word of God. Do we do it? Sing or read Psalter 105 especially stanzas 1-4.

March 2 — **Proverbs 1:1-9** The book of Proverbs is overflowing with instruction for the child of God and especially young people. We see the purpose in the second verse. We are to know wisdom and instruction. The wisdom which we must know is the fear of the Lord. We must seek after instruction daily. This instruction is that found only in true wisdom which is Christ. Following after this kind of wisdom will give to us a beauty found nowhere else. Young people, do not be foolish in this matter. Foolishness leads to destruction, but wisdom leads to glory. Sing or read Psalter 149 especially stanzas 1, 3, 5, and 6.

March 3 — **Romans 14:16-23** We often get into disputes over the physical things of this life. Verse 17 reminds us that the kingdom of God is not made of physical things but rather spiritual attributes of "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Are these your delight, child of God? Is your life righteous with regard to your actions to those around you? Are you at peace with the brother? Can others see the joy of the Holy Ghost in you? After reading these questions, ask God in prayer daily to give you these three attributes. Sing or read Psalter 325.

March 4 — **John 18:28-40** Pilate asked the question, "What is truth?" He did not know the answer even though the answer was standing before him. Jesus was the truth even as He Himself had confessed in John 14:6. Do you know what truth is, people of God? Do you ask Pilate's foolish question on occasion? For the next few days we will examine this question and see what the Bible has to tell us about truth. Sing or read Psalter 42

March 5 — **Genesis 24:10-15; 24-28** The account here is that of Abraham's faithful servant Eliezer seeking a wife for Isaac. This was done at Abraham's command so that Isaac would have a God-fearing wife and not one of the heathen. Eliezer, when he realized that God had blessed his mission, bowed his head and prayed to Jehovah God of truth. He was successful because Abraham believed in the truth that a man should seek a God-fearing wife and a woman should seek a God-fearing husband. Do you believe that truth, young people? Do you practice it in your dating? Sing or read Psalter 360.

March 6 — **Genesis 32:1-12** Here we have the account of Jacob returning to Canaan, the land of promise. As he returns he encounters his evil brother Esau. At first he is afraid and tries to come up with a plan in which he can escape and keep part of his family alive. Then he realizes that unless he depends on the God of mercy and truth he will not survive. God's truth here is twofold. First Jacob is directed to return to Canaan. He must live there. Secondly Jacob must learn to trust in God's strength and not his own. Do you understand God's word for us in this? We, too, must stay where the church is. If we are departed from it, we must return. Secondly in any circumstance in life we must depend on the God of truth and not our idea of truth. Sing or read Psalter 348 especially stanzas 1, 2, 5, and 6.

March 7 — **Exodus 18:13-26** Here we see wise Jethro give his son-in-law Moses some wise advise. Moses was burdening himself down with many small matters and not giving himself time to teach the people. Jethro told him to find truthful men and make them judges. This truthfulness was not merely honesty. This truthfulness was the fear of Jehovah and the love and knowledge of God's law. These are the kind of men to pick to be elders. Young men, are you trying to be such men so that when the time comes you can

take your place in the church? Are you seeking God's truth now so that you are ready for your responsibility? Sing or read Psalter 223.

March 8 — **Exodus 34:1-9** God announces Himself to Moses before He gives him the law the second time. He calls Himself Jehovah . . . truth. What an awesome God we have. He is truth! He is all truth and nothing but truth! What a comfort that is as well. Because God is truth, we can believe all that He has revealed about Himself in His word and creation. We do not have to worry that what He has spoken will be wrong because He is truth! As truth His laws will be good for us, and for that we can be thankful. Sing or read Psalter 60 especially stanzas 1, 3, and 5

March 9 — **Joshua 24:14-28** Do you serve the Lord in truth? Do you worship Him as He has commanded? Are you true in your life as children of the God of truth? These were the questions Joshua asked the children of Israel. These are questions we must face daily. It doesn't matter if we are elderly, middle-aged, teenagers, or children. We must live a life of truth dedicated to serving Jehovah faithfully. To do otherwise is to live the life of the lie dedicated to serving Satan. Israel needed a stone to witness their confession. We have Christ. Even as we enter God's house for prayer tonight, let us pray that he will give us the grace to live a life of truth which is pleasing to Him. Sing or read Psalter 65.

