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The Covenant and Our Friendships
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OUR CONDUCT AS A WITNESS

by Rev. Ron Hanko

One of the most important things that Peter says about Christian witness-nessing in 1 Peter 3:15 is that our witness is first of all our conduct. Certainly we must speak of our faith and hope, but we may not, must not, forget that our conduct also “speaks,” often more loudly than our words. Even before we speak we must act! Peter implies in this verse that we will not even have good opportunity to speak as witnesses if our witness is not first of all our conduct.

Peter shows us this in three different ways in this passage of God’s Word. First of all, he talks about those who ask us a reason of the hope that is in us. Clearly, this means that as Christians we have the hope of eternal life and the assurance of salvation, each one of us for ourselves. More importantly it means that we have that hope so strongly that it is evident in our lives, so evident that even an unbeliever can see it and ask us about it.

Is this true of you, Young People? Do you have that hope? Can others, even unbelievers, see that you live by that hope? You understand, don’t you, that if you do indeed have that hope, then others will ask you about it because they will be able to see it in you? Think back, then, and ask yourself whether anyone has ever asked you a reason of the hope that is in you, either by mocking it or by wondering at it.

We can understand this best if we remember that Peter is talking to believers as spiritual strangers and pilgrims (1:1). The idea here is that if we live as strangers and pilgrims in this world, unbelievers will ask us why we are different, and what makes us the way we are. Then, though they may not realize it, they are asking about our hope, for it is that hope that makes us strangers and pilgrims.

The second way in which Peter...
reminds us that our conduct is our first witness is with the admonition that begins the verse, “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.” Without going into a detailed explanation of this phrase, Peter is simply saying that we must make our hearts the holy dwelling place of God Himself, and that is the essence of all holy living, for the presence of God will transform our whole life. Peter, then, is saying much the same thing that Paul says in I Corinthians 6:19, where he asks the question, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God?” Only Peter makes it an admonition, reminding us of our calling to keep ourselves holy and purify our souls that God may be pleased to dwell within us.

The third way in which Peter teaches us that we must witness by our conduct is to be found in verse 16, where he talks about having a good conscience. As we all know, a good conscience comes in the way of holiness and obedience. Without a holy walk our conscience will only plague and torment us. That too is important in witnessing. If we do not have a good conscience we will never be bold in witnessing, but will be shame-faced and hesitant. Only a good conscience before God can give us boldness to speak of our hope in God.

Note too that Peter follows the admonition to sanctify the Lord in our hearts, with the command to be ready to give an answer: “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready...” Peter is saying two things. He is saying that if our conduct is holy we will have to be ready to witness with our mouths, because unbelievers will surely see that we are not like them and will ask about that difference. In other words, holy behaviour will give us constant opportunity to witness with our mouths.

The second thing Peter is saying is that our holy conduct is our readiness to witness by speaking of our hope. As long as we are unholy, we are not spiritually fit or competent to speak of the things of God, and will not be able to give a good witness to others even by our speech. This certainly ought to make us pause and think. Why is it that we find it so difficult to speak of our faith? Why does our testimony seem so ineffective? Is it that we have not sanctified the Lord in our hearts? Probably it is.

We must be careful, too, that we do not use the idea that our conduct is our first witness as an excuse not to speak of our faith. We often do that, don’t we? When we are reminded of our failure to speak of Christ and of our faith in Him, then we excuse ourselves by saying that our conduct is our witness. The point is then that our conduct is not our only witness, but only the beginning of it. And what is more, if our conduct is really a witness then we will also be unable to avoid the opportunity to witness with our speech, and will be both ready and eager to do so. That we do not speak of our hope is, then, not an indication that our conduct is a good witness, but that it is not witness! A failure to confess Christ is always a symptom of a deeper spiritual problem, a lack of sanctification and a testimony that we have made our hearts temples of idols rather than temples of the Lord God.

What I am saying, Young People, is that there is an important and necessary connection between witnessing and holiness. Without holiness you will not and cannot be ready to witness.
nor will you have opportunity to do so. The calling to witness, therefore, is first of all the calling to be holy as the Lord your God is holy (I Pet. 1:15, 16).

To all of this it should be added that this view of witnessing makes witnessing something very natural and an integral part of our life, not something mechanical and forced, like passing out tracts, or street preaching, or door-to-door salesmanship. It can even be said, I think, that these things are for the most part substitutes for holiness and a living hope, brought in where the true power of witnessing, the power of holiness has disappeared. Surely, it is evident that the witness of a holy life, followed by a readiness to speak and resulting in such readiness, is also a far more effective witness that any of these other things I have mentioned. What else shows clearly the transforming power of God's grace, the beauty of Christ, and the splendor of the hope of eternal life, than the living, speaking witness of the child of God, whose whole existence has been transformed by these things.

Young People, sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready - be ready always - and be ready to give an answer to every one that asks you a reason of the hope that they are able to see in you.

