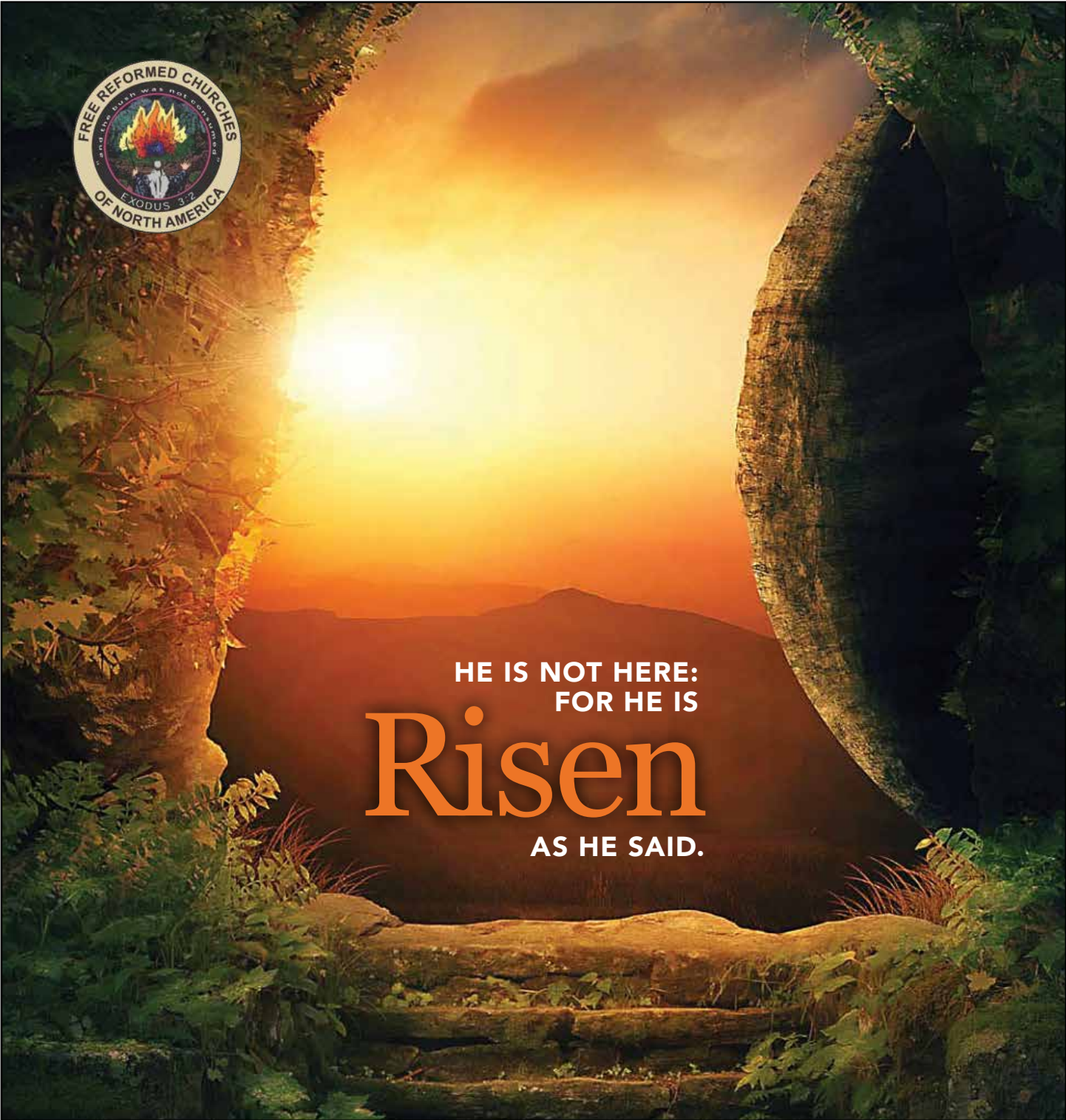


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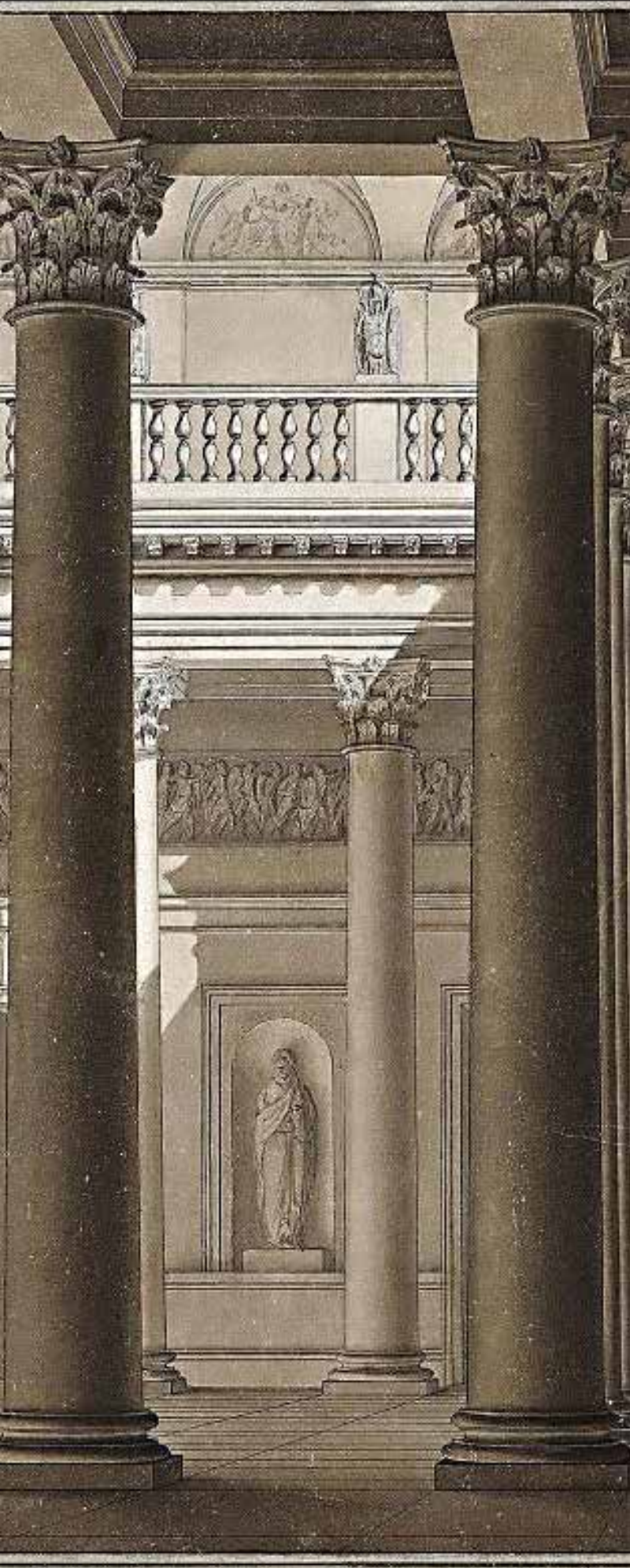
Risen

AS HE SAID.

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JESUS' SILENCE IN PILATE'S COURT

“And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.”

(Mat. 27:12-14)

How marvelous indeed! Jesus stands accused before human judges representing this sinful world and His apostate Covenant people. But He is silent!

Jesus was betrayed, arrested in Gethsemane. Now He is on trial before Jerusalem's "synod." Caiaphas the high priest, with chief priests, scribes, and elders, had Jesus accused by false witnesses (Mat. 26:57-68). Dismayed that Jesus would not respond, the high priest stands up: *“Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?”* But Jesus held his peace” (vs. 62).

Some of them spit in His face, buffeted him, and mocked him. They blindfolded Him and hit him, demanding, *“Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee?”* (vs.67-68; cf. Luke 22:64). But Jesus did not reply. He was silent when He was accused and abused.

Having received the verdict from the “church leaders,” Jesus is brought to Pilate, the governor of Judea. But the same response: *“when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.”* (Matt. 27:12). Why was Jesus silent?

