

Heidelberg Catechism Sermons

by

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Volume 2

Lord's Days 30 to 52

Lord's Day 30

Participation in the Lord's Supper

Q.80. What difference is there between the Lord's supper and the popish mass?

A. The Lord's supper testifies to us, that we have a full pardon of all sin by the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which he himself has once accomplished on the cross; and that we by the Holy Ghost are ingrafted into Christ, who, according to his human nature is now not on earth, but in heaven, at the right hand of God his Father, and will there be worshipped by us: - but the mass teaches that the living and dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ, unless Christ is also daily offered for them by the priests; and further, that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine, and therefore is to be worshipped in them; so that the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry.

Q.81. For whom is the Lord's supper instituted?

A. For those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ; and that their remaining infirmities are covered by his passion and death; and who also earnestly desire to have their faith more and more strengthened, and their lives more holy; but hypocrites, and such as turn not to God with sincere hearts, eat and drink judgment to themselves.

Q.82. Are they also to be admitted to this supper, who, by confession and life, declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly?

A. No; for by this, the covenant of God would be profaned, and his wrath kindled against the whole congregation; therefore it is the duty of the Christian church, according to the appointment of Christ and his apostles, to exclude such persons, by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, till they show amendment life.

This is the last Lord's Day that the catechism devotes to the sacraments. We have called your attention to the fact that its historical circumstances must be taken into consideration for the length of the chapters devoted to the sacraments, particularly regarding the Lord's Supper. Yet we must be careful that we do not say that, if the catechism were to be written today, the chapters should be shortened. That is, we might do so, but it would not be wise, for the doctrine of the sacraments is closely connected with the doctrine of the Church; and, if there is one thing of which there is no real conception in our day, it is the doctrine of the Church. There is hardly any conception of the Church today.

However that may be, this is the last Lord's Day the catechism devotes to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

In the first, that is, the twenty-eighth Lord's Day, the catechism called our attention to the Lord's Supper as a sacrament, emphasizing that it is an institution of Christ to His Church. In the twenty-ninth Lord's Day, the catechism emphasized the sacramental operation of the Lord's Supper. And we found that it is a spiritual, not a physical, nourishment. That therefore it requires a spiritual, not a physical, act to be nourished by it. And it therefore requires a spiritual disposition, to appropriate this nourishment.

Now in the thirtieth Lord's Day, the catechism emphasizes once more that the Lord's Supper points to the accomplished sacrifice of Christ. And, in the second place, it asks the question as to who are the proper communicants. And, in the third place, it discusses, with a view to the Church, that the Lord's

Supper must be kept pure.

Theme: Participation in the Lord's Supper.

- I. The Accomplished Sacrifice to which it Points
- II. The Proper Communicants
- III. The Calling of the Church to Keep it Pure

I. The Accomplished Sacrifice to Which it Points

It stands to reason, if you approach a Roman Catholic who is well posted in the doctrine of the Catholic Church, and say to him that their mass is a denial of the one sacrifice of Christ, and it is an accursed idolatry, he would deny both accusations. From his point of view, as he looks at the signs, Jesus Christ's body and soul, according to His human and divine nature, is on the altar; and the signs are no more bread and wine. That outward appearance, the qualities of bread and wine, remains the same; but the substance is no more bread and wine, but the body and blood of Christ. And he maintains his views as follows: When the Lord, at the institution of the Lord's Supper, said: *Take, eat; this is my body.* ... Jesus actually transmitted Himself to the signs, so that the substances of the bread and wine were actually translated into the body and blood of Christ. And the power of transmitting Christ to the signs of the Lord's Supper was given by Christ to the Apostles, and by the Apostles to the priests, so that now the priest can say, "This is His body." The substance of the bread and wine are become the body and blood of Christ. This process is called, transubstantiation.

This practice stands in close connection with the conception of transubstantiation. Once the doctrine was established that the bread changes into the body of Christ, and the wine into His blood, the question was raised and discussed, what would become of that body if a crumb be lost, or some animal run off with it? To overcome this danger the bread was substituted for with a wafer. And the same is true of the wine. To prevent a drop of wine being lost, the priests decided to drink it alone; for, after all, the priest is the Church, and the Church is the priest.

We, however, do not care so much about the form, as we do about the doctrine, the theory or conception of the Roman Catholic Church, for we are in agreement that there is an essential, spiritual celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Church cannot exist by itself apart from Christ. The whole life of the Church is in Christ. Even as the branch of the vine has its life in the vine, and a member of the body has its life in the body, so the Church has her life in Christ. If it were possible in the organic sense to separate the Church from Christ, it would lose the life it has. That life you can consider from the point of view of Christ. Christ continually imparts His life unto the body. As there is a continual current of electricity giving us light, so there is a continual giving of Christ unto His body, and the Spirit works through the body. Anyone that is a member of the invisible body of Christ wants to be a member of the visible body of Christ. There is a continual giving of Christ unto His body. That is one aspect.

Now, if the Church were like a branch, that would be all. But there is a difference. There is also an act on the part of the Church by which we eat and drink Christ when He imparts Himself. That is the essence of celebrating the Lord's Supper. Even as there is a spiritual essence in baptism, the washing away of our sins by the Spirit, so there is a spiritual essence in the Lord's Supper, namely, that we eat and drink Christ.

Now the question arises, what is the connection between this spiritual essence and the signs.

The Roman Catholic conception is that there is an act of grace upon the signs. The signs are changed into the body of Christ and you eat Him with the physical mouth. The result is that the Church is hopelessly surrendered to the priest. The priests gradually exalted themselves and finally called

themselves priests. And when they had so exalted themselves, they looked around for a sacrifice; and they took hold of the sacraments of the Lord's Supper. Of course, if that is true, the church is hopelessly surrendered to the priest. Our fathers, however, said the connection is this; the Spirit uses the visible signs. And the action is not on the signs, but through the signs on the heart by the Spirit.

But that is not all. Communion, in the Catholic Church is preceded by the mass; and to understand the accursed idolatry of the mass, we must know three things. In the first place, according to the Roman Catholic conception, the bread and wine are changed into the body of Christ. That is what is called transubstantiation. When the signs are placed on the altar by the priest, they are changed into the body of Christ. In the second place, there is in the mass the element of worship. The priest bows and the people follow and kneel before Christ on the altar. In the third place, there is in the mass the idea of a sacrifice. Christ has a continual priesthood; and therefore He comes with a continual sacrifice. But He cannot bring that sacrifice Himself anymore. He can only offer this sacrifice through those that represent Him, that is, through the priest. So the priest sacrifices Christ in the mass. It is a sacrifice for the living and for the dead that are still in purgatory.

You say, how foolish? Yes, perhaps. Perhaps you have thought that you stand far above the Catholic Church. If you did, you are to conceited to receive instruction. Sure the catechism says, the Mass is an accursed idolatry; but if millions take part in this worship, there must be something in it that attracts all of us. And there is. What is it? It is the desire to have some assurance of salvation, while maintaining our carnal life. It is so easy to be saved in the Roman Catholic Church. If you can be a stranger to repentance and conversion, and still belong to the Church and be assured of salvation, that is the element that attracts. How beautiful to again have a priest to stand a representative of Christ and forgive sin. You never repent, but you say, "The priest forgave my sins." That is appealing. It was so in the Old Testament. To bring a sacrifice, without contrition of heart, and be assured of salvation, that is appealing. We are not so far from the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church therefore teaches that in order that the cross might be of saving effect, Christ instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, by which Christ must be sacrificed repeatedly. As in the Old Testament there were shadows of the sacrifice of Christ, so in the New Testament there must be repetitions of that sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ in order to be efficacious must be continually repeated. That is Roman Catholicism. It does not deny that the sacrifice of Christ is efficacious, but it denies that the sacrifice of Christ is efficacious unless it is continually repeated. It is well that we know this. For the Catholic, that is well posted in the doctrine of his Church, is not easily overthrown. You cannot easily set him aside. And although the Catholic cannot anymore force his views upon you, he makes propaganda. Therefore we must understand this. For this mass is really the heart of the service in the Catholic Church. Not the preaching of the word, but the mass is the heart of the Roman Catholic service. Through the mass the people receive forgiveness of sins, and not through the preaching of the word. And you must understand that according to the view of the Catholic Church, the more often the sacrifice is repeated, the better it is for the Church. And you must understand also that it makes no difference whether the Church is present when the mass is celebrated, or whether the priest is present alone. The priest sacrifices Christ. For that reason you can understand the power of the priest in the Catholic Church. There is no forgiveness of sins, except through the sacrifice of Christ by the priest.

II. The Proper Communicants

But let us dismiss that question; and the next question is: For whom was the Lord's Supper instituted? Who are the proper communicants at that table of the Lord?

To that question the Catechism answers negatively that the Lord's Supper is not instituted for the hypocrites, but they eat and drink judgment unto themselves; and therefore it is important that we know what a hypocrite is.

You must remember that the Lord's Supper is essentially a coming into fellowship of the covenant of God. And that it is a coming into the fellowship of the covenant of God, in the signs of the body of Christ. And so, if we look at the Lord's Supper from the point of view of them that celebrate it, we come to this conclusion. In the first place, he that celebrates the Lord's Supper confesses that there is in his heart a longing to come into the fellowship of God. In the second place, he that celebrates the Lord's Supper confesses that there is in his heart the consciousness that he cannot come into that fellowship with God on the basis of what he is in himself. In his heart there is the knowledge of sin, and of true sorrow for that sin. In the third place, he that celebrates the Lord's Supper acknowledges that he places his trust only in the one sacrifice of Christ. In the fourth place, he that comes to the Lord's Supper, therefore, expresses that there is in his heart a desire for sanctification. That is, he has in his heart the desire to be rid of sin, and to be delivered from the power of corruption.

Now the hypocrite outwardly goes through the appearance of longing for the fellowship of God. He appears sorry for his sin and of placing his trust in the only sacrifice of Christ, and that in his heart there is the desire for sanctification. Outwardly the hypocrite passes through these very things; but he is a hypocrite.

What is a hypocrite? A hypocrite is not what we sometimes call a hypocrite. We cannot say of anyone, "He is a hypocrite." The most we can say is that he was a hypocrite but has been exposed. There was only one that could say, "You hypocrites," and that was Christ, because He judges the heart. We may not, and cannot, judge over the heart. A hypocrite is not what we sometimes call a hypocrite. Neither is a hypocrite one that is afraid that he is a hypocrite. You have people in the congregation that are always ready to call the other party a hypocrite; but there are also some that are always ready to call themselves hypocrites. Their love is not as ardent as it should be. Their sorrow for sin and their repentance is not as sincere as it ought to be. And so they say, "I wonder if I am not after all a hypocrite." But these people are not hypocrites either, for the simple reason that a hypocrite knows that he is a hypocrite. A hypocrite is not afraid, he does not wonder if he is a hypocrite. He knows it. A hypocrite does not say, "I wonder if my love is sufficiently ardent, and my sorrow for sin is sufficiently sincere." The hypocrite knows that he lacks the love of God. He knows that he lacks sorrow for sin. He knows that he lacks true repentance. He knows that he lacks the desire for sanctification. And knowing that he lacks these things, he for some carnal reason, passes through the outward actions that normally require a true spiritual disposition to pass through; and he is a hypocrite. He says he longs for the fellowship with God, and he doesn't. He says he longs for deliverance from sin, and he doesn't. And he eats and drinks condemnation unto himself.

One can be a hypocrite in principle; but one can also be a hypocrite for a time. You ask what then? Must the hypocrite stay away from the table of the Lord? And the answer is, no. Then he will surely go to hell. If the hypocrite in Israel did not want to pass through the Red Sea, and did not want to eat the manna and drink the water out of rock, he would surely have perished. All in Israel had to pass through the Red Sea, and eat the manna, and drink the water. And so it is with the Church. The Church must celebrate the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper was instituted for the Church; and the Church consist of the believers and their seed; and so the Lord's Supper is not for just a few in the Church, but for the Church. That all do not celebrate the Lord's Supper is not because there is a difference between the Lord's Supper and baptism.

That our children do not partake of the Lord's Supper is not because they have no right, but because it requires an act of conscious faith. You must not place baptism below the Lord's Supper. The Church partakes of both. And it partakes of them according to its capacity. It does not require an act of conscious faith to be baptized. In answer to the question, who must partake of the Lord's Supper, we must say, the Church, in as far as it has come to years of discretion.

You say you are not ready? You have no business not to be ready. The fact that you are not ready

does not excuse you of your obligation. You say, "I love the world?" You have no business to love the world. And if you love the world, what business have you to bear the sign of baptism. If you love the world, then wash of the sign of baptism and go back through the Red Sea. But the Church celebrates the Lord's Supper.

Yes, but you say, "I am not prepared to celebrate it this time. There is a brother that stands in my way, and the trouble between us is so deeply rooted, it cannot be gotten out of the way in a week." Now you cannot come that way; that is true. That would be Roman Catholicism. In order to come to the Lord's Supper, it is necessary to know yourself as a sinner. And, in the second place, it is necessary to humble yourselves. And, in the third place, it is necessary that you have the desire to be made holy by Christ. It is not necessary to be perfect. But it is necessary to know our sins, to repent of them, and to have the desire to be made holy. Things must be level between us and God. And thus we must come to the Lord's Supper.

So the answer is, the hypocrite must not stay away from the table, but he must tear away the mask of hypocrisy. He must turn. You say he can't. But that makes no difference to the must. He must tear away the mask of hypocrisy.

Now, over against these hypocrites the catechism says that the Lord's Supper was instituted for the godly. And who are the godly?

A godly man is not one that has no sins. He has many sins. But I do say this, that the chief characteristic of the godly man, as he comes to the table of communion, is that he has no willful sins of which he does not want to get rid. He has no sins for which he does not want forgiveness. He does not have sins of which he does not want to repent. He has no sins to which he wants to cling. It makes no difference whether that sin is as great as murder, as adultery, or stealing, or whether it is just one wrong word. The fact is that when we assume that attitude over against any sin, small or great, in which we cling to that sin, the supper is not for us. And therefore the question is not whether my sorrow for the sin is deep enough. Who shall answer that question? But that is not the question. The question is, whether our sorrow for sin is true. The question is whether it is real. And if our sorrow for sin is real, then this will be the characteristic that we long to get rid of that sin. And therefore the question we must answer is whether there is a sinner sorrow for sin with us.

III. The Calling of the Church to Keep it Pure

But there is another side. That is the Church's side of the table of the Lord.

The former side is the side of the individual members. The Church cannot judge over the hypocrites. She does not know him. There are only two that know the hypocrite, namely, God and the hypocrite himself. The Church cannot bar him from the Lord's Supper. But God bars him.

There is, however, a third class. For them the Church is responsible with a view to the table of communion. The catechism says that the Church must bar from the table all those who by confession and walk appear as unbelieving and ungodly.

There are three classes of such ungodly.

There are, in the first place, the ungodly, who are ungodly in confession and in walk. These must be barred from the table.

In the second place, there are those who have a very godly confession, and a very ungodly walk. They are very pious in their confession, but their walk is not in harmony with that confession. There must be harmony between our confession and our walk. And both must be in harmony with Scripture. They also must be barred.

In the third place, there are those that have a very godly walk, but a very ungodly confession. They

also must be barred. For them the Church is responsible. And the Church must bar them from the table of the Lord.

The Church must bar all these unless they repent. The Church must not bar the sinner. But the Church must bar the sinner who does not repent. There is room for the sinner at the table of the Lord. But there is no room for the sinner that does not repent. Such the Church must bar. And the conclusion of the matter is this. God's covenant must not be profaned.

Therefore we must heed the word of God, *Be ye holy, for I am holy.*

The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven in General

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.83. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

A. The preaching of the holy gospel, and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers.

Introduction

The distinguishing marks by which we know in this world the true church from the false church are strictly speaking only two, namely, the pure preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments according to the ordinances of God. Wherever you find the pure preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments according to the ordinances of God, there you find the true church. And we may speak relatively, that the more pure the word is preached, and the more strictly the sacraments are administered, the more pure the church will be. And it is the calling of every Christian not to ask where is the best orthodox church, but where is the purest manifestation of the church of Jesus Christ. And when he has found it, it is his calling to leave all others and join that church.

These are the distinguishing marks of the church; but there is another feature by which the church also may be known, and is therefore sometimes called a third distinguishing mark, namely, the proper use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Strictly speaking this is not in itself a distinguishing mark, except that the former two cannot exist long without these keys of the kingdom.

The subject of Christian discipline, or the keys of the kingdom of heaven, is of wide scope, and of great importance both from a doctrinal and a practical point of view. This is evident from its manifestation in the actual life of many a Christian when discipline is exercised. It is very little understood, but if the church is not to throw the keys away, it must understand what is implied in them, how they must be employed and to what end they are to be employed. For, if the keys of the kingdom are not employed with spiritual intelligence, it will not be long before we will become like any other modern church about us in which they are no longer employed. To them the subject of church discipline and of the keys of the kingdom of heaven is a strange subject; and it is no wonder. In modern churches a church is an open building in which one can go in and out as he pleases; and what is the use of keys if the doors are thrown open and the building is never shut.

But all people do not belong in the kingdom where the preaching of the word has become a general invitation to all to enter into the kingdom the church soon becomes corrupt. All do not belong into it. God has shut His kingdom to some. We do not have to shut the kingdom; God has done so. And they to whom God has shut the kingdom may not even enter into its visible form. The church must open, but it must also close the door. And for that it must use the keys. The time will come when the gates will be open; but that will be in eternity. In this world the church must use the keys.

But not only for this negative reason, but also for reasons in our midst, it is necessary to call attention to the keys of the kingdom of heaven. When we make confession of faith, we promise to submit to church discipline in case we fall into sin. And yet how often does it not occur that as soon as discipline is applied, the one to whom it is applied breaks that promise and withdraws his membership to escape church discipline. But he who does so, only escapes to his own destruction. That is why it is necessary to discuss this subject of the keys of the kingdom of heaven somewhat at length. And so this morning we call your attention to the keys of the kingdom of heaven only in general.

Theme: The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven in General

1. The Idea of the Keys
2. The Guardians or Holders of the Keys
3. The Purpose of the Keys

1. The Idea

The idea of the keys of the kingdom of heaven is a thoroughly Scriptural one. We notice from Matthew 16:18, that the church is pictured as a fortress, a city, a building. It is pictured as a building founded as *my church*. The church, therefore, from the point of view of the keys, is conceived of as a fortress, a building, founded upon a firm foundation.

That foundation is not Peter — as the Catholic Church would have it — nor does the Lord say, “Thou art Peter, and upon thee will I build my church.” Neither is it the subjective faith of Peter, as some would have it; the church could not be built on the subjective faith of Peter. But the Lord means to say, *Thou art Peter* — that is, a rock, as has become manifest in your confession — *and upon this rock I will build my church*. In other words, Christ pictures the church as a building whose foundation is expressed in the confession of Peter. Wherever the church is built on that foundation, laid by the prophet and apostles, there you have the church. And wherever there is that which claims to be the church, and is not built on that foundation, there is not the church.

In the second place, notice that in these words of Jesus the church is presented in the midst of the world as being a strong city, a fortress; for Jesus says, *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. By the gates of hell is meant, that which proceeds from the gates of hell, that which is of darkness, the power of death. The church is built on a rock that is firm, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

In the third place, notice from the same passage in Matthew 16, that the church and the kingdom of heaven are closely related. Christ says, *Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*.

It is plain that the church and the kingdom of heaven are closely related. There is a difference. The church is the communion of saints, with Christ at the head. And the kingdom of heaven is that commonwealth in which Christ is Lord, of which God is king, and in which the believers are the subjects and recipients of all the blessings God bestows upon them. All the blessings God bestows upon His people are included in that kingdom, and also in its final manifestation. That kingdom includes both heaven and earth. There is a difference, however, even though the two are also closely related. The members of the church — I mean the church, of course, as the body of the Christ — are at the same time the citizens of the kingdom of heaven, so that, if you are not a member of the church, you are not a citizen of the kingdom of heaven; and, if you are excluded from the church, you are also excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

Now Scripture and the catechism speak of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. *Keys*, of course, is figurative. Scripture uses figurative language when it speaks of *the keys of the kingdom of heaven*. The key is a symbol of the opening and shutting of the kingdom of heaven. It must be used to open the kingdom of heaven in a twofold sense. It must open the kingdom to take in and to throw out. And so also it must be used to shut the door in a twofold sense. It must be used to keep in and keep out. That is the meaning also of binding and loosing of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 18:18. We read there, *Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall loose in earth shall be loosed in heaven*. This is the binding and loosing of what goes through the door, whether it be a binding to keep in or keep out, or whether it be a loosing to admit or to cast out. *Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound on heaven: and whatsoever ye*

shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Thus we come to this conclusion. The idea of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, of Christian discipline, is a power in the sense of ability and of authority, in the sense of the right and the obligation conferred by Christ to determine what (not in the first place who) shall have, and what shall not have a place inside the walls of the church that is built on a rock □ and that in such a way that whosoever executes that power and authority and obligation determines who shall have a place, and who shall not have a place in the kingdom of heaven. That is the key power.

2. The Guardians or Holders

This key power is bestowed by Christ. But on whom?

There is in essence, in the first place, centrally only one that has the keys of the kingdom of heaven □ that is, centrally. There is only one that has the power, the authority and the calling to use the keys. He is, according to Revelations 3:7, Christ. We read there, *These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.* As Christ has the keys, as He has the power and the authority and the calling to use the keys, it means that He, as the Son of God, and as the anointed Christ over the whole house of God, He has in Himself the power, authority and calling exactly to determine who shall have a place in the church and in the kingdom of heaven. But that is not everything. Christ determines what shall and what shall not enter. And even more, Christ not only has the power to determine what shall enter and what shall not, but He also has the power to bestow the spiritual character which is necessary to enter. He also determines who shall enter, and He determines what shall enter. And he also has the power to bestow the spiritual character necessary and determines for those who shall enter. God is merciful to whom He will be merciful and hardeneth whom He will harden; and He appointed Christ as the Head of His church. And so, as the Head of His church, Christ determines who shall have a place in that church, and who shall not.

And there is still more. Christ also conferred the power to employ the keys on the apostles — and not on Peter alone, as the Roman Catholics would have it. For although it is true that the Lord, in Matthew 16 in addressing Peter speaks in the singular, it is evident that He addresses Peter because it was Peter that made the confession. But the Lord, although addressing Peter, is addressing all the apostles in Peter. This is evident from Matthew 18, where Jesus says, *Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* Christ bestows the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven upon all the apostles. And with the apostles also it is an authority's power and obligation to determine who shall have a place in the church, and in the kingdom of heaven, and who shall not have a place therein. That the apostles had that power is evident. The Lord bestows that power on them. That they have that power is due to the fact that they receive the Spirit infallibly. Infallible inspiration gave the apostles the power to infallibly determine who shall have a place in the kingdom of heaven, and who shall not. That is the apostolic word. It is Christ that employs the keys of the kingdom of heaven, but through the apostle and through the Spirit. They determine who and what shall have a place in the kingdom of heaven. When they determine what shall have a place in the kingdom of heaven, they naturally determine who shall have a place in that kingdom. When they determine that repentance, sorrow for sin, humiliation and righteousness shall have a place in the kingdom, they at the same time determine that they who do not repent, are not sorry for sin, do not humble themselves and are righteous shall not have a place in that kingdom. That is the power of the apostles. We must not forget that.

And so, in the third place, that power is also bestowed on the church. It is important that we see that. The keys are not given to every Tom, Dick, and Harry. They are not given to missions and sects, and

street-corner preachers. The keys are given to the church.

This is true in the preaching of the word. The preaching of the word must be an employment of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Otherwise it is not preaching, but merely a talk. Preaching of the word must be the employment of the keys. That is even true in mission work. Mission work must be an employment of the keys. Otherwise it is no mission work, but merely a talk. Preaching of the word must be employment of the keys.

And so, in the third place, we must understand that the keys are given to the church. This is evident from Matthew 18:17, where Jesus says, *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.* Now that church is not Peter. For the Lord is not speaking to Peter. Neither is it the apostles. The apostles are not the church. But the church is the entire New Testament body of Christ, from the time of its founding by the apostles, until the coming of Christ. When the Bible speaks of the church it means the whole church as it was founded by the apostles. And therefore when the apostles die, that same key power was given to the church, but as it was founded by the apostles. And that church must employ the keys now, through its offices. The apostles died; but the Lord gave to the church, not only apostles and evangelists and teachers, in order that there might be a well ordered whole. He also gave to the church elders and deacons. The church is not a mission station. The church is the instituted body of Christ, functioning through its offices.

Tell it to the church, then. That is, *tell it to the church* as it functions through its offices. That is the key power of the church □ and that again so that the church may have the power and authority and obligation to determine who and what shall have a place in the kingdom of heaven. Only remember that Christ is the holder of the keys. He is the holder, even when they are employed through the church. Christ employs them in the apostles, through infallible inspiration. We do not have that in the church; but the church has the power to determine what and who shall have a place in the kingdom through the word of the apostles. The church stands on the foundation of the apostles, of which Jesus is the chief cornerstone. Unto that church is given the word of the apostles.

That word is not given to all. That leads to the silly sickening condition that you see all around you. Christ has not just given the keys to anyone. The keys are given to the church. And as the church, it must employ the keys. It is dangerous business if instead of the church every Tom, Dick, and Harry try to handle the keys and to determine what and who shall have a place in the kingdom. That simply leads to the sickening condition that you find all around you, in missions and street-corner preaching. That is why the church must handle the keys. She must keep them. And she must employ them faithfully.

3. The Purpose

And the purpose is threefold.

The purpose is, in the first place, the glory of the ever-blessed God. The question of the church is not, how many members she may have on her books; but the question of the church is a question of the glory of God. *Where two or three are gathered in My name, says Jesus, there am I in the midst of them.* He had just said in Matthew 18:19, *If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven.* That is the church. The church must be holy, and unblamable in its manifestation, for the purpose of the keys of the kingdom of heaven is the glory of God.

The second purpose of the keys is the well being of the church. The wrath of God comes over the church if it is allowed to become a mob, a crowd of believers and unbelievers. If you allow just anyone to become a member of the church, it is not long before the church is gone. He that is not with us is against us; and they must stay out for the well being of the church.

And finally, the purpose is the salvation even of them that are the objects of the discipline of the

church. The purpose of church discipline is the salvation of God's people, including him that is the object of discipline. And therefore the church must exercise the key power, both in the preaching of the word, and in discipline. And a Christian must submit to that discipline.

I admit, it is possible that we have hasty discipline. It is possible for one to say, "The whole church is wrong, and I alone am right." I admit that that is possible, but it is not probable. If in the church the legal body handles the key power, it is possible that that the church is wrong, and that he alone is right, but it is very improbable. But even if that is the case, even if in his heart one is convinced that the church is wrong and he alone is right, he must not resign his membership. To resign for one's membership is profane. But even if he knows it alone, he must submit to the end. He must submit even to excommunication. And in the midst of that discipline he must maintain, "I know it alone." And then God will bless him, and curse the church.

Once more, I admit the possibility, but it is very improbable that the whole church should be wrong, and that the one alone should be right. And the church must employ the keys faithfully, and determine who shall have a place in the church, and in the kingdom of heaven. The church has the key power, and with that key power it may put out who are in, and take in who are out. It may shut in who are in, and it may shut out who are out. And the church so keeping her gates, will flourish. And instead of forming a mob that has nothing to do with the church, she will be a well-founded Zion, founded on the confession of Peter: *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

The Key Power of Preaching

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.84. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?

A. Thus; when according to the command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits: and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God, and eternal condemnation, as long as they are unconverted: according to which testimony of the gospel, God will judge them, both in this, and in the life to come.

Introduction

Of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which this chapter of the catechism treats, we said that they consist in the authority, the power, and the sacred obligation, to open and to shut the kingdom of heaven to men on this earth, and in such a way that this opening and shutting of the kingdom of heaven is valid before God.

In the second place, we saw that this power of the keys to open and to shut the kingdom of heaven belongs essentially, primarily and centrally to Christ. This is evident if we consider that essentially. The key power is the forgiveness of sins. That is why Christ says, "Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." Now there is only one that has the power to forgive sins. In the most absolute sense, the only one that has power to forgive sins is God in Christ. In that sense the Church may not use the keys. You must never let a pope or a Church or a minister stand between you and your God. The key power essentially, and centrally belongs to Christ.

In the second place, we saw that Christ conferred that power upon the apostles. The apostles were sent to preach the gospel. In that gospel they declared who would go into the kingdom and who would not. They did not go out and declare, "I forgive you your sins." They in the gospel, preached to the consciousness of men, whose sins were forgiven, and whose were not. With the apostles this key power was based on infallible inspiration.

In the third place, we saw that through the apostles that power of the keys was also conferred upon the Church. And in the Church, it consists of the calling of the Church to maintain the word of God, of the power to understand and to preach the word delivered to her by the apostles, and of the guidance of the Holy Spirit leading her in all the truth.

And the purpose of this key power is to maintain the glory of God, the purity of the covenant, the well being of the Church, and to save the repenting sinner. Now that key power reveals itself through two means.

The first of these means is the preaching of the word. We are now speaking of the word as such. But we are speaking of the preaching of the word, from the point of view of its key power.

Theme: **The Key Power of Preaching**

1. Because of its Definite Contents
2. Because of its Distinctive Nature
3. Because of its Authority and Power

1. Because of its Definite Contents

The preaching of the word is in this chapter of the catechism, regarded merely as the power by which the kingdom of heaven is opened and shut to men.

We may ask at this point, what is meant by the kingdom of heaven. And then we must understand that the Lord originally made of this world a kingdom. But that kingdom was not the kingdom of heaven. It was the kingdom of God. But it was not the kingdom of heaven. It was an earthly kingdom. God was king in that kingdom, and He ruled in that kingdom through Adam. Adam was the king of that kingdom under God. That kingdom became, in a spiritual-ethical sense of the word, the kingdom of the devil. God did not cease to be sovereign; but in a spiritual-ethical sense of the word, it became the kingdom of the devil.

God, however, had something else in mind. He had in mind, through the fall of Adam, a better kingdom, namely, the kingdom of heaven. From that point of view, sin is but a means. God brings the kingdom down from heaven and places it in this world. That is why it is called the kingdom of heaven. It is the kingdom of heaven because it comes out of heaven. It has a heavenly origin, a heavenly king, and a heavenly people. In that sense it has always been in this world. It came in the world when God set enmity between the seed of the devil and the seed of the woman.

In a sense, that kingdom is coming. In the old dispensation that kingdom had not been realized. The basis for that kingdom had not yet been laid. In the old dispensation it was anticipated. It was the kingdom of heaven by anticipation. That is why the Lord says: The kingdom is come nigh unto you. When Christ came and poured out His Spirit, the kingdom of heaven was realized in the world. And there is still a sense in which that kingdom is coming. It has not yet been realized in the fullest sense.

Of that kingdom the member of the Church are citizens. To become a member of the Church is to become citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And to be cast out of the Church is to be cast out of the kingdom. Strictly speaking, the elect members of the Church are citizens of the kingdom.

But the kingdom also has a wider idea. The kingdom looks not only at the people, but also at the dominion. That kingdom exists in the midst of the enemy. It is in the world, but not of the world. That is why the gates of that kingdom must be shut. Not all belong in that kingdom. If this kingdom was alone in the world, it would not be necessary to shut the gate. This, however, is not the case; and therefore the gates must be shut.

Now in this chapter of the catechism, the preaching of the word is regarded as the power to include and to exclude, from the kingdom of heaven. That is, it is the power to open and to shut the kingdom of heaven to the conscience of men, so that they are bound and loosed in their conscience with respect to the kingdom of heaven. In this way they carry away the testimony that they are, or are not, in the kingdom of heaven.

And that the preaching of the word is such a power is because it comes to us with definite contents. If the preaching of the word were, as to its nature, an offer, it could never be a key power. But it is not a offer. It is a promise; and a promise is distinguished from an offer in that it is definite. If I promise anything, I am bound to realize the contents of what I promise. If I offer anything, it is conditional. An offer is conditional because it is contingent upon the acceptance of him to whom I offer it. When I offer anything, it does not become a promise until you enter into that offer by accepting it. But, if I promise something, I am bound to realize that promise.

Beside, an offer is general. An offer you can put in your window display, or on signs along the road, or in the newspapers. That does not mean that all will get what is offered. A promise, however, comes to a definite party. If I promise something to a definite party, I must see to it that that party will get what I promised him.

Now, according to the catechism, and according to Scripture, the contents of the preaching of the word is not an offer but a promise. And it is a promise of God. It is God's promise, which means that the promise is sure, is definite, and is guaranteed. For God cannot lie. He is able to give what He promises; and He makes no mistakes as to what He promises. If I promise something, that promise is no more certain than I am faithful. It is no more certain than I am able to realize it. I may be mistaken in making my promise, so that the one to whom I promise it may not receive it after all. But God's promise is certain. It is a promise to the heirs. And even so, there could be no promise unless God puts that party to whom He makes the promise there. To whom will God promise anything, unless He first creates the heirs of the promise. In other words, those that receive the promise are included in the promise as well as the contents of the promise.

And as to the contents of the promise, it includes everything. That is, it includes all the blessings of the kingdom of heaven, objectively, and no less subjectively. God promises all. Centrally He promises Christ; but also all that pertains to Christ, all the blessings of salvation merited by Him. But that is not all. If these blessings were merely offered to us, then the bestowal of these blessings would not be in the promise. But the bestowal of these blessings is in the promise. God does not say, "Here are the promises, now you just accept them." He brings them to us. God promises Christ, and Christ is brought into our hearts. He does not say, "I promise you the blessings of the kingdom of heaven, but He brings them into your heart." He does not merely say, "I will forgive your sins," but, "I give you a new heart." God says: "I will regenerate you, call you, give you faith, give you to repent, I will justify you, sanctify you, glorify you." It is all of God.

There is in the promise nothing of us. The promise is unconditional, sovereign, and free, entirely of grace. We do not enter into the kingdom of heaven under certain conditions. If you ask, what must I do to enter into the kingdom of heaven, the answer must be, nothing. God does it all. If I should stand here and offer you forgiveness of sins, it would be nothing less than blasphemy. It is ungodly to offer the blessings of the kingdom of heaven. To offer Christ is nothing less than blasphemy. God brings the promise into our hearts. That is the promise. Take that away and you lose the key power.

2. Because of its Distinctive Nature

That preaching of the word is necessarily distinguishing. The preaching must be distinguishing. If it is not distinguishing, it is not preaching of the word.

The apostle says, "We corrupt not the gospel; therefore, we distinguish." That is not nice. It is not nice to be a preacher. It is not as nice as it looks because we do not corrupt the gospel, the apostle says, therefore, "We are a savour of life unto life, but also a savour of death unto death." The preaching is the preaching of the promise. It is the preaching of the promise to the heirs. If the promise is to all men, we do not need the keys. And perhaps there would be no need of preaching. If we leave it a promise, but say that it comes to all men, then the kingdom is open. Then there is no need of the key power. And if the preaching is an offer, then the preaching is only a power to open the kingdom.

If it is true, as is often claimed, that the calling of the Church consists in this, that she must be a certain missionary, preaching to all that Christ made salvation possible for all, there is no need of the key power. If that is the calling of the Church, if her calling is to preach that Christ made salvation possible for all, if in one word, her calling is to preach an offer of salvation to the free will of man, then this key power is not necessary. If there is no election, no predestination, no free sovereign grace, then the Church must set the doors wide open and throw the keys away. If the preaching of the word is an offer, then the kingdom is open. And then you can enter the kingdom anytime you please. If you only don't wait until it is too late. That is another silly, unscriptural saying. But you can enter the kingdom anytime you please, as long as you don't wait until it is too late, as long as you don't wait until you die. That is not the kingdom of heaven. That is the corruption of men.

If we only understand that the preaching is the preaching of the promise to the heirs. And the heirs are determined, not by men but by God. The heirs are never any other than the elect. God determines who shall have a place in the kingdom, with an eternal determination. And God determines who shall not have a place in the kingdom, with an equally eternal determination. Election and reprobation is the basis for the key power. Deny election and reprobation, and the key power is gone. When this sovereign determination of God is denied, there is no power in the word anymore.

Therefore, you must remember, where the preaching of the word becomes the key power, the heirs are not mentioned as elect and reprobate. The preaching must necessarily be general. It is nonsense to say, as we are sometimes accused of doing, that we must preach to the elect only. The preaching must also come to the ungodly, partly because God wills it so, and partly because we do not know whom the elect and reprobate are. But the preaching must mention the heirs, from the point of view of their spiritual state and condition. God, under the preaching, gives the heirs spiritual names. And their spiritual name, from the point of view of their receiving the promise, is always, believer. And believers are they, that have learned to sorrow for sin, and to hunger this after righteousness. They are those that have learned to put all their trust in Christ. They are those that have learned to walk according to all the commandments of God. To them the word of God brings the divine assurance that they are in the kingdom. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. In other words, they have received a spiritual name, which God gives them, so that when the word is preached, they are included in the kingdom. That is something we can know, so that it certainly remains: whosoever will come and drink of the fountain of living waters.

That will to come, however, God gives to the heirs. And as it is with the heirs, so also then that are outside the kingdom receive a spiritual name. Their name is unrepentant, unbelieving, and ungodly. And when the word is preached, they are excluded from the kingdom.

3. Because of its Authority and Power

But you understand that the word must be preached. We are talking about the key power. And if the preaching of the word is to be the key power, assuring the heirs that they are in the kingdom, and assuring the others that they are outside, it must have two things. It must have power and authority. And to have power and authority, it must be preached.

Not all preaching is the preaching of the word. The Lord did not entrust His word to every individual or crowd, or group, that they should go in their own way with it and preach it. The Lord entrusted that word to the apostles, and through the apostles to His Church. Principally, Christ preaches the word; but He preaches it through the Church. The Church preaches the word through its offices. That must be emphasized, especially in our day.

You say, what is the difference? Must we not all be missionaries? No, we must not. What is the difference? Suppose the American government should pass a decision to cancel all foreign debts, and should put that decision on paper, and appoint five or six delegates to inform these foreign nations of their decision. And suppose that five or six other men should take that message and, on their own accord, go and inform these nations of this decision. What would be the result? The result would be that they would have the same message, but it would have lost all its power. These foreign powers would ask, "What authority have you to tell us this, who sent you?" And so is it with the preaching. God does not work arbitrarily. It is always the Church upon which Christ delegates the word. It is always the Church in which the Spirit dwells, that has the calling to carry out the promise of God, through its offices.

In the second place, even then the word would have no power, if God had not given the preaching to be accompanied by the Spirit. It is the Spirit that gives the word power. It is the Spirit that makes the preaching of the word a savour of life unto life. But it is also the Spirit that makes the preaching of the word a savour of death unto death. It is an effective calling of opening the kingdom. But it is also an effective means of shutting the kingdom. So the twofold effect of the preaching is always, that it is a hardening of the heart of the unbeliever, and that it is a calling in, and an establishing in the kingdom of those that believe.

That is the way the apostle preached the word. They did not come with a general invitation to all. Their word was a two-edged sword. That is why the Church must use the apostolic word. The Church must use it. Not the minister. The Church preaches the word. She may do so through the minister, but the congregation preaches. And as the congregation preaches the word, she uses the key and opens and shuts the gate.

That is why a mere declaration by the minister that your sins are forgiven is simply nonsense. The word is the key. And being the key, it will do two things. It will open, and it will shut. If the word is preached right, not all will enter. It was not so with the Lord. The majority left Him. The word does not gather all, but it appeals to those in whom the Lord, by His Spirit, works faith. The word does not change you. My preaching does not change you; but, by the word a separation is made. If you find in your heart, sorrow for sin, and repentance, and faith, then the word declares unto you that you are in the kingdom. But on the other hand, if you find in your heart darkness and sin and unbelief, then that word declares that you are not in that kingdom; therefore, the Church may not preach a free will offer of salvation to all, but must preach the whole counsel of God. And in preaching the whole counsel of God, the Church will exercise the key power, and will open and shut the doors of the kingdom of heaven. A free will offer is no key power. The best you can do by the preaching of a free will offer of salvation is to create the feeling by some that they have accepted the offer, and by others, that they have not accepted it but have plenty of time to do so. The Church must exercise the key power in the preaching of the gospel. That is what the catechism teaches. The gospel must declare to everyone that believes that he is in the kingdom of heaven, and to the unbeliever, that he is outside.

If the gospel is rightly preached, no one will leave this church with the false notion that he is in the kingdom. It must so be preached, that the unbeliever will know that he is not in. It must be preached so that you leave here thinking you can come in if you want to. The gospel must be preached so that it will testify to the believer that he is in, and to the unbeliever that he is not in the kingdom. That is not easy. But the Church must be faithful in this. It must so preach the gospel that by the preaching the kingdom will be opened to some and shut to others. All the rest is a lie. That is not easy. It is easy to come with a free will offer to all. But it is much more difficult to convince you that you are in the kingdom of heaven. No matter how small your faith may be, the preaching of the word must testify to you that you are in the kingdom. And no matter how refined and civilized a hypocrite you may be, and how much money you give to the Church, and for the cause of God's kingdom, and how active you may be in the Church, the preaching the word must draw the line of the kingdom so that you know that you are outside.

The distinctive preaching is the key power, always distinguishing, always calling in, always establishing in the grace of Christ.

Christian Discipline

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.85. How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by Christian discipline?

A. Thus; when according to the command of Christ, those, who under the name of Christians, maintain doctrines, or practices inconsistent therewith, and will not, after having been often brotherly admonished, renounce their errors and wicked course of life, are complained of to the church, or to those, who are thereunto appointed by the church; and if they despise their admonition, are by them forbidden the use of the sacraments; whereby they are excluded from the Christian church, and by God himself from the kingdom of Christ; and when they promise and show real amendment, are again received as members of Christ and his church.

Introduction

The general nature of the keys of the kingdom of heaven is that they represent the power, authority, and obligation to open and shut the kingdom of heaven. That power belongs centrally to Christ. It has been conferred upon the apostles, and through the apostles, it has been referred upon the Church. That power was in the apostles, through the infallible guidance of the Spirit. And that power is in the Church through the word of God, and the guidance of the Spirit in the truth.

This power is now exercised in the Church, in the first place, by the preaching of the word. The preaching of the word is a key power by which the kingdom of heaven is opened and shut to men. This is so, in the first place, because it is the preaching of the promise. In the second place, it is a key power because it is distinctive; it is the preaching of the promise to the heirs of the promise. And it is the key power, in the third place, because it is preached. When the word is preached, the one is included in, and the other is excluded from, the kingdom of heaven.

But the key power is also exercised concretely, definitely, personally, through Christian discipline.

The second key power is distinct from the key power of the word. It has a much narrower scope. It does not touch all. But it touches only by the manifest unbeliever. The hypocrite is not touched by the key power of Christian discipline, while the key power of the word touches all. But in connection with this, the key power of the word is spiritual and invisible in its effect, while Christian discipline is visible in its effect.

Theme: Christian Discipline.

- I. Its Spiritual Character
- II. Its Spiritual Process
- III. Its Spiritual Benefit

I. Its Spiritual Character

The Church must exercise the key power in Christian discipline; and it must exercise individual key power. You will notice that there is a difference between the two. In the preaching of the word, the key never mentions names, and therefore can never banish any one from the Church. No matter how strict the word may be preached, it always leaves the possibility for the hypocrite to remain in the Church,

and to outwardly confess that he is a Christian. The individual Christian's discipline has to do with the visible Church. The preaching of the word draws the line of the invisible Church in the consciousness of men. The preaching of word never banishes the individual. But individual Christian discipline does. It tells the individual that he does not belong there. Or, for it is not all negative, it tells him that he ought to be a member.

Concerning this Christian discipline, we must say, first of all, that it is spiritual. Anyone that has become acquainted with the notions and practices of the Church, especially through the consistory, will realize that it is always necessary to bring to the attention of the people of God the truth, that the key power of Christian discipline is strictly spiritual. That is often forgotten. Frequently, people come to the consistory with a case, which really has to do with the question, divide the inheritance with my brother, or give me my right, or avenge me of the brother; but that is none of its business. With that question you do not come with the key power, but with the sword power. The sword power is carnal, earthly. And to them you must turn to obtain your right, your inheritance, to be avenged. With those questions you must not come to the consistory. The consistory does not have the sword, but the key. Christian discipline is not like the punishment of the state. The state has the sword; but the Church has the keys.

Let us understand that. Christian discipline is not motivated by the desire to punish, to meet out justice. If that is our deepest motive, go to the state, but not to the Church. The Church cannot give justice. The Church must forgive. If you are merely seeking vengeance, go to the state. The consistory does not have the sword but the key; and you do not apply the key power by taking the brother by the throat. You apply the key power by taking hold of the brother's heart. The key power, as far as this aspect of it is concerned, is rooted in the fact that the sins of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven have been blotted out. And therefore, while the sword power punishes, avenges, maintains justice, the key power never does.

The key power is in the strictest sense spiritual. That does not make it easier to exercise discipline. It is not easy to really exercise discipline. It is not easy to really exercise the key power. He that personally takes hold of the key power is in more danger of sinning than is he to whom the key power is applied.

The spiritual character of the key power determines, in the first place, the motive from which it must be applied. The motive of sword power is to maintain justice, to obtain one's right to be avenged. But the motive of the key power is, love of God, love of Christ, love of the Church, and love of the brother. That only can be the motive of the key power. Christian discipline is always motivated by love of Christ, in the first place, love of the body of Christ, in the second place, and love of the individual in that body, in the third place. That is not easy.

Remember that Christian discipline is not the work of a certain body in the Church; it is not the work of the officers. The Church exercises discipline. The Church preaches the word. The Church exercises the key power of the word. And the Church exercises individual discipline. Only one individual does not exercise discipline over another. The Church exercises discipline, and it does so from the motive of love. That can be the only possible motive of the key power. And therefore you must not approach the consistory with the demand, "Avenge me of the brother, give me my right." That has nothing to do with Christian discipline. But you must come to say, "I am sorry, from love of God, from love of the Church, and from of the brother, because the brother has walked in a sinful way." That is the sole attitude that may be assumed by anyone that takes hold of the key. And anyone that takes hold of the keys from any other motive sins more than the one to whom he wants to apply the key power.

That does not mean that in a material question, there may not be a spiritual question at all. Suppose someone steals a certain sum of money from me. As long as my motive is simply to get my money back, you do not apply the key power. But the question is, the brother has sinned. If you cannot

abstract the question of getting your money back from the fact that the brother has sinned, you do not apply the key power. And concretely, when anyone comes to the consistory and says, "My brother has stolen my money, please see that you get it back for me," the consistory should always say, "Except for the spiritual question involved, we have nothing to do with it." That is not easy. It is easier to go to the sword power. Then you do not have to love the brother. When you go to the sword power, you simply say, "He stole my money, see that you get it back for me." You do not take your brother by the heart, but by the throat.

This also determines the spiritual character of the purpose of Christian discipline. As the motive is spiritual, so the purpose is spiritual. The purpose is not to punish, to meet out justice, but the purpose is the glory of God in Christ, and the return of the brother. If a brother defrauds you of your estate, the purpose of Christian discipline is not the return of your estate, but the return of the brother. That is not easy. That is contrary to our nature. But that is Christian discipline.

That determines, in the third place, who are the objects of the key power. The kingdom of heaven is also opened and shut by Christian discipline. The catechism seemingly goes out from the supposition that the kingdom of heaven is shut by Christian discipline, and that it is opened again when the brother returns. But we must not forget that discipline is the exercising of the key power. And the key power determines who shall, and who shall not be admitted to the Church.

The Church consists of believers and their children. They are to be admitted to the Church, and to the sacraments. Children are admitted to baptism by the key power. And believers are admitted to the Lord's Supper by the key power. And the key power is applied to children when they make confession of faith. They do not join Church when they make confession. They are members. There are only two groups in the Church. They are the believers and their children. They are admitted to the Church. All the rest are excluded. From that point of view, it is a mistake that, so-called, baptized members are not excommunicated, instead of being erased from the books. They are members of the Church, and they should be excommunicated by the key power, instead of being erased from the books. And that also determines that one that has come to years of discretion can only be excommunicated as a manifest unbeliever. Christian discipline does not exclude the sinner from the Church. The sinner, even though his sin be as great as that of murder, is not excluded by the key power. Sinners are not excluded. Because at their head stands one who has blotted out their sins. The fact that a man is a sinner does not exclude him. But this one thing does, that he is an impenitent sinner. The sinner that never comes to repentance is excluded from the Church by the key power. And as it makes no difference how great a sinner one may be, if he repent he is not excluded; so it does not matter how comparatively small a man's sine may be, if he does not repent, he is to be excluded. A man that commits murder, and repents, is a child of God. And a man that speaks one idle word, and does not repent, is outside the kingdom of heaven. If a man does not repent of a little sin, he has not learned to repent at all. There is only one sin that excludes from the kingdom of heaven.

That is the sin of impenitence. If you ask, who are the objects of this key power in this second form, the answer is: believers and their children are included in the kingdom of heaven by it, and all the others are shut out.

II. Its Spiritual Process

This spiritual character of the key power, also determines the spiritual process.

Christian discipline is a spiritual process. The method to be employed is that of admonition, to bring to the brother to repentance. The key power is employed, so as to cover all sin.

Christian discipline is to keep the sin within the circle in which that sin is known. That is not so with the sword power. The sword power publishes the sin of the sinner in the newspapers in glaring headlines. But the Church keeps the sin of the brother as secret as it naturally is. If the sin is between

you and him, you deal with it between you and him. That is not your privilege. That is your sacred duty. For the reason is, love of the brother. It is not love to cover up the sin of the brother; and it is not love when four, or five, or six others jump in between to try and cover up the sin of the brother. You must go to the brother and admonish him, and seek to bring him to repentance. That is not a privilege. That is your duty.

And the process is, not that you talk it over with a half dozen others first, but that you keep it where the sin is known. If it is known to you only, you go to him alone and admonish him. When we read: tell it to the Church, it does not mean, tell every individual. That is wicked. That is not discipline. But starting from the motive of love, you try to keep the sin of the brother covered as long as possible. Lest the name of Christ, His body, and the brother be put to shame. If the sin is committed in a group, then the group must admonish the brother. That is duty. And when the whole Church knows about it, it is the calling of the Church to step in and that for the sake of God, and of the Church, and of the brother, but always from the motive of love.

You must go to the brother. Not once, but repeatedly. You must not go to him once and then come to the consistory. You must admonish the brother repeatedly. That is fundamental. Some will go to the brother just once, and if he will not hear him the first time, he will immediately get his witnesses and go again, and if he will not hear then, they immediately go to the consistory and tell the Church. That is devilish. That is not the exercise of Christian discipline. Christian discipline is difficult because the offended party must go to the one that has offended him. And he must go to him, not to seek vengeance or justice, but because he loves him. His motive must be to win the brother. If he does not go to the brother in that way, his motive is devilish. He must crucify the flesh and go to the brother in love and seek to bring him back. You must go to him and say, "You have sinned against me, but I did not come to you to talk about that, or to seek justice. But you are walking in a sinful way, and I come to bring you back from your sinful way." And if he will not hear you the first time, you go again and again. And if it becomes manifest that he will not hear you, then you must go to him with witnesses. If it becomes plain to you that you cannot save him alone, then you take witnesses along with you.

Of course your brother's sin is still a secret. You haven't been talking about it to your neighbor over the back fence. It is simply hypocrisy to take witnesses along with you to win back the brother if the whole congregation knows about it. And you go with these witnesses repeatedly, if necessary. These witnesses must also admonish the brother. When you come to the consistory with witnesses, these witnesses do not come to prove that the accusation against the brother is true. They come as admonishing witnesses.