Truth Vs. Error

1. God's Controversy With Israel
Hosea 4

by Rev. Robert C. Harbach

I. The Charges Made in God's Controversy With Israel
   A. The vicious and the profane everywhere (1,2)
   B. Ignorance and forgetfulness of God (6)
   C. Priests wicked and avid in iniquity (8)
   D. Drunkenness and whoredom (11,14,18)
   E. Activity in the occult - divination and witchcraft (12)
   F. Bribery of rulers (18)

II. The Consequences of God's Controversy
   A. God will punish them for their crimes (9)
   B. The entire earth ruined with pollution (3)
   C. People and prophet fall to destruction (5)
      1. The people put to shame (7,19)
      2. Nothing shall satisfy them (10)
   D. The worst judgment: divine abandonment (17)
      1. They shall not correct one another (4)
      2. God will not punish them (14)
      3. Rather, He will let them prosper (16)
III. The Warning to Judah Against Apostasy and Judgment
   A. Avoid places of idolatry (15)
      1. Gilgal
      2. Beth-aven (Bethel)
   B. Avoid profane swearing
      1. Do swear trivially, rashly, falsely, deceitfully
      2. Swear as commanded (Jer. 4:2)
         a. In truth
         b. In righteousness

Hosea 4:1, "Hear the Word of the Lord." In Hosea's day this meant that the Old Testament church was to hear and heed teaching and preaching out of Ha-TeNaCh, the Torah, (the Law), the Nebhi-im (the Prophets) and the ChethubhIm (the Holy Writings: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs). Today "the Word of the Lord" is found only in the Old and New Testaments' 66 canonical books of sacred Scripture. This means that the Bible not only contains, but is the Word of God. This proposition is based upon the Doctrine of Scripture as declared in the Reformed Confession of Faith, III-VII, which articles, in our Protestant Reformed Churches, are absolutely debatable. Likewise, the Westminster Confession of Faith, I, i-x, maintains that these Holy Scriptures are:
   (1) immediately and divinely inspired
   (2) incomparable
   (3) characterized by "entire perfection"
   (4) the only infallible rule of divine authority
   (5) kept pure in all ages by divine providence
   (6) not to be added to by new revelations of the Spirit, or by traditions of men.

Therefore, with especially (4) and (6) in view our churches, too, will not tolerate new revelations in visions, voices, dreams, "tongues" (gibberish), nor new apostles, new prophets, or new "christ"s" and their new charismata. Therefore we hold that the Bible is "the only infallible rule of faith and practice." This clearly rules out any and all extra-biblical revelation.

Consider, for example, what now is being widely accepted as a new revelation, a correct interpretation of Christianity, in a three-volume work, entitled, A Course in Miracles (priced at $40.00), which Jesus is said to have lately given the world via a female spiritist medium (modern term: trance channeler), Helen Schucman, a Jewish psychologist. Why cannot we, as other churches are doing, accept this course as on a par with or superior to Scripture? For a number of reasons: (1) because of what we (and the Christian Church) have already laid down as normative in the opening words of this paragraph; (2) because the canon of Scripture is perfect and therefore closed to any additions; (3) because Jesus Himself warned against such "revelations" in Matthew 24:23f. — therefore they cannot carry His imprimatur; (4) because no extra-biblical writings claiming to be the word of Christ have evidence of Divine inspiration, but of rather the reverse (I Cor. 8:20); (5) because it admittedly contains teaching contrary to Scripture; (6) because it does not originate from within the bosom of the church, but from an origin outside the pale of
Christianity: (7) because it denies the biblical, historic, orthodox doctrine of satisfaction through blood atonement; (8) because it teaches a heretical anthropology—man is inherently and objectively sinless; (9) because, as in the Bible, there is no golden cord of Double Predestination—Election and Reprobation—running through these three heterodox volumes; (10) because although claiming to be God-centered, it comes in almost undisguised man-centeredness, being an exposition of the old theme, "Man the Measure of All Things." It is the ancient religion of Autosoterism.

"Hear the Word of the Lord, ye children of Israel." Israel at this point in history was God's own professing people who were fast apostatizing and would soon become finally apostate. Therefore, the whole organism of the church, elect and reprobate, is addressed and exhorted to repentance (Acts 17:30), while elect Israel is called to come out of reprobate Israel (Rev. 18:4), and that before Israel falls into an irreversible locked-in apostate state. Cp. 6:1.

In God's controversy with Israel, the Lord, in the capacity of both prosecuting attorney and judge levels the following charges against Israel. First, they everywhere have become vicious and profane. 1-2. The word "controversy" (Heb., ribh, pronounced reeve) meant "a cause to plead," and to contend for it in court by the legal proceedings involving prosecutor, judge, and the accused. This cause is the cause of God's holiness and justice/righteousness which the holy and just God must uphold against all sinners, criminals and covenant-breakers. From this it is of necessity to be concluded "that judgment must begin at the house of God." Then what shall be the end of those disobedient to the gospel of God, and where shall the ungodly appear? (I Pet. 4:17, 18).

"The inhabitants of the land" means the land of Israel, the land that then was, the Holy Land. In a more general sense this means the inhabitants of today's Israel, and of any land where "there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." Then "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold down the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18), no matter what land is sunk in such iniquities. Our own nation, because of the national commission of these heinous sins, and because it has no regard for either the first or the second table of the law, has the impending wrath of God hanging over its head like a sword of Damocles. We expect this of the wicked world, but it's simply dreadful when that which is called "church" has in it "no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God." Is the reader in just such a church? Then get out of it, the sooner the better, lest the wrath of God destroy the whole church! For these sins whole churches have been swept from off the land. (See Rev. 1-3, Where today are those seven or eight churches of Asia Minor?)