March 10 — **II Samuel 2:1-7** In the dark days which followed the death of Saul and his sons, David found a bright spot of truth. The men of Jabesh-Gilead had done a kind thing in rescuing the bodies of Saul and his sons. David recognized them and called them blessed. How about you, young people? Can someone find acts of kindness founded in truth in your lives. Can someone call you blessed because of a kind deed? Living a life of truth will give you many opportunities. Will you make use of them? Sing or read Psalter 24.

March 11 — **I Kings 2:1-11** As David was preparing to die, he gave Solomon some last words of advice. One of these words was a charge toward Solomon and his children's walk in the world. The basis for this charge of course was the promise of Christ. There is also a charge for all parents and children here. Parents, are you demanding that your children live a life of truth toward God and their fellow man? Children, are you striving to live such a life? Every age has its responsibilities to live lives of truth. Are we living such lives? Sing or read Psalter 67.

March 12 — **II Chronicles 18:6-17** What did Ahab know of truth? In head knowledge he knew more than Pilate but experientially not very much. Ahab knew the God of Israel by name and actions, but yet he did not know truth because truth was not in him. Yet, he commanded that a prophet of the Lord speak the truth before him. When the prophet spoke that truth he hated it even as he hated the prophet and God. We must not be like that, people of God. We must never hate the truth even when it chastises us. We must embrace it and worship it because Christ is Truth. Sing or read Psalter 230 especially stanzas 1 and 5-7.

March 13 — **Psalm 31:1-8** In this Psalm we see a foreshadowing of Christ, In verse 5 we see the words of Christ as He died. David, as a type of Christ, was confident that in committing his soul to the God of truth he was doing a good thing. Do you have that confidence throughout your lives, child of God? Aged saint, can you say this with confidence as you face death? Young people, do you say this even as you seek entertainment and companionship? To do this means you give all of yourself away. You will take no credit for your spiritual welfare as you leave it in the hands of the God of truth. Are you ready to confess with Christ these words? Sing or read Psalter 47 especially stanzas 1-3 and 5.

March 14 — **Psalm 108** Do you ever look at the clouds? The clouds tell us things about God and His attributes. Can you remember seeing a thunderhead? Remember how it stretched far into the sky? Now think of a clear day with its fine wisps of cirrus clouds floating far above our heads. That is the figure God wants us to think of when we think of the vastness of His truth. His truth is higher than the highest cloud. His truth is so vast that it encompasses all of our lives. Do you live in awe of that truth? We should, because God is truth. Sing or read Psalter 298.

March 15 — **Psalm 117** How many things do you own that will last forever? How many unbreakable items have you seen break? How many of man's unbreakable inventions are bent and twisted by storms or earthquakes? God's truth is not like that. Jehovah's truth will last forever. He assures us of that in this short Psalm. That is one of the reasons we must be continually praising Him. Jehovah's truth is the only thing in which we can place our complete confidence. Are we singing His praises for His truth daily? Sing or read Psalter 315.

March 16 **Proverbs 23:15-25** Notice the command in verse 23. Are you out buying the truth? Is it an acquisition that you are making daily even hourly? Buying the truth is done actively. Just because you are a Christian does not personally assure you of possessing the truth. You must go out and shop for it. You do this by studying the Word of God. This must be done personally but also with other people of like faith. You do this by attending church with a worshipful attitude. It is hard work that must not be neglected. Most of us are good at shopping for earthly goods. Are we as good at shopping for spiritual goods namely the truth? Sing or read Psalter 236.

March 17 **Ecclesiastes 12:8-14** Solomon spends much of this book examining his experiences in searching for the truth. In his search he found that the truth can only be found in things of God. In verse twelve he states that man's scholastic attempts to find truth of himself only end up in the weariness of the flesh. Has this been your experience, people of God? Have you tried to find the truths of life in yourself or in man's devices? I am sure that like Solomon you found no peace then. Like Solomon we must confess that finding truth is only in fearing God and keeping His commandments. Make that your aim and you will find peace in this life. Sing or read Psalter 336.