If then he will not hear the witnesses either, then you tell it to the Church. And that for the same reason, namely, that it is the well being of the Church, and of the brother, and the glory of Christ that is at stake. But it must be that reason and motive. That is serious. That is why, when a matter is brought to the consistory, the purpose is not to find the brother guilty, but to bring him back.

Hence the consistory must proceed step by step. Sometimes people complain that a case of discipline lasts so long. But the Church must proceed step by step, for the well being of the brother is at stake. In the first place, the brother must be barred from the Lord's Supper. In the second place, the sin must be announced to the Church, without mentioning the name of the brother. In the third place, in the meantime, admonishing the brother continually, the consistory must come to the congregation and mention his name. And, in the fourth place, when the brother has shown that he is impenitent, he must be excommunicated. If the Church becomes convinced that the love of Christ is not in him, they must set him outside of the Church and of the kingdom of heaven. If the Church becomes convinced, in that way, that the love of Christ is not in him, it can with a free conscience say that he is outside.

III. Its Spiritual Benefit

That is spiritually beneficent.

It is of benefit to the brother. The key power is salvation to the brother. Not when the key is not applied, is his salvation. Not when he words off that key power. Not when others step in and try to ward it off. It is not of benefit to the wicked.

The wicked must be barred by the key power, In the first place, in order that the name of God be not profaned. The purpose of the Church is that the name of God may become glorious in and through her. And if any member of the Church lives in sin, he becomes a blot on the name of the Lord. The Church cannot allow such a one to sail under the flag of the Church. The Church must put such a one out of her midst. The Love of Christ demands it.

In that sense the key power is also beneficent. It keeps the Church pure. When all kinds of poisonous sores break out in a body, that body is already sick. And the Church that does not exercise discipline is already sick. We have such Churches that are ready to accept all. It happens time and again, that some one about to be excommunicated from a certain Church leaves and goes to another Church and is accepted. The Church that does not exercise discipline is sick. It may seem nice to bring as many as possible into the Church and to put their names on the books. But the result is that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. If the Church opens the door to all who will come in, the body becomes corrupt, and it ends up with the rankest modernism. That is history. The Church that does not exercise discipline is sick. While the Church that does exercise discipline, from the motive described above, is healthy and prospers. The second effect is that the brother will be saved. But in order to have this effect, you must bring him to repentance. Love of the brother demands it. It is not love to pat him on the back. You must tell him of his sin and seek to bring him to repentance. For only they who repent and believe are members of the kingdom of heaven. And the third effect will be, that the wicked will be cast out. And the Church will prosper, and grow in the grace and knowledge of the Savior.

The Necessity of Good Works

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.86. Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after his own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof; and that, by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ.

Q. 87. Cannot they then be saved, who, continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?

A. By no means; for the Holy Scripture declares that no unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, covetous man, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or any such like, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

When we look at the truth from the viewpoint of the Christian's experience, that is, from the viewpoint of the contents of his consciousness, the truth naturally divides itself into three parts, as in the catechism. This truth as it is applied to the heart becomes manifest as a knowledge of sin, a knowledge of salvation and a knowledge of gratitude. It is thus that the truth lives in the consciousness of a Christian. These three constitute the consciousness of a Christian.

It is not that the three follow one after the other, but rather that they are simultaneous. It is not, first knowledge of sin, then after a time a knowledge of salvation and finally a knowledge of thankfulness. The three are always present together. The Christian is always sinful, always saved and always thankful. That is the viewpoint of the catechism from a subjective, experimental point of view; and so the catechism is divided into these three parts.

We are now about to begin the third part, in which we are instructed in the nature of good works and of true conversion, and then further in the law of God as a rule for our gratitude, and in prayer as the highest expression of gratitude.

In this you will notice that the Christian instructor in our catechism approaches the third part of his instruction book in a very careful way. He first treats the Christian's gratitude for his deliverance from sin and death rather than going immediately into the question of the necessity of good works. If it is true that, in spite of the fact that a Christian is saved entirely by grace, he must still do good works, why is that so? What is the reason that he must still do good works? In approaching this subject our instructor is careful, for it is easier to go astray here than in the first part of the catechism dealing with our sin and misery. In that first part there is a danger of falling into Pelagianism; but that danger is even greater when we speak of our good works. And so, in order to avoid this danger, the catechism first treats this aspect of the Christian's gratitude.

Thus it is that the catechism first treats the relation of good works to the Christian's salvation through free grace by showing us that they are entirely proper. Then, in the second place, it shows that they have their roots in the grace of Christ. And finally it shows that these fruits relate both to the Christian himself, and to others.

Theme: The Necessity Good Works.

- I. Their Propriety
- II. Their Possibility
- III. Their Fruit

I. Their Propriety

To begin with we must see what the catechism in speaking of. It is not so much speaking of good works, as it is speaking of the doctrine of free sovereign grace in relation to our good works. If we are saved entirely by grace without works so that our good works have no meritorious power that contributes toward our salvation, why should we do good works? And so the catechism shows that these good works fit in entirely with the doctrine of free grace.

For this reason the catechism begins with the question, "Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?" That is an important question; and with it the catechism cuts off especially two wrong conceptions concerning good works. There is perhaps no subject in which the danger of becoming unscriptural and unreformed is so great as here in this doctrine of good works. A man may be ever so Reformed as to the doctrine of predestination, but when it comes to the doctrine of good works, he easily falls into error.

In the first place, the catechism rejects the error that, seeing we are saved by free grace alone, we do not have to do good works. One may easily take that attitude in practical life. And when anyone intentionally teaches that doctrine, he only takes the doctrine of free grace as an excuse for a life of lasciviousness.

This is one error, and the other the catechism rejects is that which says we must indeed do good works to merit salvation, or at least part of it. That is Roman Catholicism, and the catechism rejects it.

The catechism comes to the true conception of good works when it says that we must do good works exactly because we are saved by grace. It is for this reason is that in this second question the catechism emphasizes "that no unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, covetous man, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or any such like, shall inherit the kingdom of God." A profane person is not one that just falls into these sins — anyone can do that — but a profane person is one who walks in them. He is a person who is one with those works, and finds his life in them. If a man finds his joy in such sins, or in any one of them, so that he loves them and does not desire to be rid of them, he shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

That is important; but the reason it is important is not because those sins causes him to forfeit the kingdom of heaven. There is no forfeiting of the kingdom any more than one can merit the kingdom by his good works. And so, the man who walks in these sins simply has not been in the kingdom of heaven; for the citizens of the kingdom of heaven have a living part with Christ. They have been crucified and raised with Christ; and, if they are crucified and raised with Christ, they are dead to sin. Sin is not dead in them; but they are dead to sin. And so, if a man walks in sin, he shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

And over against this the positive side is also true, only the man that stands in a relation of grace to God can do good works. Good works are not external. It is only a good work which is performed purely for God's sake; only that is good in the spiritual, ethical sense of the word. Everything that is performed for any other purpose, for any other reason than for God's sake is corrupt.

This is the very purpose of our salvation, the glory of God. It is the only purpose. Sometimes it is presented as if our salvation had two purposes. It is said that the first purpose of our salvation is the glory of God — that is the highest purpose. But there is a purpose that is closer to us, the salvation of mankind. That, however, is impossible; for God's purpose cannot be anything but His own glory, and

the expression of His virtues. We can look about us, and reach out to something outside of ourselves, and make that our purpose, but God had nothing outside of Himself to reach out to. He was alone in eternity. There was nothing outside of Him to reach out to. He could have no purpose but the expression of His own glory. And that is God's purpose in regards to our salvation, the manifestation, the shining forth of His virtues. That is why we were created. That is why we are redeemed. That is why we are Christians. And that is why we must do good works. There is no other purpose.

Furthermore, it is just because of that purpose that the good works of the Christian can reach the highest quality. The Christian does not do good works to be saved. His salvation is finished. It is complete, so that the purpose can never be the seeking of blessings for ourselves. The soul purpose is the glory of God; and that purpose is reached in the Christian. It is not so that we must now help God to reach His purpose. God reaches that purpose in the Christian; and the good works of a Christian are necessitated by the very work of redemption. We do good works for the love of God; and if we do good works in order to go to heaven, those works are corrupt □ just as it is corrupt to hate sin because of its result.

This doctrine alone places us in a position to be able to live before God. As long as we presume our relationship to be that of an employer and employee, there is no possibility of doing good works. If I work for someone and receive wages, there is in those wages no sign that I have the good will of him for whom I worked. I earned those wages; and that receive these wages is no sign that I have the good will of my employer, nor that I worked for my employer out of a motive of love. And so, as long as I conceive of myself as working for God, I have not begun to understand the relation of one that walks in sanctification before God, nor have I begun to understand God.

And so it is that by absolute, free, sovereign grace God places us in a position in which we feel that what we do we do not do for our salvation. Why must I do good works? To go to heaven? I do go to heaven. Freely we are saved, not as wages but as a manifestation of God's good will. And it follows that there is nothing for me to merit anymore. My life before God must be purely from the motive of the love of God. That is what the catechism emphasizes. "Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?" And the answer is "Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit, after His own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us; also that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof; and that, by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ."

II. Their Possibility

Even here, however, we must be careful; and so the catechism begins by rejecting still another error.

It is not that good works come out of the Christian himself as a sort of response to the blessings of God's grace. Good works do not have their roots in us. That is an error. Gratitude does not arise spontaneously out of us in response to the grace of God over us. It is not that we see the goodness of God and the riches of His grace over us, and we spontaneously do good works as a response to this grace of God, as in the song, "I gave, I gave my life for thee, what hast thou given for me?" That is not so. If it were that God shows us the riches of His grace, and now we have to respond to it, we would never do good works. We would be still in our sin. That is why the catechism emphasizes that good works are possible only because Christ renews us after His own image by His Holy Spirit.

There have always been some people who have said that God wanted to reveal His grace and mercy, and the purpose of the Christian is not to reveal God's virtues in general but simply to make evident His grace. God's grace needs to be revealed, and is set forth in our sinfulness and corruption. We are sinners; and such sinners God brings to the light, in the doing of which His grace is made

manifest. So they ask, "Shall we hide that grace by trying to fix our natures? No, let us show that we are sinners, for the more our corruption becomes evident, the more the grace of God will become evident also." And it is to this that the catechism answers, in effect, "You forget one thing □ the Christian is not only redeemed, but he is also renewed by Christ." Why would Christ renew those whom He has redeemed, if not that they should do good works? That is the second necessity for doing good works. The fact is that by nature we are slaves of sin and corruption; and Jesus redeemed us from that slavery.

In this we have the legal side of salvation. Jesus removed our guilt, and thereby made us free men. Christ purchased us; He bought us to be free. That is a finished work. But, if that were the whole of our salvation, we would never come to do good works. By nature we are the willing slaves of sin; and Christ does not simply free us so that He can come and tells us about it, and we may willingly accept this freedom. If that were so, we would not be willing to leave the service of sin. But Christ also renews us. He renews those whom He has redeemed. The two are inseparably connected together. No one can say, "I am redeemed," who will not say also, "I am renewed." That is a fact.

Jesus, by the power of His Spirit enters into the hearts of the redeemed; and entering into their hearts, He renews them. He creates in them the power to live a new life. Therefore it is not that we are saved by grace and do not have to do good works; but rather, the necessity of our doing good works follows from our being saved by grace.

These good works, however, do not have their root in us. In a certain sense good works are ours. They are ours in that God gives them to us; but they are never ours in the sense that they have their root in us and we bring them to God. As the Apostle expresses it in Ephesians 2:10, *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* There you have the conception of good works, God ordained all their good works for His people. He ordained good works for His people, and precisely what good works they should do.

To be specific, God ordained that we should be here this morning. He ordained that we should be here this morning to worship, sing His praises and listen to His word. That is not accidental, nor is it a matter of our own free will. God ordained it. As we are here now this morning, we were eternally to be so in His counsel.

And even more, as God ordains good works for His people, so He prepares His people to walk in them. That is what we read in Ephesians. He prepares His people through Christ. Christ merited the privilege for His people to walk in good works. He redeemed us by His blood so that we might do good works. And not only did He merit the privilege for us to do good works, but He also by His Spirit renews us so that these good works are realized in us. He renews us by His Spirit. That is, He renews us unto righteousness, holiness, unto all that we need in order to do good works.

And in this all Christ is exalted. And what does He do? Does He just sit still? Does He work just once in us? Does He regenerate us and thereafter sit still? No, He works in us continually; and He works in us constantly. And it is by virtue of that operation of Christ in His people that their minds and wills and desires are turned to righteousness and holiness so that they do good works. It is as the Apostle expresses it, *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do have his good pleasure,* Phil 2:12,13. And again in Gl 2:20: *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.* And it is only because Christ lives in me, that I can do good works, as Christ Himself said, *I am the vine, ye are the branches ... for without me ye can do nothing,* Jh 15:5.

This cuts off all boasting, for the end of this truth is not that we go about talking about what we have done for God, and advertising how much we have done. That is abominable. The end of the gospel is that we boast in God; and when we receive the privilege to walk in good works, we get down on our knees and say, "Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of doing these good works."

III. Their Fruit

And finally, walking in good works bears fruit.

You understand that, when the catechism speaks of our good works as gaining others for Christ, this is not meant in the Pelagian sense. It stands to reason that in doing good works we let our light shine before men, but not in the Pelagian sense of the word. Nor is it to put stars in the crown of Jesus, or to win men for Christ. It does not mean that our good works can move others to accept Christ. That is not the meaning of the catechism when it says “that, by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ.”

In the second place, it cannot mean that our good works can gain for Christ others than the elect. We must not expect that, if we do good works, the world by seeing these works will turn to Christ. Rather, to the contrary, the more we walk in good works, the more tribulation we will have. The meaning is that by our good works the Lord uses us in winning other elect sinners.

In the third place, it also means that we gain others for Christ, not just by our walk, but also by our talk, by our conversation.

And, in the fourth place, it means that we don’t just go out into the public marketplace, but that we gain men for Christ in the immediate circle of life in which we live. Don’t go on the public marketplace to bring people to Christ if you have not brought those to Christ that live in your immediate circle. If you have not by your godly walk and conversation won your children for Christ, don’t turn instead to the public marketplace.

So often it happens that those who are won for Christ by our godly walk and conversation are those who live the closest to us. God at times uses the godly husband to win the ungodly wife, or the godly businessman to win his ungodly partner.

In turn, with regard to the other fruit mentioned by the catechism, that of the Christian’s being “assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof,” it does not mean that our faith comes to assurance in this way. Our faith does not come to assurance by our good works; faith is the bond that binds us to Christ. By that faith we are grafted into Him; and upon this the assurance of our salvation depends.

Now the catechism does tell us that “everyone may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof.” We do become assured of our faith in the way of good works, and in the way of sanctification; but note that it is not that faith comes to assurance by good works. Faith needs no assurance; it is certain □ it is “a certain knowledge.” There is in reality no such thing as a weak faith; and faith does not become assured by good works.

What the Catechism means to say is this:

In the first place, by the fruits of faith I am assured that I have faith. The question, do I have faith, is answered by my walk.

How do we become assured that we are in the faith? Some people are often troubled with the question of whether or not they are in the faith. How is such a person to become assured of his faith? In the first place, by forgetting that question. It’s not important. And, in the second place, by walking spontaneously in the way of good works. The natural man never does anything but sin, so that, if there appears in your life even the smallest fruit of good works, you have therein the evidence that you are in the faith. And in the third place, when we speak of the fruit by which I may know that I have faith, we must be careful that the works we do are works of faith. The fruits of faith are what we find in Gl 5:22,23, *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance*; and it is not a question of how many good work you do, or how great your works are, but the very existence of these works is the evidence that we are in the faith.

Neither are good works a matter of what one does outwardly. It is not, for example, a question of how much money one gives for a certain cause. The question is merely whether these good works are the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of faith is a walk in sanctification. In one word, if there is the fruit of the love of God as manifested in sorrow for sin and the desire to be pleasing to God, you have proof that you are in the faith. For that can never be anything but the fruit of grace.

And finally, the fruit of faith is not the result of calculation. We do not take inventory of our good works, and on the basis of what we find come to the assurance that we are in the faith. But the answer that comes to you and me as to our being in the faith, comes spontaneously. Spontaneously we receive the answer, if we walk in good works, we are in the faith; *For as many as are led by the **Spirit** of God, they are the sons of God.* And that testimony of the Spirit we receive in the way of walking in good works.

The Essence of Good Works

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.88. Of how many parts doth the true conversion of man consist?

A. Of two parts; of the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man.

Q.89. What is the mortification of the old man?

A. It is a sincere sorrow of heart, that we have provoked God by our sins, and more and more to hate and flee from them.

Q.90. What is the quickening of the new man?

A. It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

Q.91. But what are good works?

A. Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men.

Introduction

This is the concluding question and answer in the Lord's Day that treats the true conversion of man. We have seen that true conversion, in distinction from false conversion, from counterfeit conversion, is characterized, in the first place, by being a spiritual-ethical inner change of the whole man. It is a turning about, not merely in the outward walk and manifestation of life, but it is a change, a spiritual-ethical change, of the whole man. In the second place, we see that the true conversion of man, in distinction from false conversion, is characterized by the fact that it is not man's work, but from beginning to end the work of God. When God turns us we turn. When He changes the direction in which we are traveling, we travel in a different direction. It is true that the demand of conversion comes to every man; no man may walk in sin and corruption; no man may be unconverted; no man has the right to walk in an unconverted way. But that does not mean that the ability to convert follows from that demand. The demand is upon us; but nevertheless it is the work of God. God turns us, and then we are turned. Then we hate sin and corruption, and we desire to be pleasing to God.

For that reason true conversion has a two-fold aspect, as long as we are not perfect. These are the aspects of the killing of the old man, and the quickening of the new man, so that in the process of conversion there is in the Christian no testimony of perfection; but there is, in the process, the antithetical testimony that there is in the Christian the ever-growing desire to be rid of sin, and to flee from it, and an ever-growing desire to be pleasing to God. And, as far as the manifestation of conversion is concerned, this often reveals itself to us as being retrogressive, rather than progressive. The reason for this is that, in the process of conversion, we more and more come to see our sin, and that sin becomes active. And, because we actually sin more, nevertheless conversion reveals itself in approving the things that are of God, and walking in them.

So we come to the question, what are good works? To which the catechism gives a three-fold answer. In the first place, as to the standard by which they must be judged, they must be judged according to the law of God. In the second place, as to their motive and purpose, they must be done to the glory of God. And in the third place, as to their deepest root, they must proceed from faith.

Theme: The Essence of Good Works

1. Their Objective Standard
2. Their Inner Motive and Purpose
3. Their Deepest Spiritual Root

1. Their Objective Standard

But we must, first of all, place ourselves before the question, what is really a work of man? Not, what is a good work, what really constitutes a work of man?

We are so easily inclined to look upon the outward act, upon that which we see with our eyes and call the work of a man, without looking any deeper and seeing what lies back of that outward act, what lies at the bottom of that work. A man gives a certain sum of money to the church, or to some institution, or someone risks his life to save another from drowning, and we look upon that outward manifestation, upon that outward act, as being a good work; and we do not look any deeper to see what lies behind that work. We are inclined to have a superficial conception of good works in which there are many good works, and we understand the theory that speaks of, 'the good works of the natural man.' But that is not true. It is not a proper way of answering the question, what is a work of man? There is much more to a work of man.

To the works of man belongs not only the movement of the hands and the feet, the outward movement by which a man's works are brought to manifestation. Back of this outward movement lays the movement of the mind, of the will and the heart. When a man gives a million dollars away, he not only gives it outwardly, but he has been thinking, willing and desiring, all of which we do not see. That is not published in the papers; yet what is in his mind and will and heart belongs to his work. It is in fact an essential part of his work. And therefore, when we speak of the work of man, we must speak of it as God sees it. And God does not merely see what we see. He does not merely see the outward act; but He penetrates to the very beginning, to the very source of the work of a man, which is in the heart. And a good work is a work that, in the sight of God, is good to its very core. That is a good work. And likewise, an evil work is a work that is corrupt in the sight of God. For example, a man jumps after a child that is drowning; and that outward act is in harmony with God's law. But if that man is thinking 'I am going to show what I can do,' it is hypocrisy. It does not mean that he shouldn't have jumped after that drowning child — as it has been said that we teach, that is not true □ he must jump after that child. If he doesn't, he sins. The point is, however, that he sins whether he jumps after that child or not; he either instance he sins. You must understand that outwardly good works may well be corrupt in the sight of God. Only that is a good work that in the sight of God is good to its very root. All that is not good to its very root is evil in the sight of God.

Now the catechism says that good works must be in harmony with God's law. They must be in harmony with the law of God in as much as this law governs the inner motives from which good works must be done, which is from the motive of the love of God. All that is not rooted in that love of God is not good.

In the second place, it means that the outward manifestation of our good works must be in harmony with what is expressed in the law of God, that is, with the whole word of God. The law of God is the objective criterion, the standard, for our good works, and excludes everything that we may put down as a standard of good works. This means that the Christian is to submit his own will as to what is good and evil to the will of God.

This the world never does. The world does not ask what the will of God is, but asks, does it pay? If it pays to live in harmony with God's law, the world may do so, but otherwise it does not. If it pays to be

honest, the world tries to be honest; otherwise it is not. If it pays not to work on Sunday, the world does not work on Sunday. The world asks, is it good for me, regardless of whether it is in harmony with God's law or not.

Good works are those that are in harmony with God's law. The deep principle lying at the bottom of the fact that the law of God must be the standard for good works is that God only can say what is good; He only can determine what is good. We cannot determine what is good, so that anything that has its root in our own mind, in our own will and in our own heart, and is not in harmony with the law of God, cannot be the criterion for good works.

That is even true of the conscience. It is sometimes said that we may not sin against the conscience; but that is not necessarily so. It depends on whether the conscience is in harmony with the law of God. Our conscience is corrupt. Paul's conscience was so corrupt that he thought he was doing a good work when he persecuted the Christians. If our conscience dictates that a thing is good, while the word of God plainly teaches that it is not, then the conscience must be converted. All false mysticism and all legislation of men cannot be the standard for good works. Take prohibition and women's suffrage, they are institutions of man; and we set the word of God aside, and go ahead with these things. But only the word of God can be the standard for good works.

2. Their Inner Motive and Purpose

And then, in addition, all the works of men must not only have the standard of the law of God by which their quality must be judged, but they must also have a proper motive and purpose.

When a man does something, he has an end in view; he has a motive and a purpose. And his motive and purpose are closely related. Everything a man does has a purpose; and that purpose which we have in view, we can distinguish between the approximate or near purpose, and the ultimate purpose which we have in mind. When we go to the shop, we have in mind to earn a little money. We do not go to the shop just to be there. We have a reason for going to the shop; we go the shop to earn a little money. That is our near purpose. But we also have a more ultimate purpose, namely, to support our families and the cause of God's kingdom. But the Christian has a more ultimate purpose; and that purpose is that God may be glorified. We go to the shop not to sing psalms, but we go there to work. We go there to support our families and the church and the cause of God's kingdom; but through it all our ultimate purpose is to glorify God.

It is here that the world falls away entirely. The world may do many good works, but it never steps out of the limelight in order to give God the glory.

We can classify all works into two classes. In the first place, there are the works that have their ultimate purpose in man. And, in the second place, there are the works that have their ultimate purpose in God. And it may be said that all that do not have this latter purpose in the glory of God are evil. No matter how nice they are outwardly, if they do not have their purpose in the glory of God, they are sin.

The meaning of sin in Scripture, is 'a missing of the mark;' and as often as our works miss the mark, they are sin. If I want to go to New York, and I take a train to Yellowstone Park, it would be foolish to say after I get there, "It was a nice train ride anyway." The fact is that I missed the mark. And so it is with the work of men. The ultimate end of the good works, of the individual and of men generally, and of the world, is man; and it is a missing of the mark. It is sin. It is corruption. And it is still more corrupt for the church to say that isn't so, and even more corrupt to say that missing the mark is common grace.

The purpose of our good works must be the glory of God. God created all things in order that they should radiate His glory. This glory of God radiates in all creation; and God created man in order that he should be a conscious reflection of His glory. He created a conscious creature in order that His glory might radiate in the creation, and that this conscious creature should declare it. That was God's

purpose. Otherwise we miss the mark. God made all things for His names sake; and, if man does not do all things for the glory of God, he sins.

3. Their Deepest Spiritual Root

Our good works must be rooted in faith. *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin*; and you must not twist that word around.

If our works do not proceed from faith, they are not good works. Why? Because our works proceed from the heart? No, for the works of the world also proceed from the heart. The difference between the works of the Christian and those of the world is not that the works of the Christian proceed from the heart and those of the world are external. The difference is that good works must proceed from Christ; and all that proceed from us are corrupt.

We can only bring forth corrupt works because our nature is corrupt,. The natural man is carnal. He is subject to sin. He is not subject to the will of God, and cannot be. When he labors and works, God is not in all his mind. The mark of the natural mind is man; and when man is the mark it is corrupt. When the world extols its great men, it becomes plainly manifest that it misses the mark. God is not in all their mind.

Our good works must be to the glory of God; and they must be rooted in faith. Faith is the spiritual tie that unites us with Christ. Faith is the tie by which we are engrafted into Christ, and by which we appropriate Him and all that is in Him. Faith is the channel by which we receive all that makes us as pleasing to God. Without faith, we cannot please God; for only that which proceeds from Christ through faith is good. We, in the last analysis, do not bear fruit, but Christ bears fruit through us. And because good works cannot grow on our corrupt root but only on the root of Christ, therefore they must proceed from faith. You can picture it as nice as you wish, but because the world never does anything that arises out of Christ through faith, its works are without exception corrupt. All that is not of faith is sin.

So the catechism, in answer to the question, what are good works, answers that only those are good works which proceed from a true faith, which are performed according to the law of God, and which are done to His glory.

We therefore conclude, in the first place, that it is surely not difficult for the Christian to maintain the confession that by nature we do not do good works. It is not difficult for the Christian to understand that by nature we are incapable of doing any good works, and inclined to all evil.

In the second place, we conclude that there is in us but a small beginning of doing good works. How little we live from faith, how little we find in us of the love of God, which the law demands as the criterion for our good works. How little we labor from the conscious motive of the glory of God. And so the conclusion is that our daily prayer will be, *God be merciful to me a sinner*. The conclusion will be, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* And then the final conclusion will be, *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord*.

Good Works

Rev. H. Hoeksema

Q.91. But what are good works?

A. Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions
Introduction

This is the concluding question and answer in the Lord's Day that treats the true conversion of man. We have seen that true conversion, in distinction from false conversion, from counterfeit conversion, is characterized, in the first place, by being a spiritual-ethical inner change of the whole man. It is a turning about, not merely in the outward walk and manifestation of life, but it is a change, a spiritual-ethical change, of the whole man. In the second place, we see that the true conversion of man, in distinction from false conversion, is characterized by the fact that it is not man's work, but from beginning to end the work of God. When God turns us we turn. When He changes the direction in which we are traveling, we travel in a different direction. It is true that the demand of conversion comes to every man; no man may walk in sin and corruption; no man may be unconverted; no man has the right to walk in an unconverted way. But that does not mean that the ability to convert follows from that demand. The demand is upon us; but nevertheless it is the work of God. God turns us, and then we are turned. Then we hate sin and corruption, and we desire to be pleasing to God.

For that reason true conversion has a two-fold aspect, as long as we are not perfect. These are the aspects of the killing of the old man, and the quickening of the new man, so that in the process of conversion there is in the Christian no testimony of perfection; but there is, in the process, the antithetical testimony that there is in the Christian the ever-growing desire to be rid of sin, and to flee from it, and an ever-growing desire to be pleasing to God. And, as far as the manifestation of conversion is concerned, this often reveals itself to us as being retrogressive, rather than progressive. The reason for this is that, in the process of conversion, we more and more come to see our sin, and that sin becomes active. And, because we actually sin more, nevertheless conversion reveals itself in approving the things that are of God, and walking in them.

So we come to the question, what are good works? To which the catechism gives a three-fold answer. In the first place, as to the standard by which they must be judged, they must be judged according to the law of God. In the second place, as to their motive and purpose, they must be done to the glory of God. And in the third place, as to their deepest root, they must proceed from faith.

Theme: Good Works

1. Their Objective Standard
2. Their Inner Motive and Purpose
3. Their Deepest Spiritual Root

1. Their Objective Standard

Their Objective Standard

But we must, first of all, place ourselves before the question, what is really a work of man? Not, what is a good work, what really constitutes a work of man?

We are so easily inclined to look upon the outward act, upon that which we see with our eyes and call the work of a man, without looking any deeper and seeing what lies back of that outward act, what lies at the bottom of that work. A man gives a certain sum of money to the church, or to some institution, or someone risks his life to save another from drowning, and we look upon that outward manifestation, upon that outward act, as being a good work; and we do not look any deeper to see what lies behind that work. We are inclined to have a superficial conception of good works in which there are many good works, and we understand the theory that speaks of, 'the good works of the natural man.' But that is not true. It is not a proper way of answering the question, what is a work of man? There is much more to a work of man.

To the works of man belongs not only the movement of the hands and the feet, the outward movement by which a man's works are brought to manifestation. Back of this outward movement lays the movement of the mind, of the will and the heart. When a man gives a million dollars away, he not only gives it outwardly, but he has been thinking, willing and desiring, all of which we do not see. That is not published in the papers; yet what is in his mind and will and heart belongs to his work. It is in fact an essential part of his work. And therefore, when we speak of the work of man, we must speak of it as God sees it. And God does not merely see what we see. He does not merely see the outward act; but He penetrates to the very beginning, to the very source of the work of a man, which is in the heart. And a good work is a work that, in the sight of God, is good to its very core. That is a good work. And likewise, an evil work is a work that is corrupt in the sight of God. For example, a man jumps after a child that is drowning; and that outward act is in harmony with God's law. But if that man is thinking 'I am going to show what I can do,' it is hypocrisy. It does not mean that he shouldn't have jumped after that drowning child — as it has been said that we teach, that is not true □ he must jump after that child. If he doesn't, he sins. The point is, however, that he sins whether he jumps after that child or not; he either instance he sins. You must understand that outwardly good works may well be corrupt in the sight of God. Only that is a good work that in the sight of God is good to its very root. All that is not good to its very root is evil in the sight of God.

Now the catechism says that good works must be in harmony with God's law. They must be in harmony with the law of God in as much as this law governs the inner motives from which good works must be done, which is from the motive of the love of God. All that is not rooted in that love of God is not good.

In the second place, it means that the outward manifestation of our good works must be in harmony with what is expressed in the law of God, that is, with the whole word of God. The law of God is the objective criterion, the standard, for our good works, and excludes everything that we may put down as a standard of good works. This means that the Christian is to submit his own will as to what is good and evil to the will of God.

This the world never does. The world does not ask what the will of God is, but asks, does it pay? If it pays to live in harmony with God's law, the world may do so, but otherwise it does not. If it pays to be honest, the world tries to be honest; otherwise it is not. If it pays not to work on Sunday, the world does not work on Sunday. The world asks, is it good for me, regardless of whether it is in harmony with God's law or not.

Good works are those that are in harmony with God's law. The deep principle lying at the bottom of the fact that the law of God must be the standard for good works is that God only can say what is good; He only can determine what is good. We cannot determine what is good, so that anything that has its root in our own mind, in our own will and in our own heart, and is not in harmony with the law of God, cannot be the criterion for good works.

That is even true of the conscience. It is sometimes said that we may not sin against the conscience;

but that is not necessarily so. It depends on whether the conscience is in harmony with the law of God. Our conscience is corrupt. Paul's conscience was so corrupt that he thought he was doing a good work when he persecuted the Christians. If our conscience dictates that a thing is good, while the word of God plainly teaches that it is not, then the conscience must be converted. All false mysticism and all legislation of men cannot be the standard for good works. Take prohibition and women's suffrage, they are institutions of man; and we set the word of God aside, and go ahead with these things. But only the word of God can be the standard for good works.

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It is here that the world falls away entirely. The world may do many good works, but it never steps out of the limelight in order to give God the glory.

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The meaning of sin in Scripture, is 'a missing of the mark;' and as often as our works miss the mark, they are sin. If I want to go to New York, and I take a train to Yellowstone Park, it would be foolish to say after I get there, "It was a nice train ride anyway." The fact is that I missed the mark. And so it is with the work of men. The ultimate end of the good works, of the individual and of men generally, and of the world, is man; and it is a missing of the mark. It is sin. It is corruption. And it is still more corrupt for the church to say that it isn't so, and even more corrupt to say that missing the mark is common grace.

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Our good works must be rooted in faith. *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin*; and you must not twist that word around.

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heart and those of the world are external. The difference is that good works must proceed from Christ; and all that proceed from us are corrupt.

We can only bring forth corrupt works because our nature is corrupt. The natural man is carnal. He is subject to sin. He is not subject to the will of God, and cannot be. When he labors and works, God is not in all his mind. The mark of the natural mind is man; and when man is the mark it is corrupt. When the world extols its great men, it becomes plainly manifest that it misses the mark. God is not in all their mind.

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The Law of God

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.92. What is the law of God?

A. God spake all these words, Exodus 20, Deut. 5, saying, "I am the Lord thy God..."

Q.93, How are these commandments divided?

A. Into two tables: the first which teaches us how we must behave towards God; the second, what duties we owe to our neighbor.

We found, in answer to the question, "What are good works?" that there are especially three characteristics of good works.

In the first place, good works are "those which proceed from faith," because faith is the tie that connects the Christian with Christ. And all that is not of Christ in the Christian is of self, and all that is of self is sin. Therefore, only the works in the Christian that he does in Christ are good works; and he is in Christ only by faith.

In the second place, we found that the sole standard by which good works are to be measured is "the law of God." The second characteristic of good works, works which are good in the sight of God, is conformity with God's law. Not what we say, not our judgment, not the judgment of any group, not even the judgment of the majority can determine what is good before God. Not even our own conscience can be the standard of what is good before God. The sole standard that can determine what is good before God is the law of God; and all that is not in conformity with that law of God must be judged as being sin. It is for that reason that the catechism now turns our attention for the second time to the law of God. It did so in the beginning of our instruction book, in order to teach us our sin and misery. And it does so now in order that that law may be a guide for us, to guide us in the way. It is also for that reason that, in the Reformed Churches, it has always been the custom to call the attention of their people to that law, to read that law, to preach it, to study it, and to meditate upon that law as it is comprehended in the Decalogue in detail. And before we go into the discussion of these detailed commands of the Decalogue, we must call your attention to the law of God as whole.

Theme: The Law of God

1. In Relationship to the Christian
2. In the Perfection of its Form
3. In its Spiritual Meaning

1. In Relationship to the Christian

First of all, we must call your attention to the law in relation to the Christian.

It is not superfluous to call the attention to what is the meaning of the law for us. What do we have to do with it? For there are people, and their number is increasing, who claim that there can be but one answer to that question. That answer is that the Christian is done with the law. They say that the law can have no place at all in the Church, and in the life of the Christian. It ought to be brought to the attention of the Christian at all. It ought to be read in the Church. And they actually banish it from the services, especially in circles where they have discarded, or ought to discard the Old Testament. I refer to the millennial circles. We do not have to be surprised that in these circles they have discarded the law, for they ought to do the same thing with the entire Old Testament.

The claim of the Dispensationalist is that the Church possesses only the New Testament, and only a small part of that. They say that Christ has fulfilled the law. He is the end of the law. He has abolished it. He has fulfilled it; and shall we then again take hold of that law and place ourselves under its guidance and rule? That law was for the Old Testament people of God, when that people was still a child, and was in need of instruction and guidance, when it could not be trusted alone. They say that the law served its purpose in the Old Testament; in the Old Testament dispensation, the people of God were like a little child; and little children must be under governor and tutors. They must be under precepts and laws. You must tell them not to touch the hot stove, or they will burn themselves. You must tell them to leave the knife alone, or they will cut themselves. Therefore, you put a nursemaid over a little child, and although that nursemaid has no authority over that child, she takes it wherever she pleases. But when that child has grown up, you do not put a nursemaid over him anymore. You do not conduct and limit him anymore by precepts and rules. You do not tell a full-grown man not to touch the hot stove, or to touch the knife. Now, they say, that is the history of the Church. The Old Testament people were like little children. Christ had not yet come, atonement had not yet been brought, and, therefore, they had to be under governors and tutors. God had to prescribe every step of the way for the old dispensational people; but that is no more the case now. The Christian is free. And to put that full-grown man under precepts and rules again, is an insult. The Church is not under the law anymore. It is even an act of unbelief for the Church to again turn to that law.

In the second place, they say that the Christian is not under the law, but under grace. Our righteousness is established. It is a perfect righteousness, and is received by grace, not by the works of the law. It would be a denial of the work of Christ to again turn to that law. And so, finally, they say that we are free; we are not under the law. The Christian is free. He is free from the curse of the law. He is free from its demands. He has the law written in his heart. You tell the Christian, therefore, that he may have no other gods before him, and he will tell you, I know it, you do not have to tell me that anymore. The Church is free. The Christian has the law written in his heart. And it is wrong for the Christian to again turn to law with its commands, rather than to be the free child of God.

And so, what are we to say to this? We shall say this, that even as it is with all error, it has a semblance of truth. We have nothing to do with the law; and our discussion of the law must not bring us back under the bondage of the law. To be under the law means simply that the outward law puts its precepts upon us; and we, from fear of what that law, keep these precepts in that same outward way. And there is a danger in that. There is the danger that we again seek to become legally righteous just as they did in the old dispensation. Just to mention one thing, there is a real danger with regard to the keeping of the Sabbath that we take the same attitude that the Jews did, and think that in keeping certain days we are serving the law. Keeping the Sabbath in the old dispensation did have a certain value; but that is not so anymore. There is no value in one day above the others. That is a danger; and when they tell us we are no more under the law, we must say, "That is true." There is no more value in keeping the outward precepts of the law. It was the case in the Old Testament. There was a certain legal, typical righteousness in going to the temple; but there is no righteousness in sitting in Church. To the Jews there was a certain legal, typical righteousness in going to the temple; but that is not so anymore.

Nevertheless, although there is a semblance of truth in the saying that we have nothing to do with the law, the entire argument is based on a misunderstanding of the law. It is true that Christ is the end of the law. That, however, does not refer to the spiritual law, but to the law of ceremonies and shadows. We must distinguish between law and law.

In the first place, there was in the old dispensation the law, from the point of view of its being the body of shadows; and that law of shadows Christ so fulfilled that we can never fulfill it again. But the moral law, the Decalogue, is not the law from the point of view of being the body of shadows; it is

essentially eternal. There is something Jewish, and something earthly in the Decalogue, but its essence is eternal. And we fulfill it — through the fulfillment of Christ. Christ is at the end of the law of shadows; He is the end of the sacrifices and ceremonies. They pointed to Him. They had their end in Him. They led up to Him. Of this law of shadows Christ is the end. That, however, is not true of which we are speaking. It is not true of the law as it is an expression of the will of God concerning our relation to Him, and our relation to one another. Christ could not be the end of the law of which we are speaking, of the law of the Ten Commandments. It is not true that Christ abolished the law of the Ten Commandments.

In the second place, we may note, God wrote these Ten Commandments in two tables of stone, which is not true of the other laws. Therefore, in the way in which they are given, the Ten Commandments bear the testimony that they are not to be abolished.

Again, in the Ten Commandments we do not have something of a passing nature. That law cannot pass away because of its very nature. The principle of the law is that we love God, and that, in that love of God, we love one another. That law cannot perish, for it is spiritual and ethical.

It is true, of course, that the law, in the form in which we have it, is not eternal. The law, as we have it, will not remain. In heaven it will make no sense to say, "Thou shalt love thy father and thy mother." In heaven that relation will not exist. In heaven there will be no sense in saying, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." There will be no sense in saying in heaven, "Thou shalt not covet." There will be no sense in saying, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy;" it will be a continual Sabbath. But nevertheless, it is a law rooted in our nature and life in this world. It is the expression of God's will in relation to Himself, and in relation to one another, as long as we are in the world. And therefore, although Christ is the end of the law, in as far as its command and its threat are concerned, it not so in its ethical and spiritual meaning.

In turn, the Christian knows that he is under grace, and not under the law. And when the Church reads, studies, meditates upon that law, it is not the purpose to have that law rule over us again. It is not the purpose of the Church to obtain righteousness through the law. In that sense the Christian is free from the law, from all law. No matter how he may abuse the law, he is righteous. He is free in Christ; and he never allows that law to rule over him, and to say to him, "Thou shalt, and thou shalt not." He never allows that law to frighten him with its, "Cursed by everyone that abideth not in all the words of this law." He is not afraid of the threat of the law. He is free from the curse of the law. And we are not under the curse of the law anymore.

Nor should we allow that law to rule over us again. The law formerly was our governor' but it is not anymore. To be sure, that old governor is inclined to assume that old place as our governor. He is inclined to forget that the child has grown up. That old governor used to say, "Cursed are all that do not keep all that is written in the book of the law." But now, if that old governor starts to curse, you must tell him to keep still. You must tell that old governor to get out of your house if he starts to curse you. If he starts to curse you, you must tell him, "Christ has removed the curse. He has made me free from the curse of the law." The Christian is not under the law, but under grace.

It is, however, just because we stand in that relation of freedom to the law, that we do it. We are no more under the law but under grace, and therefore, we delight in that law, and delight to do its precepts. And as far as our freedom is concerned, it is true that the Christian is not lawless, but has a delight in the law of God.

Let us not think, however, that the Christian becomes free in the sense that God is free. God's freedom is an undetermined freedom; it is not determined for him. And his freedom is not determined for him because his being is not determined. But that is not the case with us. Our freedom is determined for us because our being is determined. And so the freedom of the Christian is not that He says, "I do not care for the law;" but his freedom is that he delights in that law.

In addition, when scripture says that the Christian has the law written in his heart, you must understand that he does not have these details written in his heart. That is not the meaning. The meaning is that he has the law written in his heart according to its chief principle; and that chief principle is the love of God. The love of God has been poured out in his heart. And the result is that the Christian does all things from the motive of that love of God.

And so, it is conceited to say that we have nothing to do with any outward precept. It is true that, once we shall have reached perfection, we will not need any outward precepts anymore. In heaven we shall see face to face; we shall be known, even as we are known. In turn, in heaven there will not be the crookedness that now is around us. But we are not in heaven; we are on earth, and it is difficult to keep the straight path of God's precepts. We do have the law written in our hearts, and may say that we have no need of the outward law; but the Christian realizes how difficult it is to keep the straight path of God's precepts in this world. Everything will tempt him to turn him away from the straight path. And the Christian himself is not perfect; there is still much corruption in him. In heaven there will not be the corruption that is in us now. When we shall be perfect in heart, and when we shall live in a perfect world, and when we shall see face to face, there will be no need to have anyone tell us not to do this or not to do that, as is not the case here in this world. In this world our mind is darkened by sin so that we do not always know God's will. It is easy to say, "Thou shalt not steal;" but to determine in this complicated world, the way in which this eighth commandment directs us is not so easy. And so we cannot just discard this eighth commandment, no more than we can any of the commandments of the Decalogue.

Even our heart is inclined to go in the wrong way. We are not perfect by any means. The Christian may have the law written in his heart, but there is much more written there as well. He not only has the law written in his heart, but there is also the old writing of sin. And that power of sin frequently overpowers him. We are not perfect. And because we are in a sinful darkened world, and because we are inclined to go wrong, we cannot discard the law. And the Christian that does so, is a conceited Christian.

We need that law. Not to rule over us, and not to curse us, but to instruct us, to guide us, to warn us, to admonish us. The proper place of the law is not that we should again bend the neck under its bondage, or allow it to curse us; but we should give it a place of honor, and allow it to put up its finger in warning once in awhile, to look up to it for guidance, and to listen to advice. The old governor still knows the will of God concerning the life of the Christian; and we must give him the place of honor, and listen to what he says.

2. The Law in the Perfection of its Form

And that law is perfect; and it bears the testimony of perfection. What I mean by perfection is that the law is complete; and the outward form of that law bears the testimony, that it is complete.

That this is so is already expressed in the fact that God engraved it on two tables of stone. He did not write it on parchment; He engraved it in rock so that it is indelible. It cannot be erased or changed.

This perfection is expressed, in the second place, in the fact that these stones were covered on both sides. Nothing can be added to it. The commandments were so written that their final number is ten, the number of completion. And it makes no difference how you divide these various commandments, or how many you put on the first table, and how many you put on the second, but it is certain that it is perfect. It expresses our relation to God, and, on the basis of that relation to God, our relation to one another.

The law is also perfect in this respect; when we carefully study it we find that no sphere of life is left out. We must not look upon these Ten Commandments simply as the law of God in perfection; but

rather as ten headings, ten titles, or so many chapters of our life. And we must study these Ten Commandments, these ten headings, in the light of the word of God, covering the whole of our life. There is no need of adding anything to it; it covers all. It covers everything concerning our relation to God, and concerning our relation to one another. The law covers God's name, his glory, and his worship. It covers every relation of life, that of man and wife, of parent and child, of master and servant. It covers life in every sphere.

And the law is also perfect in that there can be no hope for anyone, except from the principle of the love of God. There is no hope for man without the love of God. There is no hope for the world. Take God away, and corruption is the result. Take God away from the home, and the result is corruption. We need not be surprised at the corruption of family life, at adultery and divorce when the love of God is removed from the home. There is no hope for the state, for society, or for the school without the love of God. To build up a structure of society on the basis of the second table of the law without the basis of the first table, ends up in corruption. That is the law in its outward form.

3. In its Spiritual Meaning

But we know that the law also has a spiritual meaning.

The law of the Ten Commandments is almost entirely prohibitive. It tells us, don't do this, and don't do that. It is almost entirely prohibitive, which is all right before the magistrate. If you do not do what the law forbids, you are free before the magistrate, but not before God. That the law is almost entirely prohibitive is due to the fact that we are inclined to wander away from the precepts of God. But if you do not do the things the law forbids, you are not free before God, for the essence of the law is positive. It's meaning is spiritual.

The question has been asked, why must we study that law? Do I not know that I may have no other gods? Do I not know that I may not have any graven images? Do I not know that I may not use the name of God in vain? Do I not know that I must keep the Sabbath? Is that the reason I must study the law? No, I know that. Do I not know already as a child that I must honor my father and mother, that I may not kill, commit adultery, steal, or bear false witness? I may have a little trouble with the tenth commandment; but what is the use of studying that law? And that is true. If it is the purpose of the Church to study that law as a sort of a police law, then we must not preach it. In that form the law will find ready acceptance by all.

That, however, is not the purpose of the Church in studying that law. The law is not there to govern our outward walk; but in its spiritual meaning penetrates into our very heart, and we cannot be satisfied until we are in conformity with it to its very root.

The root, the essence of the law, is to love God and the neighbor. The first is the great commandment. It is not the greater; it is not the greatest; it is the great commandment. And the second is like unto it, because we cannot love the neighbor unless we love God. And we cannot love God, unless we are free from the curse.

It is, therefore, only the Christian that can fulfill the law. And in studying the law, the Christian must always come to that root. Thou shalt not kill. If applied outwardly, you can apply it to the world; but, if I trace it back to the first table of the law, to the root of the love of God, and from that principle of the love of God apply it, it means that we preserve one another unto eternal life.

So it is with all the commandments. If we place ourselves in the search light of the law, the result is that we will grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord and Savior.

At the same time we will also conclude that there is in us but a small beginning of this obedience. And therefore we must study the law, in the light of the cross. For as we study the law, we will find that we wander away from its precepts. And, if we do not look out, the law will again curse us. But in the

shadow of the cross we are safe, for the blood of Jesus Christ redeems us from all our sins and shortcomings. And we will thank God that we may discuss the law in the shade of the cross, and are not under the law but under grace, and are righteous with the righteousness of Christ.

The First Commandment: Fleeing Idolatry

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.94. What doth God enjoin in the first commandment?

A. That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul, avoid and flee from all idolatry, sorcery, suthsaying, superstition, invocation of saints, or any other creatures; and learn rightly to know the only true God; trust in him alone, with humility, and patience submit to him; expect all good things from him only; love, fear, and glorify him with my whole heart; so that I renounce and forsake all creatures, rather than commit even the least thing contrary to his will.

Q.95. What is idolatry?

Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God, who has manifested himself in his word, to contrive, or have any other object, in which men place their trust.

Introduction

The law of God, as written on the two tables of stone in the ten commandments, can no more occupy the same place in the Church of Jesus Christ in the new dispensation that it occupied among the people of God in the old dispensation. That law can no longer tell us that we must keep its precepts in order to live. Nor can it curse us anymore if we do not keep its precepts, for Christ has redeemed us from the curse. And neither can it be our taskmaster to lead us to Christ. For we have the law written in our hearts.

The law, however, can be our friend and guide; and we can look up to it for advice and guidance. As a friend and guide, it must still have a place in the life of the Christian. The law is now principally theological, as is all truth. That is, the main theme of the law is God. In the same sense that all Scripture is theological, because, for of him, through him, and unto him are all things, all truth is theological, because all truth has its origin in him, and centers around him, and has him for its object.

That is evident already from the relation of the two tables to each other. The law demands that we love the Lord our God above all; this is the great commandment. It is not the greatest commandment, but the only, the great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. It is like unto the first, because it is the same commandment; it flows from the first. The essence of the love of the neighbor is rooted in the love of God., which also becomes evident from the first commandment. I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt. That is the introduction to the law, which tells us how we must enter into the contents of that law. But entering through that introduction into the first commandment, we find that its content is theological. Thou shalt have no other gods before me, that concerns God.

The first commandment of the Decalogue is absolutely basic. It is fundamental; it is first. It is first in the sense that it constitutes the principle from which all the others necessarily follow. And for that reason, the first commandment is the commandment that governs the entire life of the Christian, from its very root to its entire circumference. And therefore, as we conceive of God, so is our life. If we are godless, our life will be godless. If we have a false conception of God, our whole life, from a religious point of view, will be false. If, for example, we look upon God as our family doctor so that we can employ him when we need him, and then pay him off and leave him, our whole life will be corrupt. Or if we look upon God as a sort of a lifeguard who must save us out of trouble and death, our whole life will also be corrupt. As is our conception of God, so is our whole life.

Our whole view of life will be theological, whether it is centered in God, or in an idol. Our whole

view of life must be theological. That is, it must not be concentrated about us, but about God. That is why this first commandment is fundamental, is basic. Our conception of God determines our life. It is sometimes said, "Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are." That is not quite true; but this is true, "Tell me who your God is, and I will tell you who you are." And therefore the first commandment is fundamental; it is basic.

Theme: The First Commandment: Fleeing Idolatry

1. Its Basic Principle
2. Its All Comprehensive Meaning
3. The Blessedness of its Obedience

1. Its Basic Principle

As to the Law's basic principle, it is two-fold. In the first place, the basic principle underlying the first commandment is that God is God. And the second basic principle is that God is one. These are the two fundamental principles that lie at the basis of the first commandment. They are the truths upon which it is based.

God's commandments are always based on truth. That is not always the case with the commandments of man. There are many man made commandments that have not the truth for their basis. So is it, for example, with prohibition; there is no truth lying at the basis of this command. But this is not so with God; in God, truth and righteousness are one. They cannot be separated; and therefore God's law is based on truth, so that, if you depart from the law of God, you depart from the truth. And the truth, the fundamental principles upon which the first commandment is based, is that God is God, and that He is one.

That God is God implies, in the first place, that He is in every respect, over against us, the wholly other. He is in no respect like us. He is in comparison with us, wholly other. That is implied in his Godhead. Characteristic of idols is that those who made them are like them. But it is characteristic of God that He is wholly other, He is the self-existing one. We are not. To be God one must be self-existing; and we are dependent for our existence. We are dependent on God's will for our existence; we are not self-existing.