Where the Ten Commandments have been removed, as in the public school system, there is, to limit ourselves to just one of these charges, "no truth". Without a standard, God's standard, the only standard, the inhabitants of the public school system have not the foggiest idea what truth is. In fact, the concern of this "secular humanistic" system is not with "the truth," but with a modern pragmatism, that is, with whatever seems to work
But there are "churches" where there is no knowledge of God, because they have no creed, no doctrinal basis, no theology. Such "churches" have degenerated to little more than an ethical society. However, without the standards of God's law and gospel, one cannot really speak of anything ethical/moral. It would be more accurate to put down these bodies, not as "churches," but as "social clubs." With truth, mercy and the knowledge of God gone, there is "no sense at all of the thing called honesty." If they had a shred of honesty they might put up a sign on their building like, "New Age Meeting house."

Now this is what had to be said of Israel then, and of much of what is called "church" now: that "by swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood" (v. 2). How does the world regard these things? The best that the world had to offer, the Greek and Roman moralists and ethicists, regarded the whole field of morals and ethics as matters of perfect indifference. To them, a la Heracleitus, good and evil were relative terms. All moral conceptions were regarded as conventional, that is, established by custom, as e.g., this or that tribal custom, as inventions of the few (rulers) to control and enslave the masses. Whereas we of the true church regard these evils as appallingly disgraceful, the Greek and Roman "moralists" maintained, "Nothing is disgraceful of itself." So they would have regarded the black catalog of sins listed in Romans One.

"By swearing..." The crimes listed here in v. 2 are sins against the third, ninth, sixth, eighth and seventh commandments. All these crimes were running rampant throughout the apostate kingdom of Israel. Good people were hidden, as we say today, "underground." Today we are inclined to think that swearing is everywhere.

But, we are informed, swearing is, or was, "not a universal phenomenon." Just as certain peoples were free of "white man's diseases" until the white man came among them and infected them with diseases they never before knew, so swearing was not found among American Indians, Japanese, Maylayans, and Polynesians until introduced by the "civilized white man." It used to be that although "gentlemen" did swear occasionally, they avoided doing so in the presence of women. Now many men show their aversion to both smoking and swearing because it is so prevalent among women as to be regarded as "effeminate."

In the Soviet Union swearing and profanity are still viewed as socially and politically unacceptable, since Communism regards these evils as marks of the decadence of Western society. Soviets ought to be embarrassed by usage since its religious implications are flagrantly out of place in an atheistical society. But as sin always degenerates, so with swearing, from debasing the name of God to employing the lowest forms of emphasis, to sex perversion, and to the cesspool of scatology. Stalin, it is said, liberally spatetered his vernacular from such sources.

As for "swearing and lying", see the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 113, where these sins are, in part, "the not using of God's name as required: the abuse of it in ignorant, vain irreverent, profane, superstitious"
WAYS...by blasphemy, perjury...sinful cursing, oaths, vows, and lots (cp. the lotteries); violating our oaths and vows, if lawful; and fulfilling them if...unlawful...perverting the Word...to profane jests." Q. 145 refers to sins forbidden by the ninth commandment, as "speaking untruth, lying slandering, backbiting...tale-bearing, whispering...flattering..." —To be continued, D.V.—

OUR GOD'S VICTORIOUS GRACE

by Rev. John A. Heys

As you young people know, it makes no difference where you prick an inflated balloon. Whether you prick it in front or in back, on the left side or on the right side, you are going to deflate it. The larger the hole the faster the air or gas will escape. In fact even a small prick can, when there is great pressure in the balloon, cause the whole thing to burst the moment you prick it.

We do well, therefore, to be very careful that we never, no never, prick the truth of God's Word with the smallest point of false doctrine. God is God, and every doctrinal lie deflates that truth concerning Him. One false doctrine may deflate it faster than another. God's glory may be denied more forcefully by one doctrinal error than by another one. And of course the truth concerning God cannot be destroyed. It can be corrupted in man's mind; but the truth concerning God stands, and all men will know that truth in the day when Christ returns. They will know that He is God and God alone. They will know their folly and that they deserve the punishment that their unbelief has brought them. And even the elect children of God who have maintained a false doctrine will know their error and be sorry for it.

Idolatry says that He is not God and that there is some earthly or heavenly creature that is God. Atheism boldly pricks the balloon of the truth of God's Word and says that there is no God at all, even though they do worship things. The Israelites, while Moses was on the mount receiving God's law, worshipped a golden calf and called it their god. Exodus 32:4. They did not destroy the truth, however, and God showed them this in the fury of His wrath, for three thousand men were slain for their devilry. Aaron, who built that calf, even called it Jehovah! That was not Atheism, but it was pricking the balloon of the truth concerning God.

But what I want to set before you at this time is that if we reject one truth of the Reformed Faith, we are pricking the balloon of the truth that God gives
us in Holy Writ; and, if it is not stopped, we will have atheism or idolatry of one kind or another. We must be very, very careful with the truth concerning Christ and our salvation. Already I called your attention to the first three points of the Five Points of Calvinism. We maintained the truth of a total depravity of mankind that made him one hundred percent corrupt in his heart and mind; for the truth of Scripture is that the day man ate of the forbidden fruit he died spiritually. And death is an absolute, a one hundred percent loss of life and ability to do anything. Fallen man can only hate God; and to love and serve Him to the slightest degree is as impossible as it is for any man who is physically dead to speak, or move or see anything here below.