March 18 **Isaiah 38:9-20** God had stricken Hezekiah with a terrible disease. Hezekiah had a tremendous worry; he had no son to continue the covenant line to Christ. In faith he prayed and God healed him. Then he wrote the words of our reading today. In verses eighteen and nineteen he speaks of truth. He first states that there is no truth at all in the reprobate. Then he states that it is the elect who can rejoice in the truth of Jehovah. Finally he reminds us of a father's duty to teach his children the truth. Are you doing that, fathers? Are you listening, children? Sing or read Psalter 77 especially stanzas 3-5.

March 19 **Matthew 22:15-22** Are the words of the Pharisee's disciple about Christ true about you as well? Can all kinds of people see that you are true and speak words of truth? Can it be said about you that you care not what man thinks about you? Here is a way we must be Christlike. Only truth must be evident in our lives. Only the truth of Jehovah must permeate every aspect of our being. It must be evident and permeate so much that any one, any time, any place can see our truth. Young people, is this so? Sing or read Psalter 138.

March 20 **John 14:1-6** We have spent much of this month pondering the idea of truth. Verse six sums up much of what we have been learning. Jesus is truth. The only way to the Father is through Jesus. Therefore it is important that we as children of the heavenly Father seek His Son and His truth. To do anything else is folly. There is no other way to heaven and no other way to the blessedness which comes from knowing Christ. Thomas's question is answered not just for him but also for us. Sing or read Psalter 256 especially stanzas 1, 2, and 5.

March 21 **Romans 1:16-25** Are you ashamed the gospel of Christ which you heard yesterday? If you are, reread the verses for today. To be ashamed of the gospel of truth has many evil consequences. First of all you will hold the truth in unrighteousness. Then you will change the truth to fit your ideas and desires. Finally God will give you unto your evils until you end up in Hell. This is not without comfort for the child of God, however. For us not being ashamed of the gospel will allow us to look at the evils of the age and flee them. For us we will see the signs of Christ's return. This is our hope and salvation. Sing or read Psalter 355.

March 22 **I Peter 1:13-25** Peter in this chapter reminds us of our duties throughout life because we are God's people. He speaks of walking a walk of sanctification. The reason is given in that because God is holy we must be holy. In verse 22 we read that we must obey the truth through the Spirit in the way of loving the brother. Are you doing that today? Do you love those around you in obedience to the Holy Spirit? If you know the truth and love the truth, you must obey the truth. If you hate your fellow student or those close to you, you hate God's truth and do not walk as you are called. "Love one another with a pure heart fervently. Sing or read Psalter 25.

March 23 **II John** Five times in this short epistle the word truth is used. The apostle John is writing to a someone whom he loves. He loves this one because they are both in the truth. He loves this one because John has found his children walking in the truth. This must be said of us. People must speak well of us because and only because we walk in the truth. In walking in this truth we will keep God's commandments and love will fill our souls for God and for those around us. Sing or read Psalter 371.

March 24 **III John** This epistle is similar to the previous. It too contains the word truth five times. Here too we see a person, Gaius, who is commended for his walking in the truth. Notice that walking

means activity. Gaius has been active in the truth. Gaius has also confessed the truth with his mouth. John has heard from others of Gaius' testimony. John rejoices in these facts. Verses 5-8 give us practical application in walking in the truth. Let us leave our study of truth with these ideas: get the truth, love the truth, and live the truth. Sing or read Psalter 338.

March 25 — **Psalm 103:1-7** David calls upon his soul to bless the Lord. The idea of blessing here is to praise or say good things about someone. David had many reasons to do that in his life. God had saved him out of many troubles. God had blessed him by making him king over Israel. God had promised him that Christ would come from his line. What about us, do we have any reasons to tell our souls to bless Jehovah? In reading these verses, we find we do. In fact we find that we have more than David because Christ has come to us and has given us His Spirit. We also have the written word. Bless the Lord, young people, and do it every minute of the day. Sing or read Psalter 277.