And just because God is, in relation to us, wholly other, He is the infinite one. We are finite. We are in every respect limited; but God is not limited in any respect. He is the infinite one, while we are finite. He is eternal, while we are subject to time. God is the unchangeable one; He does not grow older. He does not diminish or increase; He is the unchangeable one. While we are subject to change, God is wholly other, so that, when we speak of God, we must lay aside all our own ideas, our own notions, our own conceptions, our own imaginations. We must listen to him only, otherwise we cannot know God.

Again, that God is God means that He is good. It means that He is goodness in the sense of perfection. Evil cannot be God. If God is to be God, He is good, and knows himself as the overflowing fountain of good. That belongs to his Godhead. And therefore, it belongs to his Godhead, that in relation to the creature He is the absolute sovereign. He alone has the prerogative, the ultimate prerogative, the final prerogative, the authority and power, to determine how all that is in the creature shall stand in relation to him. He is sovereign. He alone has the power and authority to rule. He alone has the authority and power to make laws and ordinances. He alone has the authority and power to say what shall be the life of the creature in relation to him, and what shall be the life of the creature in relation to other creatures as well.

In the second place, it belongs to the Godhead that God is one.

Characteristic of idolatry is that the idolater can have many gods, because of the fact that idols are no gods. Polytheism, the belief and practice of having many gods, can only be because its gods are no gods. And so the first commandment is based on the fundamental principle that God is one. That God is one means, in the first place, that there is in God no conflict. The moment you presuppose any conflicts in God, each conflict becomes a god; and that is an idol. To say, for example — as has been said frequently of late — that there are two wills in God, these two wills both become gods. That is idolatry. There are no two wills in God; God's will is one. That we cannot reach out to God's ultimate union is because we are finite. All the virtues in God are one; and there is no conflict in him. There is no conflict between God's righteousness and his mercy; God's righteousness and his mercy are one.

Secondly, that God is one means that there are no gods besides him. As God is one in himself, so there is no god above, next to, or below him. If this were not so, God could not truthfully demand that we have no other gods before him. God is one. That belongs to his very Godhead. God could not be two or three; He is one. That belongs to the very God-head of God. There could not be more than one cause, one sustainer of all things. To say that God is more than one is to deny his Godhead. To say God is one, is to say that God is the only cause, creator, and sustainer of all things. God is always God, and He is always God alone. Gods is God.

2. Its All Comprehensive

You understand what that means for you and me, for our religion? You understand what it means to say that God is God, and He is one? You must understand that the truth that lies at the basis of the first commandment with regard to man, is that man must have a god. That lies at the basis of the first commandment.

The first commandment does not go out from three possibilities, as we sometimes do. It is sometimes presented as if there were three possibilities. In the first place, that man can serve the only true God. In the second place, that he can serve false gods. And, in the third place, that it is possible that he serve no god at all. But that is not true.

The first commandment goes out from two possibilities. One must either serve God, or he will serve other gods. There is no third possibility. Atheists are liars. An Atheist does not simply err; he is a liar, and the *Association for Atheists*, that has been established in our country, is an association of liars. By liars I mean they express what in their conscience they know is not true. There is no Atheist, neither as far as the inmost consciousness is concerned, nor in practical life. It is true that a man may lie to himself so long that he begins to believe the lie himself. He may say "there is no God" so long that he begins to believe it himself: and he may carry that lie with him into the grave. He may say, "There is no god, there is no god, there is no god," until he opens his eyes in hell and says, "There is a God." In that respect he is worse than the devil, for the devil does not say there is no God. The devil is no atheist. But man, although he may say there is no God, in the depth of his heart, God will not allow him to carry the conviction that God is not. Although he may try to bar God from his conviction, in practical life he must have a god. Whether he carves that god in wood or stone, or sets him up in his imagination, makes no difference, he must have a god.

This stands to reason, for man is man. His name is *image of God*; and that name is written upon his whole nature. And that is an image that cries out for its origin, so that when it loses its origin, it looks around for another. What the devil told man in paradise, namely: that he would be like God, became the origin, the beginning, of all false philosophy.

In the second place, man was made a servant. His mind is a servant's mind, his will is a servant's will, his heart is a servant's heart. He may say to God, "I will not serve thee;" but the moment he says it,

he is already seeking for another god to serve, for man is a servant, and he must have something to serve.

In the third place, man is utterly dependent. As the highest creature, he is also the most dependent. He has his breath in his nostrils; he must eat and he must drink; he is dependent upon air, rain and sunshine — upon every thing. The man that says “I am god” is dependent upon literally everything. It is that man — with that image that cries for its origin, and is a servant needing someone to serve, and who carries about with him the feeling of his dependency — who says, “There is no God.” And the moment he does so, he seeks for other gods and becomes an idolater.

Now, in the first commandment, God says, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” And the fundamental principle underlying that commandment is that God is God, and He is one. And what does that mean?

It means, in the first place, that our relation to him is always the relation of a servant. It is never anything else. That is why we have this commandment in this form. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” or, as it is literally, “before my face.” Israel stands before the face of God. And standing before the face of God, it may have on other gods. We are always servants. God is not our servant; we are his servants. God is not our family doctor, who we can call in when we need him, and then pay him and send him away. He is not our partner. He is not our employer. We are his servants. So fully are we his servants that, when we have served him, we have nothing to claim. God is not our boss, so that He must pay us wages after we have worked for him. We are so fully his servants that, after we have fully served him, we must say, “We are unprofitable servants for we have but done that which we were obliged to do.”

It is for this reason that the catechism describes this service of God in different terms. It does not say, “In order to serve God, you must do something for him.” You cannot do anything for God. It may sound pious to say, “We must do something for God;” but in reality it is idolatry. A god that you can do something for is an idol; and the moment you imagine you can do something for God, that moment you are in idolatry. You cannot do anything for God. The last and the first is obedience, service.

That is why the catechism comes, in the first place, to us and says that to serve God is to rightly know him. In order to serve God, we must rightly know him. God wants to be known. To serve God is to rightly know him. To rightly know God is already service of God. God wants us to search his revelation, to study it, to meditate upon it, in order that we may rightly know him.

To serve God means, in the second place, the catechism says, “To submit to his will.” That does not mean that we bow before the will of God, because we cannot help it, that we renounce all that is of self, and that we submit to his will. It means to renounce our own will, and to mind his will. That is the service of the true God.

It is for this reason that the catechism continues and says that the true service of God consists in this, “that I love, fear, and glorify him with my whole heart.” Love him because He is good. Fear him because He is great and glorious. Glorify him because He made us in order that we should be to the praise of his glory.

And finally, the catechism says that the service of the true God consists in this, that I trust in him alone, with humility and patience. To trust in God is to have the assurance that He loves us. And that loving us, He will seek our good, so that we rely on him. That is the service of the true God.

And mind you, that is true for our whole life. If God is God, and is one, and we are standing before the face of that God, then the service of God includes our whole life. Our lives cannot be divided. As God is one, so our lives must be one. God demands our whole life. There are not various departments in life. It is not so that on the Sabbath we worship God, but the rest of our life has not much to do with him. Our life is one. There is the life of our mind, of our soul, of our will, and of our heart, of our desires.

There is our life in relation to others, in relation to the home, to the school, to the Church, to society, to the State. There is the relation of man and wife, of parent and child, of employer and employee, of master and servant. God demands that that our whole life, our personal life, our life in relation to others, our life in all its various relations, must be devoted to him, so that God does not for a moment relinquish his hold on us. We cannot for a moment go our own way. If we do, it is idolatry.

To force God out of any part of our life is idolatry. It is idolatry if the man in the shop says that God has nothing to do with his relation to his employer. Our whole life God claims for his own. For our whole life, God writes, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The service of God includes our whole life, so that God is sovereign over the life of my body, He determines what that body shall be. He determines what my ear shall hear, not I. The moment I determine what I will hear, I am an idolater. God determines what I shall speak, not I. The moment I determine what I will speak, I am an idolater.

And as it is with the life of my body, so it is with the life of my soul. I do not determine what I shall think; God determines that. I do not determine what I shall will; God determines that. I do not determine what I shall desire, God does.

And so it is in every relation of life. I do not determine my relation to my wife; God determines that. I do not determine my relation to my children; God determines that relation. I am not my own – I am not something. We are in ourselves nothing. God determines what we shall be.

And so it is in our whole life, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" — not on the street, not in the home, not in the school, not in the shop, not in the office, not in any sphere of life. That is not left up to us. It is not something we determine. It is not so that we can look in our pocketbook to see whether we can afford to send our children to the Christian school; that is not so. God's kingdom does not depend on the dollar. It is not left to our choice whether we shall send our children to the Christian school. It is never left to our choice to rule God out of our life, even for a single moment. God determines our whole life. God is God. And we must have him in our whole life.

And then we must trust him. These two always go together. The moment you set God aside, you do not trust him anymore. Supposing you are placed before the choice of working on Sunday, or losing your job. You say, "I must work, or else I will lose my job." All right, but then you do not trust God anymore. You have set God aside. You cannot set God aside and at the same time trust him. One depends upon the other. To trust God means that we do his will.

3. The Blessedness of its Obedience

And that is not easy. It is much easier to go our own way. It is much easier to make golden calves. And it looks religious, too. Pelagian street corner preaching is much nicer; but it is corrupt. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Thou shalt let God determine your whole life. That is something the natural mind does not do, for we said in paradise that we will determine our own life. The natural mind does not want God to determine his life.

It is not easy for the people of God because they must live that antithetically in the world. This command speaks to God's people. The Lord says to them, "I am the Lord your God, which hath brought you out of the house of bondage." That house was first of all Egypt; but essentially it means, "I am the Lord your God, which hath delivered you out of the bondage of sin and death." And because they were delivered by him, that people tasted that it was blessed to have no other gods before him.

There is no blessedness in idolatry. How can it be blessed to trust in our money, in our position, in man. And don't say that we do not do it. It stands to reason that when man said, "There is no God," he should first of all turn to the powers of nature; to sun, and moon and stars, because he saw in them a certain power. It stands to reason that he should take gold and silver, wood and stone, and carve a god out of these, and bow before them. And it stands to reason that finally he should idolize man himself —

first the individual, and today humanity. Humanity is worshipped today. We must serve humanity.

And do not say that we do not do it. We don't do it in that form, but why all that fear in our hearts? Why does the farmer look up to the sun and moon and the rain if it is not to worship them? Our heart is so idolatrous that we have only begun to put our trust in God. But it is not blessed to put our trust in an idol. And it is infinitely blessed to trust in God. It is only good to see him, to mind him, to will him, to desire him. "For they that put their trust in him will not be put to shame;" or, as the Dutch psalm has it, "Hijkan, en wil, en zal in nood; Zelfs by het nadern van de dood; Volkomen witkomst geven." That you cannot say of an idol. That you can only say of the living God. He can, and will, and shall deliver His people to the full. And they that put their trust in him, shall abide forever. The idols shall perish. They are there only for a time. Then how terrible it is for them that follow after them. The idol is not there without the will of God. Both must perish. But God will abide forever. And they that do His will, will abide with him. Put away your idols, and there are many. And put your trust only in the living God.

The Second Commandment: Worshipping without Images

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.96. What doth God require in the second commandment?

A. That we in no wise represent God in images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.

Q.97. Are images then not at all to be made?

A. God neither can, nor may be represented by any means; but as to creatures, though they may be represented, yet God forbids to make, or have any resemblances of them, either in order to worship them or to serve God by them.

Q.98. But may not images be tolerated in the churches, as books to the laity?

A. No: for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have his people taught, not by dumb images, but by lively preaching of his word.

Introduction

There is, as you will readily see, a very close connection between the first and the second commandment of the Decalogue. In fact the relation is so close that many cannot see the distinction between the two; they look upon the two commandments as one. They say that there is no difference between idolatry and image worship, for it is evident that all image worship is idolatry. So they combine the first and second commandment, and make them one commandment.

You must understand that in the original the commandments are not divided. We do not know just how many commandments there were on each of the two tables of stone; we just surmise. The result is that the first and second commandment are not divided in the original, and some combine them into one commandment. Then, in order to get ten, they divide the last commandment of the Decalogue in two.

Now it is true that all image worship is idolatry. There need be no dispute about that. Even though this has been denied, it is evident that God cannot be represented by any creaturely form. To put it bluntly, you cannot make a photograph of God. The only photograph of God is in God's own consciousness. Now if the creature undertakes to represent God by an image and worships that image, it is not the worship of God but an idol.

But, although that is true, we may note that all idolatry is not image worship. Even though it is true that there can be no image worship without idolatry, so there is much idolatry that is not image worship. Transgression of the first commandment comes before transgression of the second; idolatry is first. And so also historically man in departing from God first sought out a god of his own imagination. And then, having sought out such a god, he made an image of a man or of an animal to represent that god. In the course of time, man forgot the distinction between his god and the image and came to look upon that image as the embodiment of that god, so that there is a difference between the first and second commandment of the Decalogue.

There is also a difference in their underlying principles. The underlying principle of the first commandment is that God is one. There are no other gods and God is not many. The heathen always represented the godhead as consisting of many, and in their worship often invoked the deity of one god against the other, thereby creating a state of war and confusion among the gods.

Now Scripture says that the devils know better than this. The devils know that God is one. That is what James emphasizes. Because they know that God is one and not many is why they tremble. Because God is one, He has the right to come to His people with the demand that they shall serve Him alone. That is the truth that lies at the basis of the first commandment.

The underlying principle of the second commandment, however, is that God is a Spirit and therefore cannot be represented by anything material. The first commandment answers the question as to who God is, while the second answers the question, as to how He is, and how He must be worshipped and approached. That is the second commandment, and why we must look upon it as a separate precept.

Theme: The Second Commandment: Worshipping without Images

1. Its General Meaning
2. Its Underlying Principle
3. Its Distinctive Demand upon the People of God

1. Its General Meaning

It is evident that when the second commandment forbids the making of graven images or the likeness of any creature, the idea is not that we may not make pictures of any kind. The idea is not that we may have no paintings or statues. It does not mean that we may have no photographs of creatures. That is, it does not mean that an image or photograph of a creature for the purpose of representing that creature is forbidden. That is not the purpose of the second commandment. We may have photographs of that which can be photographed. That this is so is evident from the word of God. Take for example the temple with its images, its oxen, etc. That is not the purpose of the word of God.

The meaning of this commandment is that we may not take anything of that which can be seen and touched and make a representation of it for the purpose of representing God. We may have a photograph of any visible creature. That is even true of Jesus. We might have a photograph of Jesus if we could get it. We haven't any such; but in itself, apart from the danger that we might worship such a photograph, we might have a photograph of Jesus. The human nature of Jesus could be photographed. But if anything is copied, if we make an image of any visible creature for the purpose of representing any phase of the Godhead, we have what is forbidden in the second commandment.

That is why the second commandment says, *thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them*. The underlying idea is that you cannot find anything to represent God. When the second commandment defines that we make a representation for the purpose of representing God, it turns to all creation, to the visible universe. We may not make a likeness of anything that is in heaven above. When the second commandment forbids the making of a likeness of things in heaven above, it means that you may not make a representation of anything that you see in the heavens, as the heathen actually did, for the purpose of representing God. Nor may we make a representation of any creature, man or animal, or any visible creature on the earth beneath. And so neither may we worship creatures in the waters under the earth, which is, any creature in the ocean, or sea, or river. In other words, you may not make an image of anything in the world you see for the purpose of worshipping it.

In the second place, this commandment gives the reason or ground why we may not make an image for that purpose when it says, *For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God*. God is a jealous God, but not in the sinful sense. Jealousy with us means that we desire to possess something that belongs to another, or that someone else receives that belongs to us. With God that is always the case. All the honor, and love, and praise, and adoration of God's people belongs to Him; and He will not tolerate that

that love and honor and praise be given to another.

God's people stand in a relation of a wife to Him; they are His wife. They stand in covenant relation to Him, and He will not stand for it if they bring the love of their hearts to anyone else. God is a jealous God; and for that reason the commandment continues and says that God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him, and shows mercy unto thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments. God is jealous of His glory; and He will not give His glory to another.

God will not have His glory dragged down to the likeness of a creature, and will punish all that do so in the line of their generations. God pours out His wrath upon the generations of them that hate Him, and blesses the generations of them that love Him and keep His commandments.

2. Its Underlying Principle

Now what is the underlying principle? It is the principle announced by the Lord: God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

An image is material, it is external. That is the underlying error of image worship. An image is external, and its external aspect limits it. It places it in an external relation to me. That image cannot get behind my external form. It cannot get behind what it can see of me. It cannot get into my thoughts. It cannot penetrate my desires. It cannot judge my motives. If I approach that image with a pious face, I feel safe.

God, however, is a Spirit, which means that there is no tangible, visible form of God. He is not bound by any form. He is a Spirit. He is not material. Spirituality belongs to God's being, and one of the chief characteristics of spirituality is freedom. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth. God is spiritual, and the spiritual is characterized by freedom.

All that is material is characterized by the fact that it is confined within limits. And when Scripture emphasizes that God is a Spirit, it means that He is not confined within any limits. He is perfectly free. He is not limited. The question therefore of serving God is not a question of outward form. If I approach God with a pious face, it does not mean a thing. Serving God is a question of a spiritual nature. It is a question of the heart, and of the mind, and of the will. God penetrates to the essence of all our bowing down, of all our worship, of all our sitting in Church. He knows my inner thoughts, my inner desires, my inner motives. To put it bluntly, you cannot fool God.

In the second place, there is in the second commandment, the underlying thought that God is infinitely glorious. An image is limited, I can get around it. It is confined to the laws of space. I can put it where I want to. An image is limited. It is limited in power and might and wisdom. But God is infinite in glory. He is infinite in His power and might and wisdom and understanding. He is infinite in all His virtues. God is wholly other from us. He is altogether different. He is independent, that is, He is not dependent. God's independence means that He is infinite in His existence. He is independent as far as the cause of His existence is concerned. He is infinite, that is, He is not finite. He is eternal. He is not limited by time. Time is a characteristic of the creature, but God is timeless. There is no time for Him. That is also true with regard to space. God is not only omnipresent, He is above all that is creature. There is no container that can contain Him. He is immutable, that is, He is not changeable. And so it is with all His virtues. He is infinite in His wisdom, in His knowledge, in His love, in all His virtues. God is unlimited in every way.

That is God's divine glory, and anything that infringes on this glory of God, provokes Him to jealousy. Because God is infinite in all His virtues, it follows that He is invisible and we cannot find Him out. God is invisible. No one has ever seen Him. The angels see the face of God, but they do not see Him. We shall see God's face, but we will not see God.

In the second place, it follows from this infinite glory of the Most High, that we can never comprehend Him. We can know of Him if He reveals Himself. But knowledge is no comprehension. We can have no comprehension of God. We cannot describe His form, nor determine His limits, because there are none. We cannot know God unless He reveals Himself, and then our knowledge is not comprehension. But when we make an image, we make a god that we can comprehend. God is infinite, and He is eternal. That is why we cannot comprehend Him. But an image is finite, and it can be comprehended. When I make an image, I make a god that is as big as I am. The second underlying principle is that God is glorious. That is why the commandment says that God is a jealous God. And the third underlying principle is that God alone can say 'how' He is. If we are to know God, there must be revelation. There is only one photograph of God. That photograph is in God's own mind. God alone knows and comprehends God. That photograph He has in the Son. The eternal generation of the Son is the photograph which God makes of Himself, from eternity to eternity.

Now it pleased God to reveal Himself. Revelation implies two things. It implies, in the first place, that God shows Himself, outside of Himself. Revelation means that we have a mirror in which we see the reflection of God's face. Hereafter we shall see His face, not Him. In that sense, there will always be revelation. But here, we see the reflection of His face in a mirror. All God's works are the mirror, and centrally it is the work of the incarnation. We must not speak of two revelations. We can distinguish between a general and a special revelation, but they are not two revelations. The mirror is one, and we must, in the center of that mirror, see the reflection of God's face. The center of all God's works is the incarnation. And we must stand in the center, and looking at Jesus, see the reflection of the face of God. Revelation implies that God shows Himself, outside of Himself.

In the second place, revelation implies that God created a creature that can receive that revelation. God does not merely show Himself. Then there would be no revelation. It would have been possible for God to show Himself in creation to Himself. But that was not God's purpose. God's purpose was that there should be a people that could know Him, and that could taste Him, and so God formed that people. He created a man that could read that revelation. But when that man became darkened through sin, God formed a people that could know Him and taste Him, and He manifested Himself in that people in the highest possible form in Jesus Christ. God alone can say 'how' He is.

Image worship turns that around. That is the sin of image worship. The sin of image worship is, first of all, that we turn away from God's revelation and then in our own imagination form a conception of God. And if we carry out this conception, we take a lump of silver, or gold, or we take a stick of wood and carve our conception in it. It is therefore a limited image. God is spiritual, the image is material, and we say that God looks like that image, and we limit God. That is idolatry. It is not so, as is often said, that image worship is first and that idolatry follows. Idolatry is first. Man says first that he will not serve God. But the moment he says it, he looks about for another god. And so he turns to the things about him, to sun, moon, and stars, because he sees in them a certain power. That is the first step of idolatry. Then he begins to make an image of that power that he sees in the sun, moon, and stars. That is the second step in idolatry. There were two things in heathen idolatry. In the first place, the heathen did conceive of the material sun as their god, but they saw a certain power in that sun, which they called god. And in the second place, they liked to have their gods near them. That is image worship.

You say, then we have nothing to do with this second commandment? Don't you believe it! You say, we don't carve an image of wood or stone? Perhaps not. But do not forget that that is not necessary. Image worship consists in this, that we depart from the revelation of God, and assume the part that we have the right to say who God is. Now, we may have a wrong conception of God in our mind, and the result is that we are image worshippers.

The first step in image worship is that we sever ourselves from the word of God. And we can do that in two ways. We can do it in the modernistic way, by simply denying it. And in the second place, we

can sever ourselves from that word by ignoring it, so that we don't search it. That is the first step in image worship. The first step in image worship is that we do not want the true exposition of the word in the Church. The first step is that we want a gospel that we can write on our thumbnail. The first step is that we do not want the word in our home, in our school, that we do not want to come to catechism. That is the beginning of image worship. Ignorance first, and then we look around for an image. That is the first step.

And the second step is that we run against some evangelist. We do not make our own images. We are not original enough. But images are stuck all around you. There is, in the first place, the Arminian image. The Arminian tells you that God is so willing to save you, if you only will. That is not God, but an image. It is the image of the free will of man. And you say, I'll worship that Arminian god. Or you meet some other image, the image of atheism, chiliasm, baptism, adventism, etc. The world is full of images. The only difference is you don't carve them out of wood or stone. The modern world of today is no better than the darkest heathendom, the only difference being that the modern world does not carve its image in wood or stone. The finite cannot comprehend the infinite, and the moment we say that we will not listen to God, we will turn to the creature. That is the only thing we can think of. The Arminian god is a man.

The modern god is a man, and sinful. The result is that we become like the god we make and like the conception that we have of him. They that make them are like them, the psalmist. It could not be different. If we make a god, the result is that we have a god that we do not fear. That is not only true of a god of wood or stone, it is also true of the Arminian god. The Arminian god is a god that we can satisfy at any time. For such a god, we have no fear. It is also true of the modern god. A god who is the father of all, and who winks at sin, we do not fear. And if the fear of God is gone, we walk in sin. Idolatry is the result of man departing from the revelation of God and assuming the part, that he has the right to say 'how' God is. God alone can say 'how' He is.

3. Its Distinctive Demand upon the People of God

What is the practical demand of this commandment for God's people in the world?

In the first place, it must be evident that this second commandment demands of us, in the positive sense, that we must always listen, and never speak. With regard to the knowledge of God, we may never say anything. What we say of God is always a lie. That is, you and I cannot say anything about God out of our own mind, out of our own heart, out of our own imagination that is not a lie, because God is wholly other. We cannot close our eyes and our ears to God's revelation and say anything about God. The only attitude that we can assume is that we say: who art thou O man, that thou answerest against God.

The second commandment demands of us that we only listen, and never speak. That is the fundamental error of all Pelagianism. If you say to the Pelagian that he must only listen and must not speak, he will soon change his argument, and make a god of his own imagination, and say that you make of your God a tyrant. But that is not the question. Suppose that is the case. That is not the question. This second commandment demands of us that anyone that preaches and teaches shall want to know nothing but what God says in His word. Anything that he makes that is not based on the revelation of God, but on the fact that he spoke when he should have listened, must be put out.

Therefore, we must look at the revelation of God in all its fullness. We must study it, search it, appropriate it, make it our own. Be careful what you do with it. It is not for nothing that God gave us the full Scriptures. Study that word and be filled with it. Then upon us, and upon our children, in generations to come, will be the blessing of the Lord. Let go that word, and the wrath of God will be upon us and our children. But cling to it and His mercy will be upon us and our children for years to come.

In the second place, there follows from this second commandment the demand that in all our worship we remember that God is glorious. And we must never treat Him in our mind, and in our heart, and in our worship, as if He was a finite creature. We often do. We often do so, if only in the silly notion that we can do something for God. We cannot do anything for God. God is glorious. He is all sufficient in Himself. You do not do God a favor by serving Him. He has no need of your service. He is the all-sufficient One. He is glorious, and all our worship must be in the fear of His name. God is not our next-door neighbor. He is glorious, and we must approach Him with reverence.

In the third place, there follows from this underlying truth of the second commandment that all our worship must be spiritual. All our externalism is abominable in the sight of God. The second commandment demands of us that we have truth in the inner heart. We must worship Him in spirit and in truth. That is why the catechism says that God will have His people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His word. The Roman Catholic Church has practically banished the word of God, and has substituted dumb creatures. But the catechism says that God would have us taught, not by dumb creatures, but by the living word of God. You must not let it disappear. All our worship must be in spirit and in truth. There is certain externalism in our sitting in Church, in our singing, in our preaching. But the question is, what is in your mind? And the demand is, that there be in the heart, love of God, and of all that pertains to Him.

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The Third Commandment: Honoring God's Name

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.99. What is required in the third commandment?

A. That we, not only by cursing or perjury, but also by rash swearing, must not profane or abuse the name of God; nor by silence or connivance be partakers of these horrible sins in others; and, briefly, that we use the holy name of God no otherwise than with fear and reverence; so that he may be rightly confessed and worshipped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works.

Q.100 Is then the profaning of God's name, by swearing and cursing, so heinous a sin, that his wrath is kindled against them who do not endeavor, as much as in them lies, to prevent and forbid such cursing and swearing?

A. It undoubtedly is, for there is no sin greater or more provoking to God, than the profaning of his name; and therefore he has commanded this sin to be punished with death.

Introduction

The Decalogue is in this respect similar to the Lord's Prayer, in that it is theological throughout. That is, both in the Decalogue and in the Lord's Prayer, things are concentrated about God. It is not about man that things are concentrated, as humanism has it. They do not even concentrate about Christ, as Methodism has it. All things concentrate about God. In Him all lives converge. For that reason, the first commandment of the Decalogue is basic, is fundamental. If you fulfill the first commandment, you fulfill the whole law. For that reason, the underlying purpose of the law is God.

Accordingly there is an intimate connection between the law of God and the truth of God. The law of God is based on the truth of God. The law of God is not arbitrary. It is in harmony with the truth of God. It is not so, that God could just as well have given us some other law. The law of God is rooted in the truth of God, and there is a fundamental truth underlying each commandment,

This truth we have tried to discover. The truth underlying the first commandment is that God is one, and because God is one, the commandment must necessarily be: *"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."* The underlying truth of the second commandment is that God is a Spirit, and He is infinitely glorious. Therefore He cannot be compressed into a finite image, whether it be carved in wood or stone, or impressed it on the mind. And the underlying truth of the third commandment is that God is holy, and therefore the law assumes the attitude which we must assume over against Him. If God is one, we must worship Him alone and at all times. If God is a Spirit, we cannot worship Him in outward form, but must worship Him in spirit and in truth. And if God is holy, we can only approach Him in an attitude of holy fear and reverence. Therefore, we must consider this third commandment from that point of view.

Theme: The Third Commandment: Honoring God's Name

1. The Holy Name of God
2. The Sin of Profanity
3. Our Attitude toward that Name

1. The Holy Name of God

It seems to me that it is evident that even as the first commandment is based on the truth that God is one, and the second commandment on the truth that God is glorious and a Spirit, so this third

commandment has its fundamental truth in the fact that God is holy. The first has to do with the being of God, the second with His glorious attributes. The third commandment has to do with the spiritual-ethical moral nature of God – God is holy. That is the underlying principle in the third commandment.

That God is holy, is emphasized throughout Scripture. It is emphasized both in the Old and the New Testament, and it is so emphasized, that frequently, God is referred to as the Holy One. He is referred to as the Holy One of Israel, in distinction from the idols, which are not holy. In Isaiah we also receive an impression of what that holiness of God is. We read there, that the seraphim cover their faces with their wings, and they cry to one another: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory. And when the Scripture expresses what must be our attitude toward God, it says: be ye holy, for I am holy.

Now holiness, negatively, is separation. It is separation from sin and corruption and guilt. But that negative conception is not the fundamental idea of holiness. Holiness reveals itself in separation from sin and impurity. To be pure, clean, separated from filth and impurity, that is what it is to be holy. But that is not the positive, the most profound idea of holiness. For God is eternally the Holy One, apart from sin and corruption. God is holy in His being, and therefore, in the positive sense, the holiness of God is that virtue by which God, as the only perfect One, as the only Good, and as the sole fountain of all good, is forever consecrated unto Himself. Holiness in us is to be consecrated to God. Holiness is that attribute of any nature, according to which it seeks that which is good. If all our mind, and heart, and soul, the whole of our nature seeks that which is good, then our nature is holy. With us, it means that with our whole heart, soul, and mind, we seek God. The priesthood, consecration to God, that is holiness in us. But that is not so in God. God is consecrated to no one. Then He would not be God. God is not a priest. God is His own priest. He is consecrated to Himself. Holiness with God is that He seeks Himself as the highest good. Just as with us, it would be unholiness to seek ourselves, so it would be unholiness with God to seek anything but Himself. God is holy, therefore He seeks the highest good, and that is Himself. That virtue, by which God is devoted to Himself and by which He demands that all else shall be devoted to Him, is holiness.

This holiness of God is most naturally expressed in His name. God's holiness stands before us in His name. We come in contact with God's holiness in His name. Only in His name, do we come in contact with God's holiness. We must understand that a name in Scripture, is not a mere sound, but it expresses what a thing is. The name of anything, is the thing itself. The name is the being.

When Adam gives names to the creatures that come to him, the names he gives to these creatures are not mere sounds, mere names, without any meaning, as we give names. When Adam gives names to the creatures, he looks in to the essence, the nature of each creature, and expresses in human words what that creature is, what is the nature of that creature. That is why Adam calls his wife Eve, that is, the mother of all living. That is why Noah is called Noah, that is, the Comforter. That is why Abraham is called Abraham, that is, the father of a multitude. And that is why Christ is called Jesus, that is, Jehovah is Salvation. That is what He was. That is His name.

So it is with God. Only we must make a distinction between names in the common sense, and names in the proper sense. Our name is creature, human being, man, woman, boy, girl, brother, sister. They are our common names. They are the names which we have in common with others. But alongside of these common names, we also have what we call our proper names. We are also called John, or Peter, or Henry. That is my name, that is my personal name. When you say my proper name, you touch my person. There is nothing closer to us than our name. When anyone mentions our name, he touches us. In the way anyone expresses our name, he expresses what live in his soul concerning us. When you mention my name, you touch my person. As long as you just say man, I pay no attention to you. But when you mention my personal name, I look up. If I am instructing a class of boys and I say to them in general: boys, you must pay attention, it has no effect. But if I say: John, you must pay attention, then

he looks up, he pays attention. That distinction we must make, for that we can also apply to God.

God has written His name upon all creation. Lord, our Lord, Thy glorious name, all thy wondrous works proclaim; Thine the name of matchless worth, Excellent in all the earth. His name is written on all His creatures. That is his reputation. God has made a reputation for Himself. He has made a reputation for Himself among His creatures. His name is upon all His creatures. That is His reputation, and in a special sense, God has revealed His name in Christ Jesus. Jesus is the revelation of the name of God. That name we have in Scripture. In Christ, God has revealed all His glorious virtues. And Jesus says: I have revealed thy name.

But that is not all. God has, as it were, concentrated that revelation of His name in a proper name. God has a name which we can never express. But He also has compressed His name within the sound of our human language. He has revealed Himself in names by which we may mention Him. He has also given us names by which we can know Him, and address Him, and call upon Him. And even as you may mention my personal name, so it is with the names of God. When you say God, Lord, Holy One, you touch His person.

One more remark. Among those names which God has given us to address Him, and to call upon Him, there is no name like the name Jehovah. So that if you ask: what is the meaning of the third commandment? the answer is: Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah in vain. Understanding of course, that in that name, all the other names are included. God's name is holy. That is, the name of God is pure, it is separated from all sin, and from all that is common. God's name is not a common name, because God is not common. It is separated from all other names. It is separated from all sinful names. But it is also separated from all creaturely names. Holy is the Lord, and holy is His name. That is the basic truth in this third commandment.

2; The Sin of Profanity

Now the third commandment says: Thou shalt not take the name of God in vain. Literally it says: thou shalt not take up the name of the Lord in vanity, and vanity is not something that is empty. Vanity is that which is empty of that with which it pretends to be filled. And frequently it is filled with that which gives the opposite from what it seems to give. To illustrate: I give you a glass of wine, but you put it to your lips and find that it is nothing but colored water. That is vanity. If we live in the world and turn to the pleasures of the world, they seem to give what they pretend to give, but we find that, in reality, they poison the soul. That is vanity. An idol is vanity because it pretends to be God, and it isn't.

And so when the commandment says: thou shalt not lift up the name of God in vain, it means that you shall not so lift up that name in such a way that it does not mean what it really means. To lift up the name of God, is to take it upon our lips. When we take the name of God on our lips, it must be accompanied by holy fear and reverence in the heart.

And so, to use the name of the Lord in vain, is profanity. As the sin of the first commandment is idolatry, and of the second a denial of God's revelation, so the sin of this third commandment is profanity. Profanity is that state of mind by which we make common that which is holy. With regard to the name of God, it means that we make that name common, when it is holy. We do lift up the name of God in vanity. Any expression of the name of God that does not express that that name is holy, and that he that uses it is filled with the feeling of that holiness, is lifting up the name of God in vain.

To vanity belongs not only cursing and swearing, though that is the most coarse, the most wicked form of profaning. That profanity, in its coarser form, I may expect is excluded from the Church. If this profanity in that form is still found with us, we will do well if we examine ourselves to see if there is any fear of God in us. In that narrow sense, profanity means that we make the name of God the most common thing conceivable. Profanity, in that form, expresses the utmost contempt for the name of

God. In cursing and swearing, one expresses all the hatred of his heart over against that name. So man uses it to express the bitterness of his heart over against adversity. Sometimes that profane sinner, in the way he uses the name of God, expresses his utter contempt for Him. He despises God. Sometimes he uses that name to emphasize his sinful thoughts. The name of God is sometimes used as a mere interjection. It is used to express surprise, or hatred, or envy. It is used to fill up, or in drunken revelry, and in that way, the sinner becomes so used to using that name as an exclamation mark to emphasize his words, that he uses it almost with every other word. God forbid that we should take part in thus using the name of God, or that we should be found in the society of them that do so. That is the boldest manifestation of lifting up the name of God.

But that is not all. Any thoughtless use of the name of God is profanity. So in our prayers, we use the name of God to fill up a gap. We cannot find words for a moment, and so we just fill in the gap by saying: Lord God Almighty. Any thoughtless use of the name of God is profanity. Any playful use of the name of God that does not say something glorious about God, is profanity. Therefore it is also profanity to give a silly program and then ask the minister to close with prayer. To give some silly program and then open and close with prayer, that is hypocrisy. That is also true of so-called Christian plays and drama. A Christian play is nonsense. You cannot play prayer, you cannot play the ministry of the word. That is profanity. That is true of our worship. It is true of our singing. Not only congregational singing, but also in our programs. Our choruses must not only learn to sing beautifully, but must also learn to sing spiritually. They must also learn to get into the meaning of the songs they sing. They must sing so as to fear, and praise, and glorify God. Otherwise, it is profanity. That is also why we must not have choirs. A choir is a matter of esthetics, and the esthetic is not a matter of worship. The esthetic is a matter of opera. When we sing, fear and reverence for the name of God must fill our heart. That is also true, if while we are busy in the service of the Lord, our young people talk and play instead of paying attention. If, while we are busy in the service of the Lord, we pay no attention, we are profaning the name of the Lord just as much as if we would be cursing or swearing. We are also guilty of profaning the name of the Lord as a Church. The vain use of anything that belongs to the name of God is swearing. That applies to all that reveals God to us. And it refers to all expressions that refer to God. So we often use the expression: my goodness, or my gracious. That also is profanity. That refers to God. You might just as well say: my God. There is only One that is good. God alone is goodness. He alone is gracious. And besides, it is below the dignity of the Church to learn her speech from the world. We do not want to swear, and so we say: my goodness. We must not learn our speech from the world. Let the world learn its speech from us. So also, we sometimes take a certain expression in Scripture and make a joke of it. We have the name of God, in a broader sense, in Scripture. And sometimes we take part of that revelation of God and make a joke of it. And we trample on God's revelation. It is all profanity, of which God says that He will not hold them that are guilty of it guiltless.

Notice, as in the second commandment, it is said that God will reveal His displeasure by visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, so in this third commandment, God wants us to know that He is holy, and to trample on His holiness invokes His wrath. Let us use the name of God, as the catechism expresses it, with fear and reverence, so that He may be rightly confessed and worshipped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works. The underlying, deep root of sin is profanity.

3. Our Attitude Toward that Name

By nature we are profane. In other words, by nature our hearts are no more the sanctuary of God. By nature, our hearts are the sanctuary of the devil. Our heart is by nature a den of robbers, and because that is so, we are by nature profane. The natural man cannot use the name of God in any other way but in vain. In decent worldly circles, men refrain from swearing, and they imagine that they are keeping the third commandment.

The Jews conceived of the name of God as being so holy that men could not use it without abusing it. So they changed the name of Jahweh to Jehovah, thinking that, in that way, they could escape the abuse of the name of God. But that is not so. The mere keeping silent does not help. God is holy, and He does not give us His holy name and reveal His glory for us to pass it by in silence. If upon any occasion your name ought to be mentioned, and it is purposely passed by, the insult is just as cutting as if your name had been mentioned disrespectfully.

God's name cannot be omitted from any program. We cannot avoid the name of God. It is written everywhere, and it deserves mention. The purpose of the name of God being written everywhere is that we might glorify it. And passing by it is just as much swearing as the most fearful oath. We may not pass by that name, but we must use it. But by nature, we cannot use it in any other way but in vain. For not only in the outward attitude, but in the spiritual disposition of the heart to that name, must the third commandment be obeyed.

And if we walk in the midst of that name thoughtlessly, without fear and reverence in our heart for that name, must we not then confess that last part of the third commandment: For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain? The Decalogue is addressed to God's people. The Lord says: I am Jehovah that brought you forth out of the house of bondage. That also means: I am Jehovah that brought you forth out of the bondage of sin and death. God will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain, but God has brought His people out of the bondage of sin and corruption. In the cross, He has blotted out all the sins of His people. The Lord Jesus also took that sin of profanity and blotted it out on the cross. Blotted out is the sin of our profane heart, in the blood of Christ.

In the second place, in Christ, God once more manifested His name, and so that by the power of His grace, once more the heart of His people is made the sanctuary of God. And in principle, it is possible for that people, redeemed, delivered, and filled by His grace, to lift up the name of God, not in vanity, but as the catechism expresses it, in fear and reverence. Only do not cast out this third commandment as if you were already perfect. For although you have received a principle, whereby you can again hold the name of God in reverence, there is also still the old power of profanity. Even after God has made our heart a sanctuary, who of us must not confess, that if God would carry out His threat, He would in no wise hold us guiltless. The comfort is that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all our sins. And we ought to leave the house of God with this new principle of life in our hearts, that we will hallow the name of our God. But it is well to listen to this third commandment until we shall have reached that perfection wherein we shall forever fear, and praise, and glorify the name of God.

The Swearing of an Holy Oath

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.101. May we then swear religiously by the name of God?

A. Yes: either when the magistrates demand it of the subjects; or when necessity requires us thereby to confirm fidelity and truth to the glory of God, and the safety of our neighbor: for such an oath is founded on God's word, and therefore was justly used by the saints, both in the Old and New Testament.

Q.102. May we also swear by saints or any other creatures?

A. No; for a lawful oath is calling upon God, as the only one who knows the heart, that he will bear witness to the truth, and punish me if I swear falsely; which honor is due to no creature.

Introduction

The law of God, such is the viewpoint from which we have been discussing the law, is in harmony with His truth, so that it may be said that the law of God is the truth. There are no arbitrary commands with God. So we must not only ask in general, what is the truth upon which the law is based, but we must also discuss the truth that forms the basis of each of the several commandments. And thus it is that in the first commandment, we found that the basic truth is that God is one. And because He is one, therefore He comes to us with the command that we have no other gods before Him. With regard to the second commandment, we found that the underlying truth is that God is glorious, and because He is glorious, therefore He cannot be presented within the limits of the finite creature, be it wood or stone, or in the mind of man. And because He cannot be presented within the limits of the finite creature, therefore He comes to us with the demand that we shall make no graven image of Him. The third commandment is based on the truth that God is holy, and holiness belongs to the very essence of His nature. Holiness is that virtue in God by which, at all times, He is consecrated to Himself. It is true that negatively God's holiness means that He is separated from all sin and from all that is creature. But positively, God's holiness is that He is consecrated unto Himself as the highest good. God cannot be consecrated to anything else. As in the creature, holiness is to consecrate himself to God, so in God, holiness is to consecrate Himself unto Himself.

Now because God is holy, His name is holy. God's name is His being. In the broadest sense, the name of God is all that may be known of Him. Just as all that is known of us is our name, our reputation, so all that is known of God is His name, His reputation. In the narrow sense, the name of God has been compressed within the limits of our human language. In the narrowest sense, His name is Jehovah. God's name is holy. The sin of the third commandment is profanity. The sinner is profane. All profanity, in whatever form, is violation of the holiness of God's name. In its courser form, we have it in cursing and swearing. Profanity in its courser form is when the name of God is made a play thing, when it is used as a mere interjection. Profanity in its courser form is when we meet in God's house for worship, when His word is discussed, and we pay no attention. But in its broader sense, profanity means all irreverence. All irreverence is profanity. We profane the name of the Lord every time we come into contact with that name and it does not fill our heart with fear and reverence, springing from the principle of love. This we discussed in the former Lord's Day.

Now, this thirty-seventh Lord's Day is an appendix to the preceding. It has to do with the oath. The question of the oath is a very practical question, because God's people in the world sooner or later will

come face to face with the demand to take an oath, or with the temptation to take an oath profanely. In the third commandment, it is sin when we become guilty of perjury, that is of swearing to a lie, or if we swear rashly for small insignificant things. But the question in this Lord's Day is: may we swear at all? The question is: may we swear religiously? The real question is: is it possible to swear religiously? You cannot murder religiously. You cannot steal religiously. But is it possible to swear an oath religiously? That is the question.

To that question, there have always been some that answer in the negative. Mennonites, Quakers, etc., have always said that a Christian may not swear at all. In other words, their standpoint is that a Christian cannot swear religiously. Our Reformed fathers have answered that question in the affirmative. They said that an oath may be a good work. Don't forget that we are discussing the good works of the Christian. Our fathers did not say that when an ungodly man swears an oath before an ungodly magistrate that they are then performing a good work. But they said a Christian may swear religiously.

Theme: The Swearing of a Holy Oath

1. It's Character
2. It's proper place and sphere
3. The ideal of God's people with respect to such swearing

1. It's Character

An oath is calling upon God. Just as in prayer, we call upon God, so also in swearing an oath, we call upon God. That is its essence. In our country an oath is usually taken by raising the right hand and saying: so help me God. In some circles, it is taken by laying a hand upon the Bible. But whatever may be the form, taking an oath is calling upon God. In the oath, I express that I am conscious of the fact that I am standing before the face of God. In the oath, I express that I am standing before the face of that God who is holy, who always speaks the truth, in whom is no lie, and that I am conscious of being in His presence when I testify. Being conscious of the fact that he is standing before the face of God, he that swears an oath calls upon God, not only as a witness to the truth of what he says, but also as his judge. He that so calls upon God says: what I say is so true that if you should bring me before the face, before the tribunal of God, He would say the same thing. He that swears an oath says: so help me God; and also, so judge me God.

Now an oath may be wicked. It is wicked when we swear to a lie. Perjury is sin. But an oath may also be wrong in other cases. An oath may be wrong when we speak the truth. When we tell things about others to slander them and to make their faults public, then what we say may be true, but if, because there is doubt in our mind whether people have believed what we said, we swear an oath, it is perjury. For that reason, it is just as corrupt to swear on any occasion that may come about. We have such occasions when we feel that people have not believed us, and we say: I will swear to it. You find that especially amongst habitual liars. Usually, it is the habitual liars that feel that they have lost the confidence of others and try to regain it that are always ready to swear to most anything. That is sinful.

An oath may be assumed to affirm or to deny the truth of what has been said. But it may also be used to support a promise. I am inclined to think that an oath to support a promise is always presumptuous for the simple reason that we cannot conceive of circumstances under which we have all the conditions of the promise under control. God can make a promise and swear by Himself. He can swear that He will save the elect because He has all the conditions under His control. But who are we? We do not have control of the conditions of what we promise. For that reason, the Church has always

held that any oath bound society is corrupt. Not only because we may not promise anything under oath, but also in an oath bound society, we promise what we may not promise. If a man joins the union, he swears an oath. And what does he swear? He swears that he will hold the union above every other relation. So that he really swears off his Church, his wife, his family, his every relation. That is not a religious oath. That is a wicked oath. The same is true of secret societies. In secret societies, we not only swear to what we may not, but we also swear blindly. And it is evident that if the Christian has sworn such an oath, there is only one way out, and that is that he break that oath, and that he get on his knees and confess his sin in swearing such an oath.

The question has been asked if we may ever break an oath. Of course we may, if we have sworn wickedly. So there are many oaths which the Christian may never think of swearing. But the question is, is it possible to swear a holy oath? Or is the oath in itself to be condemned? We are speaking of the good works of the Christian. Can the oath be placed in the category of good works? Good works are those that proceed from faith, that are done to His glory. So the question is: can the swearing of an oath be a good work that proceeds from faith? Can it be a good work according to the law of God? And, can it be a good work whereby God is glorified? That is the question. It is not the question, if anyone that swears is performing a good work. That depends upon whether he is a Christian.

But the question is: is an oath ever a good work? And then it is evident that it is. For in the first place, Scripture teaches that God swears, and what God does can certainly be a pattern for what His people may do. In the second place, in the Old Testament, the oath was incorporated into the law. When one was suspected of a certain crime, he was put under oath according to the law. Now the point is not, if the Christian is still under the law, but whether anything that is sinful could be incorporated into Old Testament law. We also find the oath in the New Testament. When Jesus stood before the high priest, the high priest said to Him: "*I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" And Jesus answered: "*Thou hast said.*" He submitted to the oath. Jesus did not condemn the oath. He submitted to it. So also we find that saints swore. Abraham swore. Paul used the oath. So, there can be no question that the oath in itself is not sinful. A Christian can swear an oath and perform a good work, on condition that the swearing of that oath proceeds from faith, is according to the will of God, and to His glory. But not if the purpose is to gain the confidence of others. You understand if you stand in court before the magistrate and neither the one that takes the oath, nor he that performs it is thinking of what he is doing, then it is nothing else but taking the name of God in vain. But the oath as such is not sinful.

2. It's Proper Place and Sphere

In turn, we can also see where the oath belongs. The Mennonites and others say that we may not swear at all. For they say, Jesus says swear not at all, but let your communication be, Yea, yea; nay, nay. And the Lord adds: whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. So they say that Jesus very positively says, and the Apostle James repeats it, swear not at all. And we must so read this word that the Lord condemns all oaths.

We must not explain this word as is usually done, that the Lord condemns all trivial oaths. The interpretation that Jesus is combating swearing lightly, that He is combating the light use of the oath, does not hold ground. It is said that the Pharisees made light use of the oath, that they swore by literally everything, and that Jesus is opposing this light use of the oath, and not the oath as such. But this interpretation does not hold, for the Lord does not mention any trivial oaths. Besides, we cannot change the positive statement of Jesus, "*Swear not at all,*" and make it read, "*do not use the oath lightly.*" Certainly the passage in James 5:12 cannot be explained that way, because James does not have the Pharisees before him. So that we cannot explain this word of Jesus as referring to trivial things.

Neither does it mean that the Lord condemns swearing by other objects. That is corrupt. We often do that. We often say, "by George," or "by Gully." It is really swearing by the saints when we say: by George or by Gully. Even though we do not mean it as an oath, we are nevertheless using the language of the oath. We must also get away from that language. We must learn a new language.

Now the Lord does not mean to say that we may not swear by George or by Gully, or by the temple, or by heaven, or by earth, but by God only; for He evidently means to say that swearing by these things is really the same as swearing by God. You cannot swear by anything connected with God, but you are swearing is by God Himself. If you swear by heaven, you swear by the throne of God, and if by earth, you swear by His footstool. Jesus first says: "*it has been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but thou shalt perform thine oaths unto the Lord.*" And then Jesus says: "*But I say unto you, swear not at all.*" Also that interpretation therefore does not hold.

We must understand this; that although the oath in itself is not sinful, it nevertheless presupposes sin. In the sphere of perfection, the oath has no place. If we all speak the truth in love, there will be no room for the oath. In heaven, and in heavenly perfection, there will be no oath. In heaven we will never be asked to swear an oath. Why? Because in heavenly perfection, our life will have become one great oath. When every moment we shall be God-conscious, we will need no oath. When all shall have become God-conscious, so that all speak the truth in love before the face of God, our life will be one great oath.

The oath, although good in itself, belongs in the sphere of imperfection. It belongs in the sphere where people do not speak before the face of God. And therefore it belongs first of all by the magistrate. It belongs to the magistrate because he has the sword, and the magistrate is in the sphere where people do not speak before the face of God. The magistrate may not look upon all as speaking the truth in love. The magistrate does not rule over the Church, but over the world, and the world is full of deceitful men. Therefore God gave the magistrate the sword. He may not throw that sword away and say, "I trust you all." He must punish the evil doer. Men are liars in themselves, and the magistrate must put them under oath. The Christian magistrate, and he is the only one who can take an oath religiously, places you before the face of the Lord. The Christian magistrate, when he takes an oath, says to him that performs the oath: by nature you are a liar, therefore I bring you before the face of God. The wicked magistrate cannot take an oath religiously. To swear, as is done in our day, by saying: I speak the truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God, is nothing but profanity. Only the Christian magistrate can take an oath religiously. But the magistrate places you before the face of God, whether he means it or not. The magistrate may take an oath. Not because he is better, but because he has the sword, and he is in the wicked world. When the child of God performs the oath, what does he do? He says to the magistrate, yes, I agree with you, by nature I am not before the face of God, but by grace, my conversation has again become: Yea, yea; nay, nay.

3. The Ideal of God's People with Respect to Such Swearing

But that is not what the Lord means when He says: swear not at all. The Lord is not speaking to the world, and He is not putting down certain police orders. He is addressing the Church. He is speaking to the spiritual people of His kingdom. You cannot take a rule which God has laid down for His spiritual people and apply it to everyone. There are many that do this.