We also took hold of and insisted on the truth that God eternally and unconditionally chose a people in Christ, whom He would cause to be born again with a new, heavenly, spiritual life. God does not wait to see whether dead sinners will “accept” Christ. Man may “call and speak” to one that just got killed in an automobile accident, to try to find out whether that person is dead. God knows. Look up Ephesians 2:1 and 5. He does not need to wait to see whether men are spiritually dead by inviting them to come for salvation. Why do they need salvation, if they are still alive? They may need some medicine and food to strengthen them. But God Himself says in Ephesians 2:1 and 5 that He quickens them, that is, gives them life. That is the word God gave Paul. God decided eternally who would be given faith (Ephesians 2:8-10), not who would give faith to Him. Salvation is one hundred percent God’s gift to us; and we do not get it because we started it and asked for it. We need even to be given the desire for it, and the ability to ask for it.

The truth of a limited atonement, an atonement by Christ for those who were unconditionally elected before they were born, or did good or evil, (Romans 9:11-13), we also considered already in this section of the Beacon Lights. And the truth of the matter is that GOD limits this atonement, not man by his decision whether he will accept it or not. Maintain that man decides what God is going to do and you prick the balloon of the truth that He is GOD! If He must wait for man to decide, He is dependent on man and lets man control His life. Then Satan was correct when he told Eve that man would become like God to know good and evil. Did he not say to Eve: “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” That is what conditional theology teaches. Man, it claims can know what is good for him and can accept Christ before God has already begun the work of salvation in him by causing him to be born again with a new spiritual life. God’s name is Jehovah which means I AM. But if He must wait to see whether spiritually dead men accept His invitation, His name instead is I Will Be. He will be a savior, if we let Him. You can be sure then that He will never be a savior; for dead men never decide what living people may do.

The point I wish to make at this time, however, is that if you deny any one of the Five points of Calvinism, you have pricked the balloon of the truth in them and will find that slowly or swiftly, depending on the power of your
defence of your denial, you will deflate the other four points as well. The fourth point is that of Irresistible Grace. Take the position that man has a spark of spiritual life before he asks for and gets God to cause him to be born again, and you maintain a grace of God that man can and does resist.

Maintain that election is conditional, depending upon man fulfilling the condition of asking for it and of accepting it, and you prick the balloon of the truth that God’s grace cannot be resisted. But likewise, when you deny that God’s grace is irresistible, you prick the balloon of the truth that we are saved by unconditional election. You cannot deny one of these, or even weaken one of these truths, and hold firmly on to the others. And also, maintaining that the atonement Christ realized is not limited only to those unconditionally elected, and you literally deny the truth of limited atonement. And we ought at this time to look a bit more closely at this truth of Irresistible Grace. For since God’s grace cannot be resisted, when He sets out to save those for whom Christ died, then that salvation is limited only to those totally depraved sinners who were unconditionally elected before the foundation of the world. Let us continue to maintain that God is God and is not in any way or at any time dependent upon man and his decisions. And that sad but serious truth is that through the years history has shown that churches that prick the balloon of the truth of God will in coming generations have a more deflated balloon of truth. That happened with Israel. In the days of Jeroboam they again made golden calves which they claimed could be used to worship Jehovah. This led future generations to leave off all worship of God and to turn to Baal and other idols. And God destroyed them as a kingdom. But that idolatry also spread into the kingdom of Judah, and God sent them into captivity. What is more this ultimately led these people to kill God’s Son when He came into our flesh. One sin always leads to another, if it is not stopped. One lie, one false doctrine always leads the coming generations to more lies and false doctrines. And you young people should hold fast to the truth of the Reformed Faith, the truth that God gave us through the great Reformation and turned us from the Roman Catholic idolatry.

Hold to the truth and we will have the comfort of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day I. Our only comfort in life and death is that we belong to our faithful Savior in body and soul. He is the one Who saves us and makes us by His Spirit believe the truth. And He in His faithfulness keeps us faithful. He does not depend upon us, and we do not make Him a Savior by “accepting His invitation.” He is the almighty and faithful Savior Who gives us faith and the desire for salvation. When He comes to save us. He comes with an irresistible grace, not one we can and will reject.

Yes, young people, our old man of sin, our old evil nature will be with us until we die, and it wants no salvation and will fight against our receiving it, but we also have that new man in Christ and an holy nature that believes and delights in the truth. When it pleases God to implant in us that new life, we will not be able to resist it and flee from it. Satan got Peter to deny Jesus three times and to behave as though he wanted no saving grace of God at all. But God kept it there, that
is, the new life which some days before had said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And this came to manifestation when in His grace Jesus looked upon Peter, and God caused the cock to crow for the second time. And that grace made Peter weep bitterly because of his sin. It looked for a few moments as though God's grace had been resisted; but the power of that grace was soon revealed and Peter himself became aware of the fact that God's grace is irresistible and did save him from his sinful deed.

Once we are born again, we will never lose that new life. If one in later life manifests total unbelief, then that one was never born again. It only looked that way to us. Judas Iscariot looked like a disciple of Jesus; but God's grace never gave him a new spiritual life. And he revealed that he had no such life when he betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. But if God does give us that new life in His grace, we will never lose it. Irresistible grace gives it; and no matter what our old man of sin may do, it will not remove from us God's grace or the new life which it gave us when we were born again. Do we not in Romans 8:38, 39 read? "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor

height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus." There you have God's word for it that His grace is irresistible and that our old man of sin cannot cast off that life, or stop God's grace unto us.