His Silence Before Human Accusers

Jesus did speak at certain times. When asked if He was the Son of God, He agreed (Ch. 26:63-64). When Pilate asked if He was the King of the Jews, He did not deny it (ch. 27:11). In fact, He spoke more extensively with both the high priest and Pilate as we read in John's account (i.e., John 18:19-23; 33-38). He declared His identity as Messiah and Son of God. Jesus professed “a good confession” (1 Tim. 6:12). He faithfully proclaimed the truth. But when the earthly representatives of His Covenant people accused and indicted Him as guilty, *then* He was silent. His only response was silence.

Surely, Jesus had every earthly right to defend Himself, didn't He? From every perspective of human justice, He was falsely accused. They said He perverted the nation, He forbade paying tribute to Caesar, and that He said He was able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it again. Surely, He could have contradicted their lies and distortions! They accused Him of blasphemy for professing to be the Son of God! But that was *true* (Ch. 26:63-64). Their hateful unbelief had blinded them!

They were set on killing Him. His reply? *“He answered nothing”* (vs. 12)

What a Mystery! Why This Silence?

Pilate could not understand it: *“he marvelled greatly.”* He knew the Jewish leaders were motivated by envy (v. 18). Pilate knew Jesus was no criminal or insurrectionist; He did nothing worthy of a death penalty (cf. John 18:38; 19:4,6). Pilate just could not figure out why Jesus did not defend Himself. *“Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?”* (vs.13). Possibly he thought Jesus was not aware of how dangerous this was for Him. Did Jesus not know that Pilate had the power to let Him be killed (cf. John 19:10)? Whenever Pilate declared Jesus’ innocence, the priests just kept adding more charges. It was getting awkward for Pilate. Jesus, just listen to them! But still not a word. *“...insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly”* (vs.14).

Silence, when judged, appears like an admission of guilt, right? Yes, it does. Scripture teaches, *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God”* (Rom. 3:19).

So, then the whole world is guilty! All our mouths deserve to be stopped! But why was Jesus silent? He was not guilty, was He?! Jesus became human; He was also born “under the law.” (Gal. 4:4). But could the Law of God declare Jesus guilty? Like the man on the cross said,

“And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss” (Luke 23:41).

The Bible tells us that Jesus was “without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Why did He not now speak up in His own defence?! That is the marvel!

On a human level, we might say it was of no use. The chief priests had already made up their minds: Jesus had committed blasphemy and was worthy of death. They wanted Him dead. They had already “pre-judged” Him before they came to Pilate. They just needed the governor to approve of the execution. But Pilate found no fault in Jesus. Yet, the leaders had kept stirring the crowd to keep on shouting, “Crucify Him.” It seemed useless to speak up now. But that was not the main reason for Jesus’ silence.

Jesus’ silence was not because of these *human* accusations. Certainly, Jesus was able to answer the lies of these men. He could shut their mouth quickly if He wanted to. He had silenced His enemies before. We remember one time when *“no man was able to answer him a word”* (cf. Mat. 22:46). As the Messiah-Prophet, Jesus was certainly *able* to speak in His own defence. But this was a voluntary silence with a marvelous Gospel significance. In loving forbearance, Jesus chose to remain silent. Not because He *could not* speak. But because He *would not* speak.

Peter teaches that Jesus was an example for believers to follow when they suffer for His sake:

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Pet. 2:22-23).

Yet, there was more in His silence than being an example of submission in suffering. Jesus realized that the Supreme Court of Heaven was in session. He stood before the bar of the highest Justice.

His Silence Before a Divine Judge

Here we find the main reason for Jesus’ silence. He was silent because He was standing before the Judge of Heaven and earth. As He had said in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Father, ...Not my will; but thy will be done!” He submitted Himself to His Father’s plan to give His Son as “a ransom for many,” as Mediator and Surety for His Covenant people.

Fulfilling every Old Testament sacrifice, on the eve of the Passover, Jesus offers Himself now as the “Lamb of God” to take away sin. He fulfills prophecy; in particular, Isaiah 53:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, ...so he openeth not his mouth. (Is. 53:7)

His silence proclaims Him as the sacrificial Lamb of God. God had provided Himself a lamb (Gen.

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John 6:12

MEDITATION

22:8). He willingly takes the sinner's place. In Heaven's Court-house, the guilt of His people is transferred onto the Father's chosen Lamb. What an amazing transfer! The guilt of all the Father's prodigal children is placed upon the only Son, in whom the Father was well pleased (Mat. 3:17). Yet, this Perfect Son would not be redeemed from the sword of death. He soon would hang upon the cross to endure the curse of abandonment:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Is. 53:6)

Believers, listen: "*laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*" What does that mean to you? "*The wages of sin is death...*" (Rom. 6:23). Jesus, the Son of God went on willingly, silently to pay the full price.

There, before the throne of Heaven's Justice, God "*made Him to be sin for us*" (2 Cor. 5:21) All that guilt was on Him. You could say that Jesus was then the greatest sinner of all of history. No one ever bore so much guilt as He did. It was because of that Jesus was silent, before the Judge of Heaven. He stood before God, guilty as charged. His was a silence of submission to the curse against sin, to the coming hellish punishment which Heaven's justice demanded. The full curse of the Law was upon Him. (Gal. 3:13)

Jesus' silence was because He knew that the whole "testament" of His Father's will would now be fulfilled and ratified by the death of His anointed Son:

Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. (Ps. 40:7-8; Heb. 10:4-10)

What an amazingly gracious substitution! The incarnate Word of God Himself is silent for the sake of brazenly outspoken rebels who have despised His gracious words! If Pilate marvelled, should we not marvel even more when Jesus is preached and offers Himself to be our Saviour?

His Silence Benefiting Believers

Should Jesus' loving silence not silence us? Surely, the silence of the Lamb of God should silence His murmuring Covenant people! It should stop our mouths. *We* are the guilty ones! *We*, like Peter, should weep as we realize that our Master suffered our punishment even while we were still sinners. How often we spoke denying Him! How often we were silent instead of confessing Him! How we should be struck silent with a sense of our guilt!

When His Spirit brings His Word home to our hearts will His amazing grace not overwhelm us? When the veil is lifted from our eyes, will *we* not marvel at His cross? When the *gospel* accuses us then we will wake up to the greatest marvel of it all:

*Surely, he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...
But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.* (Is.53:4-5)

Oh, what a marvel! His silent suffering paid the price of **our** peace – our *Shalom!* He bore the wrath we deserved so that by

faith we may have peace with God. Our Mediator reconciled with His Father to be truly *our* Father.


How else does His silence benefit believers? Satan's accusations are silenced. Having appropriated all their guilt in silence, Jesus has silenced "the accuser of the brethren" (Cf. Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10). The believer's sins are now paid in full – "it is finished!" Satan no longer has access to Heaven's court room (cf. Job 2; Zech.3:1). "*The Accuser of the brethren is cast down,*" having no basis for accusing believers – not even in their conscience (Rev. 12:8-10; Heb.9:14). It is *God* who justifies, who is he that condemns? (Rom. 8:33-34).

Even though "my conscience accuses me..." (Heidelberg Cat. LD.23), the Gospel assurance silences our fears of condemnation by directing our faith to Jesus' cross and open grave. We are reminded that God was *fully* satisfied by the suffering of the silent Lamb of God.

Yes, God's Holy Law still speaks its condemnation against all sin. But when the believer is frightened by the Law's voice as a Covenant of Works, the threat is silenced by assurance that Jesus Christ offered a sacrifice once and for all (Heb. 10:10). There is "*no more condemnation*" to those who by faith are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).

How often our guilt can hinder our access to God in prayer! Intending to commune with God, we find ourselves unable to pray. What can we say? Little more than, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But the Gospel beckons us to be encouraged to speak. The Mediator who was silent on behalf of sinners as the Lamb, now mediates for us as High Priest in heaven. He is ready to hear and speak on our behalf. He ever lives to make continual intercession for sinners (Heb. 7:25). "*Therefore, let us come boldly unto the throne of grace... to find grace to help in time of need*" (Heb.4:15-16). David urges us freely to confess transgressions to the Lord (Cf. Ps. 32:3). We have no reason to remain in "guilty silence." Let us be encouraged by the open access to the throne of grace to come freely to receive cleansing from sin.