There are many people that fight to apply a purely Christian institution unto the general public. So for example, there are many that fight to put the Bible in the public school. The Bible has no place in the public school, but they say it might have a good influence upon them. No, the Bible only has a good influence for the people of God. You cannot send your child to the public school and send the Bible after it. God does not work that way.

So it is with the oath. The Lord is speaking to the spiritual children of His kingdom. He is addressing them that are poor in spirit, that mourn, that are meek, that hunger and thirst after righteousness. They are regenerated, and they are always before the face of God, in principle. So, when the Lord speaks to them, He is not laying down another law to them, but He is laying down the spiritual principles that should control the lives of His spiritual children. He is laying down the underlying principles of the kingdom of heaven. Not as a law, but as they are written in their hearts. To the poor in spirit, to them that mourn, to the meek, to them that hunger and thirst after righteousness, Jesus can say, not as a sort of an eleventh commandment, but as an expression of what lives in the hearts of His spiritual children: "*Swear not at all.*" And, paradoxical as it may sound, when Jesus says, "*Swear not at all,*" He means, swear at all times. Let your lives be one continual oath. The people of God speak the truth in love. Why do they need a special oath, if they speak the truth in love?

The oath presupposes evil, deceit, the lie. Because men cannot truth each other, therefore they are put under oath. Now when the Lord says, "*Swear not at all,*" He means to say, "Let your whole life be one continual oath." He means to say, "Speak at all times as living before the face of the Lord. Let that characterize your lives." If that characterizes your life, you have no need of the special oath. Or as Jesus says at the end of the chapter: "*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*" That is the ideal. And if that is the ideal, then we must not swear at all. Jesus means to say: let your lives before God be such that the oath will not be necessary, because your life has become one great oath. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. If we look at in that light, we stand condemned, not only because we swear wrongfully, but because it is of our imperfections that the oath still finds a place.

Therefore, the positive truth is, that we must banish all lies and deceit from our midst, and speak the truth in love, so that special oath will not be necessary. Then this instruction is rich in spiritual principle. For there is not one here that can put his hand in his bosom and say, I am clean. Shame must cover our faces when we think of all the slander and back-biting and deceit that is still found among us. Brothers of the same house call each other liars to their faces. These things would never happen if we always lived consciously before the face of the Lord. What deviltry, what slander, what back-biting, what deceit would be banished if our lives would be one continual oath. We must confess that our yea is not always yea, and I do not always speak the truth in love. Our prayer must be: Lord forgive my sins, and lead me till I reach that perfection in which my life shall be one living oath before the face of God.

/recorded by M.Swart, approx 1930/

The Fourth Commandment: The Keeping of the Sabbath

Q.103. What doth God require in the fourth commandment?

A. First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained: and that I, especially on the Sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear his word, use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.

The Heidelberg Catechism has frequently been criticized for its exposition of the fourth commandment. Many have been offended because of the method the catechism follows in treating the question of the Sabbath. Many will also be offended by an explanation of the fourth commandment that follows that same method of the catechism. The reason for this criticism lies in the difference of viewpoint between these critics and the catechism concerning the fourth commandment.

The critics proceed from the point of view that the essential idea of the Sabbath is that there must be one day in which we refrain from our daily toil and labor. That is placed on the foreground. And not only is this ceasing from our daily labors placed on the foreground, but it is also emphasized that to cease from our daily labor on the Sabbath day has religious value. What we may do on Saturday, we may not do on the Sabbath. Therefore, it is also emphasized that the fourth commandment must be made a law for the world in general, and that we must petition congress to make laws enforcing upon the people in general the keeping of the Sabbath. We must petition the government to close stores, and theaters, and places of amusement.

But the catechism does not mention these things. That is the difference between the critics and the catechism. The catechism does not say what we may not do on Sunday. It does not even refer to it. The catechism is immediately busy with the positive question: what must we do. And it says that God requires, in the fourth commandment, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools (for the training of ministers, for such was the original meaning of the catechism) be maintained, and that I come to Church diligently to receive the word of God, to make use of the sacraments, to publicly call upon the Lord, and to support the poor; and that so the Sabbath may be an influence, a picture, a foretaste, and a preparation for the eternal Sabbath. The catechism is speaking to the Christian. It does not look upon the fourth commandment as an element in legislation, but as a guide and rule for the life of a Christian. In this, the catechism is right. We must not return to that other point of view, which is at heart, Pharisaic, and which pictures the keeping of the Sabbath as consisting in doing nothing. Therefore, we must look at this fourth commandment from that point of view.

Theme: The Fourth Commandment: The Keeping of the Sabbath

1. Its Meaning
2. Its Positive Application
3. Its Blessing for them that keep It

1. Its Meaning

It is not superfluous to call your attention to the contents of the text of the fourth commandment. The catechism seems to be so remote from the text of the fourth commandment that it would seem as if it had nothing to do with it. Therefore it is not superfluous to call your attention to the text of this fourth commandment.

We must see that it also speaks to us in a positive form. Remember the Sabbath. It does not come

as the former commandments: *“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me ... Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images ... Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord the God in vain.”* Rather it begins, *“Remember the Sabbath day.”* Remember it, that is, keep it in mind, have it before you, do not forget it. We might easily do so. Some are so busy in the world, and with the things of the world, that they forget the Sabbath. In the world, men are so busy with their business, or other things, that they forget the Sabbath day. In the second place, the catechism means remember the Sabbath, not only on the Sabbath day itself, but constantly. Have it in your mind at all times, so that all the days of your life, you have the Sabbath in your mind, so that you look forward to it during the other days of the week. In the third place, hallow it, that is, set it aside. Set it aside for the service of God, not because our whole life must not be set aside for the service of God, but set it aside in a special sense. That is the positive element.

The negative element, that is, negative as to its bearing on the Sabbath, is that we work six days. In order to keep the distinction of the Sabbath, the fourth commandment commands that we work six days. The fourth commandment emphasizes that we work six days, not five or four, but six days. The world today makes it more and more impossible to keep that distinction. The world in its own wisdom follows its own conceptions and corruption and confuses things. But the keeping of the fourth commandment, from both points of view, is becoming more and more impossible. But the fourth commandment says: six days shalt thou labor, and the seventh day thou shalt distinguish. Six days we must work, and the seventh day we must not do it.

It is evident that the ground, the basis of the Sabbath, is in creation. In the deepest sense, the basis is in God Himself. For in six days, God created heaven and earth and all that is in them, and He rested the seventh day. That fact lies at the basis of our working six days. Therefore it is foolish, also from that point of view, to speak of the days of creations as periods. God could have created all at once. Why did He not do so? Why did He take six days? In order that that might be the basis for our working six days. God creates time, and works day after day, and then rests a day. God did not find six days and create all things in the six days that He found. No, God created these days. We find our days ready for us, and we do things in these days. If we do not do a thing in a certain day, the day passes by, and it passes by forever. But God did not find His days ready for Him. God made the days, and each day He filled with His creative power. God created the day. He divided His creative power into six, and as it was the week days, so it was with the day of rest, He created it, and He filled it with rest. That six plus one is the basis for our life. We are created with that six plus one in our system. If we violate that six plus one, we violate an ordinance of creation just as much as when we eat too much. That is also true with a view to the earth. The soil also needs rest. That is the basis of the fourth commandment. That is not the idea, but the basis.

In the second place, notice that the commandment adds: *“the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”* That is, He filled the Sabbath day with a blessing which we cannot receive on other days. That is the meaning of the fourth commandment.

2. Its Positive Application

Now it will be seen that the fundamental idea of the Sabbath is positive. The question of the Sabbath is by no means an easy one. The problem of the Sabbath today is not of less interest than it was in former years. On the one hand, the Sabbath was never desecrated as it is today. It is so desecrated because of the very constitution of our modern world. People are insane with the craving for fun. The people of God are not to be excluded from this crazy desire for fun. On the other hand, we are not entirely rid of the Pharisaistic conception of the Sabbath, that conception being that of doing nothing. We have not gotten rid of that. We say that we must have laws forbidding labor on the Sabbath day. That notion is rooted in the idea that there is value in doing nothing on the Sabbath. This is rooted in the same legalistic conception of the Sabbath that the Pharisees had. There is no value in doing nothing. You

cannot compel a man to celebrate the Sabbath by forbidding him to work. It is better to go the shop on Sunday than to spend the day in bed. The idea of the Sabbath is not idleness.

The catechism asks: what is the idea of the Sabbath? It answers: not that we must do nothing, but that we crowd it full with certain kind of work. We still have the same idea of the sabbath that the Jews had, and that caused them to condemn the man whom Jesus had healed at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. It was not an accident that Jesus went to Bethesda on the Sabbath. He could have gone there on the day before just as well. Or having arrived there on the Sabbath, He could have waited until the following day to heal that man. There was not such a great hurry with it that it could not have waited until the next day. Or having healed him, Jesus might have told this man, now you wait until tomorrow before you take up your bed. But instead of this, Jesus tells him to take up his bed and walk. The Jews, seeing this man carrying his bed, take him to task and tell him that it is unlawful to carry his bed on the Sabbath. When the man tells them that the one that had healed him had told him to take up his bed and walk, the Jews sought to kill Jesus because He had done this. That was the Jewish idea of the Sabbath. The Jewish idea of the Sabbath was the idea of sitting idle. We must get rid of that idea. If we ask the question: may I do this or that on the Sabbath, we are proceeding on the idea that the Jews had. If you ask me: may I shovel snow off the sidewalk on the Sabbath, my answer is: if it is necessary to clean your walks to keep someone from breaking his neck, go ahead and do so. If you feel that you must glorify God by carrying your bed in the streets of Jerusalem, go ahead and do so. We must get rid of this Jewish conception of doing nothing. There is no value in doing nothing on the Sabbath.

Therefore, we must see that the idea of the Sabbath is positive. The idea of the Sabbath is not to do nothing, but the idea is rest. It is the rest of the Sabbath. Sabbath means rest. The rest of the Sabbath is God's rest. God rested on the seventh day and the Bible tells us that the seventh day was just like the other days. God rested on day of twenty-four hours. If that is not true, then Genesis 2 has no meaning and the fourth commandment has no meaning. We read in Genesis 2: and on the seventh, God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made. God rested one day and therefore, we must ask what it means that God rests. Scripture teaches that God rests. Therefore, rest cannot mean idleness. God is never idle. He is always, with all the power of His being, active. Rest does not mean to be idle. Nor does rest mean that we are tired and must recuperate. The may be unrest. If we have worked hard all day and we lay down because we are tired, that is not rest. That is simply that we quit working. One may cease from work because he is tired, in order to recuperate, and still not rest.

Rest, in Scripture, is to rejoice in a work that is finished. In that sense, God always works and rests while He works, because His work is always finished. God's work is always finished and therefore He always rejoices in His finished work. In God, work and rest are identical because His work is always finished. That God rested on the seventh day does not mean that He did not do anything. Jesus says, My Father works even unto now, that is, God always works. He never stopped working. God is never tired and when He does rest, He does not recuperate. He is never tired. That God rests means two things. In the first place, it means that His work is finished. Creation is finished. In the second place, it means that He enters into the perfect enjoyment of His work. That is the rest of God.

The meaning for man is that he labors in order that he may enter into God's rest. That is the idea of the six days of labor. God worked six days in order to enter into His rest, and God created man in His image in order that he should be a co-worker with God, to enter into that rest. In other words, the six plus one is nothing but a picture of what Jesus calls out: Come unto Me, and I will give you rest. Now you know that God's labor, His work, was not finished, as far as His counsel is concerned, when He finished creation. When God had finished His creation, His work was not done. His counsel was not complete when His creation was finished, and Adam did not enter into that rest of God. To the contrary,

he fell into unrest. Then God began a new work. That new work is the work of salvation, of redemption.

God's counsel was a new heaven and a new earth in Christ Jesus. That is what God had in mind. That counsel was not done. His creation was done, but not His counsel. His counsel was that His creation should be led on to glory. God must work again and must lead His creation on to glory. He must work the work of salvation. Adam must fall, and God must, in Christ Jesus, lead His work of creation to heavenly glory. The original day of rest means that God stopped twenty-four hours before starting His work of salvation to rejoice in the finished work of creation. On the next day, God begins His next work. It is a striking fact that Adam begins His life on the Sabbath. The first full day of Adam's life was the Sabbath. The Adventists are wrong here. According to the Adventists, we must work first and then rest. But Adam began his life with a day of rest. It is true, Adam becomes a co-worker with God in the work of creation on the sixth day, in naming the animals, etc. But the first full day of his life was the Sabbath. God brings Adam into His rest.

Now when Adam falls, God in and through the fall of Adam, continues His work. He had stopped one day. He had created that day, and then He continues His schedule, so to speak. That schedule was the work of perfecting the work of creation in the Lord Jesus Christ. That work He begins after a day of rest. That work was typically finished when Israel entered into Canaan. That is why we read that God entered into His rest when Israel entered the land of Canaan. But it was typical. That work is principally perfected in the day of the resurrection. When Jesus rises from the grave, God finished that work. God entered into His rest when Jesus arose. That is why the Church of the New Testament does not celebrate the Sabbath of creation anymore. That Sabbath is gone forever. The Church understood this, and ever since it has celebrated the first day. There was no pope or synod to change the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day, as the Adventists claim. The Church knew it without the aid of pope or synod. That is why the Adventist is not only wrong with regard to the day. I can celebrate the Sabbath any day, if you want to force a day upon me. But the Adventist does not understand that God goes on, and that we do not celebrate the creation Sabbath as Adam, but we enter with God into the finished work of redemption.

The Sabbath of creation is still the underlying form of life for the Church in this world. But she no more celebrates the Sabbath of creation. For God spoke of another rest. That is the rest of salvation, and we enter into the finished work of salvation. Of that work, the weekly Sabbath must be a picture, a foretaste, and a preparation. Now if that is the weekly Sabbath, if the weekly Sabbath must be a preparation, a picture, a foretaste of the finished work of salvation, that is, of the eternal Sabbath, we can understand why the catechism does not emphasize the negative side, but the positive side. The weekly Sabbath must be filled with rest. It must not be empty. It must be filled. It must be filled with rest. With what rest? With the rest of entering into the salvation in Christ Jesus. With that rest, the weekly Sabbath must be filled. That is why the catechism emphasizes these things. You understand, if you so fill the Sabbath with rest, the other, the question of what we may not do will take care of itself. You cannot labor and rest. You cannot fill the Sabbath with the things that are below and at the same time fill it with the rest of salvation in Christ.

The tendency of everyday life is to make us forget the rest. It is not easy to seek the things above the six days of the week. Then tendency of everyday life is to seek the things below. But that may not be the tendency, and therefore the Lord prepared a day which we must empty of all our earthly work. We must empty that day, but not in order to be in bed that day. It is better to go to the shop on the Sabbath day than to lie in bed. You do not keep the Sabbath by sitting in a chair. That is not the purpose. Not to go auto riding. The hypocrite sometimes says that it is alright to take the auto and enjoy God in nature. That is not so. And you don't meant that either. You don't go joy riding to enjoy God in nature. You go for an auto ride.

The idea of the weekly Sabbath and the fundamental idea of celebrating it is not ceasing from work.

When the Lord tells us that we must stop from our work for a day, it is not because that work, as such, is wrong. A work that is not wrong on another day is, as such, not wrong on the Sabbath. But if we look at it from the point of view of the purpose of the Sabbath, it is sin. We must empty the Sabbath in order to fill it with heavenly things. If you ask me, may I do this or that on Sunday, I will tell you to go home, I cannot solve your problem. But positively, I will say your weekly Sabbath must be a picture of the heavenly rest and you must fill it with the heavenly things. If you do that, there will be no time left and no danger of desecrating the Sabbath. The purpose is to crowd that day with rest. If we do the other, if we spend the day by sitting in an easy chair, we do not keep the Sabbath; neither do we receive the blessing of the Sabbath. Oh, we usually find things. We say we must have policemen and firemen. I admit that the world has so arranged things that it does not care to keep the Sabbath. Where the world has so arranged things, let the world take care of these things. Let the dead bury their dead. Let them that arrange the system take care of it. You say there must be policemen? My answer is, let the dead bury their dead. You say we must have firemen? My answer is, let the dead bury their dead. It is the dead that are the cause of these conditions. It could very well be arranged so that firemen could attend services, if they chose to do so. We must have bakers to supply us with fresh bread on Monday morning. All right, if the dead want fresh bread, let the dead bake it for them. Some people want fresh milk on Sunday. But if the dead want fresh milk, let the dead bring it to them. But let not the dead take your hours of service. And let not the world lay a burden on you until twelve o'clock Saturday night so that you go to sleep in Church on Sunday. The desecration of the Sabbath is a sign of the downward trend of things. We get nervous if the service lasts a little long. I wonder how people who cannot stand to be with the people of God for a short time and serve God in His house will be able to hold out with the people of God throughout eternity. It is necessary to crowd all kinds of worldly things into the services to get people to come to Church. But you may not crowd worldly things into the service of God. If you want to go to the devil, go, but do not take the Church along with you.

3. Its Blessing for them that Keep It

But the Lord says: "Keep the Sabbath day!" and so the catechism comes to these things. It tells us that we must frequent the Church of God, not because it is blessed to sit here, as such, but because you labor to enter into the rest, because you have been longing all week for the Sabbath to come, and because you long to be with God's people. It must not be necessary for the minister to tell you that you must come to Church in the evening also. When it gets that far, it's too late. I, for one, refuse to tell you that you must come to Church. What is the use? The fourth commandment is not for the world, but for the people of God.

If we so celebrate the weekly Sabbath, it is of tremendous influence for our life. In the first place, the catechism says that all the days of my life I cease from evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by His Holy Spirit in me. In the second place, that I thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath, that is, God gives one day in which to be busy exclusively with the things of God. In order that that one day, we should stretch over the entire week, and walk in sanctification. God gave us that day in order that we might be strengthened for the service of God on the six days of the week.

In the second place, there is the influence upon the Christian's hope. If we so keep the Sabbath, it will be a power causing us to look forward to the final rest. It will be a foretaste of that eternal rest of God. It will cause us to long for that eternal rest. There remaineth a rest for the people of God. The true and spiritual celebration of the Sabbath will tend to this, that when our final Saturday night comes, it will be the end of a life in which we remembered the Sabbath day. I will say: my work is finished. Now I enter into God's Sabbath day, into the eternal rest in Christ. God grant that we may so keep the Sabbath, that it may be a picture, and a foretaste, and a preparation of the eternal Sabbath of God.

The 5th Commandment: Honor those in Authority

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.104. What doth God require in the fifth commandment?

A. That I show all honor, love and fidelity, to my father and mother, and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction, with due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.

Introduction

In connection with the fourth commandment, dealing with the Sabbath, we came to the conclusion that the chief idea of the Sabbath is in the positive rest, that is, in being busy in the things that foreshadow that final rest. Our abstaining from work on the Sabbath is merely a means to attain that purpose, so that if anyone requires of us to work on the Sabbath, we ought not to say, "No, I may not work, but we ought to say, "No, I am too busy." Being busy with the things of the kingdom, I have no time to be busy with the things of this world."

Now this fifth commandment brings us to the second table of the law. Second at least in as far as the idea is concerned. It is not certain that the two tables of stone were so divided that there were four commandments on the first and six on the second. Neither does it matter. But this fifth commandment begins with that part of the law that has more respect to our relation to one another. Even as the first commandment stands at the head of the first table of the law, and therefore heads the entire Decalogue, the Godhead and sovereignty of God being basic, so the fifth commandment, for the same reason stands at the head of the second table and deals with the fear of God applied to the relationships among men, to the relationships that exist and develop in the organic relations of man.

Among those relationships, that of the family is basic. In the relationship of the family, not the relationship of man and wife, but from the organic point of view, that of parent and children is basic. It is first also in point of time.

The basic relationship between parent and child is not that of natural love. Natural love does not mean much. It does not reach much farther than the immediate family. But the basic relation is that of authority. For that reason, the fifth commandment occupies a natural place at the head of the second table of the law, and controls every other relationship among man.

Now we must call your attention to this fifth commandment. Remembering that we do not have to do with some sort of police law with a body of civil precepts, but with an underlying spiritual principle of the kingdom of heaven, as written on the heart of the Christian, and which is for him a rule of gratitude. We must remember this, for, because this second table has to do with our relation to one another and to the world in general, the danger increases that we look upon the law as a body of civil precepts. The danger is that we look upon the law as a group of precepts that anyone, even the world, can keep, as if everybody could keep the law. That danger was already present in the first table. But it increases when we come to that table that has to do with our relation to one another.

Things have become so generalized that it is said that we can preach this fifth commandment to everybody, and everybody can obey it. It has even been pointed out that they who have obeyed it have received the promise connected with this fifth commandment, as, for example, the Chinese. Instead of looking upon the law as a rule of gratitude for the Christian, it is looked upon the law as a body of civil

precepts which everybody can obey. And then we come to ourselves and say: "We have only a small beginning of this obedience, and how then can the world keep the law?" The law is not something general that can be obeyed by all, but it is a guide, a rule of gratitude for the Christian.

Theme: The Fifth Commandment: Honor those in Authority

1. Its Meaning
2. Its Place in a Sinful World
3. The Influence of Grace

1. Its Meaning

In a narrow sense, the fifth commandment deals simply with the relation of parents and children, and it addresses the children, not the parents. It has to therefore with the home. Honor thy father and thy mother.

Notice that both parents are mentioned. That shows us the position of the father and mother with relation to their children. Father and mother stand in an equal position with relation to their children. The child does not, and may not make a distinction between father and mother.

In the second place, the fifth commandment make the injunction upon the children to honor their father and their mother. We would expect the fifth commandment to say: "Love your father and mother," —in a natural sense, with a natural love. Yet that could not be the commandment to the children with relation to the parents. For that natural love has no spiritual-ethical value. We find that love also among animals. The animal loves its young. There is no spiritual value in that natural love relation, as such. For that reason you find many children in the world that —in that sense— love their father and mother, but they never honor them. They love their parents, and when their parents die, they shed tears. You must not think too much of those tears. If a dog could weep, it would shed tears also over its young, but that natural love relation has no spiritual value. This is because the law of God does not deal with natural, but with spiritual-ethical values. It does not say, love your father and mother, but honor them, that is, fear them. Acknowledge their authority, their position which they occupy with respect to you, their children. In acknowledging that relation, the children must manifest obedience. Authority and obedience are fundamental in the home. They are fundamental for all the relations of man.

What is authority? What is obedience? Authority is the right of one to impose his will upon another. It is the right to express what is right or wrong. It is the right to lay down the law for others. It is the right to make laws and to demand of others that they obey them. Not the actual act of imposing ones will on someone else, but to have the right to do so, that is authority. If I may say, if I have the right to say what you must do and must not do, that is authority.

In the second place, authority is the right to judge others according to the laws that those who are in authority have made. Obedience is its supplement. Obedience is submission to authority. Obedience is not when you tell the child to do something and the child responds with the question, of, "why?" and insists that you explain it to him. And, if your explanation suits him, he does it. That is not obedience, for then the child is following his own head. He does it, because after you explain it to him, he sees that it is best to obey. That is not obedience. The child obeys because you command it. The child must learn to obey. That is obedience.

Now you must understand that the position of the catechism, and of Scripture, and of our Reformed Confession has always been that there is none that has authority except God. That must be the position that we must take. There is no authority except God. It stands, therefore, to reason that

there is but one that can impose His authority on all. God has absolute authority because He has authority of Himself, and because He is the absolute standard of good. God does not have authority bestowed upon Him. In fact, authority is never bestowed. There is but One that has authority, that is God. He is the absolute sovereign. He is the absolute lawgiver. Although it is often presented as though God bestows some of that authority on others, that is not true. No one man has no authority over another.

In that respect, all men are equal —not in the sense of communism, that all are born equal, nor in the sense that there is no position and rank. That, however, is not authority. No man can, in himself, have the right to lay down the law to me. No man has, in himself, the right to make a law and demand of me that I must obey. Men can and have usurped authority for themselves. One may impose his will upon another by virtue of might. One may be stronger than I and compel me to obey him. But might is no authority. Neither is there authority by virtue of intellectual power. One may have more wisdom than I have, but his wisdom is no basis for him to exercise authority over me. There is no authority by virtue of financial power. A man may have more money than I have, but because he is rich, he has no authority to rule over the poor. Even the fact that my parents brought me into the world is not the reason that they have authority over me. The fact that parents bring children into the world has nothing to do with parental authority. The mere fact that parents brought forth their children, live in their homes, are stronger and know more than their children does not give them authority over them. There is no authority in parenthood as such. It may be connected with it, but authority is not rooted in parenthood as such.

Therefore we must remember that there is only one authority and there remains only one authority, and that is God's authority. Furthermore, He does not transfer His authority. However it pleases God to exercise His authority through men. It never becomes man's authority. It is always God that rules. He does not give His authority away. It pleases God to rule and manifest His authority in all the various spheres. He applies it first of all in the home. That means for the parent that he stands before God in relation to his children as God's vice-regent. Therefore, he cannot do with his children as he pleases. He cannot instruct, train, guide his children as he pleases. He stands with that relation to his child in submission to God. The parent is to be honored, but no man has the right to honor in himself. The child must honor the authority of God in the parents. Because the child must honor the authority of God in the parent, the parent must manifest the authority of God. They must stand before the face of God and acknowledge that they have no authority in themselves, and exercise authority in the name of the Lord. They must at all times ask what is the will of God, and submit to His word, with a view to the child. The parent tries to be, not a boss over the children, not a tyrant, but when they exercise authority, they must leave the impression that they do so for God's sake. For the child, this means, not that it takes a position of obedience because of natural love for the parent, but it looks upon the authority in the parent as God's authority, and for God's sake, obeys.

Now, if that were all, it would be simple. Yet the fifth commandment is one of the most difficult to be applied, for its scope is much broader than the family. The reason is that out of the family develop various other relations. The relation in the family is fundamental, but it is not the only relation. All other relations develop out of the home, and the root of all authority is in the home. It is often said that God instituted government. That is not true. Things do not happen that way. Scripture does not say that God instituted government, but that He instituted the relation of parents and children, of servants and masters, and of employers and employees. God so created things that, from the home, all other relations should develop. That is why the catechism attaches all authority to the fifth commandment. This could not be done if the home was not the root of all these other relations. All relations, in society or in state, develop from the home. That is why the keeping of this fifth commandment in the home is of such importance. The home is the root of all authority.

This can plainly be seen. You do not have to visit a particular home to see if the fifth commandment is kept there. You can see it in the children. I know you cannot always tell. But generally you can see in the children the relation that exists in the home. The relation in the home is reflected in the children. I do not mean that you have to beat them into submission. Exercise of authority is not rooted in the fact that you are stronger than your children. Exercising authority does not mean that your children obey you for fear of the stick. It does not mean that you fly into a mad rage. Exercise of authority means that you teach your children to obey you. If you have that in the home, it will reflect itself in every relation. It will reveal itself in catechism, in school, in society. That is also true of the parent. If a parent cannot rule the home, it will reflect itself outside. If he cannot rule in the home, he cannot rule anywhere. If he cannot rule in the home, he cannot rule in the Church. He should never be an elder. He should never be a foreman in the shop. He should never be president. If he cannot rule in the home, he cannot rule anywhere.

The relation in the home reflects itself in every sphere. If the home is lax, it will show itself in the attitude of the children. The home is the root. I know this is not always the case. There are Esaus. But when children, six to eight years old, become lax and attend catechism about five or six times a year, the fault lies in the home. And when these children get to be fifteen or sixteen years old, you say, I cannot take them by the hand anymore. Of course you can't, but it has never been any different. If the children have not learned to obey, it is hopeless. That is what the fifth commandment means. From the root of the home develops all life. And as from the home develops all life, so from the authority in the home develops all other authority. Out of the family develops the relation of employer and employee. Out of the family develops all the various relations in society. Out of the family develops the domain of the state. The state develops from the home. Government is not for sin. These various domains in society and state are not because of sin, but are a development of the home. What is of sin, is the sword. But the various domains in society and state develop from the home.

Then there is the domain that does not develop from the human race, but from the wonder of God's grace in Christ. That is the Church. Each of these domains has its own authority. Authority in one domain may not transgress that of the others. There is one authority in the domain of the state. There is another authority in the home, and the authority in the state may not transgress the authority in my home. What is true of the family, is true of every other domain. Something which is almost forgotten in our day is the authority of the state may not transgress the authority in the domain of business. There is a certain sovereignty in every domain; and the state has no authority over the Church. It may tell the Church how high the chimney may be. It may tell the Church what kind of coal it may burn. That does not belong to the Church. But it may not impose its authority upon the Church.

All domains have a certain authority of their own. But while they have an authority of their own, these various spheres of authority stand in submission to each other. The President has authority of his own as president, but as a member of a Church, he must obey the authority of that Church. The various spheres of authority that have a certain authority of their own, and these limit one another. The various spheres of authority occupy a place of authority and of obedience at the same time.

2. Its Place in a Sinful World

Now there would be no trouble if there was no sin. Then everyone in authority would know his own place and would not impose upon the authority of others, and all would be in perfect harmony. But there is sin.

What is sin? From this point of view, sin is the expulsion of God. Not in reality, but in a spiritual-ethical sense. You must remember that there is no authority but in God. Sin is man's attempt to dethrone God. Not that he can, but in the imaginations of man, God is dethroned and man does as he pleases.

You can compare the world to a large family of children that have expelled the parents from the home, or have agreed not to listen to them, and then try to run the home as they please. That is the human race. It has expelled God, and having expelled God, the world has become like a shop without a superintendent. In other words, the fundamental basis of all possible authority has been expelled from the world. And what is the result? The result is that there is no authority and no obedience. I mean, there is no authority and obedience for God's sake. What happens in the world is this. Man said there is no God. He said, I will be my own god. If it is true —and that is true— that all authority is from God, it follows that when man says, "there is no God," he goes on to say, "there is no master." That is the principle of revolution.

Still the world goes on, and cries for authority and obedience. But there is no authority and obedience for God's sake, so that no true authority and obedience exists. It does not exist in the home, nor in society, nor in the state. And while that does not exist, the world makes an attempt to maintain itself. It tries to keep up the home. It sees that the law of God is good for them, and it develops a certain authority, for otherwise, the house will go to pieces. The world develops a certain authority for utility sake. It tries to develop a certain authority to maintain itself. That is where all the corruption comes in.

The world succeeds for a while to establish a certain authority, but it does not last long. Why? Because they have not actually expelled God, and He blows on all the attempts of the world to maintain itself. That is why we have corrupt politics. The world tries to patch things up, but God blows on these attempts and brings them all to naught.

If the world had actually succeeded in expelling God, it might have maintained itself. But that is not the case. God blows in all the attempts of the world, and the result is confusion. There is no peace for the wicked, says God. That fact lies at the basis of all the confusion of the world. That is why, while they talk of peace, but the thunder of war is heard in the distance. That is why, on the one hand, you have individualism, and individualism is false emancipation. Individualism says, "I have just as much right as you have." The woman says to the man, "You have no right to rule over me." And the child says to the parent, "You have no authority over me, I am my own boss and can do as I please." And the parent says to the child, "You are right," and the child goes its own way and is placed on the throne. That is individualism. But the result is bolshevism, revolution and ruin.

Individualism does not ask for the will of God. And when God continues to create these relations, revolution is the result. Or if that does not develop, you get this, the relation of tyrant and eye-service. Much that is called authority is nothing but slavish fear and tyrannical power. That is not only the case with the monarch on the throne. When people work in the shop and the foreman is around, they work, but, as anyone can see, they cannot keep it up for nine hours. But as soon as the foreman is gone, they don't do anything. That is experience.

The Christian ought not to do this. Life is full of this eye-service and tyranny. It is true of every relation. Honor thy father and thy mother means, obey them as before the Lord. The world does not do it. Therefore there is no peace, but confusion in the world.

3. The Influence upon It of Grace

There is but one peace. That is the peace by which we are brought back to the fear of God. If we look at the fifth commandment as it has been influenced by the grace of God in Christ, we have this. He that was in the form of God, became man. The Lord became Servant. He gave the opposite answer to what the rebellious family had said, when He entered into the death of the cross and gave the perfect answer of obedience to God's authority. He set right the relation and changed it from a relation of rebellion into a relation of obedience. And because He gave the perfect answer of obedience, God made Him Lord. For the simple reason that only He can be Lord that stands in a relation of perfect obedience

to God.

He then receives the Spirit, and by that Spirit, He breaks down the throne of the devil in the heart. And by that same Spirit, that heart opens the door and says: "I am sorry that I have banished the Father."

The Spirit breaks down the rebellion in the heart. He does that by His Spirit. And having broken down the rebellion, He gives that heart to ask: Lord, "What wilt thou have me to do? And the result is: a small beginning of the obedience of the fifth commandment. When the grace of God enters into the heart, He takes that revolutionary spirit out of that heart, and that heart begins to seek God. And when he seeks God, then all other relations will be dominated by it. He will walk pleasing to God.

And then it makes no difference in what relation he is placed, he will obey for God's sake. If the parent asks: "Lord, what thou wilt, that shall I do," he becomes a fit parent. If the magistrate asks: "Lord, what wilt thou that I shall do," he becomes a fit magistrate. If the employer asks: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do," he becomes a fit employer. By grace we can imagine a perfect society. There is no social problem for the Christian. However, there is no social solution for the world.

The second result will be that there will be a struggle. If Christ would set His throne in the hearts of all, if there was no election and reprobation, there would be no conflict. But because Christ does not set up His throne in the hearts of all, there is conflict. There is, in the first place, conflict in the heart. There is still much in the heart of that old rebellion, that was with that principle of new obedience in the heart. In the second place, there is conflict between the conception of the Church and the conception of the world. In the third place, there is conflict that they who are in authority impose their own will upon you and not the will of God. Then it becomes a question of obeying God or man.

In every relation in which God places us, we must obey for God's sake. But there you also have the limitation. If anything contrary to the will of God is asked of us, we must refuse to obey. But even if we refuse to obey, we do not refuse submission. And if we refuse for conscience sake to obey, we do not rise up in revolution, but receive the punishment. That is suffering for well doing.

Finally, all the various relations shall be perfectly manifest when Christ shall be Lord of all. Then all shall be in perfect harmony. That is in the new heavens and the new earth.

The Sixth Commandment: Honoring the Neighbor's Life

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.105. What doth God require in the sixth commandment?

A. That neither in thoughts, nor words, nor gestures, much less in deeds, I dishonor, hate, wound, or kill my neighbor, by myself or by another; but that I lay aside all desire of revenge: also, that I hurt not myself, nor willfully expose myself to any danger. Wherefore also the magistrate is armed with the sword, to prevent murder.

Q.106. But the commandment seems only to speak of murder?

A. In forbidding murder, God teaches us, that he abhors the causes thereof, such as envy, hatred, anger, desire of revenge; and that he accounts all these as murder.

Q.107. But is it enough that we do not kill any man in the manner mentioned above?

A. No: for when God forbids envy, hatred, and anger, he commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves; to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and all kindness, towards him, and prevent his hurt as much as in us lies; and that we do good, even to our enemies.

We must emphasize the necessity of looking at the second table of the law in the right light. That is, we must look at it in the light of its inseparable connection with the first table. If we do not look at it in that light, we will soon be preaching a sort of civil law, while the purpose of the law is to be a rule for the life and conduct of the children of God. Therefore, we must not forget that the first table of the Decalogue teaches that we must love the Lord our God above all, and the second table is like unto the first.

The second table is not another commandment, it is not a lesser commandment. It is like unto the first, so that love of the brother and of the neighbor is excluded unless there is in the heart the love of God in Christ Jesus. Even though there be an attempt to show a certain love or feeling for the neighbor, by nature, we are hateful and hate God and the neighbor. Man needs the sixth commandment to remind him of his murderous nature.

It is striking that the explanation which the Lord gives of the sixth commandment, and the application which He makes of it in the Sermon on the Mount, He does not ever mention the outward deed of murder. Usually it was so interpreted. The Jews looked upon the sixth commandment as referring to the actual deed of murder. They said, "*Whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.*" Now Jesus says to them: "*Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, (that is, blockhead) shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*" But of the deed of murder, the Lord does not speak. The reason is that the Lord is looking at the law from the point of view of its significance for the kingdom of God. The presumption is that the citizens of the kingdom of heaven do not come, at least not easily, to the deed of murder. The citizens of the kingdom of heaven rarely come to the actual deed of murder. But that does not mean that they never come to the spiritual background of murder. They rarely come to the deed, but they are nevertheless inclined to murder. For that same reason, the catechism calls our attention to all these things. It speaks of the literal meaning of the sixth commandment. It speaks of its spiritual background, and it speaks of its positive demand.

Theme: The Sixth Commandment: Honoring the Neighbor's Life

1. The Literal Meaning

2. The Spiritual Background

3. The Positive Demand

1. The Literal Meaning

Literally the sixth commandment forbids murder. By murder is meant the willful taking of life by one not having authority to take life. Murder is always willful. Whether it has been premeditated or is committed in a moment of anger and mad rage, or to cover up something, murder is always willful. The element of willfulness is always in murder. That excludes the killing of animals. An animal is not a person. We may not kill the animal for sport, but we may kill it for food. That also excludes all accidental killing. Accidental killing, according to Scripture, is not murder. The Bible mentions that if the steel fly off the ax and kills someone, it is not murder. That includes all killing due to carelessness. One may not directly intend to kill. But if one through carelessness, or by not having the proper regard for another man's life, kills someone,

It is murder. It excludes, however, the taking of life by the magistrate. The magistrate has the sword, and the sword is symbol of the power to put to death. Capital punishment, the righteous taking of life by the magistrate, is not murder. That does not mean that the magistrate never commits murder when it takes a life, but the righteous taking of life by the magistrate is not murder. It also excludes righteous warfare, although that is something very rare. The emphasis must be on righteousness. War, as such, is not murder. But war because of greed, or for the sake of obtaining power, is wholesale murder. Righteous warfare is rare.

Murder is the willful taking of life by one that has no authority to do so. That also includes suicide. To take one's own life is murder. Our life is not our own, and we have no right to destroy it. Not only have we no right to make an end to our life, but we have no right to make an end to our calling either. That is what the suicide does. It does not take a brave man to commit suicide. A suicide is a coward. He runs away from his calling.

But that is not all, as far as the deed of murder is concerned. You must not look at the deed of murder as being simply that which is punished by the magistrate. There is much murder that the magistrate cannot punish. The magistrate can only punish certain cases of murder. But as the catechism has it, anything that lies in the direction of murder is to be considered as murder. Any willful wounding or hurting of self or the neighbor is to be classed as murder. This includes all the corruption in the sphere of industry and commerce which sucks the last drop of blood out of its employees, whose wages cry unto heaven. Associations, corporations, and unions often stand guilty of sinning against the sixth commandment. Then it is not the association that is responsible. There is something we should remember. An association has no heart, it has no soul. It is not the association that is responsible, but in that association, the individual souls are responsible before God. Murder also includes the hurting of the neighbor with the tongue. The law speaks of this again later on. In the ninth commandment, it also speaks of hurting the neighbor with the tongue. But there it refers to false speaking about the neighbor. That is slander. But here it refers to speaking to the neighbor. We sometimes say: "I don't talk behind anyone's back; I say it to his face." But remember that is murder. The difference is that in the one case, we speak about the neighbor, while in the other case, we speak to him. All that intends to hurt the neighbor is murder. The Lord says: "*Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, (that is: blockhead), is in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, thou fool, is in danger of hell fire.*" You understand, that does not mean that we may under no circumstances call someone a fool. We can do that at times. The Lord calls the Pharisees hypocrites. The Apostle Paul speaks of fools. He calls the false teachers dogs.

The underlying question is not how sharply you speak, but whether you speak righteously. The

question is whether we have a cause to so speak, and whether the cause is not our own, but whether that is God's cause.

2. The Spiritual Background

And so the catechism points to the spiritual background of murder. Murder lies in the heart. The catechism points to the things that lead to murder, and in principle, are murder.

There is in the first place the unholy anger. Not a holy anger, but an unholy anger. A man that cannot be angry is no Christian. There is a holy anger. God is always angry. He is angry with the wicked every day. God is continually angry because His anger is nothing but the reaction of His holiness. God is holy, and His holiness reacts against all wickedness until it is burned away from before His face. In that sense, God's people can be angry. The Lord Himself could be angry. Looking about Him, He flashed anger, so that the question of a holy anger is a question of purpose and cause. What is the cause? If the cause of our anger is in God, it is a holy anger that does not lead to murder. The reason is that a holy anger leaves it to God to work out His own anger.

Over against such holy anger stands an unholy passion. Such unholy anger is caused in the first place by the fact that our rights are violated, or we imagine that they have been violated. That always leads to murder, and in principle is murder. That is true of vengeance. There is a holy vengeance.

If a man never has a desire for revenge, he is not a Christian. God avenges. He takes revenge upon the wicked. God is an avenging God. He plans revenge eternally. There is an eternal revenge in God. There is a reflection of that revenge, in principle, in the Church. It consists in the fact that as God avenges His cause and His people, so they cry day and night for vengeance. But again, that is never murder because it leaves the ultimate judgment to God. It leaves it to God to take revenge

But over against that holy desire for revenge stands an unholy revenge. It consists in the desire to pay back the wrong, which either rightfully or which we imagine has been done to us. That always leads to murder. So it is with hatred. There is a holy hatred. Hatred is really the desire that the object of that hatred cease to be. Hatred is the opposite of love. Hatred is when the power with which God originally endowed us, and in virtue of which we loved God and the neighbor, has been put into reverse. That is true of all sin. Sin is not simply the loss of the image of God. Sin is the putting into reverse of the machine. Hatred is not another power. It is the same power put in reverse. As love is the power by which we seek, will and preserve one another, so hatred is the very opposite. Love is the bond of perfectness, but hatred is the desire to destroy its object.

God hates the wicked and destroys them. So also, the Christian says: "Should I not hate them that hate the Lord, yea, I hate them with a perfect hatred." That is hatred as it is rooted in the love of God. A love of God that we must even manifest to our enemies Love of the enemies is not that, when they curse and swear and blaspheme, we be nice and sweet to them. Love of the enemies is that we manifest the love of God to them.

But there is also an unholy hatred. An unholy hatred is the desire to destroy what stands in our way. An unholy hatred always leads to murder. The hatred of the Psalmist, in Psalm 139: 21, 22, never leads to murder. But when the cause of our hatred is in self, it is, in principle, murder, and if worked out, it leads to murder. That is also true when Scripture and the catechism speak of envy. Envy is really that feeling of spite, that we do not possess what the neighbor possesses.

Its counterpart is that holy jealousy, as it is in God, by which He wants His own glory. God wants His own glory. He will not give His glory to another. And if His glory is given to another, God is jealous with a holy jealousy. In that same sense, we may be jealous for God. Scripture calls that zeal. Our heart must be so filled with zeal that we take God's glory away from the idols and give it to God. The Christian cannot be neutral. There is in him a holy anger, a holy hatred, a holy revenge, and a holy envy.

But there is also an unholy envy. An unholy envy is murder. If we put our hand in our bosom, there is not one among us who can say, "I am clean, also with regard to the sixth commandment." There is murder in our heart. That unholy anger, hatred, revenge, and envy becomes manifest in our hearts in many ways, so that Scripture is corroborated when it says: their feet are swift to shed blood. There is a murder of the tongue and of the thought, the murder of malice, envy, jealousy, and hatred of the neighbor. It is easy to love the neighbor two thousand miles away. We are willing to give dollars for that neighbor to do mission work. But with regard to the neighbor next door, it is different. It is easy to love the neighbor far away, who doesn't get in our way and who doesn't have a store on the other corner. But when the brother and the neighbor gets in our way, then there is envy, strife, hatred, and jealousy. That is all that same murderous nature. In that light, we can say that we are all murderers. What Scripture tells us is true: our feet are swift to shed blood and we are hateful and hating one another.

The sixth commandment points at us. There is but little of that holy anger and holy hatred and holy revenge and holy envy in our hearts.

3. The Positive Demand

But that is not all. The catechism emphasizes that there is a positive element in the sixth commandment. That stands to reason. For my neighbor is my brother. Suppose that I can say that I have never killed, that I have never hurt anyone, that I have never envied, that I have never hated, (I can't say that, but suppose I could) did I then keep the sixth commandment? No, I did not. Why? Because that neighbor is my brother, and because he is that, I have a certain calling with regard to him. I must love him. That is the positive element in the sixth commandment.

God's commandments, so we have seen, are all rooted in truth. The first commandment, so we found, emphasized that God is one. The second emphasized that God is glorious. The third emphasized that the person and being of God are the subject of our adoration and love. The fourth emphasized that God is God of rest. The fifth emphasized the sovereignty of God. And so there is a truth at the basis of this sixth commandment also.

It is plain what that truth is if we only ask what the positive element in the sixth commandment is. There is a positive commandment behind the prohibitive commandment. That positive commandment is expressed in 1 John 3, "where John 3 says that if God so loved us that He laid down His life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Therefore, the basis of the sixth commandment is that God is love.

But love is not what we make of it. Love is a term much used, but it is the least found article on the market. We use the term "love" for most anything. We say: "I love that dog, I love that meal, I love that dress." But the way we use it is different from the way the Scriptures use it. We use love for most anything. Love is made so general that no one thinks anything of it anymore. That is the cheapening of love. It is made the cheapest article on the market. Love is not a certain sentiment; it is not a certain liking for anyone or anything.

Scripture speaks of love as the bond of perfection between persons. Only persons can love. Love is the bond which unites persons, so that with their all, they seek one another, will one another, and preserve one another —and that can only exist in the sphere of perfection. And it disappears where darkness sets in. There is no love in darkness. God is love. This is His being. He is a being of light, and there is no darkness in Him. Because God is light, His divine nature is essentially love.

In the divine being, there are three persons. Love is the strong bond of perfection in the divine being which unites the three persons, so that they will each other, seek each other, preserve each other. Love is not a matter of sentiment. It is a matter of the will. God is love. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost will one another, seek one another, preserve one another.

In the second place, and that is the second step, God has willed to have that life of love reflected in man. Man is a person, and he was so made that the love of God could be reflected in him, so that he could know that love, experience it, and know himself to be the object of that love, and reflect that love. Not only must love be reflected in relation to God Himself, but it must also be reflected in our relation to each other. We must love one another. And even as the bond of love between the three persons in the divine being preserves, wills, seeks one another, so the bond of love between the brethren and the neighbor seeks, wills, and preserves one another. We must love the neighbor.

That love must reveal itself in that I do him good. Fellowship of love is impossible if that neighbor is wicked. That you find in the Church only. John pictures this love of the brethren as an obligation. We must so love the brethren that we lay down our life for them, because it is by such a love that we are redeemed. God gave His life for us in His Son. You must look at the cross, John means to say. God so revealed His love that He did not hesitate to enter into the life of His children, and entering into their life, He laid down His life, because He loved them. It is by that love that the Church is redeemed. There could be no other sentence pronounced upon us but damnation. No murderer can enter into the fellowship of God. No other sentence could be pronounced upon us, if it were not for the cross. God took our damnation upon Himself, and removed the curse from us.

And if God so loved us, how ought we to love each other, and lay down our life for one another. I must also love my enemies. But to love the enemies does not mean that I call them friends, but that I call them enemies. But that love does not lead to murder, but to patience, and peace, and meekness, and kindness. Ultimately it leads to giving our life for the brother. That was manifested in Christ. He gave His life for His Church, and because that love has been shed abroad in the hearts of God's people, they turn away from the sin of the sixth commandment. In repentance and sorrow, they turn to the cross. They turn from sin, even the sin of the sixth commandment, because they love God, and also love the brother. They are ready to lay down their life for God's sake, and for the sake of the brother in order that they may enter into eternal life.

We are not often called upon to do it literally. But although we may never be called upon to literally lay down our life for the brethren, the obligation is upon us and we are obliged to seek one another at the expense of self. Don't say that you have never killed and sinned against the sixth commandment. We never meet the obligation of loving the brother at the expense of laying down our life for the brother. We cannot do it as a cold obligation.

To do it we must receive a new principle in our hearts by that same love of God, in virtue of which we love God, and love one another. A new commandment I give you, says John, which is after all an old one, that you love one another. John is serious about it. He says, if we have not the love of the brethren, we abide in death. If we have not the beginning of love for the brethren, we have not passed from death to life. If we do not love the brother whom we have seen, says John, how shall we love God whom we have not seen. Laying aside all malice, and envy, and hatred, bearing each other in love, that is the positive side of the sixth commandment.

The Seventh Commandment: Honoring the Neighbor's Marriage

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.208. What doth the seventh commandment teach us?

A. That all uncleanness is accursed of God: and that therefore we must with all our hearts detest the same, and live chastely and temperately, whether in holy wedlock, or in single life.

Q.109. Doth God forbid in this commandment, only adultery, and such like gross sins?

A. Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, he commands us to preserve them pure and holy: therefore he forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto.

Introduction

We must remember that we are not discussing the law of the ten commandments as a sort of a basis for a general social uplift of the world, but as a rule for the regenerated and converted Christian, who has the law written in his heart, and can therefore meditate on that law fruitfully, with a view to walking in its ways. In the second place, we must remember that the entire law is rooted in the first great commandment, that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, unto which the second is like. In the third place, we must remember that the law of God is based on the truth of God. God's truth and His righteousness are one, and therefore each of the commandments rests on some basic truth. We found that God is one, and that therefore we may have no other gods before Him. He is infinitely glorious and cannot be compressed within the limits of any creature. He is holy, completely separated from all sin and imperfection, and perfectly consecrated unto Himself, and therefore His name must be used with reverence and fear. He is a God of perfect rest, and it is His purpose to lead His people into that rest, of which our earthly sabbath is a picture. We found that God is sovereign and the absolute source of all power and authority, and that all power and authority among men is derived from Him. We found that God is love, and that therefore we must love one another.

And so we come to the seventh commandment. The basis for that phase of our earthly life that is touched upon in the seventh commandment must be found in the peculiar, distinctive creation of the man and of the woman. In the peculiar and distinctive creation of the man and of the woman lies the basis of that phase of our life that is touched upon in the seventh commandment. If we compare the creation of man, in as far as it has a bearing upon that phase of our life, with the creation of the animals, we find that there are two points of difference. In the first place, God did not create the animals, one pair for each species. God created many animals. While for man, He created just one man and one woman. In the second place, in the case of animals, God directly created male and female. While in the case of man, He forms the woman from the man, from which certain ordinances of God are evident.

From this it follows from this peculiar, distinctive creation of man, that the relation between the man and the woman is a very intimate relation. It is a relation which consists as a bond of the most intimate fellowship. It is a far more intimate relation than can ever exist among animals. Scripture explains this relation by saying: *"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh."* That is impossible, in that same sense of the word, for the animal. There is no such bond, no such fellowship between animals. In the second place, it follows that the relation between the man and the woman is

exclusive. God did not create a sphere of fellowship between all men and all women. But He created a relation of fellowship between one man and one woman. The matrimonial relation, is a relation which is exclusive, personal, and for life. It is therefore more than a mere carnal relation. The marriage relation can never be a relation to satisfy the mere carnal sexual desires and passions. It is a union of body and soul. It is a union of love based on an actual fellowship of life. In the third place, being such a union, it is also evident that not that which is lowest in man, but that which is higher in man must be chief, and must dominate the matrimonial bond. In the fourth place, not even that which is higher in man, but the spiritual element must be supreme in the marriage bond. It pleased God to create a reflection of His own covenant life. And the marriage relation is a reflection of that covenant life of God.