Give some thought to these truths and to that work of God's grace on the day of Pentecost; and look up I John 3:9. There we are assured that he who is born of God doth not commit sin, because God's seed remains in him; and he cannot sin—that is, his new life cannot sin—because he is born of God. Three thousand people ridiculed Jesus as He hung on His cross. They taunted and tormented Him. They were glad to see Him crucified. And if we were there and tried to stop them and turn them around, we would have failed. But on Pentecost God's irresistible grace did stop them and did turn them around with a new spiritual life. And they cried out for salvation. God's grace did it and kept that new life in them.

Dark days are ahead of us, young people. and it will be hard for our flesh to confess Christ. But because of His irresistible grace He will, if He caused us to be born again, He will keep us faithful. And that we will, the Lord willing, consider next time.

Singspirations for 1988:

**August 7**
First Jenison CRC

**September 18**
Southeast

**October 16**
Southwest

**November 20**
Faith

**December 18**
Hudsonville
DISCUSSION GROUPS
AT THE 1988 CONVENTION
by Bryan Van Baren

Again this year we are publishing the discussion group outlines for the 1988 Convention, prepared by a few of our ministers. The purpose of this publishing is to enable conventioneers to prepare for the discussions at the conventions. In so doing, all involved will enjoy themselves and grow in spiritual maturity. We strongly encourage you as young people to get together and study these outlines. We also ask that you as parents study these outlines with your young people and encourage them in their study.

The theme for this year’s convention, sponsored by the Southwest Protestant Reformed Young People’s Societies is “Jehovah’s Covenant With His People.” The speeches are on the following themes, “The Covenant: A Blessed Truth”, “The Covenant and Marriage”, and “The Covenant and the Antithetical Life.” In our discussion topics we have kept to the theme and speeches.

This year, the chaperones will lead the first discussion, which will be “Baptism and the Covenant.” The following two, “Prayer in the Light of the Covenant” and “The Covenant and Our Friendships”, will be lead by young people chosen from the conventioneers. Thus, all the more reason to prepare! We feel that in this way, we the young people may be more involved in the discussion and feel more comfortable discussing these topics.

We also express our appreciation to Rev. Kortering, Rev. Joostens, and Rev. Kamps for all the work and thought they put into these discussion outlines. It is our hope and prayer that all of us will be blessed by this year’s convention.

THE COVENANT
AND OUR FRIENDSHIPS

by Rev. M. Kamps

Before we present the outline proper in regard to our subject, let us set forth the principle of God’s Word that truly governs our subject. The principle is this that our friendships must reflect the bond of friendship between God and His people in Christ Jesus. This implies that our friendships have their basis in
righteousness. That this is the only proper view point in regard to the subject of friendship can easily be demonstrated from Scripture. Let me call your attention to but one text by way of introduction. The Lord Jesus Christ, through the psalmist David, confessed: “I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.” Ps. 119:63

I. The Covenant of Grace as the basis for our friendships among men.
   A. The Covenant is a living bond of friendship between Jehovah God and His people in Jesus Christ.
      1. The nature of the Covenant:
         a. Negatively,
            1) Not a covenant which is merely a temporary contractual relationship between God and man, which would imply various divine stipulations and conditions to be fulfilled by man.
            2) Nor a covenant established conditionally with every child born in the Church.
            3) Why not:
               a) This very prevalent conception of the Covenant is cold and mechanical and lifeless.
               b) Further it presents the Covenant as a temporary relationship and not eternal.
               c) It presents the Covenant of Grace as something outside of eternal life, but necessary to the attainment of it. Therefore, the covenant is viewed as something to be discarded after salvation is attained.
         b. Positively.
            1) Our conception of the Covenant of Grace is that it is an eternal bond of friendship between God and His people in Christ Jesus. Genesis 17:7; 12:1-5
            2) The Covenant of Grace designed and willed by God from all eternity. Eph. 1
            3) The Covenant established historically by God with His people chosen in Christ Jesus.
               a) Negatively, not established with Cain, Lamech, Nimrod, Canaan and Ham.
               b) Positively, but it was established with Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
               c) Thus two lines in all of history:
                  1/ The line of the reprobate who are from all eternity excluded from the Covenant of Grace.
                  2/ The line of the elect of God with whom He established His Covenant of Grace in Christ according to His holy and sovereignly free purpose.
   B. Proof from Scripture that the Covenant of Grace in its nature is a bond of friendship between God and His chosen people in Christ Jesus.
      1. The actual relationship of Israel to Jehovah God according to God’s own
institution.
   a. The tabernacle and temple symbolically testify of Jehovah God
dwelling with His chosen people in love.
   b. Noah and Enoch and Abraham walked with God according to
   Scriptur e.
   c. The imposed law of God as representing the boundaries of that
   Covenant relationship. Thus the law is a Word of love and grace to
   Israel.
2. From the New Testament.
   a. Jesus Himself described his relation to His people as a relationship
   b. He that is the friend of God is the enemy of the world. I John
   2:15-18 and James 4:4.
   c. The life of good works is friendship with God. James 2:23.
   d. The Spirit of God sent to dwell in our hearts (not a building as in the
   Old Dispensation) as our Sovereign Friend.
   John 14:26; 15:26 Eph. 2:22
II. The Biblical idea of friendship.
   A. A bond of love between two which is based upon the righteousness of life
   and heart towards God.
   1. Elements of friendship.
      b. Positively
         1) Friendship is an openness and a willingness to share one's life,
            in all its aspects, with another.
         2) Friendship implies a common commitment to the truth of God's
            Word and law. Amos 2:3
         3) Friendship requires self denial for the good and advantage of
            one's friend.
   2. Examples from Scripture.
      d. Jesus relationship to Mary, Martha and Lazarus - Jn. 11:11.