Sin's guilt may stifle our liberty to speak out for God's glory or to witness of Christ to others. But, while past guilt may tempt us to be silent, amazing grace will loosen our tongue in thankful praise to God. David, the moment he repents, he already thinks of glorifying God: "*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation... Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.... And my tongue shall sing aloud... O Lord, open thou my lips....*" (Ps. 51:12-15). Surely, with a saving knowledge of all Christ has done, we cannot be silent but will even sing of the blessedness of being freely forgiven (Ps. 32:1). It is marvellous!

Saviour all my guilt remove,
And my tongue shall sing Thy love;
Touch my silent lips, O Lord,
And my mouth shall praise accord. (Pst. 142:4) 

Rev. P. VanderMeyden is a Free Reformed emeritus pastor and member of the Free Reformed Church of Vineland, Ontario.

3RD ANNUAL SENIOR'S DAY

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9:30 AM,

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10:30 AM

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followed by singing

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CHURCHES UNDER THE CROSS

What churches would you describe as “Churches under the cross”? Ones familiar with our history may think of the Reformation era when the Reformed churches described themselves as “the Netherlands Churches, that sit under the Cross.” Centuries later, amid persecution, the Secession churches of 1834 split with one group calling themselves again “Reformed Churches under the Cross.” Most of these churches re-united with the other body of Secession churches in 1869. So, “Churches under the cross” is a name used in our past.

Ones attuned to the needs of those in persecution today may think this name is a fitting description for churches in Eritrea, Somalia, Iran, Myanmar, or other countries where the cross of persecution inflicts such unspeakable suffering. So, “Churches under the cross” is a fitting name for churches far away.

But what about us? Are we “Churches under the Cross”? Should we desire to be so? These questions lead to Paul’s confession in Galatians 6:14: “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

Under A Crucified Saviour

Paul desires to glory in, or boast, rejoice, exalt, and delight in something. What you glory in makes your life worth living. While many people and things present themselves as candidates for glorying, Paul turns away from them all and fixes on one great object: “the cross.”

We are so used to hearing of “the cross,” but Paul’s statement is shocking. Who glories in a cursed and shameful instrument for executing the worst of criminals? A cross is the opposite of delight, joy, and preciousness! However, this is not just any cross, but “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul was not fixated on two pieces of wood, but on the One who was fixed upon them.

Paul glories in the cross because “unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). The cross points back through time to the first moment after the fall and forward through time to the last moment before Christ returns and declares Christ crucified is the only way for that vertical relationship between God and sinners to be restored. When we discover who we are as sinners, deserving only shame, condemnation, and curse, how attractive the cross of Jesus the Saviour becomes! As the Christ, He was anointed to be the priest who endured the curse on the cross to deliver from it, save from sin, and give the blessing of God’s favour! As anointed King, in his moment of greatest seeming defeat on the cross, he crushed the serpent’s head and conquered the world. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul glories in the cross also because it is so bright with the glory of the God he has come to know and adore. The cross of shame is the place of greatest glory. Have you not trembled in awe of the glory

of God's justice not sparing His own Son and that same justice accepting His perfect sacrifice? Has your heart not melted before God's love displayed in providing His Son as a propitiation for sin? Have you not marveled at God's wisdom in securing a full salvation that is so utterly impossible for man? Have you not felt the power of God's grace that flows from the cross? "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

If we are to be "Churches under the cross," we must be deeply convinced that we cannot live without that cross. That conviction constrains us to desire to see Christ crucified lifted up in the preaching and evidently set forth before us. In such churches, Paul's confession sounds: "we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23-24).

For churches to be under the cross, we need not only a Christ-centered ministry, but also to be churches where the Holy Spirit is present glorifying this Christ. This is at the heart of the experiential element we profess to hold dear. Paul was concerned to see Galatians wandering from Christ by adding to Christ. They were beginning to glory in other things, such as circumcision (Gal. 6:13). How terrible to pay lip service to Christ and yet pride ourselves in our religious activities! To self-righteous unbelief that trusts in its own goodness, this cross is "a stumblingblock," and to sophisticated unbelief that glories in human greatness, this cross is "foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:23). As long as we boast in who we are and what we have or do, we do not know what to do with a crucified Saviour. How we need the Holy Spirit to fill our churches and our hearts, exposing the folly and sin of all idols, humbling before God's glory, and leading to glory only in the cross of Christ!

Truly experiential churches are "churches under the cross," for all Spirit-worked spiritual experience leads to the cross and flows from the cross.

How will being "churches under the cross" show? Not by changing our name, but by continuing in Paul's confession: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, *by whom the world is crucified unto me.*"

In a Crucified World

When God leads us to glory in the cross of Christ, we find that cross planted between us and the world, changing our relationship with the world. We cannot love it, devote our life to it, or conform to it. As the Spirit glorifies Christ crucified in our hearts, we see the world through the "lens" of the cross.

By "world" here is not meant simply God's good creation, but the realm of life lived apart from God. Galatians 1:4 calls it "this present evil world." Some may think that the evil world is far away in the halls of power or the nightlife of cities, but it is closer than that. It is not just a click away on your computer and a tap away on your phone, but even closer. Paul once thought the world was close and yet that he was far enough away from the world through his own obedience (Phil. 3:4-6). However, as important as barriers and filters between us and the world are, they are not enough, because by nature our hearts are no different from the world and we walk "according to the course of this world" (Eph. 2:2-3). Paul learned his heart was no better than that of the ungodly ones he despised. Now he finds the world a crucified thing to him.

How is that possible? That can be the question of someone who struggles with sin's power. The world with its lusts and pride is alive in you. Its thinking, practices, enjoyments, and even sinful addictions pull. You have tried to break with the world, but it is too strong. Yes, too strong for you, but not too strong for the cross of Christ. God has sent his Son to "deliver us from this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4). When we are drawn to Christ crucified, the light of His glory exposes the world for what it is: a crucified, accursed, repulsive, shameful thing.

A loving view of Christ crucified deadens love for the world. His love outshines all the apparent love of the world. His love is pure and divine, self-denying, and powerful. What love can the world give you compared to that? What loveliness is there in anything the world offers compared to Christ Jesus and His gracious love? The cross makes the world a dead thing compared to the glorious Saviour.

The cross also exposes the ugliness of the world. At the cross, you see what sin does. The world

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says, “Away with him” to the Son of God’s love. The heathen world living for pleasure and the religious world living by its good works join in crying, “Crucify him!” The world pierced the hands that came to bless and killed the prince of life! At the cross, the world’s mask is gone, and we see the world hates what is good – hates God himself. In crucifying Christ, the world exposes itself to be a shameful thing before the glorious Saviour. How can we then be enamored by it?

The cross also exposes the condemnation of the world. In sentencing Christ to death, the world sealed its own death sentence. The world demanded its own accursed death in crucifying Christ. The world may appear a charming and powerful prince, but through the lens of the cross, it is a condemned criminal.

By Christ crucified, “the world is crucified to me.” Churches under the cross show themselves to be such by viewing the world as the realm of sin through the lens of the cross. Then they cannot love the world anymore or ask how close they can come to the world in how they live, look, act, speak, and think. Their mantra is no longer, “is it really so bad?” or “everyone does it.” Churches under the cross know: the further from the corruption of the world the better and the closer to the cross the better. The more love to Him and the more hatred to sin the better. The more joyous glorying in the cross and the more grief over sin the better. Under the cross is the only place our churches will be devoted to God.



“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord” Revelation 11:15

As Crucified Churches

Does the world notice when churches are under the cross? Yes. That is why Paul adds: “by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” The cross not only made the world a dead thing to Paul but also Paul a dead thing to the world. Is that surprising? How can the Christ-crucifying world love His followers? Jesus said in John 15:18-19: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”

Paul knew this by experience. He confessed in Galatians 6:17: “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” The misleaders of the Galatians said they needed the mark of circumcision, but Paul says I have other marks that show I belong to Jesus Christ: the marks of suffering for Christ’s sake. His back may have born the scars of the lash and His wrists the scars of chains, but all the world’s crucifixion of him does not make him let go of the cross that brings this upon him. He clings to that cross of Christ the more. In 2 Corinthians 1:5, he confesses: “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” Let them mock, despise, or roll their eyes; let them sanction and imprison. If it is because I belong to Christ crucified, then it is an honour to share in His reproach. At the cross, God’s favour is worth more than all the smiles of the world and His frown to be feared more than all the frowns of the world.