March 26 — **Psalm 103:8-12** In this short section we see the ultimate reason for blessing Jehovah. He has sent His son to forgive our sins. Our sins should keep us from Jehovah, but because of Christ our sins are forgiven. They are taken as far from us as east is from west. Reread verse 10. What a blessing we have there! If God dealt with us the way we deserve, we would be destroyed even as we read these words. Bless Him, people of God, bless Him daily; for his mercy is great! Sing or read Psalter 280 especially stanzas 1, 3, and 4.

March 27 — **Psalm 103:13-18** Picture a father helping his son up after a dreadful fall on a bicycle. Picture a father picking up his daughter and tending to her knee after a fall on the concrete. Picture a father sitting in the kitchen late at night agonizing over the whereabouts of his teenage children. This is just a small glimpse into the pity God has for us. Fatherhood is a glorious picture of God. God knows us. He knows that we bruise easily, and He is ready to care for those bruises. There is an admonition in these verses as well. Verses 17 and 18 tell us that we must fear Him, we must keep His covenant, and we must remember His commandments, and do them. God's pity extends through Christ to His people alone. Sing or read Psalter 278.

March 28 — **Psalm 103:19-22** God is great! His kingdom is more glorious than any on this earth. Solomon's kingdom was nothing compared to the heavenly kingdom of our God. Because we have such a grand and glorious king, we must bless and praise Him. All of His creatures must praise their maker because He has made them and sustains them. These last few verses end on a personal note. David says "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Do you do that? Do you do that hourly? We should and we must. Bless the Lord! Sing or read Psalter 282.

March 29 — **Mark 14:1-9** Jesus was spending His last days before His death with His disciples. During one of the public gatherings Mary, one of his closest friends, took a box of costly ointment and anointed Him. In doing so she showed her great love for her Savior. His disciples were angry and Jesus rebuked them. He also taught them and us with this incident. First of all we must show our love for Jesus. Secondly we must do good unto the poor. Finally as we preach the gospel our good works must accompany our doctrine. Do you love Jesus for the great work He has performed in your life? If you do, then show that love even as Mary did. Sing or read Psalter 312.

March 30 — **Mark 14:10-16** On the day of the Passover which would be Thursday of passion week, Jesus and His disciples went to an upper room in Jerusalem. If you read this passage closely, you cannot help but see God's providence at work here. Judas went to the high priest and plotted with them. Peter and John found a man who provided them the upper room. All of these things were directed by almighty God. Do we see God's providence in our lives? It is by His providence that all thing worked for our salvation many years ago. It is by His providence that all things continue to exist. It will be by His providence that the time will be prepared for His second coming. Ponder on His providence and thank Him for It. Sing or read Psalter 313.

March 31 — **Mark 14:17-26** As the Passover meal ended that Thursday night, Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Do you take that for granted or do you long for it? I ask this question to both adults who have partaken of it for many years and teenagers who await their first communion. It provides wonderful pictures for us. We see the table of communion of saints. We see the bread which feeds us and was also broken for our salvation. And we see the wine which pictures the blood of the Lamb and the joy that is ours because of that sacrifice. The Lord's Supper is one of the blessings we have as Christians. Let us not take it for granted. Sing or read Psalter 311.

Apollinaris

by Tom Vander Woude

Before reading, ask yourself:

- Who is Apollonaris?
- Why must Christ have a human nature?
- How does heresy strengthen the church?

Apollinaris, bishop of Laodicia, was a highly esteemed writer and theologian of the 4th century. He was known for his piety and orthodoxy. Athanasius held him in such high regard that he would not even mention Apollinaris by name when he wrote against his heretical viewpoint of Christ's human nature.

Apollinaris denied that Christ took on a complete human nature in the incarnation. This heresy was pointedly opposed because, in essence, it robs the Church of her human Savior, Jesus Christ.

The road for the Church, so far, had not been very smooth. The Church was still young, and since the time of the apostles up to the time of Constantine the Great; a period of 300 years, persecution was the way of the Lord for the Church. This is not to say that there was daily persecution for all the members of the Church, but persecution was the lot for different areas of the Roman Empire at different times throughout this entire period. But, along with Constantine the Great and his Edict of Toleration (313) came a time of relative peace for the Church. Nevertheless, the road on which she traveled did not become any smoother. In fact, we know that the way of the Church is never a smooth ride. The devil does not cease in his attacks upon his adversary - ever. And, he will not cease for all of history until he is overcome when Christ returns. Now, seeing that persecution had not destroyed her, the devil attacked from a different angle - heretical teachings.