III. Our friendships among God's people.
   A. How to make friends among God's people.
   1. Negatively,
      a. Some young people in the Church are lonely and find it difficult to
         receive from others acceptance. This is a most painful experience
         for all.
      b. However, often the fault for this resides in one's own sinful attitude
         (not always, but often).
         1) The lonely are often rejected because they are unbearably self-
            righteous. In their view, the young people of the Church are
            never any good.
         2) The lonely often violate the simple principle that we are to put
our trust in the work of God’s grace in the young people of the Church.

3) Others conduct themselves in a superior or haughty manner.

2. Positively: Proverbs 18:24 “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

B. The responsibility of one in the relationship of friendship

1. Negatively
   a. Friendships are often formed for the wrong reasons.
      1) Social advancement
      2) For selfish gain
   b. Scripture
      1) Proverbs 14:20
      2) Luke 23:12

2. Positively
   a. A true friend in the Lord seeks his friend’s well-being both physically and spiritually.
      1) Ps. 141:5
      2) Prov. 27:6
   b. A friend in the Lord does not lead one into sin.
      1) Gal. 6:1
      2) Prov. 27:9

IV. Our Calling to be thankful for the gift of a godly friend and friends.

A. The friendship of the saints is itself a gift of God to us.

1. Because God Established Friendship with men in Christ Jesus, elect believers can have friendship with one another. (True friendship not possible among unbelievers)

2. This is one of the blessings merited for us by our Lord Jesus by His death on the cross.

B. Our calling to be thankful to God for this blessed gift.

1. It is gross ingratitude for a believer to deal meanly or to be unfriendly to any of God’s people.

2. We walk in thankfulness when we seek one another in the Lord.

Questions:

1. May the believer develop and maintain friendships with a “decent” person of the world?

2. Are our friendships solely to be established with fellow saints in our own Churches? May we not establish friendships with other believers? Can friendships with other saints ever be as rewarding?

3. Do you rebuke your friend when he/she walks in sin? Will you accept the rebuke of your friend?

4. Are your friendships a reflection of God’s Covenant of friendship?

5. Is it sin to court or accept a date from one who is unbelieving? Is it valid to claim in this connection, how can one know without first dating?

6. Is it sin to marry an unbeliever?
Introduction:

A. Prayer is the spiritual heartbeat of the Christian.
   1. There is nothing more vital and important to us than prayer.
      a. For prayer is our fellowship and daily communion with our Father in
         Heaven.
      b. The Scripture tells us to pray without ceasing - I Thess. 5:17.
      c. We are admonished to make all our needs known to God in prayer -
         Phil 4:6.
   2. It is inconceivable to live apart from prayer.
      a. When this holy fellowship is interrupted for awhile, there is some-
         thing wrong.
      b. It is good for us to seek God's face!
         1) We delight in prayer. We love to pray.
         2) It is often difficult because it is a spiritual activity and the
            flesh stands in the way.

B. For its importance we ought to discuss it together.
   1. Not a shame to ask how to pray - the disciples ask their Master.
      "Lord teach us to pray."
   2. We might ask that question.

I. What is prayer?
   A. Prayer is simply fellowship with God.
      1. Flows out of God's covenant with us in Christ.
         a. God's covenant in brief is the friendship which God has established
            with us in Christ.
            1) James tells us that Abraham was the friend of God.
            2) The essence of friendship is communication. Fellowship. Sharing
               of intimacies.
         b. That brings us then to prayer!
            1) Prayer is the means or vehicle of this intimate communion and
               fellowship.
               a. That is why it must be without ceasing. To live apart from
                  God is death.
               b. It need not always be in the formal sense of the word.
                  (folding our hands and closing our eyes)
            2) Even in our friendships here below there is a longing for
               fellowship. How much greater toward God?
         c. Chief part of thankfulness. L.D. 45
   2. Stands to reason then that prayer cannot be formalized.
      a. There is no certain or one correct way to pray.
1) Consult the Scriptures and you find many different prayers.
2) Not the intent of Christ either in the Model Prayer.
   b. Prayer is as varied as life itself. For all of our lives must be lived in God's fellowship.
   1) There is lofty praise and adoration. Many of the Psalms. Answers to the first petition of the Lord's Prayer.
   2) There are prayers of need, both spiritual and physical. Fourth and fifth petitions.
   3) Prayers in which we simply express our sorrow or joy.
   4) We may carry the feelings of our hearts to God in prayer.

B. We must be careful not to let the formalism of prayer or the perceived rightness or wrongness of method stand in the way of our heart's desire for fellowship with our God!
1. We must be careful for nothing. . . . Phil. 4:6 and 7.
2. Our prayer must be living fellowship. Covenant fellowship.