As churches, we have to ask ourselves, how many of our discussions concerning the world are filled with fear of the world and what it will do to the church? Conservative news-sites thrive on negative reports and provide fertile soil for flight or fight mentalities. Some try to escape the world. Some spend their energy battling a secular agenda. Some conform to the world to avoid its frown.

How shall we stand in this world, not ashamed of the gospel, and be willing to suffer the world’s crucifixion? Only when we are under the cross of Christ. The more we are churches under the cross, the less reason the world will have to despise us for our hypocrisy and the less ability it will have to ignore the light of God’s grace in us. The more we are churches under the cross, the more apparent it will become that the issue the world has with the church is an issue with Christ. Then, as churches under the cross, we will have great hope that, as the light of Christ crucified shines in the church and through the church into the world, He will also fulfil his own promise: “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32), be they self-righteous or unrighteous, in the church or in the world.

“Churches under the cross” then is not just nice historical name or a fitting one for persecuted churches today, but a needed one for us as well. Only under the cross of Christ by the power of the Spirit of Christ are we saved, experiential, sanctified, and witnessing churches. Being that begins with you and me bowing before Christ crucified. ①

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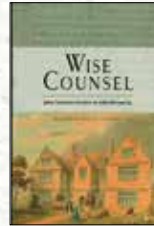
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By Grant Gordon, Editor

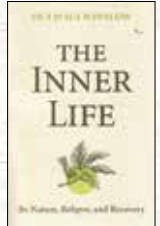
John Newton (1725-1807) was the former slave-trader turned pastor and author of Amazing Grace. He has also rightly been called 'the letter-writer par excellence of the Evangelical Revival'. All but ten of the letters in the present volume have been brought out of undeserved obscurity by Dr. Gordon, whose research in libraries and archives and little-known nineteenth-century periodicals have uncovered much material which is calculated to comfort, quicken, and confirm. The particular recipient of Newton's 'wise counsel' in this book was John Ryland, Jr. (1753-1825), Ryland was a Baptist pastor and educator, close friend of missionary leaders, and friend of all the 'who's who' of the Revival movement of the 18th century. The wider background is a very eventful period of history, from the American Revolution to the French Revolutionary Wars, by way of the colonization of Australia, the first missions to India, and the abolition of the slave trade. Dr. Gordon has helpfully set the letters in the context of these events and provides useful background detail. Hardcover, 411 pages, Banner of Truth Trust
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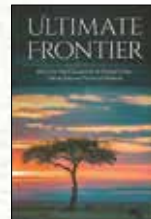
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By Leland Ryken & Glenda Faye Mathes

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BEAUTY IS YOUR DESTINY

Beauty Is Your Destiny: How the Promise of Splendor Changes Everything by Philip Ryken. Published by Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2023 Softcover, 176 pages.

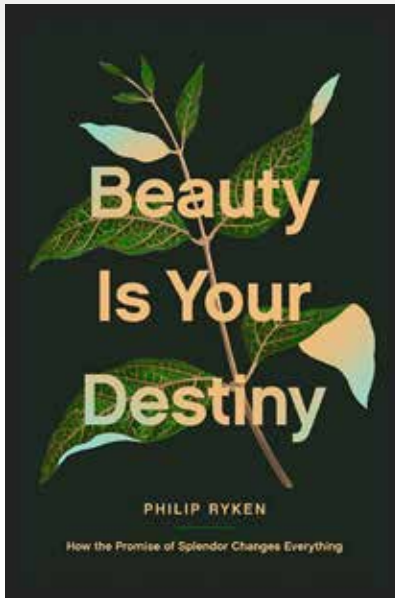
It is undeniable that the public increase of inflammatory language and blatant immorality bombarding us via electronic devices and advertising create an atmosphere of unrest and ugliness in our culture. Therefore, this book about beauty is like a balm to the soul. Can there be beauty in this world filled with wars, poverty, hunger, diseases, family and marriage breakdown, transgenderism, sexual perversion, and abuse? Yes, even after the fall, which is the cause of all this ugliness, there is reason to see beauty. How? By focusing on what the Bible teaches us about the beauty in the destiny of believers.

“One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD” (Ps. 27:4).

To behold the beauty of the LORD, to gaze upon His face, is the eternal destiny of a child of God. “If you are a child of God, made pure by the righteous blood of your Saviour, then beauty is your destiny too – the eternal, shining beauty you will behold and become forever when you see your crucified, risen Lord Jesus face to face” (p. 18). Many poets and academics have tried to describe the beautiful things God created, and the Bible has a long list of beautiful things that includes people and their voices, animals, plants and trees, clothing, cities, buildings, ships, and royalty. But it is especially God Himself Who is beautiful in His Being. “God’s beauty is, first of all, *visible*” (p. 24). Isaiah prophesied: “Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty” (Isa. 33:17).

This is dealt with in detail in the “Beauty of the Trinity” (chapter 2). Throughout Scripture, there are records of people who beheld the glory of God, such as Moses, Isaiah and Peter, and James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. Other words to depict God’s beauty are His *glory, splendour, and majesty* (e.g. Ps. 96:6; 145:5). There is also beauty in God’s “grace for penitent sinners,” in His kindness of taking care of us daily and providing for our needs (p. 27). All God’s attributes are beautiful, and they find their full expression in the “Beautiful Trinity” (p. 29) – each Person in their specific work in saving sinners, as the One Holy God: Father, Son, and Spirit.

Next, the author turns to “The Beauty of Creation” (chapter 3). This chapter is a joy to read as Ryken points out how people in the Bible praise God’s beauty and glory in the wonders of His creation. What is interesting here is that the author points to *The Netherlands Confession of Faith* (The Belgic Confession), which tells us



that the creation of the world is set “before our eyes as a beautiful book, in which all created things, great and small, are like letters, which give us the invisible things of God to behold, namely His eternal power and divinity” (p. 42). Here and many other times, Ryken quotes Calvin, John Newton, and Jonathan Edwards, as well as biblical apologists.

There are many wonders in the universe, but “Nothing in all creation is more magnificent than persons made in the sacred image and likeness of God” (p. 58). “Male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27), each with a specific task. God’s beauty is displayed in both men and women. Scripture tells us that Sarai, Moses, David, Abigail, Esther, Job, and the bride in Song of Solomon were beautiful. We are all beautifully made as God’s image bearers, but

we should think beyond the merely physical to the emotional and spiritual dimensions of human personhood. Beauty is more than skin deep (p. 63) and also comprises the “broken beauty” of aging and various disabilities. There is also the ugliness of death which turns all our beauty into dust. But we can be beautiful again by the new birth which gives us eternal life. This has implications for safeguarding human life as well. There is also a connection between sanctification and sharing in God’s beautification (p. 69).

“The Beauty of Purity” (chapter 5) deals with sexuality. Both marriage and singleness are beautiful when we honour God with our bodies. There is beauty when God’s purposes are lived out according to His will. “Because our bodies are made in the image of God, they always carry spiritual meaning. This is especially true of the believer’s body, which is united to the risen Christ and therefore destined to become immortal. When husband and wife selflessly love one another with bodies that are consecrated for the coming resurrection, together they are living into a gospel story” (p. 83). The author also deals with sexual sin, especially in the church, and has wise and helpful advice for various situations.

The chapter entitled “Beautiful Saviour” deals with the question of the ugliness of Christ’s death, which the world sees as hideous, but the church sees it as beautiful. Christ’s physical appearance probably was not beautiful either, because Isaiah describes Him as having “no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa. 53:2). This certainly describes Him on the cross, but probably also His physical appearance throughout life. Yet, His was the most beautiful sacrifice that anyone has ever made (p. 120). Of all the places where “the glory of God shines,” wrote John Calvin, “nowhere has it shone more brightly than in the cross” (p. 120). His scars

are His “beauty marks.” Augustine stated: “He hung on the cross deformed, but his deformity is our beauty” (p. 127).

Chapter 8, “Beautiful Community,” is about the beauty of Christ’s church, where no race, gender or social status excludes anyone. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Peoples and nations in their racial and ethnic diversity will all be there. The early chapters of the Book of Acts describe this church as beautiful in its spiritual unity (p. 131). Being born again by the one Holy Spirit, they are one. Their shared commitment to the Word of God, to loving fellowship, to the sacraments and their giving generously demonstrates remarkable unity.