At this time the Church was very busy with the development of her doctrines This work was accomplished by many men. Some of these men worked for God and His Church, others worked for Satan and his devils. And where did Satan strike first? At the doctrines which define the incarnation of our Savior. The devil hates Christ and will do anything to cause the Church to lose her true confession of His work. But God cares for His Church. He also controls all that befalls the Church, and God uses heresy to force the Church to turn to the Word of God to search out the truths needed to defend herself against heresy. This results in a stronger Church with clearly-defined confessions to hand down from age to age in preservation of the truth.

Before Apollinaris arrived on the scene, there was already much controversy regarding the doctrines of Christology. Origen had taught the generation and eternity of the Son, but he spoke of a subordination of the Son to the Father. And, although he said the Son was eternal, he taught that the Son was created by the Father. This resulted in great controversy in the Church. Constantine had granted peace to the Church in hopes that this would result in a unified kingdom, but now found himself instead in the midst of doctrinal disagreement. At this time the Church was also troubled with the Arian controversy which resulted in the Council of Nicea (325).

Even after the Council of Nicea the struggle over the doctrines of the Trinity and Christ's natures continued. There were those who denied Christ's human nature, and there were those who denied the divinity of Christ. Then along came Apollinaris.

Apollinaris denied the true and proper

humanity of Christ. He taught that man consists of a body, a soul, and a spirit. He felt that man's rational spirit is the source of sin, so he taught that Christ's divine spirit took the place of the human spirit in the incarnation. This resulted in a Savior who consisted of a human body, a human soul, and a divine spirit.

This, of course, led to a great problem. Apollinaris' savior no longer had a complete human nature. How could our human nature be saved by a savior who does not possess a complete human nature himself?

John 10:30 reads, "I and my Father are one." John 14:7 says, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him." Galatians 4:4 reads, "But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,". Romans 8:3 says, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." From these passages, and many others that are found in Holy writ, we see that Christ is both divine and human. He holds both natures in one body. And this is the only way it can be. Our Savior must be very man to be able to stand in our place for our sins. Our Savior must also be very God in order to suffer and satisfy God's wrath for our sins. Hallelujah! We have both in our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh.

Apollinaris was opposed by Athanasius for his heretical teachings. He was also opposed by Gregory of Nazianzum, and Gregory of Nyssa. Their opposition led to the doctrine that Christ had a perfect human nature together with a divine nature. The Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381) condemned Apollinaris and his teachings as heretical.

The Church was young. God did not immediately reveal all the doctrinal truths of the scriptures to the Church. It was up to man to discover the riches of the scriptures and to lay them down in confessional form for the generations to come. In all of this we can see God's divine hand at work as He forces the Church, through the means of heresies, to seek out the truth, enriching the confessions of all believers. Thank God, for we certainly need these confessions today!

Tom is a member of Southwest Prot. Ref. Church. He is married to Linda and has a 6 month old son. He works at Computer Products and Resources.

What do you think?

- Any positive or negative responses or comments to articles printed in the Beacon Lights are appreciated. The staff believes that both types of responses can foster new ideas.

- Remember: the Beacon Lights will answer any questions. If you have a question for the Q & A rubric, please mail it to:

P.O. Box 375
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Engagement Announcement

Congratulations to Margaret Iwema (Bethel PRC) and Patrick Alsum (Loveland PRC) who are engaged to be married May 6, 1994 in Bethel Christian Church, Elk Grove, Illinois.
Parents of the bride: *Fred and Rose Iwema (Bethel).*
Parents of the groom: *Milton and Joyce Alsum (Loveland).*
Future address unknown.

That Wonderful Change

by Rev. John A. Heys

In your catechism classes, Young People, you were taught that there are seven different elements in our salvation.