If you ask, in the light of Scripture, what is the truth upon which the seventh commandment is based, the answer is: that God is in Himself the unchangeable, faithful covenant God. The Lord is a covenant God. That implies the following truth. There is in God a communion of being, with distinction of persons. There is in God a communion of essence. On the basis of this communion of essence, there is a communion of life. The same life is lived by the three persons. They think the same, they love the same, they live the same. And because there is a communion of life, based on a communion of essence, there is a perfect communion of love. So that the Father loves Himself in the Son and through the Spirit. And the Son loves the Father in Himself and through the Spirit. And the Spirit loves Father and Son in Himself. That bond of fellowship is exclusive. There is no possibility of a fourth person entering into that fellowship. And finally, it is a communion for life, that is, with regard to God eternal. So we have a bond of fellowship, based on a communion of essence, which is exclusive. That is the covenant life of God. In that covenant life, God is faithful. The Father never denies the Son, and the Son never denies the Father, and the Spirit never denies Father and Son. The covenant bond is unbreakable. God is faithful.

Accordingly, it has pleased God to create an institution that should be a reflection of that covenant life, both as it is in Himself, and as it is in relation to His people. That is marriage. Marriage is a divine institution to reflect the covenant life, both as it is in God Himself, and as it is in relation to God's people. All Scripture teaches that. Scripture pictures the relation of God and His people as that of marriage. It pictures God as the husband of His people, the Church, the bride of Christ.

Therefore, if it is the fundamental conception of Scripture that the true marriage relation is in covenant as He establishes it with us, and that our earthly marriage is only a reflection of that covenant relation, it follows that it must be a perfect reflection. In other words, our marriage must be a union of one man and one woman. Man and woman are not two, but one. They are a unity. It is a reflection of the union which there is in God, and of His relation to His people, and because of this, it is a union of life. And because it is a union of life, it is a union of love. That union is exclusive. No third party can enter into that union. It is the union of one man and one woman, and that for life. That is the normal state of married people. Sin perverted it. Sin perverted the relation between God and man, and also perverted the relation between the spiritual and the carnal, so that it is even scientifically defended, that the carnal desires and passions in man must have free course. Just think of birth control, which is even seriously discussed in many Churches. That which has been corrupted by sin has been set straightened by grace. In Christ Jesus, that which has been corrupted by sin has been set straight again. But it has been set straight in principle, not perfectly. And there is not sin, except the sin of the tongue that clings to the people of God as the sin mentioned in the seventh commandment. And so it is not to be above us to listen to the word of God as it comes to us in the seventh commandment.

Theme: The seventh commandment: Honoring the Neighbor's Marriage

1. Its Literal Meaning
2. Its Widest Scope
3. Its Positive Teaching

1. Its Literal Meaning

Its literal meaning is taken from the very heart of that sphere in our life to which the seventh commandment refers. Thou shalt not commit adultery. What is adultery? It is sometimes said that adultery is the same as divorce. But that is not so literally. Divorce is implied. But literally, adultery is not the same as divorce. Adultery is not even the same as fornication. Fornication has a much wider scope than adultery. Adultery is more specific. Adultery is the act of the married man, in which he seeks and has intercourse with another woman than his own. Or it is that act of the married woman, in which she seeks and has intercourse with another man than her own. It is that act of a married party, by which that party has intercourse with another party that the party to whom he or she is married, whether that party be married or single. That means that adultery refers only to married people. With regard to the other party, if that other party is single, it is fornication. That is adultery.

Our Reformed Churches were right however, when on the basis of the seventh commandment they insisted that divorce may not be tolerated in the midst of God's people. In the first place, not because divorce is implied in the seventh commandment. Thou shalt not commit adultery implies: thou shalt not commit the sin of divorcement. Why? For the simple reason that the seventh commandment looks upon adultery as an act of breaking the marriage tie. Scripture looks upon adultery as divorce. Why may not a married man have intercourse with another woman? Not because the act, as such, is wrong, but because the marriage tie is exclusive. To commit adultery is to commit divorce. This is also evident from what the Lord says in Matthew 19. When the Pharisees come to Jesus and ask Him if it is lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause, Jesus answers in the negative. The Pharisees responded by saying: Why then did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? The Lord answered: Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. Notice that the underlying principle of the text is that the marriage tie can never be broken. That is the underlying principle. Before God, the matrimonial bond is unbreakable, until God Himself breaks it. If that is not the case, how can the text emphasize that if anyone marries the innocent divorced party, he commits adultery? How can anyone that marries the innocent divorced party be guilty of adultery, if it is not on the basis of the fact that God never considers the marriage relation dissolved? Why, here is a woman. Her husband divorces her. He marries again. The Lord says to that husband, you commit adultery. And he lives in adultery as long as he lives in that relation. That is why he can never truly say that he has come to repentance, unless he breaks that relation. And he cannot be a member of the Church.

But that is not all. The Lord not only looks upon the man that divorces his wife and marries another as committing adultery, but someone marries the woman who has been innocently divorced. The Lord says, he that marries that innocently divorced woman also commits adultery. Why? Because God considers the marriage tie as not broken. The marriage relation can never be dissolved, except when it is dissolved by the sin of fornication. That is the sole reason for divorce.

One of the causes of the corruption of the matrimonial bond, is that young people marry without considering anything else. A young man runs all over to find a woman. He runs to the world, to the theater, to the dances, and he runs into a woman that he thinks he likes, and without considering anything else, they marry. Then love is blind. But later on, their eyes are opened and then they try to find all kinds of excuses for divorce. That happens often. But no matter what happens after the tie has been made, except for fornication, they are united for life. And the Church may not open its doors and relinquish upon these principles.

2. Its Widest Scope

For the seventh commandment has a wider scope. The catechism tells us that all uncleanness is accursed of God. It catalogues all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, and desires under adultery. In the second place, the catechism looks upon all things calculated to entice to that sin as adultery. And in this, the catechism is in harmony with Scripture. For the Lord says in Matthew 5:27,28: *“Ye have heard it said that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”* So that we have in the first place, all those actions, gestures, words, thoughts and desires that are an expression of the desire to commit adultery. The catechism calls it all uncleanness. Chastity is the opposite. Chastity is cleanness, purity, holiness, but adultery is impurity, uncleanness.

Here we might mention many things. But I would rather not, because these things are, in the nature of the case, unmentionable. Rather than name them, it is better to draw to curtain upon them and to suggest that these things are so corrupt, so foul, that it is better not to life even a corner of the veil. But there is one thing that I do want to mention, because it is taken from behind the curtain by the world itself. The danger is by no means imaginary that it will intrude into the Church. I refer to the matter of birth control. Literature defending this thing comes into your hands. It comes into the hands of our young people. And when that literature gets into their hands, they read it. By birth control is meant that final success by natural man to find a safe way of committing adultery. Birth control opens the way to give full sway to the passions without the nuisance and suffering of bringing forth children. It is openly preached and scientifically defended. It is even seriously discussed by the Church. And according to reports, it has met with a large measure of success. Birth control is but an attempt of man to find a way to sin. To that I want to call your attention, in order that you may not be blindfolded. For the rest, let it be sufficient to say that the world is full of adultery.

Whichever way we look, our eyes behold adultery. There is adultery all about us. The commandment, “do not commit adultery,” does not only mean that we may not seek divorce. There is much divorce in our country. According to statistics, in the first quarter of this year, there were more divorces granted than marriage licenses. And the Church is not guiltless, in that it has not protested against it. But that is not all. There is the free exchange of the man and the woman, even though they are not divorced. Then there is a world full of adultery outside of marriage. Many in our day must get married. How often is it not necessary to announce from the pulpit that certain persons have sinned against the seventh commandment? That is not a reflection of the covenant life, but a satisfying of our carnal lust, and not to mention the sins committed within the bonds of wedlock. You must remember that just because a man is married, does not mean that he can do as he pleases.

Then there are the horrible sins of man with man, and woman with woman, and the sins against our own body. Not one of us is clean. As it was with the other commandments, who can place his hand in his bosom and throw the first stone on the adulterous man or woman if the Lord tells us that he that looks on a woman to desire her, has already committed adultery with her. We need not stand as a Church and look far and wide, and place ourselves above the adulterous world. I do not preach to the world, but to the Church. The world is corrupting itself faster then ever before. But let us put our hand in our own bosom. We are all by nature adulterers. I am not giving a lesson in sociology, but I am preaching to the Church that has the law written in her heart. For that reason, the catechism mentions those things that entice to that sin. Things that come to us in books, in pictures, and in theaters. Is there anything today that is placed before us more that the things that play upon the desires and passions? The things that play upon the sinful, adulterous passions are placed in the foreground. For vile money, men play upon the passions of others. This prayer must always be upon our hearts: Lord, turn my heart from vanity.

3. Its Positive Teaching

Therefore, the positive teaching of the seventh commandment is, that we should live chastely before God. There is no cure for the sin of adultery in the world. The reason is that the root of adultery is idolatry. That is the reason why scripture emphasizes that idolatry is adultery. Idolatry is then looked upon as a breach in the covenant. Idolatry is adultery with respect to our relation to God. That relation is a covenant relation, and it is an exclusive relation. But man, turning from God to another, namely the devil, becomes a spiritual adulterer. All sin is spiritual adultery. It is adultery, first of all, in relation to God. Sin is fornication in relation to God. Scripture calls the unfaithfulness of God's people adultery. Sin was this, that man left his faithful covenant God, and joined himself to another, the devil. That is always the spiritual nature of sin. Sin is that we leave God and join ourselves to another. That is spiritual adultery. God punishes that adultery and causes man to feel that to depart from God is death, and causes him to corrupt and corrupt himself, especially in the marriage relation. That man is so corrupt, is not of man, but of God. God punishes spiritual adultery with adultery among men. That man is so corrupt, is the curse of God upon man. So that if we become adulterous in relation to God, we become so in relation to man. Faithfulness in relation to the covenant God has its influence upon our whole life, and we become faithless in relation to our fellow men.

There may be an outward show of faithfulness among men. There may be an outward show of faithfulness with the business man, in order to do business. But in principle, the natural man is faithless. That faithlessness in which the sinner does not keep the bond of fellowship, reveals itself most of all in matrimony. Man that is faithless to God becomes faithless to his wife, and that again becomes the root of another sin. If our marriage relation is not controlled by faithfulness, then the only thing there is left is carnal lust. And so, under the punishing hand of God, the world corrupts itself. For that reason there is no cure for the world. The world must go on in corruption.

To this there is only one cure. That is Christ Jesus. When the Church became faithless, God did not divorce, but sent His Son. That is God's faithfulness. God recovered the adulterous woman. He recovered her by sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. The cure is in Christ. The cure is in Christ because he healed the breach where it must be healed. The breach must not be healed, in the first place, among men in a social uplift, but it must be healed where it must be healed. The breach with God must first be healed, and Christ healed it, legally and judicially. So that the adulterous woman again has the right to be called God's wife. Jesus heals the breach for His people, and God forgives. He forgives our idolatry, and therefore, our adultery is forgiven. Jesus heals the breach spiritually, so that we stand in covenant relation with God once more, by His Spirit. God redeemed the Church by pouring out the covenant life in her heart. The Church is the redeemed wife. God has led her back through the Red Sea of baptism, so that the covenant life again becomes the basis for the relations in life, particularly in matrimony.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife. Why? Because together, they want to reflect the covenant life of God. Then marriage becomes a reflection of the union of God and His Church. It becomes a reflection of that union of nature, life, and love that was realized when Christ gave His life to bring the Church back to God. The principle purpose of marriage is to bring forth the Church. But even in that, the chief purpose is to be a reflection of the perfect covenant life which the Lord showed when He recovered His wife. That is why the catechism points to the basic fact that our bodies are Christ's, and are the temple of the Holy Spirit. In the sense that as the body is the temple, the instrument of the soul, so the body is called upon to be consecrated to Christ. Then you have forgiveness and sanctification, forgiveness and deliverance. Then it will be for us a constant battle to live chastely before God.

And so we end with this threefold admonition. In the first place, if we have sinned, we have an

advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow. There is no sin too great to be cleansed by Him. We are discussing the law, but in the shade of the cross. In the second place, put on the whole armor of God. We have but a small beginning of the new life. If we were perfect, we would not need the seventh commandment. But we are not, and therefore, we must put on the whole armor of God. And in the third place, flee from fornication and from the adulterous world. Flee when she speaks adultery with the mouth, in her gestures, in her books, in her pictures. Flee and do not copy after the world. Do not copy after her in her gestures, in her clothes, in her powder and paint. There is only one woman in Scripture that painted. That woman was Jezebel. Do not copy after the adulterous world, but walk worthy of the calling wherewith you have been called, and the marriage relation will be a reflection of the relation between God and His Church. A union of life, because it is a union of being. And being a union of life and of being, it is a union of love, and adultery should not be named among us.

The Eighth Commandment: Honoring the Neighbor's Property

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.110 What doth God forbid in the eighth commandment?

A. God forbids not only those thefts, and robberies, which are punishable by the magistrate; but he comprehends under the name of theft all wicked tricks and devices, whereby we design to appropriate to ourselves the goods which belong to our neighbor; whether it be by force, or under the appearance of right, as by unjust weights, ells, measures, fraudulent merchandise, false coins, usury, or by any other way forbidden by God; as also all covetousness, all abuse and waste of his gifts.

Q.111. But what doth God require in this commandment?

A. That I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may; and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others; further also that I faithfully labor, so that I may be able to relieve the needy.

Scripture tells us of a fool who was rich. He was a rich land owner. And it happened that he was made still richer. His land yielded abundantly. "And he said to himself, I will keep it all, and I will enlarge my barns and save my riches, and I will say to my soul: soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, eat, drink, and be merry." A very common picture of a ver common kind of a fool. What was the matter with him? Scripture explains that the fundamental error of his folly was this, that he was not rich in God, and that he sought to be rich in the treasures of this world, which are no riches.

This is not true of the Christian. Christ became poor, in order that we might be rich in Him. Rich, not in the goods of this world, for God said to this fool: this night shall thy soul be taken from thee. The Christian is rich in God. For that reason, the Christian is not a thief. And principally, ideally, as he is rich in God, and seeks the treasures which are in heaven, the Christian does not need the warning and admonition of the eighth commandment.

Practically, however, it is different. Although, principally and ideally, the Christian does not need the warning and admonition of the eighth commandment, practically, and according to the old principle of sin within us, we can all listen to its admonition and warning. Remembering that the law of God, as we have been discussing it, is a guide for the good works of the Christian. The good works of the Christian are not simply characterized as being in harmony with these ten precepts, but they are rooted in faith. And they must be performed with the intention of seeking God's glory. In other words, the good works of the Christian must be spiritual.

And because it is necessary to remember this spiritual character of the law, we have sought for the fundamental truth that lies at the basis of each commandment. We found, in the first place, that God is one, and that therefore, we shall have no other gods before Him. In the second place, God is glorious, and therefore we may not compress Him within the limits of any creature. God is holy, and therefore we must use His name with reverence. He is a God of covenant rest, therefore we must keep the sabbath. He is the sole source of all sovereignty and authority, therefore we must for His sake be in submission to the authorities. God is a God of love, therefore we must reflect that love of God in our lives and may not kill. God is the faithful covenant God, and we must reflect this faithfulness in the marriage relation, therefore we must not commit adultery. And so also, we wish to approach this eighth commandment.

Theme: The Eight Commandment: Honoring the Neighbor's Property

1. What it presupposes
2. What it forbids Honoring the Neighbor's Property
3. What it requires

1. What it presupposes

The eighth commandment touches upon a problem and a sphere in our life in the world that is of great significance, and the cause of much trouble in the world. It touches upon the so-called social problem. This may not be evident if we look upon the eighth commandment in the so-called narrow sense. Not if we look at this commandment simply as a command not to steal in that narrow sense. Or not even if we look at it in the simple form of our catechism. Life at the time when the catechism was composed, was far more simple than it is now. There were no large corporations and trusts then, but everyone had his own little place of business. Therefore, our catechism speaks of cheating, and giving short measure, etc.

In our day, however, there are few foolish enough to resort to this sort of stealing. Still, if you look at the principle of this eighth commandment, it touches upon a problem considered most important in our day, and which the world can never solve. It touches upon the problem of property, of ownership. And connected with property, with riches, stands our whole life. Connected with money is power, honor, pleasure, contentment. While on the other hand, connected with poverty is lack of power, dishonor, discontentment. And the situation of today is that a small minority have the whole world, and a large majority have nothing. There is a tendency to pile up the whole world for oneself.

Now there can be no question but that the eighth commandment presupposes that it is according to God's will that property is to be possessed in the world, in the form of personal property, in the form of private property. If that were not so, there could be no eighth commandment. The presupposition of the eighth commandment is that the normal state of affairs is not that which is pictured by communism, and to a certain extent, by socialism. Socialism, to a certain extent, pictures it so that the earth and all its products belongs to all. And communism says that that is true of everything that is in the world. Communism denies the right of all private, personal property. But from scripture it is evident that such a state of affairs is not countenanced by the word of God. Wherever you read of property in scripture, you read of it in the sense of private property. Nowhere does the scripture picture communism as the normal state of affairs. That is not even true of the early Church. There was no state of communism in the early Church. Even though there was a large common fund from which the needs of all were supplied, and no one called anything his own, yet alongside of this common fund, each had his own private property. And besides scriptures warns us that that state of affairs was a failure, and the Church in Jerusalem became a needy Church.

However that may be, scripture proceeds from the fundamental notion of stewardship, and stewardship is personal. The fundamental notion of scripture is not that man is proprietor, possessor, but that he is steward. There is only one that is possessor. Naturally, He who made all things, and sustains all things, and governs all things; He who is sovereign over all things, He is possessor. That is God. God is possessor. That is the basic truth of the eighth commandment. That basic truth of the eighth commandment is that there is only one real owner of heaven and earth. That one is God. He is the only owner, the absolute proprietor, for He is the creator of all. The things created belong absolutely to Him. If I make a thing, it is not absolutely mine. My labor is in it, but not my material. God created all things out of nothing, therefore, He is the absolute owner. And, in the second place, He is the absolute owner because He maintains all things. God is possessor.

Man, therefore, can never be anything but steward, that is, one that is placed over a certain portion of God's goods. That is the second fundamental truth that lies at the basis of the eighth commandment. God placed man in the earth to be His superintendent, to be His steward. And having been placed over a certain portion of God's goods, he is responsible and accountable to God. Man is responsible for his stewardship to God, and therefore he must use the things over which God has placed him as a means. That man is steward means that the purpose of all his labors is not in the things themselves, but that he may reach the highest purpose, the service of God. The things may never be more than a means. They must always be a means to reach the highest purpose for which God created us, namely, His service, and the glorification of His name. To put it in the words of Jesus: *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you."* Man is a steward who has been placed by God over a certain portion of His goods, to use them as a means, and he is responsible to God for his stewardship. This is personal. Stewardship presupposes personal property. That is the fundamental notion of scripture.

But the eighth commandment presupposes more. It not only presupposes private property as being according to the will of God, but it also presupposes that there is a normal way in which that property is assigned. Otherwise, there could be no abnormal way of acquiring property. So that the eighth commandment presupposes that there is a normal way in which God assigns to man that portion of His property, over which that man is to be steward. That does not seem so today. Things are so confused today, that there seems to be no solution. And there is no solution. It does not seem as if there was a normal way of acquiring goods, but nevertheless, that is the case. And all that departs from that normal way of acquiring goods is stealing, and is condemned by the eighth commandment. In other words, we must say: *"I am appointed by God as steward over that which I call my property."* There are many ways in which God assigns that property to man. There are such things as the way of claim, or the way of occupation. There is the way of labor. In the way of rightful labor, we receive personal property. Then there is the property we receive, whether by our own efforts, or from God, as for example Abraham, when we read that his flocks increased greatly. Or that which we acquire by buying and selling, or by inheritance. But whatever may be the way, it must be God's way. And we must remember that man is never anything but a steward.

2. What it forbids

Now it is striking that one of the characteristics of the sinful nature of man is that he is a thief. And that sinful nature reveals itself generally. The thieving nature of sinful man reveals itself everywhere. The underlying principle being, that man by sin refused any longer to be God's steward. Man expelled God from the world. That is, man expelled God in his sinful imaginations. Spiritually, ethically, man banished God. Therefore, man is first of all a thief in relation to God. Man stole the factory away from God. He chased the proprietor out of his shop, and said, I will be my own boss. That is what man did. The devil said: thou shalt be like God, and man listened to him. It looked good to him, and he denied his stewardship, and began to act as if he were proprietor. That is the sin of the eighth commandment, from which follows, that he no longer considers God as his chief end. And man lost his purpose.

Instead of his purpose being in God, he sought it in himself. Things were divorced from God, and therefore, from their highest purpose. And divorced from God, they became things in themselves. Man saw in them a means to satisfy his carnal lust and pleasures. The sinner is not rich in God. We are, by grace, in principle, but our sinful nature reveals that we are not rich in God. Our sinful nature reveals that we are rich in the things that are meant to be means. The things of this world were never meant to be an end. They were always intended to be a means. They were intended to be a means by which we must serve God, but we made them an end. And making them an end, the underlying sin of stealing, of acquiring property in a way not assigned by God is greed, covetousness. And it is a terrible

covetousness, because it is never satisfied. The thievous nature is never satisfied. It always says, more, because there is no satisfaction in the things it acquires.

And so man becomes a thief in relation to his neighbor. Man steals in many ways. The catechism makes distinction. It speaks of thievery for which men go to jail. Some thieves go to jail, but there are many that steal and do not go to jail. For example: you have saved your pennies, perhaps with a view to the day of your old age. And you wake up one morning and read in the newspaper that you can't get your savings out of the banks. And the next morning you read that you can only get twenty-five percent. These banks are thieves. But they are not put in jail, because they say that in that case, the thief is a system, and you cannot put a system in jail. Then there is the man that has piled up millions, and says, that is mine, and defends it on the basis of the eighth commandment. If a man has piled up millions, and says, that is mine, while his neighbor is starving, I will tell that man that he has no right to it, and will debate it with him. It is his before the law, but not before God. The man that lives in a castle, and bathes himself in luxury while his neighbor is living in a shanty and suffers want, is just as much a thief before God as the highway robber.

But that is not all the stealing. There is our thievish nature, and we do not go to jail for all the stealing we do. For example: we make debts for which we are not sure that we will be able to pay. Yet, we do it. Young people get married, and they haven't got a cent. They buy a house full of furniture and they haven't got a cent to pay for it, and they go way into debt. People buy an automobile, and by time it is paid for, it is ready to go on the scrap pile. The world calls that credit. But credit is thievery. It is not God given property. The only difference between the little thief and the big thief is that the big thief steals big things, and the little thief steals little things. We have not lived as carefully as the word of God requires.

So it is with the needless cutting of wages by the employer. And with the employee that demands as much wages as possible for as little work as possible. So also the catechism mentions usury. Usury is excessive interest. Our fathers used to say that charging of interest is sin, but that is not scripture. But scripture does call all excessive charging of interest, for the purpose of becoming rich, sin against the eighth commandment. And all interest on money that ought to be charity is sin. The Israelite might not take usury from the needy brother.

So there are many things. Man is a thief. All men are thieves. There is not a soul that is not a thief in relation to his neighbor. Everyone tries to grab as much of this world as he can and says, it is mine. And he does so in distinction from God. He stands in direct opposition to the word of Jesus: "*What will it profit it a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul.*" He seeks to gain the whole world, even though he lose his own soul. He may do it in different ways.

He may do it by ordinary stealing, or by grabbing everything for himself at the expense of his neighbor, and the latter is the greatest thief before God. But if he seeks to grab the whole world, as a thing in itself, separate from God, he is a thief. If a man seeks to pile up the whole world for himself, don't trust that man. He is a thief. And that is true of every one of us. We have chased the proprietor out. That is why we cannot solve our social problem. As long as we do not let God in again, and let Him be proprietor, we cannot solve our social problem. About four percent have ninety-five percent of the property of our country, while ninety-six percent have the other five percent. And do not say that that four percent are no thieves. They are. But, the other ninety-six percent are no better. That ninety-six percent tries to take all it can of that five percent. How then are you going to solve the social problem?

And there is not one of us that is not guilty. There are many things of which we cannot conscientiously say that God has placed us over them.

3. What it requires

I started out by saying that the Christian is not thief. He has been redeemed, and having been redeemed, he is not a thief. Why not?

In the first place, because he has been redeemed from the folly that characterizes the sinful nature, to look upon that which is a means as an end. He has a new conception of the things of this present time, in relation to the eternal things. He realizes that it is foolish to say, my house shall stand for aye. He realizes that it is foolish to pile up the whole world, and then to be put in a little box and buried in the ground. In other words, he realizes that the Lord spoke the truth when He said: *“what will it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul.”*

And he has received grace to see the folly of the corrupt striving to grab for that which is no riches, and to refuse the true riches. And the heart again longs for that true riches, the communion and covenant fellowship with God. So that the things of this world are never more than a means for him. That is the principle of grace wrought in the heart of the Christian. The Christian is again steward. He has let the proprietor in again. And he says, I am not my own, but belong to my Savior with all that I am and have. And he has learned to view the things of this world, not as an end, but as a means.

In the second place, the Christian has received a principle of the life that is not of this world. He has become an heir of the heavenly inheritance. Therefore, he has a new purpose in life. He has come to understand what the Lord said: He that will gain his life will lose it, and he that will lose it for My sake will gain it. He has a new conception of things, that of the pilgrim. He lives in a tent, and living in a tent, he knows that he is heir. He has become an heir of the heavenly inheritance. Upon that, he has set his heart. No, Christ Jesus has set the heart of the Christian upon it. It, he seeks. For it, he is willing to abandon all things. And he knows that all things must serve to bring him to glory. That is why he is not a thief. Seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness, through temporal things as a means, the Christian is neither a waster nor a miser. He does not steal a penny from anyone, but says: all things are mine. And he is willing to labor in his daily calling, in order to ask: Lord, what wilt thou have me to do. He does not serve mammon. He does not pile up goods for his own sake. But he serves God with all that he possesses and does not possess.

In the third place, with relation to the goods of others, the Christian is not covetous. He does not envy the rich, because he is rich in God. And he will promote the advantage of the brother, and of the neighbor. And he says: I seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and believe that all other things will be added unto me.

But remember, that Christian is still imperfect. That old tendency is still there. The Church, the Christian, you and I, are not thieves. And it is below our dignity to have the law point its finger at us and say: thou shalt not steal. But from the point of view of our old tendency, we are still inclined to thievery. Therefore it is well not to chase the commandment out of the house, but to listen to her admonition, in order that we may not seek the things below, but may seek the things above, and may walk as pilgrims and strangers in the midst of the world.

The Ninth Commandment: Honoring the Neighbor's Name

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Lord's Day 43

Q.112. What is required in the ninth commandment?

A. That I bear false witness against no man, nor falsify any man's words; that I be no backbiter, nor slanderer; that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly, or unheard; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God; likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it; also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor.

Strictly speaking, the simple meaning, the surface meaning, of the ninth commandment is that we shall not bear false testimony in judgment of others whether it be before the official magistrate, or in private life and personal conversation. The surface meaning of the ninth commandment is that we shall not give false testimony when the neighbor is judged.

But in a general way, the catechism, in treating the ninth commandment, treats all sorts of lies, deceit, backbiting, and slander. And by way of implication, it goes on to condemn everything in the heart from which lying arises, the dark fountain from which lying pours forth. It is that which the catechism calls the proper work of the devil; and it underlies all sin, but especially with respect to the sin of the ninth commandment.

This is true for various reasons. In the first place, in John 8:44, it is said: that the devil is a liar, and he abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him; when he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it. In the second place, it is true because that is the meaning of his name, since the lie is the sin that most directly connects us to our spiritual father, the devil. In the third place, it is because sin had its beginning in the lie. Without the lie, the beginning of sin would have been impossible, and inconceivable. In the fourth place, it is because all sin is really a lie. To have another god is a lie. An image of God is a lie. To curse with respect to the name of God is a lie. And so we can go on through the whole Decalogue. The lie is simply the proper work of the devil. And so finally, the catechism calls our attention to the positive side of the ninth commandment by pointing out that briefly in this, that we are to speak the truth in love.

Theme: The Ninth Commandment: Honoring the Neighbor's Name

1. Its General Meaning
2. Its Specific Application
3. Its Positive Demand

1. General Meaning

As we have seen, there is a certain truth of God that lies at the basis of all the commandments. Doctrine and precept, confession and walk, the truth of God and the law of God are closely related and are interdependent, because God's truth and His justice are one in Him. So that each one of the commandments contains a certain truth upon which it is based. To briefly sum up, we found that God is one and that therefore we may have no other gods before Him. God is infinitely glorious, and therefore we may not attempt to compress Him within the limits of any creaturely image. He is holy, and His name

must create within us reverence and fear. He is a God of perfect rest, and our Sabbath must be a reflection of that rest. God is the sole keeper of all authority, and we must respect His authority as it comes to us in the powers and magistrate. God is love, and we must reflect that love of God, and therefore we shall not kill. He is the perfect covenant God, and His covenant life is reflected in marriage, therefore we shall not commit adultery. He is the sole Lord and owner of all things, and we must walk before Him as stewards, and with all things seek the things that are above. And so also, there is a truth underlying this ninth commandment. And then we can easily understand that the truth on which this commandment is based is that God is truth.

God does not only speak the truth, but He is truth. When we say that God is truth, we mean in the first place, that He is solely reality. All in God is real. He never deceives. There is nothing deceiving in God. God is always all that He is. That is why scripture says that they that put their trust in Him shall never be put to shame. That God is truth means, in the second place, that He knows Himself as He is. God has a conception of Himself, and God's conception concerning Himself is always in harmony with His reality. God always knows Himself as He really is. In other words, there is no error in God. In the third place, God loves Himself, and therefore He always speaks the truth.

Furthermore, we must understand that God is the truth in the antithetical sense. That is, He conceives of Himself as the truth in distinction from the lie. God can conceive of the lie. He can conceive of the lie and hates it. He can think of sin and hate it. And He conceives of the lie and hates it. God is the truth antithetically. And further, God created us in His image, also in this respect. That means that man is not the truth, but is a reflection of it. That is, we have a conception of God and of reality. We are so created that we can conceive of the truth antithetically. Man was so created, that he could also conceive of the lie. He could know the truth and love it, and he could conceive of the lie and hate it.

That man, who was so created that he loved the truth in distinction from the lie, sinned and became a liar. And to that man the ninth commandment comes and says: thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. And the general meaning is that God forbids us here to lie. The distinction has been made between the deliberate lie, and the untruth. And the distinction must be made at least, between the logical untruth, and the lie. If for example, when working a problem I make a mistake and the result of my mistake I have a wrong answer to the problem, and I put down that wrong answer, that answer is an untruth. Or when I have been wrongly informed about something, and I do not know it, and I am called upon to testify, and I present that wrong information, I speak a lie. But in the sense of the ninth commandment, and of the 43rd Lord's Day, I do not speak a lie in such cases.

The catechism and the ninth commandment, speak of the moral, ethical lie. But that does not apply to religious untruths. False doctrine, heresy, is not an untruth, but the lie. But in the ethical sense, the lie is this. I know the truth. But I hate that truth for some reason. Whether that be for personal reasons, or for something else, makes no difference. And hating the truth, I make another construction of that concerning which I know to be the truth. That is the lie in mind. And when I present that construction that I have made as the truth, then I am a liar. That is the ethical lie.

The lie is a question of love. It is a question of love of the truth. Now then, in that sense of the word, in the sense that we know the truth and hate it, and therefore make another construction of it, and present that as the truth, in that sense, we are all liars. In that sense, there is not an honest man anywhere. We are all by nature liars. We are by nature so depraved that we hate the truth and love the lie. That is why it is so easy to lie. It is easy to lie. And the reason is that we carry the instrument for lying around with us. We carry around with us a lying tongue and a deceitful heart. By nature, all men are liars. That does not mean that man always lies. It does not mean that man always lies in the sense that he never presents the truth. Neither does it mean that he is under the influence of a certain grace, causing him to speak the truth. But it means that he does not speak the truth for God's sake. When he does not lie, it is because of other considerations concerning himself or society. But, he is a liar. And he

lies every time he thinks it best. When it suits him better, for some reason or another, to speak the truth, he will speak it. When there is no occasion to lie, man will speak the truth. Why shouldn't he? Why shouldn't he speak the truth if there is no occasion to lie.

Man, however, will not speak the truth for God's sake. Man is a liar. He is a child of the devil. And that applies to everyone. I am not speaking of particular liars. Then we could go to work and say that was a good sermon for brother so and so. I am not speaking of particular liars. There are occasional liars and habitual liars. I am not speaking of these habitual liars. But we must understand that we all carry that lying nature about with us, and by nature, we are all liars, every one of us. That is due to the fact that sin has its beginning in the lie. And it has its origin in the lie. Sin has its origin in the lie of the devil. God said, "Thou shalt not eat of that tree, and the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." That was the truth. That was the truth of God. But the devil said: thou shalt not die, but when thou eatest of it, thou shalt be as God. And the devil said that, not because he did not know the truth, but because he hated it. And knowing the truth and hating it, he constructed the lie. In other words, he constructed the situation as he wanted it to be. And as he wanted it, God must have nothing to say. That is the lie of the devil.

To that lie man turned. What happened to man when he forsook the truth and accepted the lie? For that is what man did. Man knew the world of reality, he knew God, and he knew himself as the servant of God. But the devil came and pictured to him an imaginary world, the world of the lie. And what happened? Did man make a mistake? When the devil pictured to man the world of the lie, and turned the world of reality upside down, what happened? Does it mean that he can no more logically distinguish between the truth and the lie? That is not the case. It is true that a man can lie to himself long enough that he comes to believe his own lie. And in certain generations, the lie can so develop, that the result is that they can no more distinguish between the truth and the lie. But although that is true, what happened in paradise is not that Adam and Eve could not distinguish between the truth and the lie. Sin is no error. Sin is no ignorance. Knowledge is no virtue. What happened is this. Man knows that God is good, that He is truth, and that He is reality. But, with all his heart, man turned away from the truth to the lie. The lie is not a matter of error, but of hating the truth. That is what scripture means when it says that man is a liar. Man turned to the lie. Not by mistake. Adam and Eve did not make a mistake. They did not honestly err. No, they knew the truth. It was not a logical error, but an ethical turning. Sin did not have its beginning in confusion, but in the lie. And man turned to that lie. And man is a liar. He never speaks the truth concerning God. And when he develops his lie, he comes to such things as Atheism. He always construes things in such a way that he is somebody. And he lies about himself. He does so everywhere. He does so in his preaching, in his books, in his schools, in all that he does. And because man is such a liar, he is a liar concerning his neighbor. Because he is a liar concerning God, and concerning himself, he is a liar concerning his neighbor. That is where the ninth commandment takes hold of him and says: thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

2. Its Specific Application

The lie manifests itself in different forms. The principle is, love of the lie concerning the neighbor. But it becomes manifest in different forms.

The worst is the pernicious lie. That is the lie with the intent to destroy. And under that form, there is first of all, the false testimony in judgment, whether before the world, or before the Church. When you bring a case before the Church, and you know that the case cannot stand the test of the light of the truth, and you nevertheless present the case, because you hate the truth concerning that case, and present it in a false light, then you are guilty of this form of the lie. In the world you have this pernicious lie in presenting false accusations, or false testimony, or in defending that false testimony. In that form of testimony, wherein in accusing, or in witnessing, or in defending such testimony, you seek to destroy

the neighbor, you have the pernicious lie. We have a glaring example of this in Christ's accusers. The world construes the lie concerning Christ, and then they crucify Him.

Under that pernicious lie is to be classed all flattery. That seems to be the opposite. But with flattery, we mean to destroy the neighbor. In flattery, your purpose is self. Under that form of the lie, you have all slander and backbiting, which are the proper works of the devil. Backbiting and slander have this in common, that both have the very nature of the serpent. Like a serpent, they sneak up behind someone and bite his heel. Both the backbiter and the slanderer attack their victim from behind. They dare not speak to his face. A man that does not want to face you is seeking your evil. It makes no difference whether he speaks the truth about you or not, if he spreads an evil report concerning you, and will not face you, he hates you. And the difference between the two is this. The backbiter sometimes reports what is true, while the slanderer is always a liar. And who in the Church; who of us can put his hand in his bosom and pull it out clean?

Backbiting and slander are so the works of the devil, that they are directly instilled by him. To that form belongs all deceit. The world is full of that. And the world knows it. That is why they do not trust each other. The world knows so well that men are liars, that it does not trust anyone. You need witnesses, and signatures, and the oath, because the world knows that men are liars. So it is also in the Church. And sometimes it is worse in the Church. Because of the antithesis, it seems sometimes as if the very antithesis in the Church stirs up the old lying nature. Under that pernicious lie, belongs all gossip. You know how it usually goes. We come together and we do not know what to say, and we do not want to keep still, and so we begin to gossip. We are too sick to talk about spiritual things, and so we talk like the world. We have nothing worthwhile to talk about, and we cannot sit around like dummies and say nothing, and so we pick out someone and talk about him. And these things take on so many forms. Sometimes it is only a shake of the head, or a smile. When someone speaks well of another, we kind of smile at it. All are the works of the devil and have their root in the fact that we have turned away from the truth and have accepted the lie.

But there are other forms of the lie. There is the sportive lie. That is the lie in order to be interesting, to be amusing. That form of the lie is often defended. Someone tells all kinds of things about himself, or others, that are not so, just to be interesting, or amusing. Jesting and sporting, he lies. Everybody knows he lies, but he lies just to entertain and to be interesting.

Another form of the lie is the so-called beneficent lie. Someone lies, not with the intent to destroy, but with the intent to save. It is the lie used to reach a good purpose, a lie, which is a means to an end. So, for example, Rahab lies in order to save the spies, a form of the lie is usually defended on the basis that the end justifies the means. So the lie of David, when he scratched on the walls and feigned insanity, is defended. But the lie is never to be defended. Scripture does not defend it. God is a God of truth. All lying is because we do not trust the truth. And scripture admonishes us to speak the truth and to trust in God for the rest.

And then there are our conventional lies, which also are often defended by Christians. We say to someone, I am pleased to meet you, when in our heart we say, I wish I had never seen you. There are Christian people that say this is alright. But that is not so. It is perfectly alright to tell anyone to his face that you hate him, rather than cover it up with a mask of convention. Or if we dare not tell him to his face, let us bend the knee before God and confess our sin, and ask Him to remove our hatred and malice. But let us put off the mask of convention.

And so we are all liars by nature. We carry our lying nature with us. We lie with our whole makeup. We lie with our tongue, with the eye, with the attitude we assume. We lie almost all the time. We do not show ourselves as we are. Some people laugh when they ought to be crying, and they cry when they ought to be laughing. Some people will shed tears, when at heart they are laughing. The ninth

commandment is one of the most violated of the commandments.

3. Its Positive Demand

Therefore, the positive truth of this ninth commandment is, speak the truth one with another in love. Speak the truth in love, just as you speak the lie in hatred. So that the conclusion is, always speak the truth.

But does the ninth commandment, in its positive form, demands of us that we always speak all the truth, at all times, and everywhere? God forbid. That is not so. When you speak, you must speak the truth. But you do not have to speak all the truth, all the time, and everywhere. It is not even Christian to do so in the sinful world. When we shall be in heaven, we can speak all the truth, all the time, and everywhere; but not in the sinful world. When a brother sins, I do not have to speak the truth concerning that brother's, sin always and everywhere.

And therefore this ninth commandment comes to us with this positive demand, that we shall speak the truth in love. And love keeps still fully as often as it opens its mouth. Love frequently keeps still when hatred speaks. And to speak the truth in love certainly means that when we are called upon to testify, that we do so loving the truth. In the second place, it means that, being all liars, we have nothing to boast of over against the brother. In the third place, that we apply this general principle, that we defend the name of the brother and promote his honor and good character. That we never do by nature. That we only do when our sins have been blotted out and the lie has been rooted from the heart.

Therefore, this is in principle true in the Church. To speak the truth in love cannot be learned. There is only one thing. The Church is the body of Him that is the truth. Jesus Christ, the Son of God became flesh and revealed unto us the Father. And not only did He reveal the Father unto us, but He also atoned for our sins, so that if we have sinned, we have an intercessor with the Father. And there is no sin so great, but the Church has been washed of it by the blood of Christ. But that is not all. Jesus, who paid for all our lies, sent the Spirit of truth, and that Spirit of truth dwells in the Church. The love of God has been shed abroad in the hearts of His people and they love Him, and all that is of Him.

But although we know that we have been delivered from the lie, we know also that there is still a principle of that old nature in us, and we heed the admonition of the Apostle: put off the old man, and put on the new man, and speak every man the truth with his neighbor. Knowing we have only a small beginning of this obedience, it is necessary to hold before us this ninth commandment. Don't send the law away, but listen to her warning note. And taking this ninth commandment in the light of the New Testament, it becomes this: Beloved, speak the truth in love.

The Tenth Commandment: Coveting Nothing of One's Neighbor

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.113. What doth the tenth commandment require of us?

A. That even the smallest inclination or thought, contrary to any of God's commandments, never rise in our hearts; but that at all times we hate all sin with our whole heart, and delight in all righteousness.

Q.114. But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?

A. No: but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.

Q. 115. Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

A. First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin, and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavor and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection prepared to us, in a life to come.

The Heidelberg Catechism very properly connects the question concerning the ability of the Christian to keep the law with the tenth commandment. And so, in this Lord's Day, the catechism answers three questions, all relating to the law. In the first place, it answers the question as to the significance of the tenth commandment. In the second place, it answers the question as to whether the Christian is able to keep the law. And in the third place, it answers the question as to what benefit the preaching of the law is for the Christian, seeing he cannot keep that law perfectly anyway.

We might write above this 44th Lord's Day the superscription: very severe, and very healthful. Very severe, is the language which our fathers used, both with regard to what is required of us in the law of God, and with regard to the judgment they cast upon the Christian with regard to his keeping of that law. These two things are inseparably connected. The more we understand what the law requires of us, and that nothing that in any sense falls short of what is required by it, can be approved by God, the less we will talk about the goodness of man.

Severe is the catechism with regard to what is really righteousness. It tells us that nothing but what is good to the very root can be approved by God. And concerning the Christian, it tells us that even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience. And if that is true of the holiest of men, then all talk about the goodness of natural man must cease.

The catechism is very severe. Yet that is very healthful. Strong medicine is good medicine. So this judgment of the law, and of the Christian, leads to a better knowledge of sin, and it teaches us to abandon our own righteousness, and to put our trust in the righteousness of Christ. And it also causes us to long for perfect sanctification and perfection. In the mean time, it connects all these things with the tenth commandment.

Theme: The Tenth Commandment: Coveting Nothing that is the Neighbor's

1. A Severe Demand

2. A Small Beginning

3. A Blessed Fruit

1. A Severe Demand

In our discussion of the law, we found that truth and righteousness are one in the Lord. And because this is so, the truth of God and the law of God are one. And every one of the individual commandments of the law is based in some basic truth. God is one, so we found, and therefore we may have no other gods before Him. God is glorious, and we must not try to compress Him within the limits of any creaturely image. He is holy, and therefore we must hold His name in reverence. God is a God of perfect rest, and He has determined that we should enter into that rest, and our weekly Sabbaths are a foretaste of that rest, and therefore we must keep the Sabbath. God is the absolute sovereign, and the source of all authority, and therefore, whether we are in a position of authority or of submission, we must do so for God's sake. God is a God of love, and we must manifest this love of God also in preserving one another, and therefore we must not kill or destroy. God is the faithful covenant God, and His covenant faithfulness is reflected in the marriage covenant between a man and wife, and therefore we must shun divorce and fornication. God is the sole owner of all things, and man is never more than a steward, so that no one can lay his finger on anything and say that is mine, in the absolute sense. He may not steal. God is truth, and therefore we must speak the truth in love, also with regard to the neighbor, and not seek to injure by slander and false testimony.

And so we come to the tenth commandment. Literally, the tenth commandment enjoins us, negatively that we shall not covet what is the neighbor's. That is the narrowest sense of the tenth commandment. The narrowest sense of the tenth commandment is that we shall not covet anything that does not, with the will of God, and with His approval, belong to us. In accordance with the Old Testament mode of living, for of course the law is addressed to the Old Testament people of God, the tenth commandment mentions the neighbor's house, his wife, his man servant, his maid servant, his ox, his ass. But today we will have to include his money, his position, and his business. And even in that narrow sense, this tenth commandment is very severe. I may not murder, I may not steal, and I may not bear false witness against the neighbor. I may even do the very opposite. I may help the neighbor out, I may minister to his needs, and I may promote his honor and seek his good. And if I then ask the law, is that enough, the law says in the tenth commandment, laying its finger upon the heart, if in your heart you covet, if in your heart, at any time rises the desire to have the neighbor's house, his money, his position, his business, you are a damnable sinner before God. That desire does not become manifest, you do not express it, nobody know about it, nay, still more, the moment you feel that desire rise in your heart, you repress it, but the moment that desire rises in your heart, the law damns you. That desire to have your neighbor's house, your neighbor's money, your neighbor's position, although it never comes to light, is never expressed, yea, is even repressed the moment it arises in the heart, that desire is enough to make you a damnable sinner before God.

"Thou shalt not covet." In our modern life, that becomes more and more difficult. No, let me say, our modern life, with its keen competition, brings out, stirs up that covetous nature. As long as each one lives in his own house, and each one sits under his own fig tree, that covetous nature does not so much reveal itself. Then there is no competition. But the moment that grocer, or that butcher across the street becomes my competitor; the desire arises in the heart to have his business. His customers are not my customers. I cannot sell to the customers that go to his store. And the desire arises to have his customers. And although we do not express it, but the moment that desire arises in the heart, we become a damnable sinner before God. Even in that narrow sense, the tenth commandment is enough, for remember covetousness is a root sin. It is the root of practically every sin. That is the tenth commandment in the narrow sense.

In a broader sense, the tenth commandment means that we shall not covet at all. Why should I be covetous with regard to the things of this world? But the catechism goes farther, and it tells us that in the broadest sense, the tenth commandment reflects back upon the other nine. The catechism reasons this way. The tenth commandment lays its finger on our inner personal life. And since that is the principle of the tenth commandment, therefore in its broadest application, it teaches that concerning the whole law, the slightest sinful inclination, thought, desire or emotion, makes us before God a damnable sinner. That, the catechism teaches. And the meaning is plain. It is simply this, the law of God lays hold of our whole life. Back of our outward life, back of our speech, our smiles and tears —this is after all nothing but the show window— lays the entire stock of our desires, of our emotions, of our inclinations. The outward manifestation of our life is but the surface. And it is only a manifestation of what lies within. That is, it is that, not before man, but before God.

And the tenth commandment tells us that there may never be any desire, thought, emotion contrary to any of the commandments of God. So that we not only do not make another god, but never think of another god, never desire another god. So that we not only do not use the name of God in vain, but that we use it with reverence and never desire to use it in any other way. So that we not only do not kill, but that there be no hatred or malice in our heart, and never desire to kill or destroy. And so on, throughout the entire law. So that, in one word, the tenth commandment means that at all times, we love all that is good and hate all unrighteousness. It demands of us that we be pure to the root. If that is the case, then we are good. Still more, if that is the case with anything we do, then it is good before God. And if that is not the case, if anything is not good to the very root, if it is not from the root of the love of God, it is damned. The reason is that God is not a man. He is God. You cannot show God a face. God does not look upon the outward appearance, but He looks at what is in the heart. In other words, God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him, must do so in spirit and in truth. That is the truth that lies at the basis of the tenth commandment.

God is a spirit, and because God is a spirit, all His virtues are spiritual. And because God is a spirit, and all His virtues are spiritual, therefore He penetrates into the deepest depths of the soul of man and looks at what is in the heart. You cannot show God a face. We can do that before each other. That is why the real corruption can be covered up, can be hidden. That is why men can have hypocritical natures, and so cover it up that they can live together. But you cannot do that before God. Before God, a thing must be good to the very root. One can serve his boss as a man pleaser. One can sit at a tea party with his neighbor, and have his eye full of adultery with regard to his neighbor's wife. One can be very friendly toward his neighbor, and have murder in his heart. He can covet his neighbor's wife, and at the same time be very neighborly. That is because that neighbor is a man. You can say, I am pleased to meet you, and in your heart wish you had never seen him. That is our present day convention. If this convention was exposed, and we were forced to reveal ourselves as we really are, what a terrible world it would be. It may be nice to cover it up with a smile, or a tear, or a deed, but at heart the world is corrupt.

But God is a spirit, and because God is a spirit, He does not care how you look outwardly, how nice you can smile, or how large a tear you can shed. He does not care if you give a hundred thousand dollars and then publish it in the papers. God does not care for any of those outward things because He penetrates into the heart. And because God is a spirit, they that worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth, or not at all. You cannot fool the Lord. He wants truth in the inward parts. That is the truth at the basis of the tenth commandment. And lest we should consider ourselves to be good fellows after all, the Lord caps the other nine commandments with this tenth. Thou shalt not covet. And coveting is not a matter of the face, but of the heart. The Lord says that He is not satisfied with a look, a smile, or a tear. He is never satisfied until we have truth in the heart.

You say, "Why may I not covet my neighbor's goods?" If I covet his goods, I do him no harm. I do

not take his goods by coveting them. If I covet my neighbor's house, his money, his position, I do him no harm. How can I help it if sinful desires arise in my heart? And you can't. That is the sinful nature. You cannot help it, if by helping you mean reforming. You cannot reform your old nature. You can only reform in as far as you can skate along on thin ice that presently breaks you into hell. You cannot help it. There is only one that can help it. That is the living God. There is only one thing that will help. That is a regenerated heart.

2. A Small Beginning

A So you see that if you teach this to the Christian, what is his estimation of self? You cannot teach this to the world. And that is because the world cannot know it; it cannot understand it. The world cannot know it.

But there is a world of difference between knowing that it is sin to covet, and knowing covetousness as sin. So that if you place yourself before the reality of God, before what He demands of you in His law, what is your estimation? If we compare ourselves with the law as it is characterized by the tenth commandment, and ask, are we keeping that law, and are we able to keep it perfectly, what is your answer? If you should answer, "Yes, I find myself in such a state that I am able to keep the law perfectly," I would like to repeat the question. You never literally made other gods, you never made a graven image, you never literally cursed or swore, you never desecrated the Sabbath, etc., but that is not the question. But when God goes back into your heart, are you then able before God to say, "Yes, I keep the law perfectly?" And if you still say, "Yes," then you have never known yourself. And John says: "*If any man say he has no sin, he deceives himself and the truth is not in him.*" If you should persist to say that you are alright before God—and I am not talking about the ungodly, but about the Christian—I would say that either one of two things is true. Either you are not a Christian, or you are way low in your spiritual life. Oh! The Heidelberg Catechism expresses a deep truth when it answers to that question, no, we cannot keep the law perfectly.

But there is still more. The catechism says that not only can we not keep the law perfectly, but we have only a small beginning of this obedience. Nay, there is still one more step. The catechism expresses it still stronger when it says that even the holiest have but a small beginning of this obedience. Even the holiest have but a small beginning before the Lord who is a spirit and who searches the heart. It is not a question of what we do outwardly. There is nothing Christian in the argument that you must not take a drink because it is bad for you. A cow will not drink anything if it knows that it is bad for her. There is nothing Christian in not drinking because it is bad for you. There is nothing Christian in not smoking because it is bad for you. It is not a question of smoking. The Lord does not care if you smoke or not. But the question is; if the Lord goes down to the very root, if He goes down to the heart, He does not find this obedience. Do you never in your heart clench your fist against your brother? Have you never in your heart had an eye full of adultery? If you say no, you are a liar. It is not true. The catechism says that even the most holy have but a small beginning of this obedience.