Ryken states: “Our collective calling to represent the image of God together means that all the beauty we have considered so far in this book culminates in—of all places—the church of Jesus Christ... The church is the outworking of God’s triune beauty... Simply put, God is beautiful community and we, in turn, are called to embody that beauty” (p. 134), as is clearly set forth by the Saviour Himself (John 15:1-17, Isa. 4:2-6, etc.) So, why is there sin in the church and does the church at times look so ugly?

Throughout the book, Ryken has lamented the ugliness that sin brought into the world, but here he sees the brokenness of beauty as most tragic. He calls us to repent of our sin of tearing each other down and all the other sins with which the church is beset. He calls us to do what the church of Acts did: practice hospitality, give generously, do justice, pursue reconciliation, and live in Christian unity. That unity *does* exist in Christ, our beautiful Saviour Who is always with and in His church. “Apart from the presence of Christ, the church has no beauty” (p. 145). We can celebrate this unity in diversity by looking back on the long history of the church and its diversity in the ingathering of people from all over the world (p. 143). “Our calling is to live with a view toward our destined beauty so that the world can see and know the Saviour today” (p. 147).

The author closes with this thought: “That great day is coming sooner than we know. In the meantime — when beauty seems to vanish from the world and there is more ugliness than we can bear — we are called to do what we can, no matter the cost, to live a beautiful life for Jesus.” So true, but I was a little disappointed that the author did not devote a final chapter to the beauty of a new heaven and a new earth, as recorded in Revelation 21 and 22. Nevertheless, this is a beautiful book, enriched by references to Puritans and numerous literary sources. Recommended.

Mrs. Ricky (Frederika) Pronk is a member of Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario

This book may be purchased in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.



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THE ORDER OF SALVATION (17)

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS (1)

In his book entitled *Saved by Grace*, Dr. Anthony Hoekema tells the story of a pastor calling on an aged church member who was seriously ill (p.234). When asked how he was feeling, the sick man replied, “I feel very weak; in fact, pastor, sometimes I’m too weak to pray. And I worry about this; I’m afraid, so afraid that one of these days I may in my weakness let go of Christ and be lost.” The pastor then quoted Jesus’ words recorded in John 10:28, “I give them [my sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” What keeps us secure to the end, the pastor went on to say, is not our hold on Christ, but Christ’s hold on us. And I praise God, he will never let us go!

Hoekema then explained that this comment was meant to comfort this troubled soul by assuring him that if he would keep looking to Christ, even as a weak believer, he would persevere in faith with God’s help. This is not mere wishful thinking, he said, but a sure truth based on Scripture and the Reformed Confessions.

The Westminster Confession and the Canons of Dort

Although we always need Scripture to prove the truth of the doctrines and other facts God has revealed to man, we may also study the Confessions which the church has drawn up to help us consult God’s revelation in an organized and systematic way. For instance, the Reformed and Presbyterian churches adopted the *Three Forms of Unity* and the *Westminster Confession* respectively. These Confessions are very valuable and help us preserve the truth in our churches in a time of great confusion.

Let us first look at what the *Westminster Confession of Faith* teaches about the doctrine of Perseverance: “They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved” (17.1).

The *Canons of Dort* offers a slightly different definition: “By reason of [the] remains of indwelling sin, and the temptations of sin and of the world, those who are converted could not persevere in a state of grace, if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who having conferred grace mercifully confirms, and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end” (V.3).

Both confessions teach that perseverance is a work of God which enables believers to persevere in their faith to the end of their life. But the emphasis of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is slightly more on the believer’s activity than on God’s enabling power. The *Canons*, on the other hand, put more stress on God’s sovereignty than on man’s contribution to the work. In his *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, John Murray tends to favour the former position and makes a strong plea for retaining the expression *perseverance* rather

than *preservation*. The reason for his preference is that *perseverance* guards against the mere notion that believers are spiritually secure regardless of the extent to which they may fall into sin or become careless about their way of life... perseverance means the engagement of our persons in the most intense and concentrated devotion to those means which God has ordained for the achievement of his saving purposes (p. 192-193).

Murray has a point, because in his day, as in ours, many Christians seem to take for granted that a believer's salvation is almost guaranteed. "Once saved always saved" is the mantra by which many live. While this danger is real, in many cases it is better to keep the terms *perseverance* and *preservation* together as close as possible, because they belong together. The reason is that there is a connection among all the phases of the order of salvation.

Whether we speak of predestination, calling, regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, sanctification, perseverance and glorification -- these all stand or fall together. Those who have been chosen by the Father from eternity, redeemed by the Son in time, and renewed by the Spirit when He applies redemption to the hearts of the elect will also be brought infallibly to salvation. All who savingly believe in Jesus Christ are eternally secure in Him. No one can snatch His sheep out of His hands. That is the eternal security which awaits the saints: God begins, God continues, and God brings to perfection what He works in all His people.

Who are the Saints?

The *Canons of Dort* repeatedly refer to the saints. They are not the saints Rome honours and even worships like Mary the mother of Jesus or other outstanding persons who serve as models of godliness for ordinary believers. By "saints," the *Canons* mean the same persons mentioned in Scripture. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 1, the apostle Paul writes to those "that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." They are born-again believers who confess Christ. The whole church at Corinth is addressed as saints, meaning true Christians. Some of them were Christians in name only. The apostle John writes that "they went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19). In the early church like today, there were those who started out running the race well, but they fell away because they were mere professors of religion.

True saints are sinners saved by grace. They are those whom God has effectually called according to His purpose to unite them to His Son so they may enjoy communion with Him and fellow believers. The Holy Spirit gave them a new nature by which they are delivered from the power and dominion of sin and become increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. To accomplish all this, Christ laid down His life for His church so that He might purchase her to Himself, cleanse her from all impurities and finally present her to His Father without spot and without wrinkle.

That is the goal our triune God has in mind, namely that believers will become like Jesus when He welcomes them in glory.

By nature, we all are slaves of sin, but by grace and through faith, believers will be delivered from that bondage. Satan will be taken down from our throne and Christ will be enthroned in our hearts. But this has not taken place yet. The process has begun; believers are being changed. Their sanctification is going on and hopefully is increasing by the day. But the transformation and purification are far from complete.

The Saints Do Not Reach Perfection in This Life

The *Canons* mention this already in Chapter 5, Article 1, where they say: "God may deliver His people from the dominion and slavery in this life but not altogether from the body of sin and from the infirmities of the flesh, so long as they continue in this world." All God's people experience this disappointment, though in various degrees. At first, when the Lord begins a good work in our hearts, we may think we have nothing to do with sin anymore. We feel delivered and have no desire to sin. We are so taken in by the love of Christ that the affections of our hearts go out to Him, and we think it will stay that way. But sooner or later, the power of sin comes back. The apostle Paul laments in Romans 7 that he is still carnal (fleshly), sold under sin, and that he does things which he does not want to do.

The Bible does not say that believers can attain perfection in this life. Yet some people think this is possible. They believe they can reach a certain level of spirituality that will keep them from sinning. They think that keeping the law of God outwardly is enough. But they are wrong. There is also an inward, spiritual side of the law that needs to be taken seriously. God is holy and requires holy obedience from all human creatures.

His saints know that they must render such obedience at all times, but they understand they cannot do so. Perfection is demanded, but they cannot come up with it; yet they try. They love God's commandments, meditate on them and keep them whenever possible (Ps. 119:97). Daily striving for perfection, the prospect before them is that ultimately, at the moment of death or on the last day, they will be complete.

Meanwhile, the saints persevere. But not in their own strength. True, they struggle daily against sin. As *Canons* Head V, Article 2 states: "Hence spring daily sins of infirmity." There are sins of infirmity or weakness, spots adhere to the best works of the saints which furnish them with constant matter for humiliation before God. Therefore, they fly for refuge to Christ crucified. In all these situations, the saints try to persevere in faith, and they do so in the hope and expectation that God stands by them, helping them. As we have seen, those who persevere in the faith can always count on a merciful and powerful God Who preserves the work He has in them begun and will by His grace be fully done.

How God came to the rescue of saints like David and Peter, who fell into huge sins with sad consequences, we will consider next time, DV. ①



THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED!

The bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is neither a hoax nor a cleverly devised fable, but an indisputable fact of history evidenced by the changed lives of His people.

It was, undoubtedly, a peculiar blessing to have witnessed firsthand any one of our Lord's many resurrection appearances. Thomas, for instance, found that he did not have to put his finger into the print of the nails after all, or put his hand into His spear-pierced side; the very moment that he saw Christ he believed. This, however, does not validate the saying that "seeing is believing." Too often, in fact, seeing is not believing (see Luke 16:31), but believing, rather, is seeing—perhaps seeing for the first time—seeing at last what the darkness of unbelief kept hidden. As Jesus said to Thomas, "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

The historicity of the resurrection is evident in the unwavering commitment of those who were prepared to die in order to preach it to others. Peter had boasted of what great things he would do, yet that inflated claim showed little substance in the face of danger. What a change we see in him after our Lord's resurrection! When Peter was called to be a shepherd to feed the Lord's sheep (on the same shore where he had earlier been called to be a fisher of men), he was given opportunity three times to confess his love for the very One whom he had three times so shamefully denied. Peter was not able to do it; using

a different word in his reply, he acknowledged his affection for Jesus, but not his consistent love. We must not think, though, that this was an indication of more weakness; instead, it was an expression of a budding spiritual vitality. The man who had said much before, but did little was determined now by the grace of God to say little and do much—nor did he flinch when he was told by what death he would glorify God! People die for false beliefs all the time, but they think that they are sacrificing themselves for the truth. The difference for Peter, and for so many of his generation, is that having seen the resurrected body of Jesus and having experienced its sanctifying power, he knew what was true.

The historicity of the resurrection is evident not only in the commitment of those who died for Christ, but also, just as remarkably, in the commitment of those very ones who were prepared to live for Him. Saul of Tarsus was feared by Christians everywhere. Who would have guessed that such a zealous persecutor could ever be converted? But what a change we see in him as well after he was confronted by the risen Christ! At first, Christians were afraid of him still and did not believe that he could really be one of their number as he claimed. In time, however, as they learned of his conversion and as they heard how he came to preach the faith which he had once tried to destroy, they glorified God and gladly received him! Saul (now called Paul) became as zealous for Christ as he had been



against Him, and he tells us why: “that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10).

To believers, the announcement of the angel to the women, “He is risen!” ought to be as thrilling today as the first time when it echoed from the tomb. We know that our Lord’s resurrection from the dead was not an isolated event. No, this was a vital part of His ministry to seek and save lost souls, and it was what He did for us. If death could not hold Him down, death can no longer hold us down either. He ascended and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High for us, too. He did it in order to prepare a place for us. When at last His bride is ready for Him, He will come back to the earth and take her home to glory, that she may be with Him forever. If the cross of Christ is the key to understanding history, its meaning and purpose, then the empty tomb is His joyful declaration of complete victory on His people’s behalf. ①

Rev. Thomas Aicken is emeritus pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Langley, British Columbia. Taken from the April 2012 edition of the Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth.

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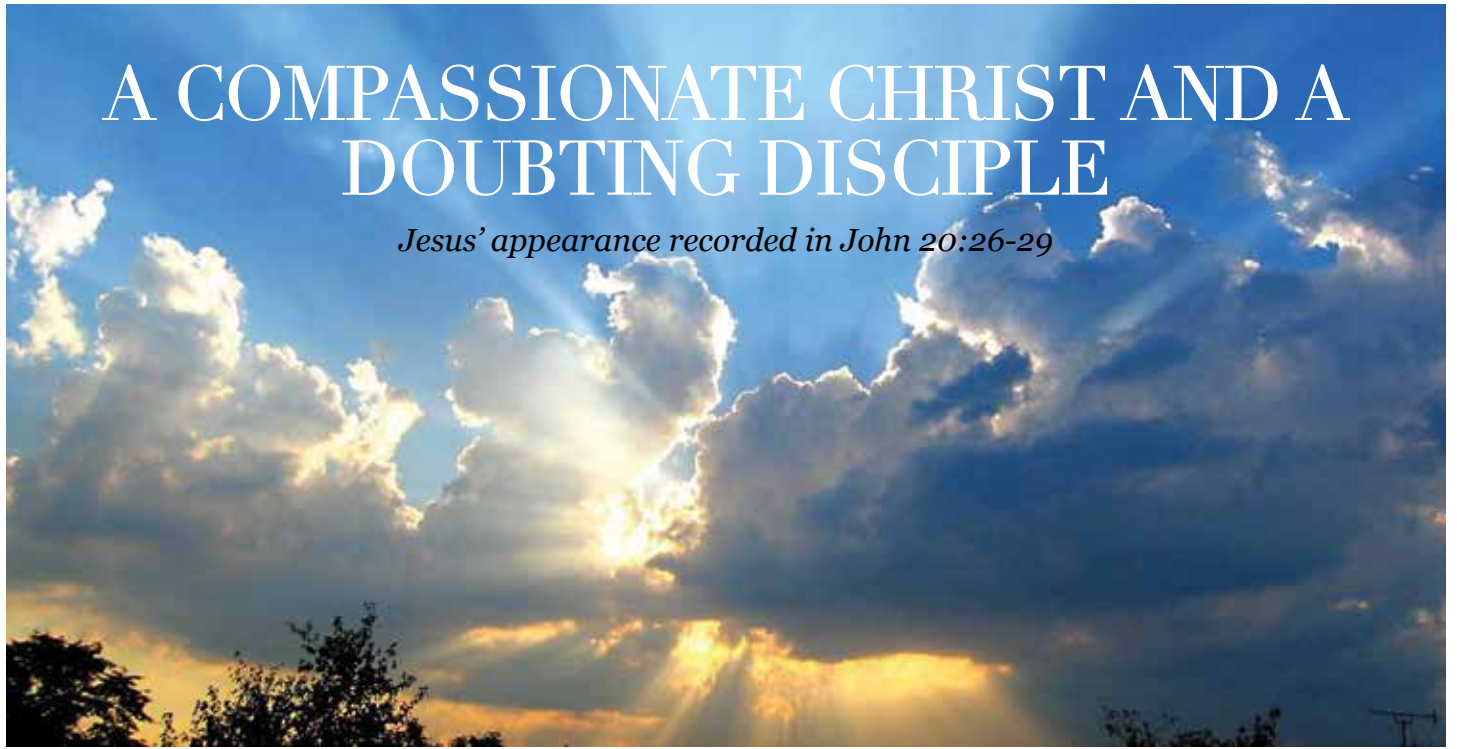
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A COMPASSIONATE CHRIST AND A DOUBTING DISCIPLE

Jesus' appearance recorded in John 20:26-29



Every one of our Lord's post-resurrection appearances had a very special purpose. When we consider the purpose of Jesus' visitation with Thomas, we come face to face with an ever-long-suffering Lord who always deals kindly and compassionately with His disciples who are oh so slow to learn. If ever there was a time when Jesus had reason to rebuke a disciple, then this was surely it. It was Thomas, after all, who had defiantly declared, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). Thomas at times is referred to as "Doubting Thomas," but, in essence, this is not so. These words bespeak outright unbelief! And yet, when the Lord appears to him, He does not say to Thomas, "Where were you when I came to the others eight days ago?" or "Why are you so wickedly unbelieving?" All our Lord says is, "Peace be unto you."

Perhaps nowhere in the Gospels do we see more vividly displayed the immensity of our Lord's tender mercy towards His obtuse and erring disciple. Many of us would sooner or later have been provoked or perplexed by the likes of Thomas, yet the Lord Jesus does not deal with him in this way. From the start, He had known Thomas was a man who saw the darker side of life. He was the one who, when Jesus was going up to tend to Lazarus who was sick, said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." In the Upper Room, when Jesus said that He was leaving them, returning to His Father's house, stating that they know the way He is taking, Thomas, in despair, cries out, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"

And now, when Thomas openly questions the resurrection of Christ, the Lord condescends to directly address each of Thom-

as's statements of unbelief, one by one: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails...behold my hands," "and put my finger into the print of the nails...reach hither thy finger," "and thrust my hand into his side...reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side," "I will not believe...and be not faithless, but believing." All his brutish ignorance (Ps. 73:22), all his unrealistic demands (Matt. 12:39), and all his senseless questioning is dealt with in infinite grace. Hearing these words, Thomas recognizes that Jesus is condescending to meet every one of his foolish demands, even giving a gentle rebuke for his lack of faith. "Stop being unbelieving, my beloved one, and simply believe" (cf. Mark 5:36). Thomas was propelled then to confess, "My Lord and my God," which was possibly one of the greatest statements to ever come from the lips of any of the apostles. Twice he speaks the personal possessive "my," indicating heartfelt appropriation of Christ's lordship.