First of all, we are by God's grace caused to be born again, with a new spiritual life. The title of that work of our God is regeneration. In the second place we have a calling out of spiritual darkness into a marvelous new spiritual life. In the third place we have a saving faith which is worked in us, and thereby we become confident that Christ Jesus has realized salvation for us. The fourth element is that God justified us through His Son and His cross. The last three elements of our salvation are sanctification, which refers to God's work of enabling us to begin to walk in holiness; preservation which God uses after our rebirth to keep us preserved in our walk as children of God; and finally, our glorification which begins in this life, is increased when we die, and becomes full when Christ returns, raises our bodies, and brings us with body and soul into the new Jerusalem.

At this time I would like to call your attention to that fifth element, namely, our justification. You no doubt have heard that some say that when God justified them, it is so wonderful and gracious that they can claim, "God deals with me just-as-if-I'd never sinned." Indeed God does deal with us as those whose sins are forgiven, because they have been blotted out by His Son through His cross.

That justification we find presented beautifully in Romans 5:1. There we read: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." That justification refers to the fact that God, through His Son, took away every bit of our guilt; and therefore took away every bit of the calling for us to be cast into hell because of our sins; and because His Son blotted out every bit of our guilt.

To be justified means to become legally just as Christ Jesus our Savior is. He never sinned, and earned for us justification, so that we have every bit of our guilt taken away completely. And because of that we have the God-given right to receive all the other six elements of our salvation.

This comforting truth, Young People, is surely pointed out beautifully in Romans 5:1. There we read that we are justified by faith, and have peace with God. Now "justified by faith" does not mean that we earn justification by our faith. We are conscious of our justification by means of our faith. But we receive that faith only because we are justified by Christ Jesus and His cross. But because of that justification God gives us faith. We are not justified because we believe. We believe because Christ earned that faith for us by our justification, which we have by His work.

Arminianism teaches the lie that we open our hearts and let Christ come in to justify us, that is, to give us that blessing of justification. Before we have been born again and had faith wrought in us, we cannot believe in justification. Then spiritually dead we cannot want salvation, and we are not justified because we requested it, and wanted it. We want salvation only after God has begun it in us by a spiritual rebirth. God does not depend upon us, and save us only if we ask Him to do so. We enjoy and want salvation only after God has begun it in us by a rebirth. As we read in John 3:3, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." God does not give us something because we gave Him something. And surely spiritually dead men cannot give God anything and cannot open their hearts to let Him come in.

Our God through Paul teaches us that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Go back to that beautiful verse again: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace

with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Peace with God comes upon us through Christ. It does not come because of what we do. Everything that we do that is correct spiritually is because of what Christ implants in us and enables us to do. We cannot give God anything in order to get salvation. We want salvation only because God has begun it in us.

Justification is God's work for us and in us. It is possible because of what God does; and it is desired by us because He implanted that desire in us. Look up Luke 1:26-38. God came to Mary through an angel, who told her that God was going to cause her to bring forth a Son, Whose name would be Jesus. He shall be called the Son of the Highest, and shall be given "the throne of His father David."

Mary asked, "How shall this be, seeing that I know not a man?" That angel told her that the Holy Spirit shall come upon her, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow her. Therefore that Son born of her shall be called "The Son of God."

What is more, in Romans 5:1 we read a moment ago, that we are justified by faith. And justification is a free gift, a one hundred percent free gift. Because faith also is a free gift. Thus in Ephesians 2:8 we read that faith is not of ourselves. "It is the gift of God." And in verse 10 we read that "We are His (God's) workmanship created in Christ Jesus." As surely as Adam had nothing to do with his creation, we have absolutely nothing to do with our being justified by Christ Jesus through His cross. And also our desire and longing for it is God's gift.

Justification is the legal side of our salvation. Regeneration, calling and faith are blessings which we receive because God justified us. similarly sanctification, preservation and glorification are ours because God justified us through His Son and His cross.

We are saved by God's grace, not by our works. Justification is a gift which we do not deserve, or by nature want. Listen, Young People, we cannot give God anything material and physical. He made it all and freely gave it to those whom He eternally planned to make us receive it. Likewise we cannot and do not have any spiritual life of the kingdom of heaven until God gives it freely unto us. He also gives us the desire for it.