II. It is important that we say a few things re our manner and attitude in prayer.
A. Significant that the Lord teaches us to address God as "our Father which art in heaven."
1. We approach God in prayer in an attitude of childlike trust.
   a. We are His children by adoption in Christ. He has loved us.
      1) He is willing and able to give us our request!
      2) A Father will never turn away his children. That trust must be ours in prayer.
   b. Such trust must be the "foundation" of our prayer the H.C. teaches us.
2. But at the same time our attitude must be one of respect.
   a. Today this is often wanting. We have all come in contact with such disrespect.
      1) That is part of the "you and your" terminology.
      2) God is not "our good buddy". God is God!
   b. We approach Him in deep humility and trust.

B. Always "for Jesus sake".
1. Jesus Christ is our High Priest Who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities.
   a. Jesus makes intercession for us.
      1) It is always on the basis of His atonement that God listens to our requests.
      2) In Christ's blood we are the covenant friends of God.
   b. Wonderful:
      1) Jesus walked among us. He experienced everything that we have to deal with.
         a) None of our problems are foreign to our Exalted Lord.
         b. He can be touched! He can sympathize.
         c. We need not hold back in prayer thinking that he will not understand.
      2) We hide in Christ before the Holy God in the assurance that His
wrath against us is completely averted.

III. Now, perhaps the most difficult question, what must we pray for?

A. Phil 4:6 and 7 tells us that we must be careful for nothing; but in everything let our requests be made known unto God.

1. There is so much that troubles us.
   a. Many things make us anxious and rob us of peace with God.
      1) These are the practical concerns of our daily living.
      2) In this pilgrim’s journey we have much suffering, distress, pain, persecution, calamity and what have you.
   b. Yet at the same time we know that all things are in our Father’s hand and must work together for our good. Rom. 8
      1) Should our attitude be stoic?
      2) Or maybe all these matters become a vital part of our prayer lives?

2. We often struggle in prayer.
   a. That struggle is to know the will of God!!
      1) We do not pray glibly. But with Scripture in hand we ask for God’s will to be done.
      2) And that God may reveal that will unto us.
      3) Long prayer chains will not change the eternal will of God!
   b. We must be careful not to make our prayers carnal or selfish. Real danger.

B. Lord’s Prayer is our instruction here:
   1. Go thru the petitions individually.
   2. We will see; God is first. His will and kingdom; we are second, lives, necessities and the spiritual needs we have with sin and temptation. Then we return to the glorious doxology that God’s is the Kingdom, Power and Glory forevermore!

THE COVENANT AND BAPTISM

by Rev. J. Kortering

I. Baptism a Sign and Seal of the Covenant

A. What is the covenant
   1. A relationship of friendship between God and His people
      a. James 2:23, “And he (Abraham) was called the friend of God”
      b. Hosea 1:10, “In the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them Ye are the sons of the living God.”
      c. Amazing wonder, sinners are taken into the bonds of friendship with the Living God.
   2. This covenant friendship is God’s work
      a. Gen. 17:7, “I will establish my covenant”
b. Acts 2:29, "For the promise is unto you and your children...to as many as the Lord, our God shall call."

   c. This includes His work in eternity (election), His work at the cross (atonement), His work by the gospel (the internal call).

B. Baptism is a sign and seal of entrance into this covenant
   2. The sign is the sprinkling of water, cleansing
   3. As such it directs our attention to an act of making clean
      a. Water is the agent for washing the body
      b. Water in baptism is the sign of washing our souls
      c. We are filthy in sin, guilt and corruption, and need this cleansing.
   4. We cannot be in God’s covenant without this cleansing, here we deal with the truth of total depravity, our natural corruption and inability to make ourselves fit to stand in God’s presence
      a. By nature we are outside God’s covenant
      b. In order to be taken inside, we need to go through the process of washing
   5. We are washed in two ways
      a. By the blood of Jesus which takes away the guilt of sin
      b. By the Holy Spirit of Christ Who works in us the victory over the power of sin
   6. Both are signified and sealed in baptism
      a. The water sprinkled is the sign
      b. The seal is the verification of God through the sacrament that this two-fold cleansing is real.

C. Questions for discussion
   1. Why cannot God be friends with sinners who remain in sin?
   2. Show from the Old Testament that God’s people needed cleansing
   3. Why does the error of Arminianism or common grace detract from the sacrament of Holy Baptism?
   4. How should young people derive comfort and strength from the administration of baptism?
   5. Is there any significance in whether the water is sprinkled, poured or the person immersed in the water? Did they sprinkle water or blood in the Old Testament? Why do we sprinkle?

II. The Baptism of infants
   A. God established His covenant with believers and their children
      2. God is a covenant God of friendship with children
         a. Important thing to consider in this connection is that children are not potential members of the covenant, they are already members of the covenant from the moment they are conceived
         b. This is rooted in election, from before the foundations of the world we are known to God, Eph. 1:3-6.
         c. David expresses this in Psalm 139:13-17.
         d. Jesus expresses this in Psalm 139:13-17.
         e. Jesus took a child and said, "Suffer the little children and forbid
them not to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven,' Matt. 19:14.