Here are three practical lessons:

- In this interchange that takes place between the risen Lord and Thomas, we have the heart of God revealed to stubborn and dull sinners like ourselves. Demanding a sign, the very thing that God condemns because it reveals a heart of unbelief, is dealt with according to the weakness of faith of the individual. This passage is in our Bibles for our benefit to supply abundant evidence that Jesus is rich in patience and compassion and bears long with the infirmities of His people. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:13-14). Let us make sure we do the same with others. Let us not look down on those

whose faith is feeble and whose love is cold. As J. C. Ryle so poignantly says, "The Lord has many weak children in His family, many dull pupils in His school and many lame sheep in His fold. Yet He bears with them all and casts none away."

- Unbelief is so often the plague of our own hearts. "We must ever be seeing or we will never be believing" when the Bible clearly tells us we walk by faith and not by sight. We demand some kind of sign from the Lord to prove Himself. Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.
- Let us not fail to see, in this glorious faith confession of this once beleaguered and desponding disciple, the divinity of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. These words unequivocally prove that Jesus is God. If this were not true, all the grand doctrines of Christianity would have no significance—the atonement for sin, His holy priesthood, His mediation, or His redemption. But as God, He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to the Father by Him.

Once Thomas had made his bold confession, his comfortless and desponding predisposition was banished forever. He went forth with the other apostles after Pentecost a fearless evangelist for Christ, his God. ❶

Dr. Arthur Miskin is an emeritus Heritage Reformed pastor residing with his family in South Africa. Taken from the April 2012 edition of the Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth.

Hope Reformed Christian School

Hope Reformed Christian School is a Christian K-12 school in Paris, Ontario, serving the local Reformed Christian communities of southwestern Ontario. We offer a Christ-centered, Reformed education, nurturing and developing the students' God-given gifts, character, and Biblical faith for the glory of God and the building of His Kingdom.


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"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord." Ps. 127:3

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THE RISEN CHRIST APPEARS TO FIVE HUNDRED BRETHREN AT ONCE

Jesus' appearance recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:6

What a magnificent gathering this must have been! Yet, it is equally mysterious for us who read of its occurrence in a single verse of 1 Corinthians 15. The details are sketchy, but its import is great. We are not told explicitly where or when it happened. Most people think that this meeting occurred in Galilee according to the promise of Christ and the angel in Matthew 26:32 and 28:7,10. Tradition holds that it took place at Mount Tabor, a possible location of Christ's earlier Transfiguration. Most readers would also like to think that it happened on the first day of the week—Christ leading in and receiving worship on His day.

Though we are short on specifics, the purpose of this verse is threefold.

First, Paul is confirming his testimony by appealing to a myriad of people who beheld the risen Lord. Even if he is “the least of the apostles” (v. 9), still the “greater part of brethren” were still alive when he wrote 1 Corinthians. If they doubt him as “the least,” he sets before them “the greater part” as reliable witnesses of the risen Christ.

For Paul, this host of witnesses would reinforce the gospel which he preached to the Corinthians (v. 1). The resurrection was the very solid foundation of the message; while the message didn't need external verification, Paul was willing to make use of it to bolster his ministry to the Corinthians.

Second, Paul is affirming the gathering of believers and the attending blessings. The same church he once persecuted (v. 9) he is pleased to see growing and prospering. Paul knew the dangers the Corinthians were facing: the danger of further splitting up (see ch. 1), the danger of having “believed in vain” (v. 2), and the danger of not appreciating the grace of God in the risen Lord (v. 10). This meeting of more than five hundred at once shows that the resurrection holds together the church of God—nothing, not even death (v. 55) can destroy her! We need to strive to see the church as Christ her risen Lord sees her: not at the mercy of a hostile and dying world, but as those being gathered to the risen Christ.

Third, Paul is encouraging diligent labour for the risen Lord. The last part of the verse speaks of those who were “remaining” and others who had “fallen asleep” (a classic way of referring to believers' death). The greater part was still standing, still serving in the power of the resurrection. Why does he mention both groups? It is to show how the resurrection applies to both. We often denigrate the resurrection by referring to it only in cases of death. But the resurrection has as much meaning and significance for people who are living! Paul ends verse 1 with the words, “wherein ye stand,” which indicates there is a power in the Spirit's application of the resurrection to the heart, unmatched by any other power.

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unbelief begins to fade away before the light and glory of the risen Lord. Our inactivity is overpowered by the grace of God in opening our eyes and hearts to the resurrection. Our fear of men and of death is transformed by the sleep to which the risen Lord can lay down His people.


Most of those who had seen Jesus were still alive serving Him diligently until the time would come for them to "fall asleep." Verses 10 and 57-58 speak of abundant and worthwhile labour for the Lord, and such kingdom advancing work originates with a steadfast stand in the resurrected Lord. 11

Rev. Don Overbeek is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Bradford, Ontario. Taken from the April 2012 edition of the Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth.



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FOURTEEN RESURRECTION CERTAINTIES

Charles Hodge wrote that “the resurrection of Christ is not only asserted in the Scriptures, but it is also declared to be the fundamental truth of the gospel. ‘If Christ be not risen,’ says the Apostle, ‘then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain’ (1 Cor. 15:14). It may safely be asserted that the resurrection of Christ is at once the most important, and the best authenticated fact in the history of the world.” This “authenticated fact” and “fundamental truth of the gospel” is full of implications, full of comfort, full of certainty for the Christian.

Here are just fourteen of the many comforting certainties that we who are true believers by grace find in the resurrection of Christ:

1. Christ is alive forevermore. “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore” (Rev. 1:18). “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5).
2. Christ has been vindicated as our chief Prophet and Teacher. “Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again” (Matt. 17:22–23). “He is risen, as he said” (Matt. 28:6).
3. Christ has been declared to be the Son of God. “The promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Acts 13:32–33; cf. Psalm 2:7; Rom. 1:4).
4. Christ has been exalted at the right hand of God. “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Ps. 110:1). “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour” (Heb. 2:9). “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9).
5. Christ’s sacrifice has been accepted by God. “This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool” (Heb. 10:12–13; cf. Ps. 110:1).
6. Christ has fully satisfied for all our sins with His precious blood. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:14). “Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin” (Heb. 10:18).
7. Christ has raised us up to a new life. “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.... Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:4, 11).
8. Christ has delivered us from all the power of the devil. “As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14–15). “Now is come...the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down...” (Rev. 12:10).
9. Christ has conquered death. “Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him” (Rom. 6:9). “I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev. 1:18). “Our Saviour Jesus Christ... hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10).
10. Christ has sanctified the grave. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Rev. 14:13).
11. Christ has secured our own resurrection to eternal life. “As in

Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming...for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15: 22–23, 52).

12. Christ shall judge the world in righteousness. "God...now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:30–31).
13. Christ has purchased an everlasting kingdom for us. "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:10–11).
14. Christ will perfect the work of God in us. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the

everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20–21).

Christ is risen indeed! Such are the certainties, the solid ground under our faith and hope, as those who rest in Christ's atoning death for justification from the guilt of all sin, who rejoice in His glorious resurrection, who live by faith in Him, and who look for His appearing the second time to perfect His work in us, to judge the world, and to bring us into the possession and enjoyment of eternal glory. ①

Dr. Joel R. Beeke is Chancellor and professor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, and a pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Taken from the April 2012 edition of the Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth.

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SPIRITUAL LIFE IN A CHILD OF THE CHURCH

Differences of opinion exist concerning how to approach youth: Should they be addressed separately in the preaching? Should they even have separate services? In many ways, pastors have sought to reach children through preaching and include them in the preaching of the glad tidings of salvation. Youth meetings have also been organized.