In Romans 5:19 we find such a comforting and basic truth concerning all of our salvation. There we read: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many shall be made righteous." Through Adam the whole human race became guilty, and spiritually dead. By Christ Jesus, our Savior the believers were delivered from their guilt and given spiritual life. That we are justified means that God made us to be righteous in His judgment. Sanctification means that He makes us holy; but justification means that He makes us righteous, that is, makes us legally right in His judgment.

Now the proof of God making us righteous, by His act of justification, is Christ's resurrection with a glorified body. That resurrection and glorification reveal, that all those for whom He died are promised regeneration, a calling, faith, sanctification, preservation and glorification. For all this we get on the basis of that justification.

Peace with God comes upon us through Christ. It does not come because of what we do. Everything that we do that is correct spiritually is because of what Christ implants in us and enables us to do.

Do not, therefore, push justification into the background. All those six blessings come upon us, because this righteousness, realized by justification, is ours. Thank God for that justification as well as for the regeneration, calling, faith, sanctification, preservation and glory. Justification making us righteous, that is "Not Guilty", is the legal basis for every other blessing which God gives us.

We owe God thanks for that justification, because it opens the door to those six other elements of our salvation. And in Psalm 139:14 we have the thankfulness for that salvation expressed by David. And in God's grace we sing it thus in Psalter #383:1:

"All that I am I owe to Thee,
Thy wisdom, Lord, hath fashioned me;
I give my Maker thankful praise,
Whose wondrous works my soul amaze."

Unconditional Election

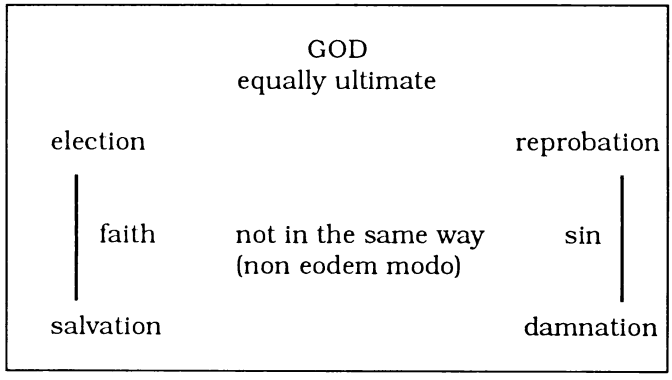
by Bruce Miedema

This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by him, and effectually to call and draw them to his communion by his Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of his Son, finally, to glorify them for the demonstration of his mercy, and for the praise of his glorious grace; as it is written: "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 by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." Eph. 1:4, 5, 6.
Canons of Dordt, First Head, from Article 7

Unconditional Election is the second doctrine which John Calvin treated in what have come to be known as the Five Points of Calvinism of the TULIP.

Unconditional Election is the working out of predestination. Predestination has for its backdrop the counsel of God (also known as His determinate plan), which is wise, good and holy. Therefore, Election is one of the works of God.

Predestination is a particular application of God's all-encompassing determinate plan that pertains to the eternal destiny of all mankind. God ultimately determines the final destiny of man by choosing His own out of this world and ordaining them, out of free love, to eternal life and passing by the rest ordained to dishonor.



As Adam's descendants, all people share in his transgression and inherit God's sentence upon sin. This sentence we know to be eternal death. In unconditionally electing, God "passes by" the reprobate out of wrath for his sin and lays His gracious redeeming hand on another whom He calls His Chosen. The unconditionality of this act is shown to the one elected to eternal life in that his direction was no different than the reprobate who was passed by.

Election and reprobation are equally ultimate. Both trace their origin equally and ultimately to God's decree and are not conditioned upon anything in man. However, damnation does not flow forth from reprobation in the same manner as salvation does from election. In between election and salvation is **faith** (a free gift of God). Whereas, between reprobation and damnation there is **sin** (a responsibility of man).

God makes no humanly perceptible distinction between the actions of the one He will pass by and the actions of the one He will save. Therefore, prior to conversion, one's life makes no difference to God when we speak about election. There is no human explanation for the action taken by God. This is God's sovereign choice. This is God's unconditional election.

Bruce Miedema is a member of Hudsonville Prot. Ref. Church.

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