If you please, the true Christian in his own estimation becomes very far from perfect. He is not a perfectionist. Perfectionism is simply a superficial conception of the sinful nature of man. Perfectionism, as you hear it in the testimony given on the street corner, is nothing but a superficial conception of sin. If you listen to the testimony on the street corner, what do you hear? You hear this testimony: "I used to be an awful drunkard, but not anymore, I have been saved from the awful life I used to lead." But if this is all there is to the Christian life, this tenth commandment would not have to be written. But that is not so. Perfectionism is superficial. The Christian that begins to know himself will not begin to think of perfectionism.

What does it mean that even the most holy have but a small beginning? What does the Apostle mean when he says in Romans 7: "*I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law*

in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members?" Does he mean that a Christian is a dual person? No, the Christian is one. He is one soul, one heart, one mind. But if he is not two persons, what then? Is it so that there are some in the Church who are very holy, and others who are less holy, and still others who are only a little holy? Is it so that there is a ladder of holiness? No, that would be a contradiction. What then? If the Christian is not a sinner and a saint at the same time, if he is not a sinner with a small beginning of perfection, what then? He is a sinful saint. In his deepest soul, the Christian is not a sinner. In his deepest soul he is holy; he is a regenerated, reborn child of the living God. In principle, in his deepest heart, the Christian is a saint, not a sinner. He is born of God. And mark you, even when in answer to the question, "Canst thou perfectly keep these commandments," he says, "no," that, "no," is principally a "yes."

There is, however, in the Christian, (who is in his deepest heart a saint,) that old sinful nature, and in that nature sin has left its ruts. This old human nature of ours is six thousand years old. In that old nature, sin has reigned for six thousand years. And sin has left its grooves, and ruts, and inroads upon that old nature. It is not so that there are grooves and ruts upon this old nature because of what we have done personally. There were grooves and ruts in that old nature when we received it at birth. They were there in our infancy. Sin left its impressions upon that old nature. And we carry that old nature with its ruts with us to the grave. And frequently the Christian gets into these old ruts. The Apostle calls that the law of sin which is in his members. It is no more the engine. The engine has changed. But there are ruts, and the Christian is inclined to follow these ruts. But when he goes into these ruts, he says, no. His "no" has become a "yes." And he fights and strives to go in the right direction.

It is not so that the Christian is not a dual person. He is not a sinner with a small beginning of perfection, but he is a sinful saint. And that is true of the most holy. Even the most holy have but a small beginning. That does not mean that the holiest have a small beginning, and that the others have still a smaller beginning. But the meaning is that all have but a small beginning, no matter how holy they are. Regeneration does not mean perfection. And sanctification does not mean that we gradually lose our old nature. But this is the case: the ruts remain until the end. And they remain just as deep to the end. Sanctification does not mean that gradually we improve, but sanctification does mean, as the catechism has it, that I see more and more the ruts. Where formerly I walked in these ruts, I now see them more and more as ruts.

In other words, regeneration means that this old nature of mine is united with Christ. And being united with Christ, we have a principle of new life in that old nature. When we are united with Christ, we do not lose our old nature, but that old nature is united with Christ. And Christ takes His seat in the very center of that old nature and creates within it a new principle of life. We do not lose our old nature. We keep our old nature unto the grave. And we do not receive a new nature. Sanctification consists in this, that the new principle of life within us gains control, and it reveals itself as victor over our old nature, so that, although the old nature remains with us, we nevertheless walk worthy of the calling wherewith we have been called. Sanctification means that the new power within us gains more and more control, so that the old nature is more and more pushed in the background. Where formerly, it had a place upstairs, it is now forced down into the cellar. So that if you ask the question: can the Christian keep the law of God perfectly, the answer is first of all, no, for he carries his old nature with him, and he has but a small beginning of the new life. In the second place, the catechism does not say that the Christian has but a small beginning in the sense of the beginning of a road, but in the sense of a principle, a root. He carries within him the root, the principle of this new obedience.

The fact that the Christian cannot keep the law perfectly, is not an excuse to walk in sin. Some people do that. That say we cannot keep the law perfectly anyway, so what is the use of trying. Let us sin that grace may abound. But that the Christian cannot keep the law is not excuse to walk in sin. For the catechism adds that the Christian has but a small beginning, root, principle of this obedience; yet so

that with sincere resolution, he begins to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God. Is that so? Is that so in your heart? No, not in perfection, but perfect in principle. Do you find in your heart the desire to be pleasing to God with respect to every one of His commandments? Don't answer too quick. Do you find that when sin stares you in the face, you hate it? And do you find that in that respect you increase in spiritual sensitiveness? So that what formerly was no sin for you, has now become sin, and you hate it? That is the Christian with the small beginning of the new obedience.

3. A Blessed Fruit

And furthermore, that is why the fruit of preaching of the law is that there comes a deeper sense of sin. It serves to make us more sensitive to see our sinful condition.

And if that were all, it would be well worth while. If there is one thing that characterizes our superficial age, it is this, that there is no sense of sin. We so often paint the handle, but overlook the corruptness of the pump. And the preaching of the law serves to uncover the sin and darkness within our corrupt nature. That is a good fruit. Don't be afraid of it. It is a good fruit to have our sin uncovered, so that we see it.

The fruit of meditating on the law is that there comes a deeper sense of sin, and as the sense of sin deepens, this also deepens, that we come with nothing but the righteousness of Christ. Meditating upon the law of God causes us to leave our own righteousness behind, and to come with the righteousness of Christ. That is the second fruit. The second fruit of the preaching of the law is not to drive us to despair, but to teach us to more earnestly seek refuge in Christ. Not once, or twice, but every day, humbling ourselves before God, and seeking remission of sin in the blood of Christ. That is the fruit of the preaching of the law for the Christian.

In the third place, realizing our sins, and being sorry for it, and realizing that we cannot reform ourselves, the result will be in the Church, that by earnest prayer, by which the soul is opened to grace, we strive for sanctification. It will be our daily prayer that Christ will, by the Spirit of grace, more and more make us conform to His image.

And finally, the fruit will be that we begin to long for perfection. The fruit of meditating on the law will be that we long for the time when we shall be perfectly delivered from the old nature, from the old ruts. Realizing that no matter how we strive, we carry the body of this death with us, the preaching of the law has this fruit, that it causes us to look forward to the day when we shall be perfectly delivered from all sin and corruption, and shall serve God in perfection. So that the conclusion is that of the Apostle in Romans 7: O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

True Prayer

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.116. Why is prayer necessary for Christians?

A. Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us: and also, because God will give his grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desires continually ask them of him, and are thankful for them.

Q.117. What are the requisites of that prayer, which is acceptable to God, and which he will hear?

A. First, that we from the heart pray to the one true God only, who hath manifested himself in his word, for all things, he hath commanded us to ask of him; secondly, that we rightly and thoroughly know our need and misery, that so we may deeply humble ourselves in the presence of his divine majesty; thirdly, that we be fully persuaded that he, notwithstanding that we are unworthy of it, will, for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer, as he has promised us in his word.

Q.118. What hath God commanded us to ask of him?

A. All things necessary for soul and body; which Christ our Lord has comprised in that prayer he himself has taught us.

Q. 119. What are the words of that prayer?

A. Our Father...

The subject of prayer is of course a very practical subject. If prayer is the chief part of thankfulness, that is, if it is the greatest good work we can possibly accomplish, we must be very practical when we discuss the subject of prayer. If it is true that we receive nothing of God's grace and Holy Spirit unless we pray for them, then prayer is necessarily a very practical subject. The catechism says: God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desires, continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them. Practical is the subject of prayer, if on the other hand it is true that if we ask, we receive. For the Lord says in Matthew 7:7, "if you ask you shall receive, if you seek you shall find, if you knock it shall be opened unto you." If these things be true, we will understand that the subject of prayer is a very practical subject.

But it is also an extremely difficult thing upon which we are to concentrate our attention. It is extremely difficult for us to pray, and it is extremely difficult for us to understand what real prayer is. For prayer is not a science, but an art. And as is always the case, in art there are many amateurs, and the amateur always insists that he is the real artist. That is also true with regard to the spiritual art of prayer. But that is not the only reason why real prayer is so difficult. For we are all beginners in the spiritual art of prayer.

We have just confessed in the previous Lord's Day that we have but a small beginning of the obedience which is required of us in God's law. How much more is this true with regard to this chief part of the thankfulness of the Christian. And this is also true in art that when we are just beginning, we think that we are it. Later on, we see how miserably poor those first beginnings were. That is also true of the Christian as he develops spiritually. With regard to the subject of prayer, as the Christian grows and looks back as to how he used to pray, and what he used to pray for, he sees how miserably poor his prayers really were. And because it is so difficult to really pray, we can benefit by the instruction of our catechism with regard to the subject of prayer. And in Lord's Day 45, we have the introduction to what constitutes real, true prayer.

Theme: True prayer

1. What It Is
2. How it ought to be
3. For what it asks

1. What It Is

You will notice that the catechism characterizes true prayer as the chief part of thankfulness. It looks upon prayer as the climax of our good works. In our humanistic, pragmatic world and age, it seems rather strange that the catechism finds the climax of our good works and thankfulness in prayer, and that the highest form of thankfulness is not in deed, but in word, not in service, but in prayer.

Prayer is the highest part of thankfulness. By so characterizing prayer, the catechism reminds us of what really constitutes good works. Good works are not what and how much we do for God, for then, prayer could not be the chief part of the Christian's thankfulness. If good works were characterized by great accomplishments, then prayer could not be the chief part of thankfulness. Prayer accomplishes nothing. In prayer, we speak, we say something to God, or about Him, but we do not accomplish anything. A good work is not that we accomplish something, that we do something for God, but when we can say something of God, that is a good work. A good work is not that we come with great accomplishments, but that we taste and say that God is good. From a humanistic point of view, by which our age is characterized, this would seem rather foolish. The world today wants action, not words. Service, is the slogan of the day. And it is a slogan which is frequently applied to the living God. But when the child of God places himself before the face of God, the relation becomes different. The child of God understands that God is self-sufficient, and that he can do nothing for God. He knows that it is an abomination to the Lord to say that we are doing something for Him. Therefore the highest part of gratitude is in word, not in deed; in prayer, not in doing something. That is why prayer is the greatest good work and is the chief part of thankfulness. Prayer is not that we ask God for something, it is not the expression of our desire for material things. Then the subject of prayer would not fit in at the end of this last part of the catechism which deals with the chief part of gratitude. Then it should be placed at the beginning, and not at the end. As long as we conceive of prayer as the expression of our desire for material things, it does not fit in this last part of the catechism as the chief part of thankfulness. If we look upon prayer as the expression of our desires, how can it be the chief part of thankfulness? Or if prayer is something that the natural man can at least do, how can it be the chief part of thankfulness? You hear that sometimes. You bring the truth to the natural man, and he will not hear the truth. He will say to you, I cannot do anything to my salvation anyway. And you keep still, for that is true. But if you are not on your guard, you will say to him, you can at least pray. If that is prayer, then we must put it at the beginning, not at the end of this last part of the catechism, as the chief part of thankfulness. Then it must precede all else. But the catechism puts it at the end.

Why is that? All prayer is not the same. Scripture uses many terms to express real prayer. It speaks of prayer as we do. Meaning that we express our needs. It speaks of supplication, meaning that the feeling of our deep need, we draw nigh unto God with supplication. It speaks of groanings and crying. Out of the depth I cry unto thee. That is prayer in a condition of oppression. It speaks, on the other hand, of the pure worship of God. Worship is a form of prayer. To bow down before God, to adore Him, to worship Him, is a form of prayer. So scripture speaks of praise, etc. All these different terms express the one idea of prayer. They express the one idea of prayer as it manifests itself in different conditions and circumstances. And if we take all these different terms and these different connotations together, we find that real prayer is that, on the one hand, we acknowledge that God is God, that He is good, and

that He is the sole fountain of all goodness, and on the other hand, we express in all real prayer, that we feel the need of Him. That is prayer. That is the essence of it all.

The expression that God is good and that we want Him, that is the essence of all true prayer. If you please, the turning of the soul to the fountain of living waters, to drink out of Him, and after drinking out of Him, to give thanks and to say, it was good to drink out of that fountain of living waters, that is prayer. Any prayer, in which he that prays does not want the living God, is not prayer. It is imitation and is corrupt. That is why scripture emphasizes that God is far from the prayer of the wicked.

That must be emphasized at all times, but especially in our day. We have heard and seen so much of that imitation prayer of the wicked, with respect to the conditions in which, by the hand of God, we are walking, that the danger is real that we adopt the carnal conception of the world concerning prayer. Then we cannot understand that prayer is the chief part of thankfulness. Real prayer is the turning of the soul to the living God in acknowledgment that He is good and that we feel the need of Him. All prayer that does not have that principle in it, is imitation. I do not hesitate to say that all prayer that does not have that principle in it, is no prayer.

The catechism asks the question, why prayer is necessary. We must know that God is not a God of the hour. He does not fix things from moment to moment, in an arbitrary way. The Lord has fixed all things in His eternal counsel. Why then is prayer necessary? Is it necessary to inform the Lord of our needs? Jesus answers that question when He says: Your Father knoweth what things you have need of, before you ask. We need not assume that attitude. The Lord knows what we have need of without us telling Him. It is not necessary to let God know about our needs. Is prayer necessary then to persuade God to give us what we like? That attitude is often assumed. The attitude is often assumed that by our prayers, we must persuade God to give us the things we would like to have. That attitude is quite generally assumed in our day. It is said that God will give us all that we stand in need of, if we only pray for them, and keep on praying, and with our prayers, persuade the Lord to give them.

But it is not necessary to persuade our God. For He not only knows all our needs, but He has from eternity determined to give us all things necessary, nay, to make us heirs of eternal life with Christ. Therefore prayer is not necessary to persuade God. From that point of view, prayer might even be harmful, for God is not man. As I said, He is not a God of the hour. When we appear before God, we do not appear in a sort of an office and lay our needs before Him, and then God says, I will consider it. God is God, and there is never a thing you need that He has not determined that you should have it. All has been determined. There is nothing uncertain about it. And He has not only fixed all things, but the way in which He fixed them is the best way. We can never by our prayer improve upon it. But the trouble is, that would not be prayer. Prayer is not a means by which we prevail on the Lord to give us something. The necessity of prayer is not to change the fixed determination of the Lord.

Prayer is the highest part of gratitude. As the catechism expresses it, we must pray because God wills it. If you ask the question why is it necessary to pray, the answer is, because God wants His children to receive, consciously, all the fullness of His grace. God gives a tree all that it needs, but the tree does not know it. He gives the animal all that it stands in need of, but the animal is not conscious of it. It is true, the ravens cry to God for meat, but not in the sense that the children of God pray to Him. But He wants His people to be His covenant people, and to be conscious of it. Prayer is to the Christian, what our breath is to our natural life. It is God's will that we should breathe to live. That is not something arbitrary. That is God's ordinance. And even as it is God's ordinance that we should breathe to live, so it is His ordinance that the Christian should pray to live as a Christian. The Christian must pray to live.

Prayer, in its deepest sense, is the expression by which we acknowledge God as God. That is why prayer is the highest part of gratitude. The heart of prayer is always that God is God. That is what glorifies Him. Just as the deepest principle of unthankfulness is that God is not God, so the deepest

principle of prayer is that God is God. Acknowledging that God is God, and that He is the fountain of all good things, is the heart of the prayer of the Christian. Then we can understand that that other element of true prayer fits in, namely, that it is the key to the treasures of God's grace. The catechism says: God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them. What does that mean? Does that mean that we must first pray before God will give us the blessings of His grace and Holy Spirit? Does it mean that we must pray first, before God will give us regeneration, and faith, and repentance, and righteousness? Of course not. If that were the case, then we would never be regenerated, we would never come to repentance, we would never believe. The unregenerated man does not pray, least of all, for regeneration. If that were the case, no one would receive the Spirit of Grace.

But the catechism is speaking to the Christian, not to the natural man. And God has so connected His children with Christ that they must continually live out of Him. That is why they must have grace every day. And the catechism means to say that the Christian, in his daily consciousness, as he needs grace, as he needs forgiveness, and righteousness, and sanctification, and as he needs these continually, must turn to the living God in prayer, in order that the soul may be opened to consciously receive that grace. God has so willed it, that he should receive that grace consciously, and consciously live out of Him. The Christian needs grace continually, for grace is not something that we can run away with, but must flow to us constantly. We cannot shut grace up in our heart, but need the living God, in order to receive His grace. Therefore the catechism means to say, you must stand in a constant receptive attitude to God. That receptivity is not ours. Prayer is not ours. He creates that receptivity in us. But nevertheless, that receptivity is indispensable for God to give His grace and Spirit. God opens the mouth, and He fills it. But for that reason, in order to receive that grace in his consciousness, the Christian must stand in a constant receptive attitude to God.

2. How it ought to be

So we understand that if prayer is that gift of God to His child, by which His child turns to Him, to eat and drink out of Him, and then to be thankful and say that it was good to eat and drink out of Him, we understand that prayer is not everybody's work. Prayer is a delicate work. That is why the catechism mentions certain things by which our prayers must be characterized.

The first characteristic is, that we from the heart pray to the one true God only. We would say it is foolish for the catechism to remind us that we must pray to the true God. Do we pray to an idol? Is there danger that we pray to an idol, so that it is necessary to remind us that we pray only to the true God? Yes, there is. We must pray to the true God. Who is the true God? He is the living God. He is the God from whom, if He should suddenly appear before us, we would all run away. He is the living God, before whom the seraphim cover their faces and say: holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. To that living God we must pray.

Don't you see then, that as far as we are concerned, we are inclined to pray to an idol? We must pray to the living God, who knows what we are going to ask of Him before we open our mouth. Prayer is not that we give God information concerning our needs. God knows our needs better than we do. Is it not true then that we often pray to idols? We must pray to the living God, who does His will, not ours. Our prayers do not influence God. But is it not true then, that we often have in our mind an idol, instead of the living God? We must, from the heart, pray to the one true God.

That means that in prayer, we must assume an attitude in which the whole man is occupied. Prayer is an act of the whole soul, of the mind, the will, the heart, expressing itself even in the body. That is why we like to assume a certain attitude in prayer. In the folding of our hands, which is but an act of the body, we mean to express our helplessness. That is why we close our eyes in prayer, by which we express that we want to be busy with God and want to exclude all other things. That is why we like to

assume a kneeling position, thereby expressing humility. But that is merely an attitude we assume with the body. But in prayer, the whole soul is occupied. In prayer, the mind is occupied. The catechism says that we must pray to the true God and not to an idol. It is possible to pray to an idol. That is why the mind must be occupied in prayer, and we must know God in order that we do not pray to a mental idol. When we address God as if He were our next door neighbor, it is not prayer, but blasphemy. Therefore in true prayer, the mind must be busy until it has found the true God. Much of objectionable prayer is due to lack of knowledge concerning God.

In the second place, we must pray in humility. That means that we do not appear before the Lord with anything of self. Our attitude should be, Lord thou art all, I am nothing. That is why the Christian must pray in the name of Christ. That does not simply mean, upon authority of Christ. He must pray as a member of His body.

And in the third place, the catechism says that real prayer must be characterized by a true sense of our needs. That is undoubtedly where we go wrong most often. We do not know our needs. There are two reasons why we do not know our needs. The first reason is a carnal one. I have a child that is sick, and the first impression is, that my need is that that child recover. I have no work, and I think my need is that I must have work. In other words, from a carnal point of view, I think my need is that which is right before my nose. That is not so. Our need is that we may have eternal life in the knowledge of the living God. That is our chief need. All other things are connected with that one need, and must serve us in obtaining that one need. If I am out driving in my automobile, and I come before two roads, the one paved and the other a muddy road, I am inclined to take the paved road. But the muddy road leads to my destination. Is then not that muddy road my real need? Of course it is. We are so carnal. We grab what is immediately before our nose. But that is not our need. Our need is that we may have the living God, that we may have eternal life, that we may have heavenly glory. But there is another reason that is not carnal why we do not know our needs. That is that we do not know what is coming. We do not know the details of God's counsel. We do not know the details of God's will concerning me.

3. For What It Asks

That is why we must be careful, as far as the details of our prayers are concerned. The Christian must pray for the proper things. True prayer is always heard. That is why the catechism says that we must consult the word of God with regard to our prayers. We do not know what is pleasing to God. We must not pray for the details of life. We do not know what is best for us. We do not know whether it is best for us to die tonight, or to continue to live. We do not know what is best, to have health and strength, or to be sick. There is one prayer that Paul prayed for fourteen years, and the only answer he received at the end of these fourteen years was: My grace is sufficient. Frequently, we must learn to bow before the Lord at the end of our prayer and say: Thy grace is sufficient. But the more we consult the word of God with regard to the contents of our prayers, the more we will leave out the details and say: Thy will be done. there is a whole sphere of things to which we must say: Thy will be done.

In the second place, there are things for which we must never pray. We must never pray for the fulfillment of our carnal lusts, to get ahead in the world, etc. Instead of praying for these things, we must fight until we do not pray for them anymore. In the third place, there are things for which we are told to pray. When Jesus says, "*Ask and it shall be given unto you,*" He does not mean that if you have a broken leg that if you ask, your leg will be healed. He does not mean that anything you might desire will be given unto you, if you only ask for it. But it means that the Lord is the giver of all good gifts. And there is not a good thing, but if you ask for it, He will give it. There are many foolish things that we ask for, but the Lord does not give them to us. But every good gift He gives abundantly.

That is why Jesus gave us the Lord's Prayer. This prayer has been called the most perfect prayer. And it has been called such in the first place, because it is the most simple and most complete prayer. It

is the most comprehensive, and yet the most simple prayer. And the Lord has given it to us in order, not that we should mechanically repeat it, but that it should serve us as guide for our prayers. Did you ever notice that in the Lord's Prayer, there are no details at all? Except for one little detail which concerns that which we need immediately, namely our daily bread. But for that, there are no details in the Lord's Prayer at all. If we are hungry, we may pray for bread. Not for prosperity, but we may pray for the need that is immediately before us.

Notice the contents of the Lord's Prayer. Hallowed be thy name. No details there. Let thy name be hallowed, no matter what may come. Thy kingdom come. Not details. That prayer may mean, give us depression. Ultimately it means a prayer for the destruction of the whole world. And then, the only detail in the whole prayer: give us this day our daily bread. And even there, there are no details.

When we can pray the Lord's Prayer in all its implications, then we have perfected the art of prayer. In that light, must we not confess that we have but a small beginning? Must we then not end with a prayer for prayer? We must learn to pray. And we must fight to pray. We must not pray simply when we feel like it, As we only have a small beginning of the obedience with regard to God's law, so also we have only a small beginning with regard to true prayer. There is so much in which we can get along without God, so that we must not only pray to fight, but we must also fight to pray. Sometimes we get along without prayer for days. Oh, we pray at meal time, a good old custom, but we sometimes go along for days without pouring out our soul before God. We must pray to fight, and fight to pray. And as we learn to pray, we learn the meaning of what the Lord says: ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. Let us ever turn to the living waters and be satisfied, and acknowledge that the Lord is good.

Addressing the Father

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.120. Why hath Christ commanded us to address God thus: "Our Father"?

A. That immediately, in the very beginning of our prayer, he might excite in us a childlike reverence for, and confidence in God, which are the foundation of our prayer: namely, that God is become our Father in Christ, and will much less deny us what we ask of him in true faith, than our parents will refuse us earthly things.

Q.121. Whu is it here added, "Whuch art in heaven"?

A. Lest we should form any earthly conceptions of God's heavenly majesty, and that we may expect, from his almighty power all things necessary for soul and body.

The Lord's Prayer consists of an address, six petitions which may easily be distinguished into two groups of three each, and of a close in the form of a doxology or song of praise. It is to this address of the Lord's Prayer that our attention is called this morning.

We must remember that in explaining the Lord's Prayer, we must explain the various ideas contained in it, from the point of view of prayer. The question is not, what is the meaning of these various expressions? But the question is, What is the state of heart and mind required in order to pray this prayer? Therefore we do not intend to enter into any detailed, dogmatic discussion of all the ideas found in this prayer. We might do so. In this prayer, we find the idea of fatherhood, of heaven, of the kingdom of heaven, etc. And of course, we might enter into all these ideas and ask, What is the meaning of them? Yet that would cause us to miss the purpose for which the Lord taught us this prayer. The purpose of this prayer is to teach us the true spiritual attitude of heart and mind, which is necessary to assume in our prayers.

It is not as if we must entirely ignore and be indifferent as to the contents of this prayer. Not as if a discussion of the doctrine contained in this prayer would not be beneficial in teaching us how to pray. There are many who mechanically repeat this most perfect prayer, who if you would ask him, with regard to each of the petitions contained in this prayer, what he had been praying for, would not be able to answer a single question. And therefore there is room for the development also from that point of view. But the purpose of the discussion of the Lord's Prayer is not to instruct us as to the things mentioned in this prayer so that we may know what we are praying for. Rather that is presupposed. The catechism has instructed the Church with regard to these things in the previous Lord's Days. It spoke of the Fatherhood of God, etc. And the Lord's Prayer forms the climax of this discussion. Therefore we must proceed from such questions as the following. What is the spiritual attitude of the heart and mind that is required, in order for me to express these petitions? When I say, "Our Father which art in heaven," am I sincere? When I ask that God's name be hallowed, do I mean it? When I pray, "Thy kingdom come," is it my earnest desire that that kingdom come?

Prayer is the opening of the soul to God, acknowledging that He is the fountain of all spiritual good, and the desire to drink from that fountain. That is the purpose of the discussion of the Lord's Prayer. The purpose is to teach us the spiritual attitude which we must assume in our prayers. So it is with this address. This address is not merely a form, an expression of politeness. But it is the expression of what lives in the heart and mind of God's people when they pray. This address is the expression of that state of heart and mind in which we say: Our Father. When we pray, it is essential that we draw nigh unto God, not that He come down to us. Prayer is not an attempt to change God according to our desires, but

that our desires should be blended according to His will. We must come to God. In our address, we express that we come to Him, that we stand on His threshold, and standing on His threshold, we express what lives in our heart and mind concerning Him.

That does not mean that we always use these same words. Nor does it mean that when we use these words, that then the rest of our prayer will be in harmony with the will of God. But it does mean this, that when the Lord says, "after this manner pray you," that we pray in that state of heart and mind in which we can say: Our Father which art in heaven. That is the essential teaching of Christ when He says: after this manner, you must pray. Now what is the state of heart and mind that is presupposed in order to say: Our Father which art in heaven?

Then, if we look at this address carefully, we find that it contains especially three elements. In the first place, this address teaches us that all prayer must proceed from a sense of holy reverence. In the second place, that there must be a sense of love, both in the sense that we love and that we are loved. And in the third place, there must be a sense of childlike confidence, in the sense that we trust that God will grant exactly what we pray. If any of these elements are lacking, we cannot say: Our Father which art in heaven. And if any of these elements are lacking, there is something wrong with the state of our heart and mind, or with the contents of our prayer.

Theme: Addressing the Father

1. A Sense of Holy Reverence
2. A Sense of Love
3. A Sense of Childlike Confidence

1. A Sense of Holy Reverence

First of all then, this address teaches us that our prayers must proceed from a sense of holy reverence. It can also be expressed thus, that our prayers must proceed from the sense that God is God.

We must pray in the sense of what is expressed by Christ when He says: Our Father which art in heaven. Notice that the Lord, in teaching us this prayer, is very simple in His address to God. He simply says, "*Our Father*," and He uses that name only once. Never again in this whole prayer is the name of God mentioned, which does not mean that we may never use any other name of God besides the name, Father. Nor does it mean that we may only use God's name once in our prayers. But it does mean that in the name, Father, is expressed the indispensable attitude of the heart and mind in prayer. Even if we use another name, we must use it in the attitude expressed in the expression: Our Father.

In the second place, it teaches us that we must not use the name of God in vain in our prayers. We must not use the name of God to fill in our prayers. This is frequently done. The Lord says, "*Our Father*," and He never uses that name again in all this prayer. The Lord says, "*Our Father which art in heaven*." We must pray to God who is in heaven. We cannot say that we must pray to God who is everywhere. Much less can we say that we must pray to God who is on earth. We must pray to our Father which is in heaven. And the reason is not that God is not everywhere. He is everywhere. God is omnipresent. He is omnipresent as to His being. And He is omnipresent as to His power. The catechism says that the expression, "*which art in heaven*," is added to teach us His heavenly majesty and almighty power. Now undoubtedly that is true. But it is not the entire truth. God is omnipresent, yet we feel that we cannot say in our prayers: our Father who is everywhere. For that is true of all beings. That in itself is no religion. That is even true of the devil. From that point of view, the devil must also say: in Him I live, move, and have my being. That is God's omnipresence. But God's omnipresence is providential, and that cannot be the cause of prayer. In prayer, we do not seek God's providential power. In prayer, we seek

God's fellowship. In prayer, we do not seek God's being; we do not seek to touch God's power. In prayer we seek God's face. And God's face, in the highest covenant sense, according to scripture, is in heaven.

God is in heaven in a sense in which He is not elsewhere. And if you ask in what sense God is present in heaven, scripture answers, that in heaven is God's face. And God's face is His person. When we address a person, we do not look at his feet, or hands, but we look for his face. Preferably, we look for his eyes. We want to address the person, and the person is expressed in the eyes, in the face. Now God's face is in heaven. God's face is not on earth. We do not see God's face on earth. God's being, we never see. We do see His face, but not here on earth. What we see here is a reflection of God's face. That is also true of our Bible. In the Bible, we have a reflection of God's face. The angels see God's face. God's face is in heaven. In heaven is the highest revelation of God.

What we have here on earth is but the circumference. The center of God's revelation, His face, is in heaven. There is His throne, not here. There is Christ, not here. There is the inner sanctuary, not here. Now when we pray, we cannot say: "Our Father which art everywhere." That is providence. Nor can we say: our Father which is on the earth. For in prayer, we are seeking His face. And if I seek God's face, I enter into the inner sanctuary, and standing on the threshold of the sanctuary of God, we say, "*Our Father which art in heaven.*" You see when we pray, we draw near to God. What does that mean? What does it mean if we really pray? We often pray without being conscious of the fact that we are drawing near to God.

Now how is it possible to draw near to God? We cannot go to heaven. We cannot see His face. We are far removed from that central revelation of God. How then can we draw near to God? The answer is, of course, that I do not draw near to God with my being, with my presence, but in my heart. But how can I draw near to God in my heart? And the answer is that I have a conception of God. I have a conception of God in my mind. I know Him. And that conception that I have of God, is not a conception that I have formed myself. It is a conception that He has given me. It is a conception that is based on His own revelation. And as I have a conception of God that is based on His own revelation—a conception of Him as He really is—my heart yearns after God as I know Him. There is spiritual action in true prayer. That is why the catechism tells us that we must not form an earthly conception of God when we pray. When we approach God in prayer, we must approach the true God, and to approach the true God, we must have a true conception of Him. We must not have an earthly conception of Him. And for that reason, we must not conceive of God as one who my prayers must influence. I must not conceive of God as one who I must change. I must not conceive of God as one who I must inform as to my needs. I must not conceive of God as one to whom I must pray to awaken His mercy. The moment I do, I do not approach God. Then I approach one that is like me. And it is because there is no conception of God that there is so much that is wrongly called prayer. I must pray to the true God who is glorious, infinite, exalted highly above us, the God who is in heaven.

The expression, "*Our Father which art in heaven,*" limits the rest of prayer. I must pray to the glorious, infinite, exalted God, who is glorious in all His attributes. I stand on the threshold of His sanctuary. That is why prayer is so difficult. As long as we have no conception of God, it is easy to pray. That is why it is said that we can have prayer in public institutions. That is why people say that we can have the Bible in the public schools and pray the Lord's Prayer. That is because there is not conception of God. As long as you conceive of God on earth, as long as you have an earthly conception of God, you can make up a list and say, "Lord, please give me health, and strength, and prosperity, etc." But that list is not sent to our Father which is in heaven. But the moment I say, "*Our Father which art in heaven,*" I stand on the threshold of the sanctuary of that God, before whom I must be filled with holy reverence, and before whom I ought to tremble. When I say, "*Our Father which art in heaven,*" I stand before the God from whom we would all flee, if He should suddenly appear before us. How then is it possible to draw near to God? That is only possible if we do not fear. If we fear, we cannot enter into God's

sanctuary. If we fear, we will run away.

But how then is it possible that we do not fear? Do we not fear before that God? I stand before God who knows me. And I am going to unburden my heart before Him. I come to Him with my needs, my sins, my corruption, and I ask Him to rivet His attention upon me. And then not fear? How is that possible?

2. A Sense of Love

There is no fear in love. And therefore if I am to enter into God's sanctuary, I must know that He loves me. I must be able to say: "My Father."

God is not our Father in the sense that He created us. That is not the Fatherhood of God in scripture. The idea of a universal fatherhood of God is foolish. In a philosophical sense, we can speak of the fatherhood of God as our creator. He is the Father of all in the sense that He is the origin of all things. But remember, when you speak of the fatherhood of God as creator, and of the universal brotherhood of man, you must include the devil also. When you speak of the fatherhood of God, in the sense that He is creator, you must include the devil and his entire host. But that is not the fatherhood of God in scripture.

God's fatherhood is spiritual-ethical fatherhood. It is an exclusive, particular fatherhood in Christ Jesus. By nature, I am not a child of God, but of the devil. So that there is in that fatherhood of God, in the first place, the confession that I know that thou lovest me. Not because of what I am in myself. No, but I appear before Him and say, I know that thou lovest me, because I look at thee in the face of Christ. So that approaching God in the sense that He loves us, we say that we love Him. We cannot approach God if we hate Him. When we say, "*Our Father which art in heaven,*" we say to God, just as thou art, I love thee. So that the expression of this address does not mean that we have no sin. Then we could never approach God. But it does mean that we approach God in the sense of hatred of sin, and of fleeing from it. And finally, this address presupposes too, that we love the brethren. The Lord says: Our Father. He is our Father. If I do not love the brethren, I do not love God. The Lord places this prayer on the lips of His disciples, of His Church. And therefore that, "*Our,*" means, not all men, but, all of God's people. That makes things very delicate.

That makes it very difficult to pray. It is difficult to say: Our Father which art in heaven. And you can imagine that there are some people that leave it out. They say that it is the height of perfection to say: Our Father which art in heaven. And therefore, they leave it out. But that is a bigger mistake. To say, "*Our Father which art in heaven,*" does mean that there is a sense of reverence, and a sense of love, and a sense of confidence. And there is no question but that you cannot pray the rest of this, if you cannot say: "*Our Father which art in heaven.*"

Some people say that we cannot always come to God and say: "*Our Father.*" It means something to say this. Our Father, notice the plural. Every time we say, "*Our Father,*" we profess that with all God's children, we are His heirs. That is implied in the expression, "*Our Father.*" The expression, "*Our Father,*" implies a relation of rights. A child has rights over against his father. He is his heir and has a right to the inheritance. So the child of God has rights which are given by grace. By nature, we have no rights. By nature, we have but one right, and that is a negative one. By nature, we have only the right to be damned, so that there is only one possibility for God to be our Father, and that is based on the work of Christ. Therefore it is blasphemy to imagine that the Lord's Prayer can be prayed by anyone, and anywhere. That "*Our,*" in, "*Our Father,*" means, "we brethren in Christ." By saying, "*Our Father,*" we profess that we are His heirs.

In the second place, every time we say it, we profess that with all God's children, we are His likeness. That is also implied in the expression. The expression, "*Our Father,*" implies a relation of

likeness, of similarity to Christ. It is not a relation of likeness outside of Christ. Ungodliness does not look like holiness, but is its antithesis. Unrighteousness does not look like righteousness, but is its opposite. And by nature, we are unholy and unrighteous. Also in that respect, there is no universal fatherhood of God. By saying, "Our Father," we profess that we are His likeness.

In the third place, every time we use this expression, we say that with all the saints that we are assured of His love. That is also implied in the expression. The expression, "*Our Father*," implies a relation of love. In this respect, the love of God finding response in the love which He has kindled in our hearts. Also in this respect, the fatherhood of God is not universal. By nature, we do not love God, but are His enemies. And on the other hand, God cannot love the wicked. God cannot love anyone as he is in himself. There is only one way in which God can love anyone, and that is in Christ Jesus. It is simply nonsense that God hates the sin of anyone, but loves the sinner, as is often said. Certainly God hates the sin of His children, and still loves them, but He does so in Christ Jesus. He hates the sin of His children, and that is why He cleanses them. But He hates the wicked outside of Christ, and curses them. By saying, "*Our Father*," we profess that He loves us. By saying, "*Our Father*," we profess that we are God's heirs, that we are His likeness, and that we are assured of His love. And therefore some people say that we cannot always use the expression, "Our Father." And we say, no, but we say this first. There is truth in the remark that we cannot always say, "Our Father." How often do we use this expression as we ought? Sin cleaves unto us.

In turn, if there are times when we cannot say, "*Our Father*," then we cannot pray at all. If those people who say we cannot say, "*Our Father*," are right, then they must go a step farther and say, we cannot pray at all. There is only one condition in which we can expect anything from God, and that is when He is our Father. And if there is something which makes it impossible for us to say, "*Our Father*," then we must remove it, and get it out of the way.

3. A Sense of Childlike Confidence

So we see that confidence is the key note of prayer. We cannot pray, except in the confidence that He is our Father. We can use another name, but we must do so in the spiritual attitude of heart and mind expressed in the name, "*Our Father*." Why? Because while all other names of God express some relation, the name, "*Father*," expresses the relation we must be conscious of, in order to be able to pray. We can begin our prayer with, "God Almighty," and have nothing. God Almighty may damn me just as well as bless me. I can use other names and have nothing to build my prayer on.

In order to pray, I must assume an attitude of confidence. What is confidence? Confidence is the knowledge that someone is willing and able to help me. Confidence is the knowledge that God loves me. That confidence is expressed in this address: "*Our Father which art in heaven*". On that, I can build my prayer. So that confidence is the key note of prayer. When I pray, I must have the assurance that God will give me what I ask. I must have the assurance that God is able to give me what I ask.

Now, don't say, that is easy, for God can do anything. That is not so. God cannot do anything contrary to His will. And if you have confidence that God will give you what you ask, it means that you have confidence that your prayer is according to His will. We must be able to say: Our Father which art in heaven. That shuts off many carnal prayers. That shuts off the prayer for prosperity. We may ask for daily bread, but not for prosperity. All prayer for carnal things is shut off. And all prayer for spiritual things, in a carnal way, is shut off. You cannot pray, "Forgive me my sins," when you hate the brother. Then that, "our," is hypocrisy. This address of the Lord's Prayer is so simple, and yet so comprehensive, that it shuts off all carnal prayer. How then can we continue to pray the rest of this prayer? Simple as a child, and impenetrable as the heavens, is this address. The natural man cannot say it.

The child of God can only say it in principle. Must we not then pray that we may be able to pray

the prayer that is introduced by this address? On the other hand, it is true that if God is our Father, then we have confidence that He will give us all things. But on the other hand, if we call God our Father, then we must walk the rest of our sojourn here in fear. And we must struggle to say: "*Our Father which art in heaven.*"

The First Petition

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.122. Which is the first petition?

A. *"Hallowed be thy name"; that is, grant us, first, rightly to know thee, and to sanctify, glorify and praise thee, in all thy works, in which thy power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy and truth, are clearly displayed; and further also, that we may so order and direct our whole lives, our thoughts, words and actions, that thy name may never be blasphemed, but rather honored and praised on our account.*

We must remember that in discussing the several petitions contained in the Lord's Prayer, we are dealing with prayer, and all these petitions must be considered from that point of view. We are not dealing with a commandment. This first petition does not read: "Thou shalt hallow My name." Neither are we dealing with doctrine. Then this first petition should read: "God's name is to be hallowed." But we are dealing with prayer, and prayer is the acknowledgment, on the part of the Christian, that God is God, and He is the fountain of all good. Furthermore, it is the approach of that Christian to that fountain to drink out of it.

Now scripture teaches that *"He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."* That last meaning, that in relation to prayer, they that come to God must believe that God will grant them exactly what they ask for. If we really pray according to the standard of Christ in the Lord's Prayer, then we have the assurance that God will grant just exactly what we ask of Him. That is also the meaning of James in the first chapter of his epistle, when he admonishes us to pray, not doubting, for he that doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed, and he must not think that he will receive anything of the Lord; a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Now to assume that attitude, or rather to be conscious of that spiritual disposition of heart and mind in which we have the assurance that God will grant us exactly what we ask of Him, two things are necessary. In the first place, that we pray, as to the contents of our prayer, according to His will. But that is not all. The second condition for the certainty that God will grant just what we ask for, is that we do not doubt that we really desire what we ask for. The first condition is that the contents of our prayer are according to God's will, and the second condition is that we really want what we ask. We most frequently go wrong on that last. We by no means always want what we ask for. The first condition, namely, that the contents of our prayer be in harmony with God's will, is certainly fulfilled in the Lord's Prayer. If the contents of our prayer is in harmony with the Lord's Prayer, then we have the assurance that our prayer is in harmony with the will of God. So that the question really is, in how far do we really want what we pray for? In how far do we really want what we ask for when we pray: *"Hallowed be thy name"*? Do we really want that? In that light we will consider this first petition.

Theme: The First Petition

1. What It Means
2. What Its Specific Application Is
3. Its Spiritual Requirement for God's People

1. What It Means

God's name is God Himself. To hallow the name of God is to hallow God Himself. To say, hallowed be thy name, or to say, hallowed be God, is for the Christian the same. Only it is God as we know Him. The Bible identifies God's name with God Himself. For instance, we read that they called upon the name of the Lord. You understand that in that expression we have the same thing as in the expression, to call upon the Lord. To call upon the name of the Lord is to call upon the Lord.

That is still more evident in other passages. For the attributes of God are directly ascribed to the name of the Lord. So we read that the name of the Lord is a strong tower. We read: "*The name of the God of Jacob defend thee.*" So that it is evident that power is ascribed to the name of God. The name of God and God are identified. So we read: "*We will overcome all our enemies in the name of the Lord.*" Therefore we read that prayer is brought to the name of the Lord. We read: "*We thank and praise thy holy name.*" In that name we are baptized. Before that name, we bow. All of which means, that in some way, scripture identifies God and His name.

God's name is God as He is known unto us. God is invisible. He is hidden from us. We cannot see Him, or touch Him, or come to Him. If we are to approach God, He must come to us. God is far above us, He is wholly other from us, so that, if we are to know Him, He must come down into our sphere. That He does in His name. God's name is His revelation of Himself, and in His revelation, God comes to us. We cannot know God unless God reveals Himself to us. That revelation of God is His name. God's name is that by which we may know Him. In that sense, the name of God is in all His works. All creation is the name of God. All creation reveals unto us the name of God. That is His self-manifestation. That name of God has been concentrated in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the name of God. In Christ, God comes to us. In Jesus we know God, and the revelation of that name of God which we have in scripture.

Now that name of God is not an abstraction. You cannot put it in a shrine and visit it once in a while, as the Mohammedans do. No, the name of God is in everything. That we must understand if we are to pray: "*Hallowed be thy name.*" That name is in everything. In all that takes place in the history of the world, and in our lives, is the name of the Lord. The name of the Lord does it all. Then that name of the Lord becomes very concrete.

That name of God is holy; for God is holy, and hence His name is holy. That God is holy and that His name is holy means that He is wholly other from us. God is alone. That is why scripture emphasizes that holiness is the attribute of God. God is separated from all sin and imperfection. And He is separated from all creatures in the sense that God is good and that He is the fountain of all goodness. God is the implication of all perfection in Himself. We are nothing in ourselves. Because God is the implication of all perfection, He is the fountain of perfection. That holiness of God is the deepest ground and the principle implication of this first petition of the Lord's Prayer. God is holy. He is the implication of all goodness and perfection, and because He is the implication of all goodness and perfection, God is exclusively consecrated to Himself with all His heart, and mind, and will, and power. With every operation of His divine virtues, He is consecrated to Himself. That is, He seeks Himself. He cannot do anything else. He is the highest good and He must be consecrated unto Himself and seek Himself as the highest good. That attribute by which God is consecrated unto Himself, and consequently separated from sin, is His holiness.

And because God's holiness is that attribute in God by which He is exclusively consecrated unto Himself, therefore He must demand that all creatures be consecrated to Him. That consecration of the creature, as an act of faith, is implied in this first petition. That is God's holiness. Now then, when the Lord teaches us to pray: "*hallowed be thy name,*" it means, "Let thy name be sanctified." And to be sanctified means to be made holy. It means, to appear and to become manifest as holy, and to be acknowledged as holy. That is the implication of the prayer: "*Hallowed be thy name.*" "*Hallowed be thy*

name” means, let it become manifest that thou art holy, and good, and righteous, and just, and let it be acknowledged that thou art holy, and just, and righteous, and good.

2. What is Its Specific Application

Now what does that imply? What is the specific application of that prayer? “Lord, let the holiness of thy name become manifest in all thy works, and let it be acknowledged.” What then do we pray? The catechism really looks at it entirely from the point of view that we must hallow God’s name, and that is true. But it is not all the truth. “Hallowed be thy name” has a far broader implication. It means in the first place: “Hallow thou thy name.” That first of all. “Sanctify thou thy name,” that is, “Reveal clearly in all the works of thy hands, in all the history of the world, in all my experiences, that thou art righteous and just and holy and good.”

As I said, you cannot put God’s name in a shrine. God’s name is a causal factor in all things. So that when we pray: “hallowed be thy name”, we mean: let it become manifest in all the history of the world, and in all my life and experiences, that thou art holy and righteous and good. What does that mean? Does it mean, let there always be sunshine in my life? No, “*Hallowed by thy name*” has nothing to do with sunshine. Does it mean, “Let my way always be smooth?” It has nothing to do with a smooth way. Does it mean, “Let there always be prosperity?” It has nothing to do with prosperity.

Let us look at a few examples in scripture. When God sanctifies His name in Job, He takes all away from him. When God sanctifies His name in Christ, it meant the cross. Now as far as the specific application of this prayer is concerned, from this point of view, it may mean war or peace, sickness or health, adversity or prosperity; but whatever it may be, “I pray: Lord, glorify thy name.” When war, or sickness, or depression comes, I do not pray for anything else, but I pray: “Lord, glorify thy name.” Shall we pray it? Will we not complain? Are we ready to say: “*Hallowed be thy name*”? Suppose that it brings war, or sickness, or depression, is it then our prayer: “*Hallowed be thy name*”? Are we ready to pray it? That is the implication of the prayer: “*Hallowed be thy name*.” We pray it as long as that prayer means, “sunshine.” But as soon as it means sickness and adversity, we begin to squeal and we say: “Lord, hallow thy name no more.” That is due to our sin. But that is the implication of our prayer. It’s awful for the sinner. That is the first implication of the prayer: “*Hallowed be thy name*.”

And so the next implication is that in this prayer I pray for grace to hallow God’s name. I pray: “Lord, grant me grace to always hallow thy name in all the circumstances in which thou leadest me.” That is what Job did. While Job sat upon His ruins, he glorified the name of God. Job saw God’s name in the things that had come upon him. That we must do. In our petition, we ask for grace to do it. In this petition we pray: “Lord Grant that I may at all times be consecrated to thee as thou hast revealed thyself.”

This means, in the first place —to put it in the language of the catechism— that we may know God rightly. To pray: “hallowed be thy name” means that we ask the Lord to give us good preachers to expound the word of God for us. It means that we say to the “Lord, give us Christian schools that our youth may be trained in the way of the covenant.” It means that we ask Him to give us catechism in order that we may be instructed in the knowledge of Him. It means that we ask God to give us societies where we may come together to study His word. If we pray, “*Hallowed be thy name*,” it means that we say to God, “If you give us the means by which we may know thee, we will make use of them.” Otherwise we do not pray this first petition. Then our praying will be pure hypocrisy. To pray, “*Hallowed be thy name*” means, “Grant that I may rightly know Thee.”

In the second place, it means, “Grant that I may at all times sanctify, glorify and praise thee.”

And in the third place, it means that in all my life I have for my purpose, for the object of my consecration, the living God.

But there is more. In this petition we ask for grace to glorify the name of God in our walk. That is terrible. If we stand between the alternative of having bread and having a job, and having prosperity without the name of God, or of having no bread and no job and no prosperity, with the name of God, then we pray in this petition that the Lord may give us grace to make the right choice. Let us apply it to certain concrete cases. It means that if you belong to a union and have sworn to place your union relation above every other relation, that then in this petition you ask for grace to break that relation. The prayer: *"Hallowed be thy name,"* would solve the union question. The trouble with the brethren that joined the union was not that they believed in the union, but that they said, give me my daily bread first, and then said, let thy name be hallowed. And if you said that, you have not prayed this prayer. *"Hallowed be thy name,"* means that all such things as where we may be, and where we may go, and what we may do, and what worldly amusements we may partake in are solved. We cannot go into the world and then say, "Lord, Let thy name be hallowed." That is impossible. God is God. We cannot fool God. God is not mocked. You cannot appear before God as a hypocrite. You cannot say, I will hallow God's name today and go to church, but tomorrow I will go out and seek my bread first. If you do that the Lord will say, get out of here. I have taught you to pray: hallowed be thy name. *"Hallowed by thy name"* means that we pray: Lord if I have loved anything more than thy name, then give me grace that I may do it no more. That is what we pray for when we pray: hallowed be thy name. And if we cannot pray that, we cannot pray the rest of the Lord's Prayer. Suppose you have denied the name of the Lord for bread. Then you cannot pray: *"Hallowed be thy name."* And if you do you are a hypocrite. Then you do not mean it. Then God will give you your prayer, if you are His child, but He will give it to you in a terrible way. If you have denied the name of the Lord, then you cannot pray for daily bread. If you have denied the name of the Lord for bread for tomorrow, and for next week, and for a year to come, then you cannot pray for daily bread. You do not want it. And therefore the highest that we can seek is not bread. That the heathen seek.

The highest is that we pray: *"Lord glorify thy name."* It must not escape our attention that this is the *first* petition. We cannot, as far as the meaning is concerned, change the order around. We cannot first pray *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* and then pray, *"Hallowed be thy name."* Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and all other things shall be added unto you. The prayer: *"Hallowed be thy name,"* is *first*, otherwise we lose the purpose of this prayer. The first petition is: *"Hallowed be thy name."* That means, when we pray it in spirit and in truth, that when we ask the Lord for the contents of this first prayer, we say: "What is uppermost in my mind, what is dearest to my heart, is it that I may be to the praise of thy name?" I do not first pray for daily bread, or a nice home, or a nice automobile, or money to buy gas with, but when I come to thee, I can honestly say that which is uppermost in my mind, and the deepest desire of my heart, is that thy name be hallowed. Do we want it?

You know the Apostle James in the first chapter of his epistle says: *"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God."* But also he adds, *"Let him not doubt when he asks."* When James says that he that prays must not doubt, he does not mean that he must not doubt as to whether he will receive or not, but he means that you don't want it if you doubt. If you ask the Lord for wisdom, you must be sure that you want His wisdom, otherwise you are *like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed*. If we pray for anything, we must be sure that we want it. And to know if we want it, we must know the meaning of what we pray. We must know the practical significance of what we ask. If we are to pray this prayer, we must not say, "Give me my daily bread first," and "Give me a nice home, and a nice automobile, and plenty of money to buy gas." Rather, we must say, "That I *might know the Lord; that is my first concern.*" We cannot pray this prayer and say, "The Christian School is not what it should be." That is true; but if the schools are such that we cannot send our children there, then we must build schools of our own. If we pray: *"Hallowed be thy name,"* we pray that we may send our Children to the Christian school. If we pray: *"Hallowed be thy name,"* and we really mean it, if our prayer is not pure hypocrisy, then we will

seek first the kingdom of God, and all other things will be added unto us.