We believe that children belong to the congregation and household of the Lord. Therefore, the child must also be brought to the gathering of the congregation. The preacher must never forget that the children too are under the proclamation of the Word. The children of the covenant are where the Holy Spirit works through the Word. This reality must also come out in the preaching. One should seek to reach the children not simply with a cute story, but with the full ministry of the Word. The Word is to be expounded in such a way that the full meaning and intention of the Holy Spirit becomes clear also for the children.

In the full ministry of the Word, there will be no reason to analyze it as objective or subjective preaching, redemptive historical or exemplaric preaching. No one will be able to say: the preaching was not experiential, uncovering, discriminating, or spiritual. When the word is rightly ministered, preaching brings the full message of salvation and makes clear who sends that message, for whom it is addressed, what it works out by the Holy Spirit, and how the fruit of salvation reveals itself.

These elements also apply to the children. In some circles, too many cling to the idea that the conversion of a sinner only consists in the arresting of an ungodly person, who is then picked up from the mire of sin and powerfully converted. He (or she)

then goes through the depths of hell, learns to understand he deserves condemnation, learns to despair of his salvation, and then, after many anxious nights and laments, receives a sight of the Door of Salvation. Now, we are not saying that these things are not known on the way of life, but we only want to point out that we should not explain the Word of God one-sidedly. With such presentations, children may soon think, this does not relate to me; I cannot be converted; I cannot become a disciple of Jesus.

Scripture clearly teaches that God regenerates even young children (Luke 1:41-42). Wilhelmus a Brakel rightly points out that young children can be born again and come to the knowledge of Christ through the simple teaching of the Word. The Holy Spirit is able to work faith and repentance in them. Such children show that they look to God, fear to sin, and become fearful when they have sinned. They pray for salvation and look to the sufferings of Christ. They also know struggles in spiritual life and a rejoicing in God. Some keep memories of these spiritual exercises for the rest of their lives.

As a child grows, spiritual life also develops, though not the same for each regenerate child. Some proceed quietly, writes Brakel. As years pass, light, faith, and sanctification grow, albeit with more or less struggles, and times of darkness or stumbling. Others have deep periods in which it seems they have never received grace from outward appearances. Yet, within them remains a convicting light, a burdened conscience, and surges of sorrow over their decay. Such periods can be interspersed by times in which the heart is drawn to God and prayer comes from a tender heart. These tender moments can then fade away

again. As the child grows older, these restoring mercies can come more frequently.¹

Of course, not every sermon should describe these things in a systematic way. But, when these things are well presented in the preaching, children are drawn into the preaching and God's Word makes an appeal to their young hearts – including those of the maturing youth.

When spiritual life in youth is addressed in the preaching, not only are the children and youth not forgotten as part of the congregation, but they will also sense something very important: they must be born again. They will see that spiritual life must show itself in one's life and see how it will show itself, even in a child. Even the young tree is known by its fruit. If the child is to be considered a reborn child, spiritual fruit must prove this. If this is considered, then the superficial spiritual positivity about children, which is extremely dangerous and misleading, will end. The life that the Holy Spirit works must also show itself in a child and will bring forth fruit in a child regenerated by God's grace.

Our children are not born in "holy simplicity," but "dead in trespasses and sins." Even the sanctified seed of the church, left to itself, would perish under corruption's power. No cooperation in conversion can be expected from a natural child. Rebirth is necessary; radical renewal is indispensable. This is possible through God's Spirit.

A child reveals himself to his parents as a child. The child trusts his parents. Unconditionally, it believes what father and mother say. If the parents are Christians, then their example is not only "law" for the children, but also a very attractive preaching. This applies not only to young children. Parents, please do not forget this. Being an example of grace is more powerful than a thousand admonishing words.

J. van Anandel remarks that: "A child loves its parents. The awareness of its dependence drives it to them every time. Blindly, it sides with them. Their love makes it happy, but their wrath it cannot bear. That is why it is obedient to them. It does too often assert itself forcefully against parental prohibitions. But then it also asks for forgiveness and does not rest until it has obtained that forgiveness. The child overlooks itself. Soon it is embarrassed with itself. Pride is not its sin."²

A child who is truly a child reveals himself as a child, not as a stranger. Such a child loves its parents, feels the bond it has with its parents, and is bitterly sad when the child-parent relationship is not right.

Spiritual life is no different. If a child is born again by God, then that child acts as a child toward God. Such a child confidently accepts everything the Scriptures say as the Word of God. If God's Word is read, the child will show interest and desire to understand it. Van Anandel observes, "It will be seen imperceptibly bowing its knees before God. It will have great esteem for godly people and will eagerly listen to their words." Seeing young, godly children demonstrate this grace is moving. The

work of God's Spirit, when present, does not remain hidden. Such a child learns to see disobedience as sin. Disobedience to the parents, then, is sin against God. Not only the parents, but also the Lord must be asked for forgiveness. Without enjoying that forgiveness, the Lord's favour is missed. The wrath of the Lord is oppressive to the child. Such a child does not think highly of himself, but feels he needs true repentance.

Just as trees reveal fresh greenery in springtime and young fruit in summer, young, born-again children will show the fruit of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit works savingly in young children to produce the aforementioned spiritual exercises, then these dispositions "will be accompanied or followed by a believing occupation with the Lord Jesus." This comment by the late Rev. J. van Anandel is correct. After all, the Holy Spirit intends to glorify Christ. When He works new life in a young child, He will also glorify Christ in that young heart. He will pour out in such a heart the love of God, the love of Jesus. To cite van Anandel again: Surely the Spirit leads to Christ; what does not end in Christ is not from the Spirit, namely, from the Spirit of regeneration. Faith in Christ is the seal on all the movements of the spirit. Where faith in Christ is lacking in the child at a time when the measure of intellectual development makes room for the exercises of faith, one does well to suspend judgment on the value of what goes on in a child.

Teachers and parents can never infallibly discern in a child's life what is fruit of regeneration and what is not. The Lord judges infallibly. Jesus received the children, took them in His arms, laid His hands on them, blessed them, and prayed for them.

The God of the covenant of grace has ordained strength from the mouths of children and infants (Ps. 8). He understands the language of little ones perfectly. He also judges infallibly.

So let us realize that spiritual life in a child reveals itself in spiritual fruits with a childlike manner. In parenting, we must take this into account and point it out to our children. In preaching, these things must also come out in a Scriptural manner. This will also captivate the children. We believe such preaching will captivate the children more than some harsh admonitions. The preaching will then also have more significance for self-examination and child-raising.

Everyone who fears the LORD will bring forth fruits of faith – fruits which will ripen for eternity. This also applies to a young child. ^U

Endnotes

1. Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, Vol. 1, Ch. 31).
2. J. van Anandel, *Pastorale Brieven* (Zalsman, 1907).

The late Prof. L. H. vanderMeiden (1882-1962) served as professor in Apeldoorn. This free translation is of his articles entitled "Het Kind der Gemeente" in De Wekker (05-12-1958 and 12-12-1958).

ANNOUNCEMENT

OBITUARY



HENNY KNOR

(NEE KOENS)

*"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from the Lord,
which made heaven and earth."*

PSALM 121:1,2

The Lord took unto Himself our beloved, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother on **Saturday, February 17, 2024** at the age of 92. Predeceased by her dear husband of 49 years, **Jack Knor**.

Loving mother and grandmother to:

Harold and Deborah Knor (*Brian & Angelica Knor, Karen & Fred Macey, Amy & Greg Sommer, Wendy & Tim Boers*);

Andrew and Karen Knor (*Mary & Justin Govan, Bethany & Steven Everts, Caleb & Beracha Knor, Calvin & Paige Knor, Jordan & Desiree Knor, Grace & Peter Germain, Esther & Calvin Ysinga, Josiah Knor*);

Deanne & Peter Rienstra (*Jessica & Scott Nelson, Michelle & Albert Brink, Melanie & Randy Van Essen, John Rienstra, Michael Rienstra*) and 49 great-grandchildren.

Survived by sister, Ada Brinkman, and sister-in-law, Rene Koens (the Netherlands), and brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Klaas & Diny Knor (Brampton) and nieces and nephews.

Funeral service was at the *Maranatha Free Reformed Church*, officiated by Pastor G.R. Procee.

BALTIC REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Riga, Latvia



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April 12-13, 2024
FRIDAY @ 7:30PM • SATURDAY @ 9:30AM

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