3. For this reason the promise of God is unto them
   a. Acts 2:39, the promise is exactly that, not an empty wish or feeble desire, it is God’s infallible oath which He swore by Himself.
   b. That promise must be viewed “organically”
      1) God’s covenant is not established with all the natural seed of believers; rather, their spiritual seed
      2) This was true in Old Testament and New Testament, see Romans 9:7-9.
      3) Promise of God is to the elect seed as they are brought forth by Christian parents
      4) Since we do not know which of the children are elect, which are reprobate, God instructs parents to instruct all their children in the assurance that He will accomplish His purpose

B. The sacrament of Holy Baptism includes children
   1. It still is true, that children of God who come to faith in their adult life are baptized
      a. This is becoming more common-place in our country, the influence of secularism is seen in many homes and neighborhoods. When God by His mercy brings the gospel of salvation to them they come to faith, they receive baptism as adults, they were not brought up in covenant homes as children
      b. This is also true in our mission work both in this country and in foreign lands
      c. Part of our form for baptism reads specifically for adult baptism.
      d. Once these adults profess faith and are baptized, their children are also to be baptized
   2. Infants of believers are to be baptized
      a. This conclusion is drawn from their membership in the covenant as stated above.
      b. The sign of admission in the covenant is for them, this was true in the Old Testament circumcision, Genesis 17:12, and true in the N.T. with baptism, Acts 16:33.
      c. Since God is a covenant God of only one covenant people, both Jew and Gentile, Eph. 2:13ff, Rom. 2:28, the sign of the covenant is for children of both O.T. and N.T. Baptism and circumcision are brought together in one spiritual union, Col. 2:11, 12.

C. Questions for discussion
   1. Express briefly why you believe in infant baptism. Be prepared to demonstrate from the Bible.
   2. Why do the “Baptists” admit to infant circumcision but deny infant baptism? What is our answer to this?
   3. How do we explain the change from the sign upon the males of the O.T. but include girls in baptism?
   4. Does God’s covenant promise apply to adopted children just as well as
natural children? Why do we wait with baptism in such cases?
5. How do we explain the "silence" of the N.T. in that we do not read explicitly of baptism of an infant. Why is this silence in favor of infant baptism?

III. The Significance of Holy Baptism
A. God realizes His covenant through means of instruction
1. A great fallacy would come into being, if we would conclude from the above that children are mystically, magically, automatically made members of the covenant.
2. The way anyone, adult or child, is made a member of God's covenant is by the work of the Holy Spirit who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel
   a. True, regeneration precedes faith, it is the first work within our hearts, John 3:3.
   b. Regeneration is an immediate work, which the Holy Spirit is able to perform within the womb of the mother, or at any time He pleases
   c. The conscious expression of this work is faith, and such faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Romans 10:17.
3. This involves instruction of children from infancy on
   a. Parents promise to do this at baptism
   b. It is the means that God uses to work faith in hearts of children
   c. The church assumes a vital interest in children, not to win their soul for Christ, but to bring to expression the faith which God works in them.

B. Youth are called by God to respond to their baptism
1. You understand, that just because you are baptized does not make you a child of God
   a. We do not know what God does by His Holy Spirit within the child at the time of baptism, this is speculation that is not healthy to try to go into
   b. We do know that the sacrament is for the church, every time we have baptism, the sign and seal placed upon infants within the church. God speaks to every member, young and old alike, parents as well as non relatives. The word is, God's people are a peculiar people, separated from the world unto God.
   c. As we come to years of understanding, this message of baptism must mean more and more.
      1) God placed you within a covenant home and all that that means, whether you have only one believing parent or both are believers, your home is special. God is enthroned there, Jesus Christ is King.
      2) You begin to search yourself to know your personal relationship with God. You do not have to question this, you have to deal honestly with this. Just being brought up in a covenant home, attending church, being schooled in Christian education does not determine your relationship to Christ. It is the means that God is
pleased to use to give you faith. Your honest evaluation of yourself must include the searchings of your heart for the evidence of faith.

2. Your response to baptism
   a. Sometimes young people think that there is a spiritual vacuum between baptism and making confession of faith.
      1) They reason, yes, my parents presented me for baptism, that doesn’t obligate me.
      2) My obligation begins with confession of faith, then I must be serious, but until then. I have plenty of room to play the field, experiment, sow my wild oats, etc.
   b. This is false reasoning
      1) David thanked God that from the womb, God had chosen him
      2) Hannah gave Samuel to the service of Jehovah from his youth up
      3) Paul commented upon the blessing that was Timothy’s to have a godly mother and grandmother whereby he served God from his youth.
   c. The sign and seal of baptism makes youth special
      1) In the O.T. the sign was permanent in the flesh. God was dealing with them as children, they needed an object lesson that made them different from the nations about. Even the enemy could know who was an Israelite by their circumcision
      2) The spiritual lesson is the same for us now. We are not children, we do not need a physical sign to point us to our difference, now we have a spiritual sign (water which is invisible, but no less real) that we are a peculiar people, separated unto God from the wombs of our mothers.
      3) It is the privilege of young people of the church to live in such a way that as youth, to demonstrate that not only the children, not only the adults, but also the youth of the church are peculiar, spiritually different from the world, separated unto God for His service.

C. Questions for discussion
   1. Is there a danger in that young people do not take seriously their personal salvation because they just assume too much?
   2. Are covenant homes, Christian schools, distinctive churches too protective for covenant youth, should we let young people get more exposure to the world?
   3. What is a covenant breaker, how do you reconcile this idea with God’s unchangeable covenant? If a young person falls into serious sin and lives in the friendship of the world, must we conclude that he is not in the covenant?
   4. How do we distinguish spiritual separation from the world from physical separation. Do they overlap?
   5. Can covenant youth know they are in the covenant before they make confession of faith? How should this influence their behavior?
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