3. What Spiritual Requirement It has for God's People

Don't you see how silly it is to put this prayer in public institutions. The world does not mean it when it says: "*Hallowed be thy name.*" The world, the natural man seeks self. He does not seek God.

In the second place, don't you see that you must have a regenerated heart to even begin to say it. In other words, God must first sanctify Himself in our heart before we can pray: "*hallowed be thy name.*" And when God sanctifies Himself in my heart, then I begin to see how sinful, how corrupt it is, that I have sought things not connected with the glory of God's name. We do not always say it that way. But when we say: "God be merciful to me a sinner," we say the same thing.

In the third place, don't you see that it must lead to a sanctified life to pray: "*Hallowed be thy name.*" You cannot walk in sin all day long and then pray in the evening: "*Hallowed be thy name.*" Then you do not mean it. It is exactly in the measure that we are willing to break with sin that we mean this prayer. And on the other hand, in the measure that we are not willing to break with sin, we do not mean this prayer. Are we able to pray this first petition? Are we able to pray it in sincerity and truth before the face of God?

There is not one of us here that is able. No one here can say, I am able to pray the implications of this prayer. If we have looked at the brother while we were discussing this prayer, let us go back and apply it to ourselves. Let us confess: "O God, if that is the state of the heart and mind of one who truly approaches thee in prayer, what a wicked sinner I am. If that is the implication of this prayer; if the glory of thy name is the chief purpose, and I look at my life, then that life is condemned. How I have placed the hallowing of God's name in the background, and have placed the hallowing of my own name in the foreground. How I lay myself down and arise in the morning with a thousand thoughts that curse against this petition."

So this is the conclusion. The natural mind will never pray this petition. And what there is left in us of that natural mind seems to a large extent to dominate. And in the second place, if I have been instructed in the line of the instruction of our catechism, and have said, "Amen," to that instruction, and have learned that your only comfort in life and death is that you belong to Christ, then you can also say that in spite of all sin and imperfection, there is in your life the inmost principle that says: I desire to be to the glory of God's praise, a small beginning in the midst of much imperfection. And therefore we must all introduce this petition with the prayer, "Lord, teach me to pray: '*Hallowed be thy name.*'"

Praying for the Kingdom

Herman Hoeksema

Q. 123. *Which is the second petition?*

A. 123. *"Thy kingdom come"; that is, rule us so by Thy word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee; preserve and increase Thy church; destroy the works of the devil, and all violence that would exalt itself against Thee; and also, all wicked counsels devised against Thy holy word; till the full perfection of Thy kingdom take place, wherein Thou shalt be all in all.*

Introduction

Prayer is the highest expression of the Christian's gratitude, according to the viewpoint which the catechism takes. It is the highest expression of the new life which has been implanted in the heart of the Christian by Christ.. And it is the highest expression of gratitude, because in the highest sense, prayer is the acknowledgment that God is God, and that He is the fountain of all good; that there is no other God beside Him, and that there is no good but from Him, and that out of Him only we eat and drink all that is good. That is prayer. And because prayer is the acknowledgment that God is God, and that He is the fountain of all good, that is why it is the highest expression of gratitude.

And because that is prayer, because prayer is the highest expression of gratitude, and because we have but a beginning of the true obedience within us, it is evident that in our prayers we are very imperfect. We can never discover in how far we have learned to truly pray, but by looking in the mirror of the Lord's Prayer. That is the purpose why the catechism discusses the Lord's Prayer, in order to determine in how far we are perfect in our prayers, in how far we can really truly pray.

From that point of view, we looked at the first petition: hallowed be thy name. We found that in that petition we professed that it was our greatest desire that God's name be hallowed, and that all might be cut out which does not serve to hallow God's name. From that same point of view we must look at this second petition.

This second petition is a very difficult petition to pray. And yet, if we could really learn to pray this petition, then in that prayer, and in the fulfillment of that prayer, we would be blessed. We will realize that it is difficult to pray, *"Thy kingdom come,"* if we consider that the spiritual disposition that is required in order to pray this petition is expressed in the saying of the Lord in Matthew 6:33: *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* That we hardly ever practically believe. Before we know it, we forget that beautiful and spiritual part of Jesus' instruction, when He says that we should not ask what we shall eat, and what we shall drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed; that we lay not up treasures on earth where moth, and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but that we lay up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal. We are so foolish, so that before we think of it, we are after the things which moth and rust corrupt, and we are asking, what shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we clothe ourselves. We forget that the things we need are nothing compared with life itself. And in that disposition, we cannot pray: *"Thy kingdom come,"* for the simple reason that those things do not belong to the kingdom of God. In the second place, we must see what is meant by the coming of that kingdom. And finally, we must consider what is the spiritual attitude presupposed in praying for its coming.

Theme: Praying for the Kingdom

1. The Idea of the Kingdom
2. The Development of the Kingdom
3. The Spiritual Disposition of One Who Prays for the Kingdom

1. The Idea of the Kingdom

The Lord teaches us to pray: *"Thy kingdom come."* What is that kingdom? In order to pray this petition, we must have some conception as to what it meant by the term, *"kingdom of God."*

The term, *"the kingdom of God,"* is much used in our day. Nearly everyone is speaking of the kingdom of God, and of working for the kingdom of God. Therefore it is necessary that we know what is meant by that term.

The kingdom of God is frequently mentioned in scripture, and especially the Lord Jesus frequently refers to it. He speaks of the kingdom of God, and of its coming. He speaks of the subjects of that kingdom, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. Many parables of Jesus serve to illustrate that kingdom to us. What is that kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, as it is also called?

Ultimately it is the final realization of God's counsel with respect to all things which God had in mind. When God created this first state of things, He had in mind a better state of things, and He purposed to lead this first state of things to that better state of things.

Now if we search scripture concerning the idea of the kingdom of heaven, we find that it defines four things. In the first place, it is defined as the spiritual-ethical rule of God. In the second place, it is the spiritual-ethical rule of God through Christ. In the third place, it is the rule of God through Christ, in and through His people. And in the fourth place, it is an all-comprehensive, universal, heavenly kingdom. That is the conception of scripture concerning the kingdom of heaven.

It is the spiritual-ethical rule of God. The kingdom of God is that state of things in which God is king. It is called the kingdom of heaven because heaven is its origin. But by the term, *"kingdom of God,"* is expressed that state of things in which God is king. It is that state of things in which God rules, in which He has dominion, and that in a spiritual-ethical sense. God is of course king. He rules by His sovereign power. In that sense, He is supreme over all. He has dominion over all things. He rules all things by His power. There is nothing that escapes His rule. But that kingdom of power is not meant when scripture speaks of the kingdom of God.

Then another dominion is meant. The idea of the kingdom of God is not that God rules by His power, but the idea is that in all creation, He is acknowledged as the only good and perfect being, before whom we bow. There is a difference between the rule of God over the power of opposition, and His rule in the hearts of His people. There is even a difference between God's rule over the brute creature, over trees and plants, etc., and His rule in the heart of man.

Now the kingdom of God is where God is acknowledged as the only good and perfect being, and the sovereign of all. It is the spiritual-ethical rule of God. For when we pray, *"Thy kingdom come,"* we pray that God may be acknowledged and may be served consciously and willingly from the principle of love.

In that kingdom, Christ is Lord. When that kingdom shall be perfectly realized, Christ will stand at the pinnacle of that kingdom. That has been denied. On the basis of what the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 15, namely that when Christ shall have subdued all things, He will deliver the kingdom unto His Father.

It has been denied that Christ shall forever be the Lord in that kingdom. But the meaning of that passage is that when all things shall have been made subject unto Christ, Christ will subject Himself with all that kingdom unto God. But Christ will be Lord in that kingdom. It will be a kingdom in which Christ

will forever be Lord. His mind, His will, will rule in the hearts of His people forever. He will be king under God. He will be the chief connecting link between the sovereign king and the new creation, including His people. Jesus will be Lord in the kingdom for which we pray.

In the third place, it will be a kingdom also in which His people shall reign. Christ shall not rule in that kingdom alone and as an individual, but He will reign in that kingdom in and through His Church. He shall reign as Christ, and the Church shall reign with Christ, and we shall reign over all things. All things shall be subject unto us in Christ. We shall be kings, sitting in Christ's throne, even as Christ is seated in God's throne. Finally, that kingdom will be universal and heavenly. It will include all things.

We must not look upon that kingdom as the destruction of all things, so that only heaven is left. We often speak of going to heaven and that the earth will be destroyed. Now it is true that this present world shall perish. So strongly does the Apostle Peter present it, that He tells us that the very elements shall melt away. But although this present world shall perish, it will not be annihilated. Even as our present bodies shall perish in the grave, and shall return to their very primary elements, so that you cannot find anything of them anymore, but that is not annihilation. So also it is with this present world. This present world shall be dissolved to its very primary elements. But from those primary elements, God will create new heavens and a new earth. But that new creation shall be different from the old creation. Even as our present bodies shall be changed into a glorious body of Christ, so this present world shall be changed so as to be in harmony with that glorified body. In other words, we may say that the new creation shall be just like Christ. Christ will be the center and head of all that new creation.

Therefore that new creation will be a heavenly creation, and that entire new creation will be united in Christ, and through Christ with God. So that when scripture speaks of the kingdom of God, it refers to the spiritual-ethical dominion and rule of God through Christ, in the hearts of His people. By "kingdom of God" in this second petition is expressed that state of dominion of God through Christ in the hearts of His people, in which He is served consciously and willingly, and in love.

The term "kingdom of God" is a twofold conception. There is a present and a future conception. Scripture frequently uses the term "kingdom of God" when it speaks of that kingdom as it now is. Then it is the sum total of all the spiritual powers and graces and blessings in Christ. The sum total of all the spiritual powers and graces and blessings, are often denoted by the term, "kingdom of God." We must learn to realize that when scripture speaks of the kingdom of God, it does not refer to anything external. The kingdom of God does not refer to anything in culture, or politics, or business. Christian culture, Christian politics, or Christian business, has nothing to do with the kingdom of God. The kingdom, as it now is, has nothing to do with anything outward. The kingdom of God, as it now is, is the sum total of all the spiritual powers, and graces, and blessings, which in scripture are expressed in the one word, "righteousness." When God rules, through Christ, in the heart, you have the kingdom of God; not when Christ rules through politics. Christ does not rule in politics. That is foolish. The kingdom of God is spiritual. The kingdom of God is all that is expressed in the term "righteousness." *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."* When you are righteous judicially, that is, righteous with a view to your state before God, and when you are righteous spiritually, so that you are righteous, and do the works of righteousness, then you are a citizen of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God refers to the spiritual rule of God only in the heart of His people. What the kingdom of God is, is beautifully expressed in the sermon on the Mount. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Lowliness of spirit is a manifestation of the kingdom of God. Blessed are the meek. Meekness is a realization of the kingdom. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. Hunger and thirst after righteousness is a manifestation of the kingdom. All these things which scripture calls righteousness are a realization of the kingdom of God.

In the second place, the term, "kingdom of God," is a future conception. Also that the modern

philosopher does not want. The modern philosopher says that the present state of things is to develop into the kingdom of God, and we must all work to bring about that kingdom. But scripture says when the kingdom of God shall be completed; it will replace the present state of things. The future kingdom of God will not be a further development of the present things. It will replace the present state of things. The present state of things is to be destroyed, and the future kingdom of God will replace it. And then the kingdom of God is that state of things in which God is all and in all in the new heaven and the new earth, and in which He shall have dominion and rule over all things, through Jesus Christ. The state of glory is also the kingdom of God.

2. The Development of the Kingdom

That kingdom is coming. Not because we cause it to come. Not because we pray for it to come. It is coming. God brings it. He causes it to come. That kingdom is coming.

In fact, it is coming through the history of this world. The history of this world is the coming of the kingdom of God. All that God does in the history of the world is related to, and connected with, the coming of His kingdom. God brings it from the very beginning, and nothing ever happened that was not a coming of the kingdom.

It was a coming of the kingdom of heaven when God created the first world. In paradise, there was a picture of that kingdom. For God reigned in Adam over all things. In the heart of Adam, God established the kingdom of heaven, but it was an earthly kingdom. But when God made that earthly image of the kingdom of God and realized it in the heart of Adam, He had in mind the kingdom of heaven.

That first kingdom was an earthly kingdom and it depended upon man. The kingdom of heaven cannot depend upon man. Therefore, that first kingdom must fall; and the fall of that first kingdom was a coming of the kingdom of heaven. It is not so that the first kingdom falls and that God now must make something else. The fall of the first kingdom is the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

We must not have the idea that God first had His kingdom in paradise, and then that kingdom falls away from His control, so that God is now compelled to make of that kingdom of creation, a kingdom of heaven. The entire history of the world is a coming of the kingdom of glory, including the fall, the devil, sin, everything. God originally created an earthly kingdom. But that earthly kingdom fell, and had to fall in order to become the kingdom of heaven. This earthly kingdom had to fall, and the moment it does, the king comes. Christ replaces Adam. He does not immediately come in the flesh, but from the time that the earthly kingdom fell, the kingdom of heaven developed in antithesis to the spiritual kingdom of the devil.

Hence, all history is the history of the coming of the kingdom of God. That kingdom was established when God set enmity between the two seeds. It was established in the hearts of His people in the old dispensation. It was in Adam by the grace of God. It was in Enoch, in Noah, in Abraham. But the kingdom had at that time no form. In Israel, we have an outward, typical form of the kingdom, a shadow of it. It was established when Christ came into the world. When Christ comes, the king comes. He laid the foundation for that kingdom. He established it in His blood. And having laid the basis, He receives the glory of that kingdom in person. And He is exalted to the right hand of God to rule in the name of God.

The kingdom of God is realized in the king, when Jesus is exalted to the right hand of God. That King receives the Spirit. And He established it in the hearts of His people. That is what Jesus meant when He said: the kingdom of heaven is come very near unto you. It came near in the shadows and types. But it came very near in its spiritual, heavenly essence, when its king came into the world, and it was realized when He poured out His Spirit That is the kingdom of heaven. It is established. We are citizens of that

kingdom. Even though we are still on earth, we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven, and have our walk in heaven. That is the realization of the kingdom of heaven as it now is.

3. The Spiritual Disposition of One Who Prays for the Kingdom

And if we understand that, then we understand the reason for this petition, *“Thy kingdom come.”* That kingdom is still coming. It is not yet perfect, but it is realized in the hearts of His people. That explains the spiritual side of this petition. We are citizens of that kingdom. But there is much imperfection. That kingdom is still imperfect because of the sin round about them, and it is still imperfect because of the earthly state of things. There is much within us and about us that is not of the kingdom of heaven. And there is all kinds of battle and struggle and imperfection. And standing as, in principle, citizens of the kingdom of heaven in the midst of imperfection, we pray: *“Thy kingdom come.”* We do that in a twofold sense.

The catechism mentions that this prayer for the coming of the kingdom of heaven, first of all, has a personal element, *“Thy kingdom come.”* That means, the catechism says, *“rule us so by thy word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to thee.”* In that sense, the prayer for the coming of the kingdom of heaven is a prayer for perfection. When we pray, *“rule us so by thy word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to thee,”* our prayer implies, first of all, that it is our desire to be conformed to the will of God and to be pleasing to Him. It means that it is our desire to be conformed to the will of God in our willing, in our thinking, in our desiring, and in all our life. It means, in the second place, that there is much in me that is against the will of God, and I am troubled. When I pray, *“Thy kingdom come,”* it means that I am grieved, because of what is in me, that is against the will of God. It means, in the third place, that I realize that it must be done by God. There is not free will in this prayer. To pray, *“Thy kingdom come,”* and really mean it, therefore, means a life and walk of sanctification. Just as it is impossible to pray, *“Our Father which art in heaven,”* and just as it is impossible to pray, *“Hallowed be thy name,”* just so impossible it is to pray, *“Thy kingdom come,”* unless we walk in sanctification.

As soon as we walk in sin, the prayer for the kingdom of heaven dies on our lips. If we walk in sin, we do not mean to do the will of Christ, but our own will. In the second place, there is in this petition the prayer for the perfecting of the body of Christ. *“Preserve and gather thy Church,”* the catechism teaches us, is the second element in the prayer for the coming of the kingdom of heaven. That stands to reason. The Church is to be the capital of that kingdom. The Church is the New Jerusalem. The Church is the perfected city, the capital of the perfected kingdom. Before that kingdom can come, all the elect must be gathered into the Church. Every last one of them must have been called before that kingdom can be completed. So that when we pray, *“Thy kingdom come,”* we do not say, *“Let everybody come, bring in all you can,”* but we pray: *“Preserve and gather thy Church.”* All God’s chosen, every last stone must be fitted into the new Jerusalem, and the citizens pray that all the stones may be joined together and fitted into the city.

Finally, when we pray, *“Thy kingdom come,”* we pray for the passing away of all things. We pray for the passing away of this body, and of all things, and for the coming of the new kingdom.

Can we pray it? We can mechanically repeat it after the Lord, but do we mean it? Do we want it? Before we receive anything else, do we say: *“I pray that thou mayest so rule in me that I may more and more submit to thy will?”*

Is there not a power in us that causes us to fear that the Lord may hear us? There is.

If we always realized what it means to pray, that in our whole life, the kingdom of God may come, we would not pray it. We don’t want it. By nature, we don’t want it. By nature, we don’t want to get

there where we say: "I have learned to seek the kingdom of heaven first."

The first question with us is, where shall I live? And the second question is, what kind of business shall I be in? And the third question is, what kind of pleasures shall I seek? And the fourth question is, what will happen if I insist on seeking the kingdom of heaven first? All these things come first with us. If we pray, "so rule us, that we may always submit ourselves to thy will," and God hears that prayer, we may lose all. And I warn you, if you do not wish to lose all, don't pray it.

All children of God who have sincerely prayed this prayer, have lost all. If you pray this prayer and God hears it, you may lose all. But what is it profit it a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? All these things, that is, bread and clothing, and a home, etc, the heathen seek, says Jesus. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. And only when you do that can you pray: "*Thy kingdom come*".

We will never pray this second petition by our old nature. All the children of the world really pray: let thy kingdom never come. It is difficult to pray this petition. But in principle the citizens of that kingdom pray, "*Thy kingdom come.*"

In us there is a small beginning of the new obedience, and because of this small beginning of the new obedience, there is a longing to be able to pray: "*Thy kingdom come.*" There is a longing to seek the things above. It is often covered up. But it is there. If it is not there, we are not in the kingdom. But if it is, then this should be the conclusion, we say: "Lord teach me to really and truly pray: '*Thy kingdom come.*'"

It is true that it is hard for the flesh. But if you examine yourselves you will find this principle: that, by the grace of God, in your deepest heart you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. That is difficult for the flesh. But it is only in the way of the fulfillment of that prayer that we are blessed.

Praying for God's Will to be Realized

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.124. Which is the third petition?

A. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"; that is, grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey thy will, which is only good; that so everyone may attend to, and perform the duties of his station and calling, as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven.

Both in the meditation of the first and of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, we came to the conclusion that it behooves us to humble ourselves and to acknowledge, that especially with regard to prayer, we have but a small beginning of the new obedience. This could not be different, and we would not expect it to be different, if we understand the true nature of prayer and know ourselves. For prayer is the highest expression of gratitude. We must understand this, especially in our day, for prayer is not to ask God for a little prosperity. Prayer is the highest expression of gratitude. But if we keep that standard of prayer and have but a small beginning of that true thankfulness within us, it behooves us to pray: Lord, teach us to pray. There is but a small beginning of the new obedience within us. So it was with the first petition. Teach us to pray that above all else it may be my desire that thy name be hallowed: the prophetic prayer. So it was in the second petition. Teach us to say, "*thy kingdom come:*" the kingly prayer:" so we will find it to be with this third petition. Teach us to say: "*Thy will be done*": the priestly prayer. The catechism gives the answer to the question: what does it mean when we pray, "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,*" that all men may renounce their own will, and that all men may obey the will of God. All men. That does not mean, and cannot mean, that the Church comes before the face of God with the imagination and request, that all men, as they are now, regardless of their spiritual condition, may renounce their own will, and may obey the will of God. That would be impossible. All men will not renounce their own will. And unless all men are converted and regenerated, in that sense this petition will not be heard. Nor does it mean, that in this petition, the Church prays: "Let all men be converted." That is also contrary to God's will. And it is not pious and religious, but wicked and conceited to appear more merciful than God is.

Nor does it mean that, in the first place, we, as we are now manifest as God's people in the world, with all that God shall still call out of the world, may renounce our own will and may perfectly obey the will of God, and the time may come when there will be only men that will do the will of God always, as it is done in the new heavens and the new earth. The Lord teaches us to pray: "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" In heaven, the will of God is done without fail. It is done by the angels and by the saints in glory; and in the highest sense, it is done by Christ. In heaven, the will of God is done perfectly. There is no struggle in heaven to do the will of God. In heaven, there is no opposition to the will of God. It is more easy to do the will of God in heaven. It requires no suffering, no trials, no affliction or death to do the will of God in heaven. But here, doing the will of God meets with all kinds of opposition, opposition from within and opposition from without. And we must not imagine that it is easy, not only to do the will of God, or to pray this prayer, "*Thy will be done.*" That is a difficult petition to pray. We do not easily mean what we pray when we utter these words. We do not easily want that for which we pray when we utter these words. And if we examine ourselves, we will find that all within us rebels against the granting of this petition.

Theme: Praying for God's Will to be Realized

1. The Will of God
2. The Relation of Our Will to God's Will
3. The Prayer for God's Will

1. The Will of God

God is a willing God; He is a willing being. Among creatures, we can easily see the distinction between willing creatures and the creatures without a will. Such creatures as we call brute creatures are creatures without a will. A tree acts and bears fruit, but it does not act willingly, it does not act consciously, it has no choice, it does not determine. So there are many creatures. A willing creature is a creature that acts consciously, and willingly, and intellectually, and determines to do things according to the dictates of his heart. It is the will that distinguishes man and angels from the rest of the creatures. The will is the power by which we judge, distinguish what is good and evil, and choose for ourselves. So God is a willing being. God is a personal being, and it belongs to a person to possess a mind, an intellect, reason, by which to will. God is a willing being. In all His acts and works, God is an intellectual, conscious, determining being. He decides, determines what is good and chooses it. That is true of all God's acts. That is not true of us. Our willing action is very limited. The action of my heart is not subject to my will. But with God, all action is subject to His will. God is not limited in His willing. He is limited only by His being, that is, God's willing is like His being. It is rooted in His being. That is not the case with us. But God's will is not determined by anything but His being. God's will is independent. That is, God's will depends only on Himself. That is why God has a sovereign will. God's will is not determined by anything outside of Himself. God wills what He wills. We cannot. Our will is not sovereign, but is limited by things outside of us, but God can will what He wills. He is not limited by anything in His willing, but by His being. In other words, His being determines the character of His willing. God's will is determined by His being. In one word, God determines Himself. When God knows Himself, He always determines Himself that He is the highest good. And determining that He is the highest good, He wills Himself as the highest good. God is God. He is wholly other from any creature. He is also sovereign, so that with respect to the will of God, God always wills Himself. That is the underlying reason for what the catechism says that God's will is only good.

Now the distinction is made between the will of God's decree and the will of God's command. And it is best that we remember that distinction just that way, rather than to speak of the revealed and the secret will of God. The distinction is also made between the revealed and the secret will of God. But it is best to let these terms go. They do not fit in. It is best to distinguish the will of God as the will of decree and the will of command. Only we must remember when we make this distinction that these are not two wills in God. God is one, and His will is one. There are no two wills in God. God's will is one. God's will of decree is His will as He executes it, and we receive it, suffer it. And His will of command is His will as He reveals it unto us and we execute it. But they are one. The will of God's command is subject to the will of His creature, and they come together in our life. But although God's will is one, we can distinguish and speak of the will of God's decree or counsel, and of the will of His command. It is better to remember the distinction just that way, rather than speak of the revealed and secret will of God.

God's will is not secret. In the first place, it is not secret, that there is a will of God's counsel. And in the second place, it is not secret, what is that will of God's counsel. God has revealed His will. He wants His people to know His will. He wants them to know what He has been doing, and what He is doing, and what He shall do. It is true that we do not know the details of God's counsel. But as far as the general line of His counsel is concerned, God has not hid what is His counsel, but has declared it to His people, in order that they should declare it in the midst of the world. For that reason, we must not deceive ourselves and speak of God's secret will, in order then to say that we have nothing to do with what God

has hidden. It is true that we have nothing to do with what God has hidden from us. "*The secret things are for the Lord, but the revealed things are for us and for our children.*" That is also true of what God has revealed to us of His counsel. And it is the calling of the Church to proclaim that will of God's counsel. The Church must know the will of God. It must know all that God has revealed in His counsel in order that she may declare it. That is implied in the prayer, "*Thy will be done,*" so that that distinction is better, that we speak of the will of God's decree or counsel, and of the will of God concerning our will, the will of His command.

2. The Relation of Our Will to God's Will

Now man stands in a certain relation to that will of God. All creatures stand in a certain relation to God, but man is a creature that, like God, also wills, acts consciously, intellectually, knowingly, determiningly. Man is so created. But the will of man is a servant's will, and therefore, the will of man is dependant and of such a nature that, in as far as its being good or evil is concerned, it is determined by the will of God. Man's will is dependant. It is dependent upon circumstances and on things around him. But in the deepest sense, man's will is dependent on the will of God. God's will is independent. The will of God is sovereign. It is a will that commands, that absolutely determines. Man's will is a servant's will. Man distinguishes between what is good and what is evil, and he chooses it. In that respect, he is created in the image of God.

But man's will does not determine, decide, is not the standard for what is good and evil. The will of man is dependent. It is determined by the will of God. The will of God is the standard for the will of man. Man has a servant's will. Now originally, the will of man was so that it was in harmony with the will of God. His will was in perfect harmony with the will of God. That is called righteousness. Now when man sinned, his will became contrary to the will of God. Not just a certain thought, nor a certain act of his will, but his entire will became contrary to the will of God, so that his will is corrupt. Thus, by nature, we do not say: "*Thy will be done.*" Rather, by nature, we say: "My will be done;" not "*Thy will be done.*"

Now when God, through Christ, comes into the heart, then we again, in principle, say: "*Thy will be done;*" for there is only one straight will. That is the will of Christ. Christ is in perfect harmony with the will of God. And when the Spirit of Christ comes into our heart, then we in principle again say: "*Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" That does not merely refer to the will of God's command. That is often said.

When we come to this third petition of the Lord's prayer, it is contended that it has nothing to do with God's will of decree. It is contended that this petition has to do only with God's will of command. That also seems to stand in the foreground in our catechism. This third petition is usually interpreted as having nothing to do with God's will of decree. It is interpreted as having only to do with God's will of command. The argument is that we can do nothing about the will of decree. We cannot change it. All we can do is receive it and suffer it. We are entirely passive with regard to God's will of decree. All our experiences come to us according to God's will of decree, according to His counsel. The time of our birth, and the time of our death, and all that is between the two, is determined by God's counsel, and we cannot change it. We simply receive it. We suffer it. If He sends me health, I receive it. If He sends me sickness, I suffer it, and can do nothing about it. And therefore, so it is said, this prayer has nothing to do with God's will of decree.

Now notice that the way in which this third petition is expressed, is all together too general for such an limitation. In the second place, notice that the form of this petition is similar to the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane. When Jesus prays in Gethsemane, "*Thy will be done,*" He not only means, let me obey thy will, but also, "*Let Thy will be done concerning me.*" In the third place, we cannot so separate the will of God's counsel and the will of His command. They are one. The will of God's counsel and the will of His command come together in our life.

Let me illustrate. The will of God's counsel is that I shall sanctify Him on the Sabbath. But I am without work, and I walk the streets looking for work and cannot find any. After a while, I meet with a position, but I must work on Sunday. God's counsel sends me that position, but I must work on Sunday. Don't you see that the will of God's counsel is that I perfectly deny myself? The two come together in our life. In one word, it is our calling to obey the will of God in the way in which He leads us. The counsel of God and our will in life come together. So that when we pray, "*Thy will be done,*" we do not mean in the abstract, "Let me do thy will," but we mean, let "*Thy will be done*" concerning me.

And there are two more aspects. In the first place, we must will that there is a counsel of God. That is the problem with Pelagianism. The problem with Pelagianism is not that they cannot understand that God's counsel determines all things. A child can understand that; but the trouble is that they do not want it. In the second place, we must will the will of God, as we meet with it in life. In everything we come into contact with the will of God; and we must not assume that it depends upon us whether the will of God will be done. That will, will be done. But it is the calling of the Church to renounce her own will and perfectly obey the will of God. When I have a sick child, I do not ask that my will be done concerning that child, but that God's will be done. Not so, that I simply say it, but that, if it becomes manifest that it is God's will that my child shall die, I say: I am in full agreement with His will, for His will only is good. It is true that we cannot resist or alter the unchangeable will of God's counsel. And when God's will runs contrary to my way of judging and thinking, my way of judging and thinking does not change the will of God at all. And yet the child of God has not reached the proper relation to God, as long as he cannot say: "*Thy will be done.*" I do not stand in the proper attitude to God until my will is in perfect harmony with God's, as that will has decreed things concerning me. If God sends me adversity and others prosperity, if He sends me sickness and others health, that is His will. That is not His secret will, but the revealed will of His counsel. And then I am not right before the Lord until I can say: "I will what thou wilt." If you take my child, I give it. I do not stand in the proper attitude to God until my will is in perfect harmony with God's will of decree. So that I cheerfully will what God wills concerning me. So it is with everything. There is a will of God in every station of life.

This third petition covers the whole life of the Christian. That is why the catechism says, not only that in praying this petition we pray that we may renounce our own will and without murmuring obey thy will, which is only good, but also, that we may always so attend to and perform the duties of our station and calling, as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven. Notice the view that the catechism takes of the Christian in the world. It speaks of his station and calling,

The Dutch has it—which is a better translation of the original— "*zijn ambt roeping,*" that is, "his office and calling".) In this way the catechism proceeds from the assumption that all the people of God are office-bearers. Not only is there an office of the minister, or of elders and deacons, but all Christians are office-bearers. All have an office. They are office-bearers in their whole life, in all that they do. An office-bearer is one who is a servant and accomplishes all things as a servant. In this case, it is a servant of the Lord. An office-bearer is one who receives all his talents and gifts from God, and uses them according to the will of God. In that sense, each Christian has an office. And his office becomes specialized in each one's calling. The child in school has an office. The purpose of the child should not be to receive high standings, first of all, but to do the will of God. That is it's office. God has placed the child in that station. The teacher, the father in the factory, the mother in her home, the storekeeper in his store, in all their life, are office-bearers. Let us understand that. In the first place, because that is the Christian's liberty. The Christian does not go to the shop as a slave, but because of the will of God. That is his station in life from God. It makes no difference what we are, we received our station in life from God. And if that is true, there can be only one question for the Christian. That question is, what is God's will concerning me, and how can I execute my office. The question of the father in the home is, what is my calling to my children before God? Fatherhood is his office. The Christian that goes to the shop, etc,

is not concerned with the question, wherewith he shall clothe himself and what he shall eat and drink. If he is concerned about these things, he is already on the wrong track. That is not the question. God will take care of that. But the question is, how can I be in this station, pleasing to Him who has placed me here. So it is with regard to my whole life. If you ask where must my children be educated, the one thing is to ask God where your children shall go. That is the meaning of this third petition.

So it is in eternity. Only there, there will be no opposition to that will of God. But when I pray, "*Thy will be done*," it means, grant me grace that at all times, and in all circumstances, I may so perfectly do thy will, as the angels do in heaven.

3. The Prayer for God's Will

That is awful. That is an awful prayer for the natural man. And it is an awful prayer for the flesh. Would we, in the light of the meaning of the contents of this petition, be able to kneel down and say: give me grace that I may absolutely renounce my own will, and may absolutely and cheerfully do thy will? We would not. We may be very pious in a superficial sense and say: "*Thy will be done.*" But this cuts. And before we begin to pray this petition, we may well pray: "Lord give me grace that I may pray: '*Thy will be done.*'" We are not often in the spiritual disposition to pray, "*Thy will be done.*" All that is in us by nature, from a spiritual-ethical point of view, rebels against doing the will of God, and wants to do its own will. That is because that old nature is rooted in the desire to be as God, and to choose for itself, and determine what is good and evil. There is something wrong in my way. But that something wrong gives me a place in the world. Therefore, I would rather keep it. I have a nice position. But I belong to a lodge, or to a worldly union in order to keep my position. And at night I pray, "*Thy will be done*," but I don't mean it. I am a hypocrite. I do not mean it. I do not want to leave my sinful way.

That is the case with all of us. We do not want to renounce our own will. It is easy to say, "*Thy will be done*," when my will is not in conflict with the will of God. But when my will is in conflict with the will of God, I do not want to renounce my own will. In the second place, it is difficult for the Christian in the world to do the will of God as the angels in heaven do that will. It is easy for the angels in heaven to do the will of God. Easy, because for them, the battle is finished. But we are in the world, and the will of the world is in conflict with the will of God. It is not easy to do the will of God in that world. It is not easy to pray: grant that we may renounce our own will and without murmuring do thy will. Therefore, as soon as we pray, "*Thy will be done*," there are a thousand voices within us that say, "Lord, don't do it." If God's will is to be done, we have to renounce a good deal. And we don't want to.

Therefore we pray this prayer, but a thousand voices within us say: "Don't do it." That is our heart. It means, that in my heart there is the desire that the will of God be done, before I can pray: "*Thy will be done*". And then I feel helpless and pray: "Lord, apart from thee, I can do nothing. And I choose the evil instead of the good. And I pray: let thy will be manifest, and give me grace to do it." That is ultimately eternal life. It is not good to do our own will. To do our own will is death, is hell. But it is good to do the will of God. For the will of God is only good. And to do the will of God is eternal life.

The Prayer for Our Daily Bread

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.125. Which is the fourth petition?

A. "Give us this day our daily bread"; that is, be pleased to provide us with all things necessary for the body, that we may thereby acknowledge thee to be the only fountain of all good, and that neither our care nor industry, nor even thy gifts, can profit us without thy blessing; and therefore that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures, and place it alone in thee.

The fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer is one of the most difficult petitions to really pray. And I believe that I am safe in saying that even today, now that those days of so called prosperity which we have had are past, we have scarcely begun to understand this petition: *"Give us this day our daily bread."*

It is so difficult because it is so spiritual, and we are so carnal. Spiritual, not because in this petition God teaches us to pray for spiritual bread, as some would have it. A false spirituality has frequently suggested that, in this fourth petition, the Lord does not refer to material things, but to spiritual things, not to earthly bread, but to heavenly bread. And the reason why this suggestion was made was that earthly bread was considered too mean, too common, too low, to be the object of our prayers. Or it has been said that this fourth petition at least has no place in such a heavenly prayer as the Lord's Prayer. But this suggestion sprang from a false spirituality.

For in the first place, it is not true that bread is too low, too insignificant, to become the object of our prayer. We must not forget that the entire Lord's Prayer is earthly in its viewpoint. We will not be able to pray this prayer in heaven. The viewpoint of this prayer is earthly. The Lord did not lay this prayer upon the lips of His saints in heaven, but on the lips of His people here on earth. And therefore, also this fourth petition has a place in the Lord's Prayer. Bread is not something too low, too insignificant to be an object of our prayers. To pray for bread does not imply a carnal state, but requires a high state of spirituality. Bread is a very important thing in our lives. Bread is a need. Without bread, we cannot serve God. Bread is a necessity.

In the second place, they that look at it as if bread was too low, too insignificant to have a place in our prayers, have not understood it at all. For it there is any petition in this Lord's Prayer that requires a high spiritual state, it is this fourth petition. And therefore, this fourth petition is spiritual, not because it teaches us to pray for spiritual bread, but because it requires such a narrowly defined, such a high state of spiritual life to utter this petition. All prayer requires that we believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

All prayer requires that we are confident that God will give us just exactly what we ask of Him. And that implies in the first place, that we do not pray at random, but that we know our prayer to be according to the will of God. In the second place, it implies that we pray so, that we actually desire what we ask for, and that we give thanks when we receive it. And it is in that last sense that this fourth petition is most difficult.

We are hardly ever satisfied when God gives us that for which we pray. We always want abundance. We always want riches. We want what we call prosperity. And we are hardly ever satisfied with God and today. God hardly ever gives just what we ask for in this fourth petition. God hardly ever just gives us daily bread. We are from that point of view still rich. God gives us far more than our daily

bread, and we ought to be ashamed of talking about depression. We still have far more than we ask for in this petition.

Now I want to look at this petition from the point of view of that spiritual background. And we will try to find the spiritual position that is required of him that really prays this petition: *“Give us this day our daily bread.”* We will do this from a fourfold point of view. In the first place, it will be from the point of view that this prayer for daily bread is an expression of complete contentment. In the second place, that it is an expression of humble dependence. In the third place, that it is an expression of childlike trust. And in the fourth place, that it is an expression of brotherly love.

Theme: The Prayer for Our Daily Bread

1. An Expression of Complete Contentment
2. An Expression of Humble Dependence
3. An Expression of Childlike Trust
4. An Expression of Brotherly Love

1. An Expression of Complete Contentment

The prayer: *“Give us this day our daily bread”*, is first of all an expression of complete contentment. This is evident from the simple things for which we are taught to pray. The Lord teaches us to pray for bread; and that, for daily bread. It might seem superfluous to call your attention to this fourth petition. We would almost say that everybody understands this prayer. It seems so simple, that we would say a child can almost pray it. But I want to call your attention to this fact that it is so simple, that we, in everyday life, fail to see the perfection of that simplicity, and the high spiritual state required to pray this fourth petition.

The Lord teaches us to say: *“Give us this day our daily bread.”* And He could not express it more simply. There is not a word in the English language that can state our needs so simply as the word, bread. We can get along without luxuries. And we may not ask for them. The Lord teaches us to say: *“Give us bread.”* Now I realize that man cannot live by bread alone. Bread is here a figurative term. It is one of those expressions in which a part is taken for the whole. We need more than bread. You cannot give a baby a piece of dry bread. A baby needs milk. We do not only need bread. We also need raiment. We need clothing, and fuel, and a home to live in. We need a certain amount of money. But that is all covered by the one word, bread.

The catechism explains this petition as referring to all things necessary for the body. But even so, this prayer for bread is characterized by simplicity. The Lord could have told us to pray: *“Give us all things necessary for this life.”* But He doesn't. He teaches us to say: *“Give us bread.”* And that word, bread, is the embodiment of all that expresses simplicity in our lives. The Lord uses the word, bread, to express just what we need. It expresses the bare necessities of life. The Lord teaches us to ask for bread. He does not teach us to ask for cake and pie. And that is not good for us either. The Lord does not teach us to pray for luxury and prosperity. These things, the Lord say, the heathen ask for. The heathen would eat until they were full, and then feel sorry that their stomach was not larger to hold more. They would put their finger in their throat in order to spit up the food, so that they could eat some more. We must pray for bread, and after God has given us bread, we must not pray for prosperity besides, as was done recently in our city. We must eat to live, not live to eat. And as bread stands for simplicity in food, so it stands for simplicity in clothing. We need clothes. But we do not need a seventy-five dollar suit; we do not need high-priced shoes and silk stockings. We need a home. But we do not need a mansion. We need a roof over our head, but we do not need a home of fifteen or twenty thousand dollars. We must

have something in the home. But we do not nearly need all that we have in our homes.

The Lord teaches us to pray for bread, and that represents all the simplicity of life. The simplicity of life is expressed in bread, so that this prayer for bread is characterized by simplicity. That is the more emphasized by the fact that we are taught in this petition to pray for daily bread. The form of the original word for "daily," is such that it is difficult to see just what its meaning is. According to some, the meaning is, "Give us today bread for tomorrow." But that is contrary to what the Lord teaches us in Matthew 6, "Take no thought for tomorrow." But that is also contrary to this prayer. According to others, the meaning is: "Give us bread for our sustenance." "Daily," meaning, bread for our sustenance, bread for our daily need. Just as we find it in Proverbs 30:8. There we read, "*Feed me with the bread convenient for me,*" which means, "give me the bread which I need." So it is here. The meaning is: give me bread for the sustenance of the body.

Now that presupposes a strong spiritual life characterized by complete contentment with respect to the things of the present. Contentment, satisfaction with just a little of this earth, is expressed in this petition. A man that is not content, that is not satisfied with a little of this earth, cannot pray this prayer. Suppose that we pray: "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" and the Lord would hear us literally, so that we would have nothing but bread. And suppose the Lord would take everything that we do not need and put it in a pile, how big that pile would be! But if the Lord should do so, if He should hear this prayer literally and take away from us all that we do not need, so that we have nothing left but just bread for today, would we come to the evening service and thank God for the good which He had given us? We would not. Let God take away everything but just enough bread for today, so that at the end of the day the bread basket would actually be empty and there would be nothing left for tomorrow morning, and before sundown, we would be grumbling.

It is especially since we have been so spoiled by the prosperity of the last decade that we think that we must pray for prosperity when our cake and pie is taken away from us. The Lord teaches us to pray for bread, and that implies complete contentment with respect to the things of the present. That does not mean that we may not have more than daily bread. It does not mean that we may not have luxury. We may have luxury, provided the Lord gives it to us, and we do not steal it, or obtain it by cheating, or by sucking the last drop of blood out of the poor man working for us, and provided we can stand it.

Luxury and abundance of things is dangerous. And the abundance of the last decade has not done the people of God any good. What has been the influence of the abundance of the last decade? The influence has been that we have an auto, and a radio, and the home has been destroyed, home life has been lost, our young people go chasing about and do not stay home anymore. And the people of God say that they cannot afford to seek the kingdom of God first anymore. Oh the shame of it. The Lord teaches us to first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things will be added unto us. And then we dare to say, "I send my children to the public school because I cannot afford to seek the kingdom of God first." Oh the shame of it. The Lord teaches us to first seek the kingdom of God, and He will take care of the rest. If we are ever to pray this petition, we must come down from our high pedestal of prosperity. But if the Lord gives us luxury, we may have it. And we may enjoy it too. The Lord also gives oil and wine. Nor does it mean that we may not have less than daily bread.

This fourth petition has reference to the common run of life, and we cannot separate this petition for daily bread from the former three petitions. And then it means: if it is not in conflict with the hallowing of thy name, and if it is not in conflict with the coming of thy kingdom, and if it is not in conflict with the realization of thy will, "*Give us this day our daily bread*". There may be times, when for God's sake, we must go hungry. If it pleases God to blow all the wheat from the field and give us dust to eat, as He did this past week, then the people of God must suffer with the world. And then it is not true that we will always have bread. But in the common run of life, if I pray, "Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," then in the wake of these three petitions, I will have daily bread.

In other words, *“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.”* That is what the Lord teaches us in the order of these petitions. So that we shall pray first: *“Hallowed be thy name.”* Secondly we pray: *“Thy kingdom come.”* Thirdly we pray: *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* And only then shall we pray: *“Give us this day our daily bread”*. How often do we subvert that very order? How often do we not make our daily bread first concern, and only after we have plenty of bread do we seek the kingdom of God?

This fourth petition does not mean that we will always have bread. Neither does it mean that we may not have more than daily bread. But it does mean that I do not pray for more. Also it means that if the Lord hears this petition and gives me just what I pray for, that then I shall be content. It means that if the Lord gives me what I need for today, and I do not know where my bread will come from tomorrow, that then I shall be content with thanksgiving. You will admit that, in spite of all the talk about conditions, and about depression, we can say the Lord has given us far more than we ask of Him in this fourth petition. And it means that as long as that is the case, regardless of how God gives it to us, we stop talking about depression. To pray this petition, *“Give us this day our daily bread,”* and really mean it, means that we be filled with contentment. It means that if God gives us bread for our daily sustenance, that we receive it with thanksgiving. Otherwise we do not mean it when we utter this petition.

2. An Expression of Humble Dependence

In this petition there is a beautiful expression of direct dependence upon God; something which is all the more beautiful today. The prayer, *“Give us this day our daily bread,”* is an expression of humble, direct dependence upon God, just as the Lord, in Matthew 6 teaches us direct dependence upon God. ‘As God feeds the sparrows and clothes the lilies,’ says Jesus, ‘so also He will care for you.’ Absolute dependence upon God is what this petition teaches us. This fourth petition does away with all idols. It teaches us not to begin with praying that the wheels of industry may spin, and that there may be plenty of money in the banks, but it teaches us to say, *“Give us bread,”* an absolute dependence on Him, and on Him only. Not on man, not on things, not on President Roosevelt, but humble and direct dependence on God for our daily bread. You say that does not fit in our day. The Lord teaches us to pray: give Thou us bread.

Now we must remember that bread is the finished product. And the Lord presents it as if it were a matter of sitting around a table of our Father in heaven, and that we must simply ask Him for bread and He will give it to us. But, perhaps the Lord did not know how complicated society would be in our day. Perhaps He did not know that when He would give bread, that there would be some twenty-five thieves to snatch that bread away from us. Perhaps this fourth petition is a nice prayer for the former. Perhaps it was a prayer for Israel in the desert, when they were eating manna direct from heaven.

But perhaps the Lord did not know how complicated society would be in our day. Look where that bread must come from. From the soil, yes. The Lord gives rain and sunshine, and causes that bread to spring from the soil. But from the soil, it falls into the lap of the farmer. And who is the farmer? He is a man that will keep that bread away from you as long as he can. He will hold on that bread and gamble with it as long as he can. He will establish organizations and unions in order to gamble with that bread and keep it away from you. Shall we ask that farmer to give us bread? But when that farmer decides that he has gambled long enough with that bread, it goes into the hands of the money men. And that is not us.

When the farmer finally lets go of that bread, it goes into the hands of your big corporations and Trusts. And they gamble with it, and the prices go skyrocketing. I assure you that there are people in Chicago that are glad when God blows the wheat from the field and gives us dust to eat, as He did this past week. They are glad when God blows the wheat from the field, so that they can raise prices. From

the farmer, the bread goes into the hands of the big corporations and Trusts, and they gamble with it, and keep it within their own small circle until they have sent the prices sky-high.

No, I am not a socialist, but that is reality. Shall we ask these big corporations and Trusts to give us bread? That bread finally comes out of the hands of the Trusts after they have gambled with it and raised the prices sky-high, and it comes into the hands of the flour mills, and into the hands of the retailer, and it is placed in the show window. And then you will have bread, if you have the money to buy it.

That is reality. And there is no question but what the N.R.A. is there to keep that bread in the hands of these Trusts and corporations. And then it is said that it is for the common people. Don't you believe it! The purpose of the N.R.A. is to keep that bread in that merry-go-round. The main purpose is to boost prices. Do anything you want, but prices must go up. Shall we ask them: "*Give us this day our daily bread*"?

No, the Lord knew how things would be. And He says, "You must receive bread from Me." We are dependent only upon God. We will say, "Our Father which art in heaven ... *Give us this day our daily bread*". And we say thank you to no one except God. This petition, "*Give us this day our daily bread*," also means that when our table is covered with abundance, that we then do not, like the world, simply sit down and eat, but that we then still ask, in humble dependence upon God, Lord give it to me.

3. An Expression of Childlike Trust

So there is in this petition, "*Give us this day our daily bread*," the expression of childlike trust. That implies two things.

When we say, "*Give us this day our daily bread*," and we really mean what we say, then we say: "Lord, with thee, knowing that thou art tomorrow, and knowing that thou art our God, we are perfectly free of care." It implies that if the Lord should literally hear us, so that at the end of the day the bread basket is actually empty and there is nothing left for tomorrow, we would lay us down and sleep as peacefully as if the bread basket were full. Perfect confidence in the word of the Lord that as He feeds the fowls of the air, and clothes the lilies of the field, He will much more give you all that you stand in need of. That is what the Lord teaches in this petition. But it is a delicate situation. To be carefree is a very narrow spiritual attitude. To be carefree requires that I know that God is my God for Christ's sake. I cannot pray for daily bread unless I know that God is my God for Christ's sake.

But that is not all. Even if I have that general confidence that God is my God, who does not mean that I am always in that spiritual attitude. To pray for daily bread means that I am also in the Lord's way. That means many things. That means in the first place, that I am not a waster. And many of us have been that in the years of crass prosperity that we have had. If the Lord gives us bread for today and tomorrow, and we throw the bread for tomorrow away, then we cannot trust in the Lord to give us our daily bread. If we have thrown the bread for tomorrow away, and we then come to the Lord and say, "*Give us this day our daily bread*," the Lord will say: "I gave you bread for today, yesterday."

In the second place, the gambler cannot trust in the Lord for his daily bread. He is not in the Lord's way. The gambler is not trusting in God for his daily bread, but he is trying to get it himself, and to get it in abundance. You must be in the way of the Lord in order to pray this petition: "*Give us this day our daily bread*". If we are not in the way of the Lord, we cannot take this prayer upon our lips. I know that is very narrow, but scripture is narrow. The gambler can't pray this petition. The waster cannot pray it. He that is not in the Lord's way, I mean in the Lord's way with respect to bread, cannot pray it. How many of us are able, in that humble dependence, with that perfect contentment and in that childlike trust to say: "*Our Father which art in heaven, Give us this day our daily bread*". And if the sun goes down, and my prayer is heard, and although I cannot look farther, and I do not know where my bread will come

from tomorrow, how many of us would be able to get on our knees and say: thanks Lord for the care which Thou hast taken of me today? Would we be able to say: I do not have bread, but I have the source of all that I need?

Don't you see that this is not a carnal prayer, but that it requires a high state of spirituality to pray this prayer? Don't you see that this prayer, "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" is a spiritual prayer, and very difficult to pray? The bread in question is a terrible question in the world.

4. An Expression of Brotherly Love

Therefore we must not think that when we are taught to pray in the plural: "*Give us this day our daily bread*", that that means all men. This prayer certainly means more than: "Give me this day my daily bread," but it does not comprehend all men. In the first place, all men are not capable of praying this petition with you.

In the second place, the natural man will not be pleased with you for praying this petition in his behalf, if he understands it. The natural man is not satisfied with daily bread, whether that is the rich man or the poor. If that were the case, there would be no social problem, no depression. That we have depression is because all want abundance. The natural man wants abundance, and we cannot all have abundance. That is why the social problem cannot be solved. We can all have daily bread, but we cannot all have abundance. And as long as all want to have abundance, you will have your multi-millionaires. That is not because of these multi-millionaires, but because we all want to have abundance. As long as all want to have abundance, you will have multi-millionaires who pile things up and grab everything they can, and the rest can go to the dogs if they choose.

But we pray: "*Give us this day our daily bread*". That means that if we have bread for today, we are content and trust in God that He will give us bread for tomorrow. But that also means that the rich cannot pray this prayer and then say to the brother: "Go and get warm." It means that we say: give us, me and my brethren, this day our daily bread. Which presupposes a spiritual fellowship in the Lord? So that we cannot eat our cake and pie, so that it will not taste good to us, as long as the brother suffers. The Lord does not teach us to say, "Give me bread," but, "Give us bread." That means that when the Lord gives us bread, we will not let the brother suffer.

The congregation must remember that. Don't come to the Lord and say, "Give me bread," and then say to the brother, "Go and pray for bread for yourself, and go and get warm." "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" That is the one side.

On the other hand, those that are in need must learn to pray: "*Give us ... bread.*" There are some that would rather die of starvation than eat of Christ. They would rather go to the welfare association than to Christ. That is wrong. We may not suffer. It is not a shame to live of the deacons. The idea that it is a shame to live of the deacons must be removed. To live of the deacons is to live of the Church, and to live of the Church is to live of Christ. "*Give us this day our daily bread*". That means there is spiritual fellowship, and that we live out of Christ.

And so you will agree that this fourth petition is not a carnal prayer, but a highly spiritual one which only the Christian can pray. Fellowship, brotherly love, humble dependence, childlike confidence, all lie in the background of this petition. It may seem hard for the flesh, but it is a joy to the spirit to live out of Christ. Happy is the people whose God is not the world, but the Lord, and who put all their confidence in Him, and depend on Him alone. But that confidence is often far from us. And we have learned enough to cause us to get down on our knees and to pray: "Lord teach us to pray, Our Father which art in heaven, ... *Give us this day our daily bread.*"

A Prayer for Forgiveness

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.126. Which is the fifth petition?

A. "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"; that is, be pleased for the sake of Christ's blood, not to impute to us poor sinners, our transgressions, nor that depravity which always cleaves to us; even as we feel this evidence of thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor.

The more we study the Lord's Prayer, the more we realize how appropriately it is called the most perfect prayer. One marvels that so much perfection can be compressed within the bounds of so short a prayer. The entire prayer hardly counts three score and ten words. Yet there is nothing omitted. There is no need of the soul or of the body that is not covered by it. We may elaborate on it, but the fact is, that when we pray the prayer which the Lord has taught us to the end, there is nothing else left to pray for. It is perfect as to its contents. It is perfect as to its order. There is no mistake there. There is no mentioning of important things last, and of less important things first. There is no confusion of any kind.

And thus it is also with the second part of this prayer that has more to do with our needs for this life. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer for this life. We will not pray this prayer hereafter. We can only pray this prayer as long as we are in this life. The reason why this fifth petition occupies this particular place in the Lord's Prayer is evident in itself. It follows the prayer for daily bread.

This prayer for bread is first, not because the material is first in importance, but because scripture teaches that the natural is first, in point of time, then the spiritual. The temporal is first, then the eternal. The earthly is first, then the heavenly. That is, they are first in point of time. As long as we need daily bread, we need forgiveness of sins. In other words, this petition for forgiveness of sins shall cease at the same time with the petition for bread. And so, there is one petition for our bodily needs, and there are two petitions for our spiritual needs.

These two petitions refer to two aspects of our spiritual wants. Together they cover the entire need of the Christian in order to be perfect. But separately they look at our spiritual needs from two aspects. They look at the need of the Christian from the point of view of his being perfected from the guilt of sin, and from the point of view of his being perfected from the pollution of sin. The Christian must be delivered from his guilt, but he must also be delivered from the corruption of sin. In other words, he must be sanctified.

Notice the order also here. The forgiveness of sins is first. Deliverance from its corruption is second. There can be no deliverance from sin, unless there is forgiveness of sin first.

The general meaning of this petition is also plain. It reads: forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. These terms must not be changed into "trespass," as is sometimes done. Instead of saying, "forgive us our debts," we sometimes say, "forgive us our trespasses." Now, we may say that, but that is not in harmony with the original form of this petition. The original can only be rendered by the word, "debts." Forgive us our debts, that is, forgive what we are behind in our obligation before Thy face. The prayer is that these debts be forgiven. In other words, to put it in an earthly form, that we, in spite of the fact that these debts stand against us, may have a clean bill. Forgive us our debts, that is, impute not unto us that which we are behind in, in our obligation to Thee.

And finally, there is a certain standard expressed in the last part of this petition. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Do as we do. Grant us according as we do. Which puts a certain characteristic stamp upon this prayer, and which makes it very narrow, so that it requires a certain

spiritual disposition to pray this petition.

We wish to look at this fifth petition from that spiritual background, that is, we wish to look at it as prayer. We will ask: what spiritual disposition is required in order to pray this fifth petition, and then we will find three elements. In the first place, that this prayer for the forgiveness of our debts is an expression of true sorrow over sin. In the second place, it is an expression of personal assurance and faith in the atonement of Christ. And in the third place, that it is an expression of a spirit of forgiveness.

Theme: A Prayer for Forgiveness

1. An Expression of True Sorrow over Sin
2. An Expression of Personal Assurance in the atonement
3. An Expression of a Spirit of Forgiveness

1. An Expression of True Sorrow over Sin

True sorrow for sin. It is well that that be emphasized, for that is essential. Scripture frequently calls attention to true sorrow over sin, and also to counterfeit sorrow. The sorrow after the world worketh death, but the sorrow after God worketh repentance unto salvation.

Scripture calls our attention to many examples of counterfeit sorrow, which sometimes very closely resembles true sorrow, so that you can hardly tell them apart. It calls our attention to the example of Esau, who sought a place of repentance with tears, and found it not. We have that same example in Pharaoh, who repents again and again, only to fall back into the same thing again. We find such an example of counterfeit sorrow in Saul. And supremely, we find such an example of counterfeit sorrow in Judas. And so scripture calls attention to the difference between true sorrow over sin and counterfeit sorrow.

We ought to know the difference. For even our sorrow over sin is not always true sorrow. There is a close resemblance in outward appearance between counterfeit sorrow and true sorrow. In the first place, both have to do with sin. In the second place, both ask for forgiveness. Yet there is a fundamental difference. There is, in the first place, the difference in motive. The sorrow after the world is rooted in self. Because one loves himself, he is sorrowful due to the circumstances into which his sin has led him. But sorrow after God is rooted in love of God. It is sorrow because God has been offended, and His law has been transgressed.

Sorrow after the world and sorrow after God each differ in their objects. Sin is not the object of the sorrow of the world. This is evident because sin never brings that sorrow. The sorrow after the world is not occasioned by sin. In other words, the sorrow after the world is not occasioned by sin, but by the wages of sin. The wages of sin is death. And because sin pays these wages, this accounts for those who sorrow after the world. But sorrow after God has for its object, sin. Because sin is transgression of the law of God, sin is the object of true sorrow over sin. And so, the two have different aims. Sorrow after the world aims at the separation of the wages of sin from sin itself. Sorrow after the world aims not at the removal of sin, but at the removal of the wages. In other words, he that is sorry with a counterfeit sorrow, would have God separate the wages of sin from sin itself. And when such a one prays this petition, he prays that God may separate the consequences of his sin from his sin, and if he can sin safely, he will keep right on sinning.

Sorrow after God, however, is the direct opposite. He that sorrows after God does not, in the first place, think of the removal of the wages of sin, but he wants sin itself removed. And because of these fundamental differences, there is a fundamental difference in effect. The sorrow after the world worketh death; it worketh hell. But the sorrow after God worketh salvation. Just because it is rooted in

the love of God, and has for its object the removal of sin, therefore the sorrow after God worketh salvation.

We therefore do not easily pray this petition perfectly. If we examine our heart when we pray this petition, we will find that the carnal element is always present. It is not easy to pray: forgive us our debts. For in the perfect sense, that prayer is always an expression of sorrow over sin. He that truly expresses this prayer will say: regardless of whether I must die, or regardless of whether I must go to hell, I must have forgiveness of sins.

That this is so, is plain from the form of this prayer: forgive us our debts. The original means our debts. It refers to the obligation which we failed to perform. Only we must not conceive of it in a mechanical way. It is a spiritual obligation. The obligation is to love God. The obligation is always to live to the glory of God from the principle of love. The obligation is always to live according to the law of God from the principle of love. And our debts are those thoughts, those words, those manifestations of our life, that are not rooted in that love of God. So that he that prays this fifth petition says, forgive all my thoughts, and words, and deeds, that were not rooted in the love of God.

That love of God is the deepest principle from which this prayer arises. It does not arise from the fear of hell. The Christian is delivered from hell, and he knows it. When he comes with this prayer for forgiveness of sin, he is not thinking of hell at all. It does not rise from the fear of hell, but from the principle of the love of God. The love of God has been poured out in his heart. It has been poured out in his heart, so that, he knows that love of God; he tastes it. And by that love of God poured out in his heart, there has been kindled in his heart, as the catechism expresses it, the desire to walk according to all the commandments of God. The love of God is the deepest root from which this prayer arises. From this love of God comes sorrow for sin. So that we come to the Father, not in order that we may not go to hell. The Christian does not seek forgiveness in order not to go to hell. He does not say: come to Him now for tomorrow may be too late. To say, "tomorrow may be too late," is a vulgar gospel. To say, "tomorrow may be too late," is vulgar street corner preaching. But he that prays this fifth petition, prays not from fear of hell.

He that prays here, has said, "Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done. That same Christian prays here, "forgive us our debts." Not because of fear of hell, but because he is sorry that he has offended God. And notice, that this petition puts it in the plural: forgive us our debts. So that in this petition, we do not merely ask in general: forgive us our sins. When we pray this petition, we do not merely have before our mind the general fact that we are sinful, and pray in that general way: forgive us our sins. We usually do that in all our prayers. In all our prayers, we ask in general, for forgiveness of sin. But that is not the meaning of this petition. This petition puts it in the plural. Forgive us our debts. In other words, when we pray this petition, we do not merely have before our mind the general fact that we are sinful, but we have before our mind our sins. Those which we have committed today, and yesterday, and last week, and last month. It means that we have examined ourselves and have found certain definite sins. So that when we pray, "forgive us our debts," and the Lord should ask us, "What do you mean," we could say, "This is what I mean. I mean this sin, and that sin," and I mention them by name.

2. An Expression of Personal Assurance in the atonement

That is why this petition, in the second place, is an expression of personal assurance, that we have a part with the atonement of Christ. Otherwise, we could not pray it. We cannot pray this fifth petition, unless we have personal assurance that we have part with the atonement of Christ.

There are people that say that we cannot put this prayer for the forgiveness of sins on the lips of the new dispensation people of God. They are people who appear to be so pious, so enthusiastic, that in

their hearts they imagine themselves to be more pious than scripture, and then the Lord Himself. There are such people. They are, O so pious. They are O so enthusiastic. They are at all times ready to give their testimony. And in a cloak of piety and enthusiasm, they carry in all sorts of errors. That is also the case with regard to this fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer.

There are also those who claim that this fifth petition is old, that it is out of date, and that the Church of the new dispensation should not pray it anymore. The prayer for forgiveness of sins may have been alright in the old dispensation when Christ had not come, and the blood of the atonement had not yet been shed, and sin had not yet been paid for. It may have been alright to pray for forgiveness of sins when the people came with bulls and goats. Israel coming to the temple with bulls and goats may have looked forward to the forgiveness of sins and prayed: forgive us our debts. That was alright in the old dispensation, but in the new dispensation, the sins of the Christian are forgiven. And he should believe that they are forgiven. If you ask these people why then the Lord gave this petition to his disciples, they say that this was before the cross. Christ had not yet suffered and died when He gave this fifth petition to His disciples. This prayer for forgiveness of sins was given to the disciples before the cross. But after Christ has died, the Church cannot pray anymore, "forgive us our sins," because our sins have been forgiven, and we cannot pray for what has been done. Sin has been forgiven, and it is impossible to ask for what has been done.

How corrupt is that reasoning. We can hardly imagine a Christian that can so speak and act accordingly. We can hardly imagine a Christian going along without ever asking for forgiveness of sins. It looks like a spiritual monstrosity for a Christian to walk about in this world, full of sin, and sinning every moment, to shout hallelujah, and never to humble himself before God in true sorrow for sin, and never ask for forgiveness. That is such a spiritual monstrosity, that these people who say that they do not have to ask for forgiveness, because their sins are forgiven anyway, will go to hell shouting hallelujah. A man, who says that he does not worry about his sins because they are forgiven anyway, and has nothing else, has never tasted the grace of God, no matter how much he may shout hallelujah. If a man has never felt the need of praying for the forgiveness of sins, he has never felt the grace of God in his heart. So that we may say, at the least, that not to pray for the forgiveness of sins is very unchristian. Even as it is safe to say that to pray for the forgiveness of sins is a distinguishing mark of the Christian.

But not only is that reasoning unchristian, it is also characterized by error. They that say that they do not have to ask for forgiveness do not understand that there is a difference between the atonement for sin, and the forgiveness of sin. The two are closely related, but they are not identical. It is true that objectively atonement has been made, and that sin has been blotted out. Reconciliation has been accomplished. Atonement has been made. Objectively our sins have been removed. Strictly speaking, the Church cannot say: blot out our sins. Strictly speaking, it cannot say: atone for our sins. Strictly speaking, the sins of the Church are atoned for, once for all. There is an element of truth in what these people say, as is so often the case. The sins of the Church are atoned for. The sins of the Church are no more. In fact, in the deepest sense, they never were. The guilt of the Church has been atoned for in the everlasting love of God in His counsel. And the Church in the old dispensation, in that sense, could not say either: forgive us our sins. The sin of the Church of the new dispensation has been blotted out historically by the cross. Christ shed his life blood, and the shedding of that blood was the everlasting blotting out of sin. That blotting out of sin has been sealed by God when He raised Jesus from the dead.

But that is not the idea and purpose of this prayer for forgiveness of sins. Rather it is the purpose of this prayer that we say: Lord, so apply the atonement of Christ unto me, that I may have the consciousness that my sins are blotted out. In this fifth petition, the Lord does not teach us to pray: blot out my sins. We cannot pray that our sins may objectively be blotted out. They have been blotted out.

But we do pray: grant that I may consciously appropriate the atonement of Christ, and that I may eat and drink out of the fountain of forgiveness. For how do we receive the forgiveness of sins? Does

God say to us, merely as a cold fact, never mind, I have blotted out your sins? And do we receive the forgiveness of sins merely as a cold announcement? Do we receive the forgiveness in that way? No, we never receive spiritual things in such an unspiritual way. We receive spiritual things in a spiritual way. God bestows the blessings of His grace upon us. He applies the atonement unto us. He gives us a new heart to receive the forgiveness of sins. He gives us a new life and pours a principle of the love of God in our heart. And He calls us, and gives us new eyes, new ears, and new tastes. And as He gives us new eyes, ears and taste, He shows us our sins. He places us in the midst of our sins.

And what is the result? That we shout hallelujah? No, the result is that we cry out: O God, be merciful to me a sinner. And then He leads us to the fountain of atonement, and we drink out of that fountain of atonement. The prayer for forgiveness, is the approach of the soul to the atonement of Christ. It is the opening of the mouth and the drinking out of the fountain of atonement. That is the spiritual background. Personal assurance of having a part with the atonement of Christ, is the spiritual background of this prayer for forgiveness. Some say that prayer for forgiveness of sins is born of doubt. It is said that this prayer is good for the doubting soul. But assured faith does not bring this petition to the throne of grace. That is not so. Prayer is never born of doubt. It is not doubt that sends this petition up to God. You can never pray this fifth petition in doubt. Doubt does not pray. Unbelief does not pray. This fifth petition presupposes a personal assurance of our part with Christ. The prayer for forgiveness of sins is not that we say: I don't know whether my sins are forgiven, and that therefore we cry out, Lord please forgive me my sins. That is not the prayer for forgiveness. We would not dare to pray this petition if we do not know that our sins are forgiven and blotted out. Therefore, this prayer is not a contradiction to personal assurance. No, it is in personal assurance that I know I have a part with the atonement of Christ, and I turn to God and say: apply that atonement unto my heart, and let me drink out of the fountain of forgiveness. Therefore, it must be understood that it is a fact that the sins of the Church have been blotted out. That is a fact, and we must be careful not to change it. That has been done. In the Dutch, we often pray: "*verzoen onze schuld.*" We should not pray that. That is frequently done. In the English, we pray: blot out my sins. Strictly speaking, we should not pray that. Frequently when we pray that way, we mean nothing more than, forgive our sins. But we should not pray, "blot out my sin," if we understand what we are praying. Just as we cannot pray that the Spirit may be poured out and may dwell in the Church. The Spirit has been poured out. So also, we cannot pray: blot out my sins. That has been done. But there is a difference between atoning for sin, and the application of that atonement to my heart. Atonement is the blotting out of my guilt, and forgiveness is the applying of that atonement to my heart. To use a figure: atonement is the bread already prepared for us, while forgiveness is that God takes that bread of atonement and nourishes our soul with it constantly. Atonement is not that God prepares it for us, and that He then gives us the whole business and tells us to run away with it. That is not salvation. Salvation is in Jesus, and Jesus receives it from moment to moment, and through all eternity from the Father. Now when I pray, "forgive me my sins," I know that the atonement is there. There is atonement, but God connects my sinner's heart with Christ, and feeds me with the bread of atonement, day by day, as I need it. And as He feeds me, He forgives, and as He forgives, He feeds me with peace and joy. O the brute who has never prayed: forgive me my sins. For the relation is this, that I am born in sin, and when Jesus changes my heart, there comes in my heart a beginning of new life. And that beginning is characterized principally by this, that I assume God's attitude over against my own sin. By nature, we take the devil's attitude. But when the light of Jesus Christ begins to shine in our hearts, we see the darkness of our nature. And it does not develop in this way, that when we come to see our sins and ask for forgiveness, that then our sin drops away. No, the Christian is a man that sins every day. And as Christ grows in him, he discovers more sin all the while. As he discovers his sins, he must have peace. In order to have peace, he must be fed by the bread of atonement. When the Lord does so, he prays always: forgive me my sins. It is his daily prayer. Exactly because he believes, and because he daily sees his sins, he prays in more earnest need and fervor, and in personal assurance of having part with

the atonement of Christ: forgive me my sins.

3. An Expression of a Spirit of Forgiveness

Hence, because this prayer, “forgive us our debts,” is the expression of true sorrow over sin, and of personal assurance of being a partaker of the atonement of Christ, this last part belongs to it. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

You cannot separate these two. Scripture teaches that everywhere. God will not forgive our sins if we do not forgive one another. There is an inseparable connection between God forgiving our sins, and our forgiving the sins of one another. When the Lord teaches us to say, “as we forgive our debtors,” He teaches two things.

This fifth petition is variously rendered. One rendering is: forgive us our debts, even as we have just forgiven our debtors. The supposition is that we can only pray this at that time. So that when we pray this petition, we say: if I do not forgive my debtors, then do not forgive me. That is what we say in this prayer. The spiritual things are delicate. Things must be even before the Lord. So that in this petition, we pray: do as I do, and don’t do as I don’t. And that not because our forgiving one another is ground for God forgiving us. The meaning of this fifth petition is not: forgive us our debts because we forgive our debtors. But the meaning is: with what measure you meet, it shall be meted out to you.

There is a spiritual law of receptivity. The measure of our receptivity is no larger than the measure with which you meet. If you do not love the brother, you do not love God, and our prayer for forgiveness is pure hypocrisy if we cannot say: as we forgive one another. So that it is impossible, spiritually impossible, to obtain forgiveness of sins if our soul knows not the spirit of forgiveness. He that goes to the Lord to ask forgiveness of sins, and does not have the desire to forgive the brethren, does not mean it. And the Lord really means to say: if you go to the throne of grace with this prayer, you must do so in the spirit that forgives the brother.

But there is more. It means that when we forgive each other, we do so in the same manner that God forgives us. That means, in the first place, that we are glad to forgive one another.

In the second place, it means that the brother wants forgiveness. In other words, that we humble ourselves. If we are to receive forgiveness from God, we must humble ourselves. If we are to forgive the brother, that brother must humble himself.

And in the third place, it means that the offended look up the offender. That is what God did with us. It means that there is in our hearts the earnest desire, which is a reflection of the earnest desire of God to reconcile us unto Himself, to reconcile the brother.

Is it not true that that last added to this petition, crashes all hope that we have advanced very far in praying it? O what little of that love of God do we taste! How little of our sins do we see. And how little of the little that we see of sin do we realize. How our heart is inclined to enmity and hatred.

Yes we know that there is within us a small beginning. There is a longing to taste the forgiveness of sins. And there is a longing to be able to forgive the brother. And in principle there is the desire to be able to pray: Lord forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. But we may well ask for the precious grace whereby we will be able to pray: forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. That prayer is always heard. It is heard unlimitedly. And it is heard in the measure that we come to the spiritual fountain of forgiveness, to be filled with God’s forgiving grace. There is no reason why we should not consciously have forgiveness of sins and should say: we then being justified by faith, have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

A Prayer for Deliverance from Sin

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.127. Which is the sixth petition?

A. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"; that is, since we are so weak in ourselves, that we cannot stand a moment; and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, cease not to assault us, do thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in the spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, till at last we obtain a complete victory.

Even as there have always been people, and there are people today who, not understanding the truth, claim that we do not have to pray for forgiveness of sins anymore, so there are, and have been, people who hold that we cannot pray anymore: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. There were such people at the time of Paul. There were and are people who think it is a shame to pray: deliver us from evil. These people said that the Christian's life is one program of sin and pardon, sin and pardon. And they even went so far to say: let us sin that grace may abound. That is the antinomian view. On the other hand, there are people who say we do not have to pray anymore, "deliver us from evil," because we have reached the goal, and to pray, "deliver us from evil," would be a denial of the fact that we have reached the goal. We have been delivered from evil, these people say, and have become holy, and having become holy, we do not need to pray anymore: "deliver us from evil." These people have a very superficial conception of sin. Both of these conceptions are denied by the Lord in this prayer, when He says: And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. It is a very unspiritual thing for anyone to say, I am holy, in the sense of being perfectly separated from sin and corruption, and wholly consecrated unto God; or to say, let us sin that grace may abound. Both these conceptions are very unscriptural, and both these conceptions result in this, that the people adhering to them end up in all kinds of corruption.

The way of the Christian is a way of battle, and as long as he is in this present battle, he needs two things. In the first place, he needs forgiveness of sins. He needs to have the atonement of Christ applied unto his heart. He must have the grace of forgiveness in his heart. And in the second place, he needs deliverance from evil. He needs the grace of deliverance from the power of sin. Now this sixth petition refers to the Christian's deliverance from evil. In the fifth petition, he prays for deliverance from the guilt of sin and its consciousness, and in the sixth petition, he prays for deliverance from the corruption of sin and its power. So that the subject matter of the fifth and sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer is essentially the same. Both deal with the attitude, the desire of the child of God, with respect to his sin. The fifth and sixth petitions are but different aspects of that one desire. In the fifth petition the child of God brings before God his desire with respect to the guilt of sin. He expresses that it is his desire that he longs for the forgiveness of sin. In the sixth petition, the child of God brings before God the desire to be delivered from the corruption of sin. The fifth petition deals with our justification, and the child of God confesses that he cannot rest until the blotting out of sin, which took place nineteen hundred years ago, may be applied to him, and he has become a conscious partaker of the reconciliation of Christ. But the sixth petition deals with our sanctification. The child of God confesses in this sixth petition that he cannot be satisfied until he be delivered from all sin and evil and corruption, and that in the midst of the world, he cannot be satisfied until he knows that God will not lead him into temptation. That is the sixth petition.

Now remember, we are dealing with these things as a matter of prayer. We are not speaking of justification, of atonement, of sanctification, of deliverance from sin and guilt. We are speaking of the subjective attitude of the child of God to them. They are realities in his life. Temptation is not something remote, something far away. It is not something that may happen. Temptation is something real. It is as real as daily bread is real. And over against that temptation, the child of God assumes a certain attitude. These temptations are realities in his life. And over against these temptations which he meets, there is something in the soul of the child of God. If you ask what that is, you find that there is in the soul of the child of God, a great fear of a great danger. That is implied in this prayer. Lead us not into temptation. The child of God dreads being led into temptation.

Secondly, there is in this petition the confession of a strong confidence in God's sovereign guidance. If he is to be led into temptation, God must do it. Not the devil. God only can lead Him into temptation, so that there is here a confession on the part of the Christian of his confidence in God's sovereign guidance. In the third place, there is in this sixth petition a strong confession of his longing to be delivered from evil. Does that reality live in our hearts? Does that dread of a great danger, and that confidence of God's sovereign guidance, and that desire and longing for deliverance from evil, is that reality, if we analyze our spiritual life, present with us? Or is it so with us that we love to be led into temptation and court sin; that we never have the confidence that we are subject to God's sovereign guidance; and that we never long for deliverance from evil and corruption? These three are absolutely necessary to pray this petition.

Theme: A Prayer for Deliverance from Sin

1. A Confession of fear of a great danger
2. A Confession of Confidence in God's Sovereign Guidance
3. A Confession of Longing for Deliverance from Evil

1. A Confession of fear of a great danger

First of all, a dread of a great danger. The danger is being led into temptation. It is not the dread of temptation, but of being led into temptation. Temptation is closely related to trial. Scripture frequently uses the same word for both. The apostle James writes: "*Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*" Temptation there, is undoubtedly looked at from the point of view of trial. Temptation and trial have this in common, that both make it difficult to walk in the way of God. Any trial makes it difficult for the flesh, for our nature, to keep the way of righteousness. Trial makes the way very narrow. And so it is with temptation. Temptation and trial make the way very narrow, and make it difficult for our nature to keep the way of righteousness. And on the other hand, both apparently make it easy to walk in the way of unrighteousness.

But although they closely resemble each other, there is an essential difference. There is a difference as to motive. The motive of trial is love of righteousness. But the motive of temptation is hatred of righteousness. He that tries someone loves righteousness. But he that tempts hates righteousness. And as there is a difference in motive, so there is a difference in form. The form of trial is always the truth. Trial never lies. Trial always points out clearly: this is the way, walk in it. But temptation is the lie in its very form. Temptation lies about righteousness. Temptation is misleading, is deceiving. We have them both together in paradise. When God put the tree in paradise, He put an obstacle in the way of righteousness, but He spoke the truth. He said, this is the way. In the day that you eat thereof, you shall die. But the devil added the temptation to the trial. He said, you shall not die, but be as God. That was the lie.

And as there is a difference between trial and temptation in motive and form, so there is a

difference in purpose. The purpose of trial is to glorify righteousness. The purpose of trial is to put a burden upon righteousness, to prove that it cannot break. But the purpose of temptation is to break righteousness. The purpose of temptation is evil. And although trial and temptation, as far as their content is concerned are similar, yet they can very well be distinguished. The purpose of temptation is to lead the children of God away from the path of righteousness into the way of sin and corruption, and causing that way of sin to look appealing and preferable to the way of righteousness. Temptation always has to do with the children of God. The children of the world are not tempted. Only the children of God are tempted, and the purpose of temptation is to lead the children of God astray from the path of righteousness into the ways of sin and unrighteousness. So that when we pray, "lead us not into temptation," we say: lead us not in ways wherein we will turn away from thee and from the way of righteousness, and wherein we will fall into sin and corruption. That is temptation.

Now that temptation, the child of God confesses, is a great danger. This prayer is occasioned by the fact that he beholds that danger. The attitude of him that prays this petition, is not the attitude of the happy-go-lucky, who does not worry about anything. No, it is the attitude of the child of God as he sees the danger of temptation, and he dreads to take one step, because he is conscious of the reality of that temptation. Real, because the devil is real. Did you ever notice that in times when the fear of God is covered up, when we see but little of that fear of God, that then there is no fear of the devil either.

If you ask some people, I mean some older people, because the temptations of the younger people are usually different, whether they know if they are being tempted by the devil, they will give the same kind of answer which people gave the Apostle Paul when he asked them if they had received the Spirit: we did not know that there was a devil, as far as their experience is concerned. But this dread of danger which the child of God experiences, presupposes that he is conscious of the fact that there is a tempter, and that tempter is the devil. And the devil is a liar. All the temptation you meet with, as far as the author of that temptation is concerned, converges in the devil. Temptation has for its agent, the devil. Literally, this sixth petition should read: deliver me from the devil. Even as the Dutch has translated it: "*Verlos ons van den booze.*" All temptation has a personal agent. The sphere of the tempter is the world.

We often speak of the devil, the world, and the flesh. But these are not three tempters. The devil is the tempter, but he tempts through the world, the world, taken now in the sense of the sinful world. The world conceived of as the totality of sinful man in connection with all things. In that world, the child of God lives. In that world, the devil is prince. Not in the absolute sense, but in a spiritual-ethical sense, the devil is prince in that world. And through the world, he tempts the child of God. Originally he could not tempt through the world. That world didn't always exist. There, the devil must come through the serpent in order to tempt man. That world did not exist before man fell into sin. That is why the devil tempted man through the serpent.

But the devil does not need the serpent now. He tempts the child of God through the world. It is a personal devil that has dominion over the things of this world, and causes the things of this world to appear as preferable to the things of righteousness. When we seek sin, and we all do, we should remember that back of all temptation in the world stands the devil. And it is not putting it too strong to say that they who seek temptation, seek the devil. And with regard to the children of God, temptation seeks to lead them away from the way of righteousness. The world is an agent of temptation, but it is an instrument of the devil. The devil seeks to make the way of sin so attractive, that it seems as if it were to be preferred to the way of righteousness. He seeks to make that way attractive in a doctrinal way. He causes many errors of doctrine to be proclaimed in the world, and he makes them so attractive, that they seem preferable to the way of righteousness. And by them, he seeks to tempt the people of God and to lead them astray.

I know of some of our young ladies, that they attended a lecture, given a short time ago, on birth control. That was the devil seeking to lead the children of God astray from the path of righteousness, by

means of error of doctrine, made attractive and seemingly preferable to the way of righteousness. Or the devil will make that way attractive in a practical way. He will place on that way honor, riches, position, pleasures of all kinds, and he will make that way seem preferable to the way of righteousness. You can say that the Christian must walk the straight and narrow path, but along that way, there are all kinds of cross roads and sidetracks. And at every corner, the devil has his agents, or his signpost, and he calls to the Christian: come this way, turn into this cross street. So that the Christian reaches the final victory through the midst of all kinds of temptations. Now that child of God would be immune, he would be safe if he could walk through that world in perfection. Or let me rather say, if the life of Christ in him, the Christian would be safe. Then temptation would have no influence upon him. But there is something else in him. There is in him a point of contact with the world, in the flesh. And through the world, finding a point of contact in the flesh, the devil leads the child of God into temptation.

2. A Confession of Confidence in God's Sovereign Guidance

No, he doesn't. God does it. I has been said that we cannot pray, *"lead us not into temptation,"* in the evil sense, in the sense of leading into sin. It is said that God does not lead into temptation. For in temptation, we have this picture. Temptation is a trap. And God is the leader. And the suggestion is that God is willing to lead us into the trap, and therefore we pray: lead us not into temptation. And so they say that we cannot pray this petition in the evil sense. Therefore they say that the meaning of this petition is: lead us not into trial, or at the most it means: keep us from temptation, lead us not into circumstances in which I may be tempted. But that the meaning is not, "lead me not into trial," is evident from the last part of the petition: but deliver me from evil. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Deliver me from evil, that is the opposite of being led into temptation. And where evil is the opposite of temptation here, the meaning cannot be, lead me not into trial. And to say that the meaning is, keep me from temptation, is no exegesis of the phrase: lead us not into temptation. And besides, it is impossible to keep us from circumstances which may tempt us, for the simple reason that the Christian leave the world. The Lord says, *"I pray not that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from evil."* And so He teaches them here to pray: *"lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."*

I will put it stronger. It is God's purpose that His people should go through these temptations. Roman Catholicism has tried relatively to escape these temptations by erecting monasteries and convents, but all attempts to escape these temptations are in vain. Salvation does not lie in escaping temptation. It is true one age differs from another. But essentially the world does not change. Salvation does not lie in escaping temptation. In the first place it is impossible to go out of the world, and in the second place, temptation follows us wherever we go, and our sinful heart is open to it. And therefore we do not pray: "lead us not into circumstances in which we may be tempted." But rather do we pray: *"count it for all joy when ye fall into divers temptations."* Why? Because salvation does not lie in running away from temptations, but in meeting them with the Lord. The prayer, *"lead me not into temptation,"* means, surrender me not to the power of the devil. It means, lead me not into the crossroads and side streets. For it ever we are to go astray from the path of righteousness and wander into the ways of sin, there is only one that leads me there. Therefore, the Christian prays: *"lead me not into temptation,"* lead me not into these crossroads, but make me strong to pass them by delivering me from evil. He does not pray that he may not cross these side streets, but that when he crosses them, he may hate them and pass them, and that when he passes them, there may be nothing in his heart, but the fear of the Lord. That is the meaning of this prayer. So that the child of God does not say: "please keep me from falling into temptation." No, he appeals directly to God and says, "God leads me."

There is no dualism, no big God and a little devil. There is only one that holds the reigns. And the child of God prays: *"lead me not into temptation.* I love righteousness, and holiness, and truth, and I

hate unrighteousness, and corruption, and the lie. And I have confidence that it is not necessary for me to be led into temptation.”

No, God does not tempt, if the motive be hatred of righteousness, and form of the temptation be the lie, and the purpose be the destruction of righteousness. But the petition does not say: tempt me not. But the devil, manufacturing temptation, does so under the sovereign control of God. And although the devil manufactures the temptation, God controls him and causes him to set the trap where He wants it to be set, and God causes him to do His will and counsel. God causes the devil to set the trap where He wants it, and God takes His child by the hand and leads him right into the trap. And God demolishes that trap. God leads His child right on until he is trapped. He sometimes leads His people into a state in which, for a time, they are wholly surrendered to the devil. The Lord does so.

So it was with David, when God led him on to count the people. We read that the Lord stirred up David to count the people. In another place, we read that the devil did it. But we also read that God stirred up David to count the people. We read that the Apostle Paul was buffeted by an angel of the devil. And we read in Isaiah: *“why didst thou cause us to err from our way.”* So it was with Peter, who was led on and on, until he falls into the trap. And why does God do it? Why does He lead His people into temptation? And mark you, we are not talking about walking in temptation, about living in temptation, about seeking it. We are talking about being led into temptation.

Why must the child of God be led into temptation? Because the child of God does not always live a careful life, and is often far from God and becomes self-confident, and thinks that he can take care of himself. And the Father takes him by the hand, and leads him into temptation; He leads him into the trap, in order to cure him. So it was with David. So it was with Peter. In spite of all the advice of his Master, Peter walked in that way, to the very top of self-confidence. And God led him on in that way to the very top of self-confidence, and led him in the trap. And being led on, Peter falls from the top of that self-confidence, and denies his Lord. So it is with all sin. So that we must understand, that if we fall into temptation, the Lord leads us into it. And we can somewhat understand it too. By nature, we are slaves, servants of the devil, and we have no right to be anything else. In the second place, remember we are saved from the clutches of the devil by the power of grace. In the third place, remember that it is the same power of grace that must keep us in the way of righteousness. If the Lord would take His grace from under us, we would fall back into the service of the devil. As the catechism expresses it; that we are so weak in ourselves that we cannot stand for a moment. All God has to do is to draw His grace from under us and we are gone. And many times, the Lord does so. Many times we are strong in our own conceit, and the Lord tells us to go ahead. He tells us, if you think you can get along without Me so well, go ahead, and He lets us go until we get so tangled up in the mire of sin, that we realize that we cannot get along without God, and we lose all our conceit.

There are times when we seek temptation, and we are admonished until we get indifferent. And then we get so that we cannot pass a movie, or a theater, or a dance hall anymore. I am talking on the supposition that you have grace in your hearts. You can see it on some of our young people. They want to go to the movies, and the Lord says, go. And they do go. And there are instances when they are so led into temptation that I would not dare tell it from the pulpit. There are young people of our own congregation, that are so led into temptation, that if I would reveal them, they would go to jail. There are young men of our congregation who run road houses, and sell liquor, and sell girls. The Lord sometimes leads us into temptation and lets us taste the bitterness of sin. God leads us into temptation, but He does so to cure us of our conceit, to cure us of the desire for sin. The purpose is not to lead us in the trap, but with the temptation, God sends deliverance. And having been delivered, the child of God prays the more fervently: lead me not into temptation. Grant that I may never have to be led into temptation, but deliver me from evil.

3. A Confession of Longing for Deliverance from Evil

And so there is in this sixth petition the confession that we long to be delivered from evil. It makes no difference whether you read with the Dutch translation, "*deliver me from the evil one,*" or whether you read with the English translation, "*deliver me from evil.*" He that prays this petition expresses that it is his longing to be delivered from evil, whether he takes the Dutch version, "*verlos my van do booze,*" or whether he takes the English version, "*deliver me from evil.*" You cannot be delivered from evil, until you are delivered from the evil one, and you will not be delivered from the evil one, until you are delivered from evil.

And so the Christian prays: "*lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.*" As he prays that he may be delivered from the guilt of sin, so he prays that he may be delivered from the corruption of sin. And he says: "I long to be delivered from evil, so that there may be no more corruption in me, and I may no more be under the influence of the evil one. And I long to be holy, even as thou art holy."

Thus this prayer includes, in the first place, an abhorrence of sin. In the second place, a desire to be pleasing to God. In the third place, a consciousness of our own weakness. In the fourth place, a confession that we are kept by the power of God.

And now, how is it with us? Are we able to pray, "*lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil,*" one hundred percent? Or am I after all a hypocrite when I pray it? And will we not, when we pray, "*lead me not into temptation,*" say, "yes," but I will look for temptation when I get up from my knees? And when I pray with my lips, "*deliver me from evil,*" will I not, with a certain sin which I do not wish to let go, say in my heart, don't do it Lord, don't deliver me from that one sin? Is there no lie in our right hand when we pray this petition? Is there the abhorrence of sin which there should be? Is there that strong desire to be pleasing to the Lord that enables us to pass by the crossroads and byways? Is it there?

Oh, I know, that with us all, this last petition, as well as the first, brings us to our knees with the confession that we have but a small beginning of the true obedience, also with regard to this petition. And we must pray, "Lord teach me sincerely to pray: lead me not into temptation, but *deliver me from evil.*"

Thine is the Kingdom, Amen

Rev. Herman Hoeksema

Q.128. How dost thou conclude thy prayer?

A. "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever"; that is, all these we ask of thee, because thou, being our King and almighty, art willing and able to give us all good; and all this we pray for, that thereby not we, but thy holy name, may be glorified for ever.

Q.129. What doth the word "Amen" signify?

A. "Amen" signifies, it shall truly and certainly be: for my prayer is more assuredly heard of God, than I feel in my heart that I desire these things of him.

The doxology of the Lord's Prayer you will find, has been eliminated from the revised version of our English bible. You look in vain for this doxology in the revised version. The idea of omitting it is that it is said that this doxology was added to the six petitions of the Lord's Prayer in later years, as a matter of liturgical addition, as a form with which to close the prayer. They say it was a matter of liturgical addition added by the Church as a conclusion to the Lord's Prayer. In the original manuscript, they say, this doxology is not a part of the Lord's Prayer. And so it has been omitted in the revised version of our English bible. Now I do not like our revised version anyway. And I am opposed to leaving anything out of the text that is found in the original manuscripts. That is a dangerous business. And although there is room for improvement in our translation, we should not remove anything from the original manuscripts. You must remember that this doxology is not only found in our English Bible, but it is also found in the original manuscripts. It is part of the Lord's Prayer.

Besides, the reason given for omitting this doxology is a very flimsy one. The reason given is that this doxology is not found in Luke. But that is no reason. That this doxology is found only in Matthew, and is omitted in Luke, is due to the fact that Jesus spoke the sermon, in which this prayer occurs, on more than one occasion, but does not each time repeat it word for word, just as a preacher will preach the same sermon twice, without repeating it word for word. But we find this doxology in Matthew, and that is proof enough that it fell from the lips of the Lord on some occasion, and so it is better to follow the Authorized Version.

We feel that this last part of the Lord's Prayer is different in character and content from the six petitions which we have discussed. We do not here have to do with another petition, but what we have here is what is usually called a doxology. The Christian does not ask for anything here, but declares something. He declares something of God. And that not to one another, but he declares something to God. That is the peculiarity of the Lord's Prayer. The peculiarity of the Lord's Prayer is that, in closing, we declare something of God, and to Him. *Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.*" And we declare something concerning our own attitude to prayer when we seal it with the little word, "Amen."

Now there are two aspects to be considered when discussing this doxology. In the first place, what does this doxology mean when taken by itself? What is its idea? What is its contents? And in the second place, these closing words of the Lord's Prayer do not stand separate from the rest of the prayer, as in a way the former six petitions do. But this doxology is connected with the entire prayer with the conjunction, "for." So that the question is, what is the significance of this doxology with regard to the entire prayer. And again we must remember that we must not treat these closing words as a matter of

doctrine. We must not read these closing remarks like this: unto God is the kingdom, and unto God is the power, and unto God is the glory. No, this doxology is part of the prayer. It is therefore something that the praying people of God can say. *“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.”* And to say that, is to close our prayers, not as a mere repetition of words, as an idle tale, but as a matter of spiritual reality.

We have seen again and again, that it is not easy to pray. So it is also with regard to this conclusion. And the question is, what spiritual disposition of heart and mind must be presupposed in order to pray this conclusion? We find that there is required in the heart and mind, the spirit of humble adoration. In order to repeat these words, so that they are true, there is required the spirit of humble adoration. There is, from the view point of prayer, in this conclusion, in the second place, a very strong plea. And there is in this conclusion, together with the seal, *“Amen,”* a firm assurance. That is the attitude required in this conclusion to the Lord’s Prayer.

Theme: The Conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer

1. A Spirit of Humble Adoration
2. A Very Strong Plea
3. A Firm Assurance

1. A Spirit of Humble Adoration

A spirit of humble adoration. That, first of all. Adoration: the acknowledgement that God is God, and that He is the fountain of all good, and that we know it, and that therefore, we draw near unto Him, to drink out of Him. That is the essential character and purpose of all prayer. Prayer is the highest expression of gratitude. Prayer is the highest expression of the grace of God in your heart. Prayer is not expressed in a desire for money.

There is one thing that the heart of the natural man will never do. That is pray. He may sometimes act as if he were praying. He may pile up the wheat until he has to burn it in the furnace, and then say to the poor man, *“Let us pray for prosperity.”* But that is an ungodly, carnal prayer. Anybody will pray for money. But prayer that will be an expression of that deep humility, wherein we say, *“not mine, but thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,”* that prayer is the expression of the grace of God in the heart. It is the highest expression of our needs. But not in the carnal sense. No, when the Christian prays, he does so in the confession that God is the sole fountain of all good, and he opens his soul unto God, to drink out of that fountain of good. Prayer is the opening of the soul to God, to drink out of Him who is the fountain of all good.

But although that is the essential character of prayer, yet this is also a special, a separate adoration to prayer. Prayer is not complete without this separate adoration. What does it mean? What does it mean that we can close our prayer with this adoration? What is the idea of it? What does it mean? It means that our prayer has not been a vain repetition of words, which they are so frequently. Which they are, sometimes to a large extent, and which they always are, to some extent. It is a good thing that there are so many terms which we have at our fingers ends, of which our consciousness feels nothing. Otherwise, we would be stammering all the time in our prayers. But if we say, *“for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever,”* and I do so in truth, it means that my prayer was not a mere repetition of words, in which my soul was not included. It means that we have been in the sanctuary. It means that we have been in God’s presence. It means that while in the presence of God, we have beheld His beauty. Even as when the four beasts and the twenty-four elders, in Revelation 4, worship God, it is not a mere repetition of words, but in a spirit of adoration, they cry out: *“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty.”* That is the spirit of adoration. It means that we have been in the presence of God

by faith, and have seen His beauty, His goodness, His holiness, His majesty, His power, His glory, and we must express it. We must tell Him about it. And we say: "*Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.*" We do not have to tell Him, you understand, because God does not know. But we must tell Him, because we are under the impression of that power, and majesty, and glory of God. We have been in His presence and have beheld His beauty, and now we sink down before Him in humble adoration. That is adoration.

And so it is, not only as to the idea, but also as to the contents of this adoration. After all, when it comes to prayer, everyone is Reformed. And this adoration is thoroughly Reformed. A man cannot be Arminian in his prayers. When you speak to God, you cannot speak Arminian doctrine, and that, just because you speak to God. It may be easy to speak Arminian doctrine among men. I may be easy to preach Arminian doctrine in the Church. But you cannot get rid of any Arminian doctrine in your prayers, because in prayer, you acknowledge that God is God.

In prayer we acknowledge: *Thine is the kingdom.*" What does that mean? It may mean, thou hast the power, the right, the authority to rule. And that is not excluded. But the meaning is emphatically that His is the kingdom, the power, the right, the authority to rule. The meaning is not, thou rulest. No, thine is the kingdom. That means that there is no authority outside of God. The word, "*kingdom,*" may mean the domain over which a monarch rules, over which he has dominion. But it also may mean the actual execution of that dominion and the authority to rule.

If taken in the former sense, the meaning of the term, "*kingdom,*" is God's domain, the domain over which He rules, which is the entire universe. There is nothing excluded from His domain. He rules over all His creatures. He rules over the wicked, against their will. And He rules over His people, with their will. In the second place, the term, "*kingdom,*" may mean the actual rule and domain of the Lord. Then the expression means: Thine is the authority, the power, the right to rule over all things. And where the Lord Himself does not limit it, therefore we should also take this expression in both senses. So that Jesus means to teach us to say: Thine is the domain, and thine is the right, the authority to rule over that domain.

Notice that the Lord, in this doxology, excludes all possibility of any dualism. He does not say: "May thine be the kingdom." He does not pray that the kingdom may be the Lord's sometime in the future. The Lord says: "*Thine is the kingdom.*" This doxology is based on the fact that God is one, and that there is no God besides Him. Hence, Jesus says: "*Thine is the kingdom.*" That means that there is no kingdom outside of God's kingdom. No creature has any domain, any authority and right to rule outside of God. That is called monotheism. Heathenism, looking at the evil in the world, came to the conclusion that there were two gods. One of these was a good god, from whom all good proceeded, while the other was a bad god, who was the author of all evil. That must not be applied to anything. That must not be applied to the domain of the devil either. We must not say that God is the supreme ruler. God is the sole ruler.

So it is with the other terms. "*Thine is ... the power.*" Not, "Thine is power," but "*Thine is the power.*" That is, "There is not power outside of Thee." This is the power. The power that is in thee and the power that is in the creature, is thine. All the power in heaven, and in the world, the power in the forces of darkness, is thine. God does not have to fight. God does not have to hold off the enemy, or otherwise he will attack Him. That is heathendom. No, there is no power anywhere but it is thine. That is Reformed. So that we must not say that God has more power than any creatures. He is the alone power. That God has almighty power means that He has the sole power. He does not have supreme power, and all kinds of little powers besides Him. All power is the power of God. The devil's power is God's power too. Thine is the power. That is the fundamental thought of scripture, and that is the basis of all prayer. We are not dependent upon men, or money, or prosperity, or rain, or sunshine. We are dependent only upon God.

And, *“Thine is ... the glory.”* God’s glory is the radiation of His goodness. God is good. God is goodness. We can’t really express what God is, because He is wholly other than we are. But if we remember that it is an imperfect way of talking about God, we may say that God is goodness. He is goodness in the sense of perfection. And the radiation of His goodness is His glory. And this doxology does not say: *“Thine is ...the glory sometimes.”* No, thine is the glory. There is no glory outside of thee. Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Forever. Not once in a while, but for ever. That is the meaning of this doxology.

2. A Very Strong Plea

That humble adoration that is caused by the feeling that God is God, is at the same time an expression of assurance. And because it is that, it assumes the form of a strong plea. We have this in the injunction, *“for.”* *“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.”* We sometimes speak of a ground to plead on with God. And certainly we must have a ground to plead on. That ground cannot be in ourselves. Why should God hear our petition? Why should He even listen to us? I don’t have to listen to you if I don’t want to. I have a right not to listen to you if I don’t want you. But God, who has the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, why should He listen to us at all? No, if we are to approach God, the ground must be in God Himself. And that we have in this doxology.

If you ask what is the relation of this doxology to the body of the prayer, the answer is that it is a doxology, that is, it is praise, adoration, rising from the heart of him that prays this prayer. Therefore, it is a most fitting close to this prayer.

But in the second place, there is in this doxology a motive. It is the expression of the motive why the Christian prayed. It is the expression of why he prayed at all, and why he prayed as he did, and why he prayed for the things he did. It is the basis of this, and of all prayer. If there was someone else that had power besides Him, we might as well turn to that other one. Or we might divide our attention between the two, as the heathen do. But if His is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, then we should turn solely to Him. That is why the Christian prayed, and that is why he prayed as he did. That is why the Christian did not begin by saying: give me prosperity. No, he began by saying: *“Our Father, which art in heaven; Thy name be hallowed: Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done.”* *“That,”* so the Christian says, *“is my first concern. That is uppermost in my mind.”* The rest follows. The rest concerns me. The rest is of secondary importance. The glory of God and the cause of His kingdom is first. He must be glorified first. And all my happiness is bound up with the glorification of God. That the Christian prayed. That is his plea.

And the ground for his plea, we have in this doxology. So that the Christian says; *Our Father which art in heaven, thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, that is why we come unto thee. To whom shall I go with my needs, with my need for bread, with my need for forgiveness of sin, with my need for deliverance from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. It is a plea. And whatever petition you may put between these two: “Our Father which art in heaven, ... Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,”* will surely be heard. Because in the prayer, we really say to God: thou art my God for Christ’s sake. I come to thee to whom belongs all power, and dominion, and glory, with all my needs.

3. A Firm Assurance

Can it fail? No, for we close with the seal upon our prayer, *“Amen.”* We do not often seal our prayers. *“Amen,”* often means for us that we have come to the end of our prayer. But in scripture, *“Amen,”* means that it is sure from every way you look at it. It means that it is firmly established. So that, *“Amen,”* has in it the idea of faithfulness, of truthfulness, of certainty. It comes from the Hebrew

word which means, it is fir, it is sure. That is why the Lord uses it so frequently. When the Lord says, "Verily, verily I say unto you," he really says, "Amen, *Amen*, I say unto you." So that when we use it at the end of our prayers, that is , when we really use it so that there is something in our soul that corresponds to the word, there is a threefold assurance.

In the first place, the word, "*Amen*," means this, that I am assured that in the prayer which I have just now closed, I have presented nothing that is contrary to thy will. It means that the contents of my prayer are true and right and are in harmony with thy will. It is true that with regard to some of our petitions we do not know what to pray for as we ought. But surely our prayer is accompanied by the prayer: "Lord, I know not what to pray; teach me to pray as I ought." There is nothing in the Lord's Prayer that is contrary to the will of God. "*Amen*," means that there is nothing in our prayers that is contrary to God's will.

That is not true of many of our prayers. That is not true of our prayers by which we close our silly programs. There are many of our prayers that are really godless. There are our prayers to please men. We often pray, not as we ought, but to please men. All these things happen. But, "*Amen*," means that we are assured that we have prayed nothing contrary to the will of God.

In the second place, "*Amen*," means: I really want what I have prayer for. That is also expressed in the catechism by way of implication. We read in the catechism: "*Amen*" signifies it shall truly and certainly be: for my prayer is more assuredly heard of God, than I feel in my heart that I desire these things of Him. "*Amen*" means that I really desire what I have asked for. It means that I meant what I said. It was my desire that thy name be glorified first. The coming of thy kingdom was uppermost in my mind. My first concern was that thy will be done. When I prayed for bread today, I did not mean cake and pie. When I asked for forgiveness of sins, I really meant it. It was truly my desire to be delivered from evil, when I prayed: deliver me from evil. And I can truly say, "*Amen*," on all these things.

"*Amen*," means in the third place: I believe that thou art willing and able to grant every one of my petitions. I express in the word, "*Amen*," that I am much more sure that I shall receive the things I prayed for. Much more than I feel in my heart that I desire them. That is often not at all sure. But much more sure it is that the Lord will give, and is able to give, all that I asked for. Why? "*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.*" As the Dutch has it: "*Hij kan, en wil, en zal in nood, zelfs by nadern van den dood, volkomen uitkomst geven. Amen.*"

And what is the result of that prayer? The result is that "*the peace of God which passeth all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*"